

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 5 February 2024
1.00pm

François Leleux oboe, cor anglais
Emmanuel Strosser piano

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)	Oboe Sonata in D Op. 166 (1921) <i>I. Andantino • II. Allegretto • III. Molto allegro</i>
Henri Dutilleux (1916-2013)	Sonata for oboe and piano (1947) <i>I. Aria. Grave • II. Scherzo. Vif • III. Final. Assez allant</i>
Tsotne Zedginidze (b.2009)	Oboe Sonata (2023-4) <i>world première</i>
Eugène Bozza (1905-1991)	Fantaisie Pastorale Op. 37 (1939)
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)	Rapsodie for saxophone and orchestra (1901-11) <i>arranged by Gilles Silvestrini</i>



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



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'M. Bas came to try out my Sonata and it worked like a charm,' noted **Camille Saint-Saëns** in a letter sent to his publisher in the summer of 1921. The venerable composer's visitor was none other than Louis-Jean-Baptiste Bas, formerly principal solo oboe with the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire and Orchestra of the Paris Opéra. 'He seemed so happy that I offered him the dedication of the piece (or rather of the three pieces that make up the whole).' Saint-Saëns's Oboe Sonata, part of a series of works planned for every symphonic wind and other 'unfavoured' instruments, of which the composer completed only three, opens with a theme that harks back to the 18th Century. Two rising scales preface a change of key and style, more romantic and increasingly introspective, before the main theme returns. The central *Allegretto* grows from a rhapsodic introduction, like a shepherd's pipe tune, into a charming pastorale in 9/8 time. Saint-Saëns pays tribute to Bas's famed virtuosity in his sonata's finale, especially so with tricky sequences of semiquavers, a wonderful extended trill and surging runs high into the instrument's upper register.

Henri Dutilleux hailed from the French conservatoire system, at first in the northern city of Douai, later at the Conservatoire de Paris, where he studied composition with Henri Büsser. Dutilleux's Sonata for oboe and piano was written in 1947 as one of four *solos de concours* for the Paris Conservatoire's latest crop of graduating oboists. Although he later dismissed from his official catalogue what he regarded as an immature work, its combination of lively virtuosity, expressive nuance and lyrical elegance found instant favour among performers. The piece opens with an impassioned solo *Aria* that rises above a rather passionless walking bass line; the piano's meandering counterpoint gradually gives way to a more intimate and engaged dialogue with the oboe, the intensity of which is dissolved by haunting oboe cadenzas and sighing piano chords. Dutilleux satisfies the Conservatoire test-piece brief in his sonata's *Scherzo* by providing technical challenges galore while furnishing the movement with more profound musical material, notably so in an introspective coda based around a spellbinding three-note motif. The work closes in neoclassical style, propelled by a jolly theme that is reimagined and recycled like an old street tune transformed into a witty cabaret number.

Overhearing his grandmother's keyboard students inspired the five-year-old **Tsotne Zedginidze** to ask for piano lessons. He felt an immediate affinity with the instrument, made remarkable progress and soon turned his attention to composition. Zedginidze's musical language consists of intricately woven melodic patterns and exquisite harmonies. His Oboe Sonata begins with an introduction for unaccompanied oboe built from melodic and rhythmic cells that supply much of the work's

thematic material and quixotic character. The piano enters with an ostinato figure, which grows in dialogue with the oboe and becomes increasingly complex in its rhythms and shifts of meter. A sequence of rapid-fire triplet quavers in the oboe part, similar in character to an Irish reel, leads to a thrilling solo cadenza constructed from bustling arpeggio patterns. Zedginidze applies the brakes with a short sequence of slow piano chords but releases them for a sprint to the oboe's final cadenza, this time quiet, reflective, winding down to a near-inaudible flourish.

Childhood studies with his Italian-born father, a violinist in French Riviera casino bands, gave **Eugène Bozza** a flying start as a performer. He developed his skills in Rome as a student at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia and, during the so-called Roaring Twenties, at the Paris Conservatoire. Bozza became leader of the famous Padeloup Orchestra in 1925 before returning to the Conservatoire to study conducting. He went back to school again in 1932, this time to study composition with Henri Büsser, and made his breakthrough in 1934 by winning the Prix de Rome. His *Fantaisie pastorale*, dedicated to Conservatoire professor Louis Bleuzet, solo oboe at the Paris Opéra, follows the pattern of lyrical, recitative-like introduction and more animated final section favoured for *solos de concours* throughout the 1930s. Bozza's composition, following the exoticism of its opening, includes a gentle sicilienne that serves as an interlude before the piece sprints towards its conclusion.

Gilles Silvestrini's elegant arrangement for cor anglais and piano of **Debussy's** *Rapsodie* draws on his practical knowledge as an oboist. The work, originally conceived in 1901-11 for alto saxophone and piano and orchestrated by Jean Roger-Ducasse for its première the year after Debussy's death, was written for Elise Hall, the Paris-born, Boston-based champion of the saxophone. Hall, or the 'saxophone lady' as Debussy described her, had learned the instrument as a mature student with the oboist and conductor Georges Longy. The wealthy Mrs Hall set about commissioning new works from leading French composers to convince Boston audiences that the saxophone was more than a toy-store novelty. Debussy apparently shared their prejudice, dismissing the saxophone in a letter to André Messager as 'this aquatic instrument' and labouring over the *Rapsodie* for many years before placing its draft score in a drawer. Deafness prevented Hall from giving its first performance in Paris, although she did receive the composer's holograph sketch of the work soon after. A version of the *Rapsodie* was performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1932 with the solo part given to cor anglais.

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