

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 4 November 2024
1.00pm

Impressions Parisiennes

Quatuor Van Kuijk

Nicolas Van Kuijk violin
Sylvain Favre-Bulle violin
Emmanuel François viola
Anthony Kondo cello

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

2 poèmes de Louis Aragon (1943) *arranged by Jean-Christophe Masson*

C • Fêtes galantes

Les chemins de l'amour (1940) *arranged by Jean-Christophe Masson*

Baptiste Trotignon (b.1974)

Francis from *Ces messieurs* (2023)

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Mandoline from *5 mélodies 'de Venise' Op. 58* (1891) *arranged by Gildas Guillon*

Après un rêve Op. 7 No. 1 (1877) *arranged by Gildas Guillon*

Baptiste Trotignon

Gabriel from *Ces messieurs*

Erik Satie (1866-1925)

Je te veux (?1900) arranged by Gildas Guillon

Baptiste Trotignon

Erik from *Ces messieurs*

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Pavane pour une infante défunte (1899) *arranged by Gildas Guillon*

Baptiste Trotignon

Maurice from *Ces messieurs*

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

From *Petite Suite* (1886-9) *arranged by Emmanuel François*

Cortège • Menuet • Ballet

Baptiste Trotignon

Claude from *Ces messieurs*



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3



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Note: The running order of this concert has changed since these notes were written.

The Quatuor Van Kuijk's 'Parisian Impressions' programme features works by five major composers who lived and worked in the French capital. The concert ends with Baptiste Trotignon's *Ces messieurs*, which was written for the quartet and has five movements, each dedicated to one of the other composers on the programme.

Poulenc had many literary friends and often set contemporary poetry, including that of Louis Aragon, a politically engaged author associated with the surrealist movement. In this concert, Poulenc's *2 poèmes de Louis Aragon* are performed in arrangements by the cellist and composer **Jean-Christophe Masson**.

Aragon (unlike Poulenc) was involved in the Resistance movement and his wartime poems, such as 'C' and 'Fêtes galantes', have a strong political edge. 'C' (referring to a bridge of that name) is a poignant wartime song with a melodic line that is here shared between different members of the quartet. The poem harks back to medieval times but very clearly had contemporary resonance during World War II, culminating in the line 'O my France, O my forsaken one.' In French culture, the term *fête galante* evokes the idealised ancient Greek world portrayed by 18th-century painters such as Watteau and Fragonard, but in his poem of this title, Aragon pulls the curtain back to show us the sordid everyday world beyond the image. Poulenc's patter song-style setting is reflected in the busy activity of this quartet version.

'Les chemins de l'amour', also arranged by Masson, strikes a very different mood though it too was composed in the war years. In this slow waltz, the violin takes the role of the singer, accompanied by the other quartet members: this is Poulenc in classy popular song vein. The song was composed for the actor-singer Yvonne Printemps to perform in Jean Anouilh's play *Léocadia*.

Ravel's *Pavane pour une infante défunte* is played in an arrangement for quartet by the violinist **Gildas Guillon**, a version that has both the intimacy of the piano original and much of the textural variety of Ravel's later orchestration. The pavane is a Renaissance dance which, according to the 16th-century French dance historian Thoinot Arbeau, was generally danced by couples in a procession. Ravel's mention of an infanta locates the dance in the Spanish court, making this one of his many works which evoke an imaginary Spain. The pizzicato accompaniment of the opening conjures up the plucked strings of the vihuela, the Spanish ancestor of the guitar, and the four instruments come together at the ends of phrases to emphasise the rich harmonies.

In **Fauré's** song 'Mandoline', the plucked string theme continues, though this time the setting transports us to Venice. This song, from Fauré's *5 mélodies 'de Venise'*, takes us back to the world of the *fête galante*, though with none of the heavy irony of Aragon's interpretation. In 'Mandoline', Verlaine's poem evokes a mandolin

serenading garden party guests as they mingle and make small talk. Gildas Guillon is also the arranger of 'Après un rêve', one of Fauré's best-loved songs. It was popularised in a version for cello and piano by Pablo Casals, but Guillon has chosen to divide the melodic line between all the members of the quartet.

Guillon's arrangement of **Satie's** waltz 'Je te veux' ('I want you') features the violin and viola carrying the tune with the other instruments accompanying. Unlike the other composers on this programme, Satie was himself a popular musician, working in the late-19th Century as a pianist in Montmartre cafés. He regularly accompanied the celebrated singer Paulette Goddard, for whom he composed 'Je te veux', one of few popular successes Satie enjoyed in his lifetime.

Claude Debussy is represented by the second, third and fourth movements of his *Petite Suite*, originally written for piano duet and idiomatically arranged by the Quatuor Van Kuijk's viola player **Emmanuel François**. *Cortège* is a lively procession with snappy dotted rhythms that keep the momentum going; the two violins take the melodic lead. The *Menuet* is a quintessentially French dance style, and Debussy infuses the poise and grace of the classical period with modal harmonic inflections (and in François's arrangement, contemporary string techniques). *Ballet* rounds off the selection in upbeat style, and its contrasting central section is in waltz rhythm.

The jazz pianist and composer **Baptiste Trotignon** wrote his second string quartet, *Ces messieurs* ('These gentlemen'), for the Quatuor Van Kuijk. It is in five movements, each being an affectionate tribute to a different French male composer and titled with their first name. To some degree, Trotignon creates a pastiche of the style of each composer, first capturing something of the vivacity and wit of Francis Poulenc. A slow harmonics-based passage is like a ghostly echo of the gamelan passage in Poulenc's Concerto for two pianos. The second movement, *Gabriel*, is dedicated to Fauré and the ambiguous melodic charm of this composer comes to the fore. *Maurice* (Ravel) is like a dreamy reminiscence of that composer's String Quartet, with elements of both the first and fourth movements recalled, though Trotignon's own more minimalist style is also audible.

Erik, of course, is Satie, and naturally the movement starts as a *gymnopédie*, with touches of slow waltz. There are many abrupt changes of rhythm that would confound any would-be dancers of this movement, and the music unpredictably changes direction several times. For 30 years, Satie was a good friend of Debussy (until they fell out shortly before Debussy's death), and in *Ces messieurs* it is 'Claude' who has the last word, with rhapsodic solo lines inspired by Debussy's fluid arabesques and hints of the composer's own string quartet.

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