



À la française ~ 22nd August 2010

~ Program Notes ~

Sonata no 4 for flute and basso continuo (Michel Blavet)

Michel Blavet was a French flute virtuoso who was born in Besançon in France.

Although Blavet taught himself to play almost every instrument, he specialized in the flute and bassoon.

Blavet composed primarily for the flute. His surviving works include a concerto and three books of sonatas. All of his works are written only in the easiest keys, since he wrote them for amateurs to play. They are unquestionably some of the most delightfully written chamber works ever composed for the flute. They exude happiness and are a delight to play.

Today, Suzanne Cowan and David Vance are performing Blavet's 4th Flute sonata.

L'horizon chimérique (Gabriel Fauré)

Fauré was born in the Pyrénées in 1845. At the age of nine he was sent off again, this time to Paris to study at the École Niedermeyer, a school which prepared church organists and choir directors. During the 11 years he attended the school, Fauré studied with several prominent French musicians, including Camille Saint-Saëns.

In 1883, Fauré married. A few years later, he had two sons. In order to support his new family Fauré spent most of his time in organising daily services at the local church and teaching piano and harmony lessons. He only had time to compose during the summers. He earned almost no money from his compositions because his publisher bought them, copyright and all, for 50 a mere francs each.

In 1896, he became chief organist at the Église de la Madeleine, and also succeeded Jules Massenet as composition instructor at the Conservatoire de Paris. At this post he taught many important French composers, including Maurice Ravel and Nadia Boulanger.

Fauré later worked as a critic for French newspaper “Le Figaro”, and then as director of the Conservatoire de Paris. This position meant that he was better off in terms of income, and he also became much more widely known as a composer.

In 1920, at the age of 75, he retired from the Conservatoire mainly due to his increasing deafness. A heavy smoker, Fauré died in Paris from pneumonia in 1924.

The song cycle “L’horizon chimérique”, written in 1921, takes four poems by Jean de la Ville de Mirmont, and depicts images of the sea and of departures.

Each of the songs describes a different aspect of the sea and, even more important, the emotions it evokes. The first, “La mer est infinie et mes rêves sont fous,” is quick and restless but free of turmoil. The second, “Je me suis embarqué sur un vaisseau qui danse,” unfolds with a repeated but slightly uneven rhythmic pattern that suggests the rolling of a ship. The third, “Diane, Séléné, lune de beau métal,” depicts the light of the moon on the still sea. The last, “Vaisseaux, nous vous aurons aimés,” is the grandest of the four, with majestic lines in both voice and accompaniment. While it returns to the key of the first song, the text speaks of leaving the sea, belonging to the land; yet still feeling an intense longing for the vast expanse of water.

Please enjoy today’s performance of L’horizon chimérique by Lisa Nolan and David Vance.

Cinq pièces breves (Jules Mouquet)

Composer Jules Mouquet was born in 1867 and studied at the Conservatoire de Paris. Between 1896 and 1907, he won many prestigious prizes. In 1913, Mouquet became professor of harmony at the Conservatoire de Paris.

Like Debussy and many other French composers at the turn of the century, Mouquet favoured subjects from Greek mythology, as a sort of neoclassical reaction against the treatments of Norse legends in Wagner’s operas.

Today, Gianna Cheung and David Vance will bring three movements from Mouquet’s “Cinq pièces brèves”.

Divertissement grec (Philippe Gaubert)

Philippe Gaubert was born in 1879. He was a distinguished performer on the flute, a respected conductor, and a composer, primarily for the flute.

Gaubert was born in Southwest France and became one of the most prominent French musicians between the two World Wars. After a prominent career as a flautist with the Paris Opéra, he was appointed in 1919, at the age of forty, to three positions that placed him at the very center of French musical life. He became the professor of flute at the Conservatoire de Paris, the principal conductor of the Paris Opéra, and the principal conductor of the Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire.

