

Lumas Winds with Jonathan Ferrucci, piano

Dutilleux 1916 – 2013

Au Gré des Ondes Along the waves

Prélude en berceuse

Claquettes

Improvisation

Movement perpétuel

Hommage à Bach

Etude

This suite for piano was written in 1946, as incidental music for radio. The “waves”, being radio waves. It is an early, neo classical work in style, with Debussy and Ravel clearly reflected. Critics at the time were disparaging of its old fashioned form, harmony and expression. Audiences however, found it appealing and it was broadcast frequently. Dutilleux’s family were amateur musicians and it is thought that their influence was stronger than that of the current musical developments in Paris, his home.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

'Le tombeau de Couperin'

(1918) arranged by Hans Abrahamsen for wind quintet.

Prélude. Vif

Fugue. Allegro moderato

Forlane. Allegretto

Rigaudon. Assez vif

Menuet. Allegro moderato

Toccata. Vif

Musically, 'un Tombeau' is a piece written in memory of someone. Ravel's original six movement piece for piano is patriotically titled as being in memory of François Couperin (1668-1733), who established a distinctively French keyboard style of composition; but each of the movements is also dedicated to the memory of a different close friend killed in the first world war. When war broke out Ravel was working on his piano trio, the symphonic poem *La Valse* and a few other projects including *Le Tombeau*. He completed the piano trio in five weeks and then volunteered for service. His several attempts to enlist as an aircraft pilot were turned down on health grounds, but he finally became a driver in the motor transport corps. Despite the death in January 1917 of his mother, who was perhaps the only person to whom he was ever closely emotionally attached, Ravel finished the six pieces of *Le Tombeau* and planned to perform them. When bombing postponed the initial performance, Ravel used the time to create an orchestral version of four of the original six movements.

Debussy 1862 – 1918

Images Book 2

Cloches à travers les feuilles *Bells through the leaves*

Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fût *and the moon descends on the old temple*

Poissons d'or *Golden fish*

Debussy was taught the piano at an early age and he was a student at the Paris Conservatoire where he took up composition and won the Prix de Rome in 1884. Earlier, in 1879 Debussy travelled to Italy, Austria and Russia where he heard the music of Tchaikovsky and Borodin. In the restaurants and bars of Moscow he heard “gypsy music” and these influences all gave Debussy a liking of unusual music and sound worlds far away from the academic models he was expected to follow in the conservatoire. In 1889 the Universal Exhibition employed a Russian orchestra and also an utterly different sound from a large group of instruments. This was the Gamelan from Java. The different tuning, scale, timbre and the structure of pieces played by the collection of gongs mounted on ornate wooden frames, captured Debussy immediately and his piano compositions reflect this. After all, the piano is a percussive instrument like the gong.

Images book 2 begins with a piece inspired by the church bells of the village of Rahon in the Jura region of France. The second piece evokes Javanese and more generally East Asian music, as understood by Debussy with his French sensibilities. The third piece is an aural picture of a golden fish in a bowl, in a painting or as embroidery on fabric. The exact influence is not recorded.

Francaix 1912 – 1997

Wind Quintet No 1

Andante tranquillo – Allegro assai

Presto

Tema con variazioni Andante

Tempo di Marcia Francese

Jean Francaix was born into a highly musical family and he was enrolled as a composer and pianist at the Conservatoire of Le Mans, where he lived. Nadia Boulanger taught Francaix and many of his compositions were played in Paris. He won a prize as a pianist at the Paris Conservatoire and toured Europe and the US. He was a prolific composer and wrote for many different instrumental ensembles as well as for the full orchestra.

Stylistically Francaix's music is neo classical and he was strongly influenced by Ravel, Poulenc and Stravinsky. There is a lightness of touch and humour running through his work.

Poulenc 1899 – 1963

Improvisation in A minor No 13

Sextet for piano and wind

Allegro vivace

Divertissement: Andantino

Prestissimo

Poulenc was born in Paris to a prosperous family and his mother taught him the piano as a young child. Later, as a young man he became one of a group named “les six”. All six friends lived and worked in Montparnasse. Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc and Germaine Tailleferre. They shared musical ideas and developed their differing styles alongside each other. Despite not attending a conservatoire Poulenc managed to have his music performed and he was helped by Stravinsky who had publishing contacts in London. Poulenc was an excellent pianist and this, together with his Catholic faith gave him confidence to write much vocal and choral music. He travelled in Europe, meeting Schoenberg in Vienna and Casella in Italy.

Poulenc resisted French influences from Messiaen and the mixture of neo classicism and light-weight attractive melodic music, leavened with intense Catholicism, has ensured that his is a singular and instantly recognisable voice.

Improvisation No 13 is one from a group of 15 short pieces. They were composed between 1932 – 59 and some were dedicated to friends. No 13 is a dark mysterious sounding piece and the instruction to use the sustaining pedal helps foster the mood. The languorous melody is simple yet with chromatic shifts and an utter lack of sentimentality it avoids kitsch.

Poulenc's sextet was begun in 1932 and revised in 1939. It is said to have been influenced by Poulenc's visits to the circus with his musical friends such as Satie and Milhaud. The first movement is in ternary form. A-B-A. Jazzy rhythms and high energy are its characteristics. The second movement has two obviously contrasting sections; one considerably slower than the other. It is a glance back to the contrasting pace of movements in the classical period of Mozart's time. The final movement is heavily indebted to jazz and ragtime and there are repeats from the previous two movements which help to bind the whole together.

Programme notes by Helen Simpson (Dutilleux, Debussy, Francaix, Poulenc) and Chris Darwin (Ravel)