WIGMORE HALL 125

Tuesday 7 April 2026
7.30pm

Cédric Tiberghien piano

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)	I. Prélude from *Le tombeau de Couperin* (1914-7)
François Couperin (1668-1733)	1. La reine des coeurs from *Quatriéme livre de piéces de clavecin* (pub. 1730)
Maurice Ravel	II. Fugue from *Le tombeau de Couperin*
François Couperin	2. La bondissante from *Quatriéme livre de piéces de clavecin*
Maurice Ravel	III. Forlane from *Le tombeau de Couperin*
François Couperin	3. La Couperin from *Quatriéme livre de piéces de clavecin*
Maurice Ravel	IV. Rigaudon from *Le tombeau de Couperin*
François Couperin	4. La harpée from *Quatriéme livre de piéces de clavecin*
Maurice Ravel	V. Menuet from *Le tombeau de Couperin*
François Couperin	5. La petite pince-sans rire from *Quatriéme livre de piéces de clavecin*
Maurice Ravel	VI. Toccata from *Le tombeau de Couperin*
	Interval
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)	Images, Series 1 (1901-5) *I. Reflets dans l'eau • II. Hommage à Rameau • III. Mouvement*
Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)	XVI. L'entretien des Muses from *Pièces de clavecin avec une methode pour la mechanique des doigts* (pub. 1724)
Julian Anderson (b.1967)	Etude No. 4 'Misreading Rameau' (1999)
Jean-Philippe Rameau	From *Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin* (pub. c.1729-30) *XIII. Les sauvages • XIV. L'Enharmonique • XV. L'Egiptienne*
Claude Debussy	Pour les huit doigts from *Etudes Book I* (1915) Pour les agréments from *Etudes Book II* (1915) L'isle joyeuse (1903-4)

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'The harpsichord is perfect in its range, and brilliant in its own right; but, as its sounds cannot be enlarged or diminished, I will always be grateful to those who […] might succeed in rendering the instrument capable of expression.' Contemporary harpsichordists might balk at François Couperin's suggestion that the instrument is inexpressive, but Couperin's musical descendants were able to take advantage of the piano's wide dynamic and tonal range when paying tribute to music of the past. This programme highlights Debussy and Ravel's multilayered interaction with their French forebears. Both composers were, of course, greatly affected by the First World War, and their wartime experiences added extra poignancy to their reimagining of music of an earlier, seemingly less complicated era.

All the **Couperin** works in this programme are from his 21st *ordre*: his term for a suite of pieces. *La reine des coeurs* (Queen of Hearts) is improvisatory with ornamented, plangent descending lines, and *La bondissante*, as the title suggests, is leaping and dancelike. The ingratiating *La Couperin* has been described in contemporary terms as a 'selfie.' *La harpée* is an Allemande, classically elegant and graceful though with less regular phrasing than might be expected. The title alludes to a quarrel, the word being related to the English idiom 'to harp on'. The descending chromatic line of *La petite pince-sans rire* (straight-faced wag) is shared with other pieces in the *ordre*.

The **Rameau** pieces range widely in their sources of inspiration. *L'entretien des Muses* (The Discourse of the Muses) was conceived as a keyboard study: it is simple and plaintive, requiring evenness of touch. *Les sauvages* evokes two Huron Indians from Canada who were sent to perform as exotic display in Paris in the 1720s. Their leaping, jaunty dance is, to 21st-century ears, lively rather than wild. *L'Enharmonique* features unusual modulations which, as the composer rightly stated, sound logical and natural. We return to the theme of exoticism for *L'Egiptienne* (in Rameau's spelling): this depiction of a vivacious, capricious Egyptian girl features hand crossing and much other leaping around the keyboard.

Ravel's model for *Le tombeau de Couperin* was the French keyboard suite of the Baroque era associated with composers including the Couperin family. The term 'tombeau' – literally meaning 'grave' – was used in Couperin's period as the title of a work paying tribute to someone who had died. Ravel's intention was both to pay homage to his French musical ancestors and to provide memorials for friends who had served during World War I and were killed in battle.

The *Prélude* features the delicate ornamentation characteristic of Couperin's era, while the *Fugue* turns its subject every which way, with challenging hand crossing towards the end. Ravel moves considerably past Baroque musical language in the astringent harmony and disjunct intervals of the *Forlane*. The *Rigaudon* combines lively outer sections with a more reflective centre; the *Menuet* has a similar design, though the drama of its central part makes the *Minuet*'s reprise all the more poignant. Dedicated to Joseph de Marliave, husband of the pianist Marguerite Long, the *Toccata* evokes the brilliance of her playing; Long herself gave the première of the work at Salle Gaveau on 11 April 1919.

The three pieces of the first book of **Debussy**'s *Images* for piano (1901-5) are highly diverse. *Reflets dans l'eau* taps into favourite Debussy topics – reflection and water – and *Hommage á Rameau* is a sarabande whose stately chordal progression adheres to classical notions of balance and moderation: it sounds nothing like Rameau, though. Paradoxically, *Mouvement* is essentially static (an image, indeed), surface animation over long pedal points. It is like a mechanism which has been wound up and allowed to run for a set duration.

Julian Anderson's fourth Etude for piano (1999) also sounds nothing like Rameau but it has the composer's 'Le lardon' as its starting point, as its title 'Misreading Rameau' suggests. Anderson occasionally swaps the clefs of the left-hand and right-hand parts, completely changing the harmony, and his overarching aim was 'to transform the rather plain Baroque original into music using the types of piano harmony and sonority I enjoy.'

In 1915, **Debussy** was asked by the publisher Durand to edit Chopin's piano Etudes, as German editions were withdrawn from circulation during the war. This prompted Debussy to compose his own 12 Etudes in August-September 1915, dedicated to the memory of Chopin. His focus was not simply on technical virtuosity, but also on sonority and timbre: a new departure for the piano study. Debussy's witty preface states that he has deliberately not provided fingering suggestions; he both points out that people have different hand sizes, and recounts an anecdote about the child Mozart playing a note with his nose because his hand was too small to reach it. The rapid perpetuum mobile *Pour les huit doigts* (For the eight fingers; thumbs not required here) closes the first book, and *Pour les agréments* (For ornaments) also evokes 18th-century French harpsichord performance practice, though its harmonic language and elliptical form, as if it were improvised, is pure Debussy.

The 'fête galante' style is characteristic of French art of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; poetry by Verlaine as well as music by Fauré, Debussy and others drew on French painting of the 18th Century that depicted bucolic, often ancient Greek-inspired scenes. *L'isle joyeuse* is an unusually exuberant example of this style, capturing the Arcadian bliss of a summertime escape to an island. Debussy was inspired both by Watteau's painting *L'Embarquement pour Cythère* (1717) and the composer's own escape to the 'joyful island' of Jersey with his then mistress, Emma Bardac. The piece showcases the full range of the modern piano in a way that would surely have enchanted Couperin.

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