As a composer, Gaubert was by no means an innovator, but his work benefited from the examples of Franck, Ravel and Debussy.

Sous le dôme épais (Léo Delibes)

“Sous le dôme épais” is much better known as “the Flower Duet” from Léo Delibes’ opera Lakmé, first performed in 1883.

Léo Delibes was born in 1836 in central France. His father was a mailman, his mother a talented amateur musician. His grandfather had been an opera singer. He was raised mainly by his mother and uncle following his father's early death.

Starting in 1847, Delibes studied composition at the Paris Conservatoire. A year later he began taking voice lessons, though he would end up a much better organ player than singer.

Amongst many other works, Delibes composed various operas, the last of which, Lakmé, contains the famous Flower Duet, a barcarolle that was made famous in the 1990s by British Airways commercials.

Please enjoy listening to Gaubert’s “Divertissement grec”, followed by Delibes’ “Flower Duet”. Both works are performed by Suzanne Cowan, David Vance and myself.

Pavane (Maurice Ravel)

Joseph-Maurice Ravel was born in 1875 and is most known as a French composer of Impressionist music.

Much of his piano music, chamber music, vocal music and orchestral music has entered the standard concert repertoire.

Ravel is perhaps known best for his orchestral work Boléro, which he considered trivial and once described as "a piece for orchestra without music."

Today, Suzanne Cowan, Ilir Merxhushi and David Vance will perform Ravel’s Pavane.

Chanson triste, La vie antérieure, Le manoir de Rosemonde **(Henri Duparc)**

Duparc was born in Paris. He studied piano with César Franck and became one of his first composition pupils.

Duparc is best known for his seventeen art songs with texts by poets such as Baudelaire and Goethe. These pieces are considered by many to be among the greatest compositions by any composer in this form.

A mental illness caused him to abruptly cease composing at age 37, in 1885. He devoted himself to his family and his other passions, drawing and painting. However, he began losing his vision after the turn of the century, which eventually led to complete blindness. He destroyed most of his music, leaving fewer than 40 works to posterity.

He spent most of his remaining life in Switzerland and died in southwest France, at age 85.

Lisa Nolan and David Vance are today performing three of Duparc's works: Chanson triste, La vie antérieure, and Le manoir de Rosemonde.

The Swan from “The Carnival of Animals” (Camille Saint-Saëns)

Le carnaval des animaux, or “The Carnival of the Animals” is a musical suite of fourteen movements by the French Romantic composer Camille Saint-Saëns.

The work was composed in February 1886 while Saint-Saëns was vacationing in a small Austrian village. It was originally scored for a chamber group, but is usually performed today with a full orchestra of strings, and with a glockenspiel replacing the rare glass harmonica.

Saint-Saëns, apparently concerned that the piece was too frivolous and likely to harm his reputation as a serious composer, suppressed performances of it and only allowed one movement, The Swan, to be published in his lifetime. Only small private performances were given for close friends like Franz Liszt.

Saint-Saëns did, however, include a provision which allowed the suite to be published after his death. It was first performed on 26 February 1922 and it has since become one of his most popular works.

Please enjoy today's performance of The Swan by Ilir Merxhushi and David Vance.

Louange à l'éternité de Jésus from « Quatuor pour la fin du temps »
(Olivier Messiaen)

Quatuor pour la fin du temps, also known by its English title "Quartet for the End of Time", is a piece of chamber music by the French composer Olivier Messiaen.

Inspired by the language of the Apocalypse, the quartet is one of the most remarkable works to have come out of World War II, composed by a musician whose religious faith was a constant inspiration, even in the most arduous circumstances. In May 1940 the German army entered France, and Messiaen was among the thousands of French soldiers rounded up by the Germans: he was taken to a makeshift camp in a huge field to the west of Nancy in north-east France. There he met other musicians, including the clarinetist Henri Akoka and the cellist Etienne Pasquier. This produced an immediate burst of creativity from Messiaen.

