

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 5 May 2023
7.30pm

Wigmore Soloists

Emily Beynon flute
Michael Collins clarinet
Michael McHale piano
Catrin Finch harp
Isabelle van Keulen violin
Sini Simonen violin
Rachel Roberts viola
Torleif Thedéen cello

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)	Syrinx (1913)
Guillaume Connesson (b.1970)	Techno Parade (2002)
Alphonse Hasselmans (1845-1912)	La source Op. 44 (1898)
Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)	Impromptu No. 6 Op. 86 (1904)
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)	Introduction et Allegro (1905)

Interval

Gabriel Fauré	Trio in D minor Op. 120 for clarinet, cello and piano (1922-3) <i>I. Allegro, ma non troppo • II. Andantino • III. Allegro vivo</i>
Maurice Ravel	Piano Trio in A minor (1914) <i>I. Modéré • II. Pantoum. Assez vite • III. Passacaille. Très large • IV. Final. Animé</i>

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Syrinx, entitled originally *La Flûte de Pan*, was written by **Debussy** in 1913 for a scene in Gabriel Mourey's play *Psyché*. Following Greek mythology, Syrinx is a nymph with whom the demi-god Pan falls in love. Pan's love is unrequited: Syrinx hides from him by becoming a water reed which Pan cuts down to make his pipes. Debussy's music was to be played off-stage, as if by Pan himself, in a cave; Louis Fleury, its first performer and dedicatee, insisted on playing it behind a curtain in concerts.

Syrinx was the first significant solo flute work since CPE Bach's Sonata in A Minor and Telemann's Fantasias in the mid-18th Century. The manuscript had no bar lines: these were added by flautist Marcel Moyse in preparation for publication in 1927.

Guillaume Connesson, born in 1970, is one of France's most widely-performed contemporary composers, including by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Royal Scottish National Orchestra. He describes his inspiration coming from 'the complex mosaic of the modern world'; influences include Couperin, Wagner, Strauss, French Impressionism, Messiaen and Dutilleux, the American minimalism of Reich and Adams, film composers Bernard Herrmann and John Williams, and contemporary pop music.

Connesson calls his hyperactive *Techno Parade* (2002) 'a single movement, with a continuous pulse from start to finish. Two motifs swirl and collide, giving the piece a festive and restless character. The howls of the clarinet and the obsessive repetitions of the piano seek to rediscover the brutal energy of techno music.' In the music's middle section, the pianist uses a brush and sheets of paper to create sound effects; afterwards, all three instruments are 'drawn into a rhythmic trance which ends the piece at the frenetic tempo.'

Belgian harpist **Alphonse Hasselmans** (1845-1912) composed 54 works, all for his own instrument. After his initial studies in Strasbourg, he became Paris's most prominent harp soloist. Hasselmans's virtuosity transformed the harp's potential; this also encouraged innovations by harp manufacturers Pleyel and Erard, who respectively commissioned Debussy's *Danse sacrée et danse profane* and Ravel's *Introduction et Allegro*.

La source was composed in 1898. Dedicated to his pupil Hélène Gayat, it is based on cascades of notes whose rhythms and dynamics change subtly every few bars, ending in a grand sweeping run to the bottom of the instrument.

Fauré's five piano Impromptus are some of his best-known works; Impromptu No. 6 was a test piece commission in 1904 for the Paris Conservatoire's annual harp competition. The winner, Micheline Kahn (1889-1987) – another of Hasselmans's students – was unusually young, aged only 14.

There is an unsubstantiated rumour that Hasselmans edited and perhaps wrote some of Fauré's work: there is a striking stylistic change approximately halfway, with a

series of virtuosic variations more idiomatic than the first part. Fauré was over-worked, with multiple jobs – organist at Paris's La Madeleine church, Conservatoire professor, Administration des Beaux-Arts inspector and critic for *Le Figaro* – none alone offered a viable living. It is not impossible that Fauré asked Hasselmans, to whose daughter Marguerite he was close, for help.

Op. 86's strong rhetorical start reminds us that Fauré's music is not all delicacy and tenderness, although its central 'meno mosso' offers plenty of these. In 1913, Alfred Cortot transcribed it for piano; apparently Fauré was unconvinced and alluded to pianists – Cortot in particular – who 'allow my music to pile up without actually playing it.'

Ravel fulfilled his Erard Company commission for *Introduction et Allegro* in 'a week of concentrated work and three sleepless nights' during the summer of 1905 before joining a cruise hosted by Alfred Edwards, editor of newspaper *Le Matin*, a strong supporter of his work, and his wife Misia Godebska, a model for Renoir and influential Parisian salon hostess. The first performance however was not until 1907 in Paris at the French Photographic Society in an all-Ravel concert including his String Quartet and song cycle *Histoires naturelles*. The first British performance was in 1913, under Ravel's supervision, here at Wigmore Hall during World War One.

In contrast to its rushed creation and origins as a sales pitch, the music is a supremely idyllic masterpiece of refined virtuosity for all seven instruments, including a spectacular harp cadenza.

In 1920, Fauré, almost completely deaf, retired from the Paris Conservatoire, his time there having included 15 years as director. With more time to compose, he wrote to his wife that his publisher Jacques Durand was 'begging' for a Piano Trio for violin, cello and piano. In this form it was first performed in May 1923 at a Société nationale concert celebrating Fauré's birthday, which he was too ill to attend. Fauré's first thoughts had been for clarinet instead of violin: this version darkens the work and heightens its wistful, reflective character. After a pensive first movement, the *Andantino* is the Trio's eloquent emotional core, followed by a finale of imaginatively humorous surprises worthy of Haydn.

The Piano Trio was Ravel's last work completed in 1914 before joining the army in World War One as an ambulance driver. Ravel described the sombre first movement as 'Basque in colouring'; the second's title, *Pantoum*, comes from a Malayan poetic form that inspired poems by Verlaine and Baudelaire: it is an extrovert celebration of irregular rhythms. The third movement, *Passacaille*, starts in the piano's depths, creating the effect of a procession of inexorable intensity, leading directly to a fast *Final* in which the trio of instruments comes as close as possible to full orchestral sonorities.

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