In July 1940, Messiaen, Akoka and Pasquier were transported to a Prisoner of War camp near Görlitz, about 70 miles east of Dresden in Germany.

The instruments available to Messiaen presented a challenge in terms of blend and balance, and his solution was to present them in different combinations: solo (clarinet), in duos (cello and piano, violin and piano), and trios (clarinet and strings). The whole ensemble plays together in the sixth movement, but in unison, and it's only in the seventh movement that the full power of the ensemble is unleashed.

The fifth movement of this work, Louange à l'éternité de Jésus, is written for cello and piano. In this movement, Jesus is considered as the Word. A broad phrase, infinitely slow, on the cello, magnifies with love and reverence the eternity of the Word, powerful and gentle. The melody stretches majestically into a kind of gentle, regal distance. John Chapter 1, verse 1 tells us that "In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Please enjoy this wonderful work, performed by Ilir Merxhushi and David Vance.

Trois Aquarelles (Philippe Gaubert)

For the last work on today's program, we return to the works of Philippe Gaubert.

Gaubert wrote the *Trois aquarelles* (or *Three Watercolors*) in 1915. In this work, he tries to translate into sound the visual effect of watercolour technique. Just as paint colours can be perceived alone and blended with other colours, the distinct tonal colours of the flute, cello, and piano sound alone and in combination, with melody and rhythm providing basic textures.

In the first movement (*Par un clair matin*), the flute opens with a spirited wakeup call, while the piano arpeggios might suggest the rays of the morning sun. Marked by a brooding passage in the cello, *Soir d'automne* has a subdued and autumnal quality. *Sérénade* is in a Spanish style, with imitations of the sound of castanets.

For the last time today, please welcome Suzanne Cowan, Ilir Merxhushi and David Vance to the stage.

Bibliography:

"Flute History | Michel Blavet." flutehistory.com. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <http://www.flutehistory.com/Players/Michel_Blavet/index.php3>.

"Gabriel Fauré - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel_Faur%C3%A9>.

"Gabriel Urbain Fauré: Biography from Answers.com." Answers.com: Wiki Q&A combined with free online dictionary, thesaurus, and encyclopedias. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.answers.com/topic/gabriel-faur>>.

"Henri Duparc (composer)." Henri Duparc (composer) - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Aug. 2010. <[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Duparc_\(composer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Duparc_(composer))>.

"Jules Mouquet - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jules_Mouquet>.

"Jules Mouquet | Classical Composers Database." Home page | Classical Composers Database. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.classical-composers.org/comp/mouquet>>.

"L'horizon chimérique, song cycle (4) for voice & piano, Op. 118: Information from Answers.com." Answers.com: Wiki Q&A combined with free online dictionary, thesaurus, and encyclopedias. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.answers.com/topic/l-horizon-chim-rique-song-cycle-4-for-voice-piano-op-118>>.

"Léo Delibes - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%A9o_Delibes>.

"Maurice Ravel - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurice_Ravel>.

"Michel Blavet - Classical Archives." Classical Archives: Home. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.classicalarchives.com/composer/2199.html#tvf=tracks&tv=about>>.

"Philippe Gaubert - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippe_Gaubert>.

Simeone, Nigel. "Philharmonia Orchestra - Olivier Messiaen - Quatuor pour la fin du Temps (Quartet for the end of Time)." Philharmonia Orchestra. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <<http://www.philharmonia.co.uk/messiaen/music/quatuor.html>>.

"The Carnival of the Animals - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Carnival_of_the_Animals>.

"The Flower Duet - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Flower_Duet>.

Weitz, Jay. "Program Notes American Chamber Players Saturday, October 18, 2003." Chamber Music Columbus. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <http://www.columbuschambermusic.org/03-04_season/Program%20Notes/program_notes_acp.htm>.

"Michel Blavet - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michel_Blavet>.

MLA formatting by BibMe.org.