

Maurice Ravel (1895-1937) Rapsodie Espagnole

1) *Prelude a la nuit*

2) *Malaguena*

3) *Habenera*

4) *Feria*

Maurice Ravel was born in the Basque town of Ciboure, near the Spanish border. He showed promise as a pianist from the age of 7 and also studied composition. At the age of 14 he entered the Paris Conservatoire and won the first prize in the Conservatoire's piano competition but decided to concentrate on composition. Along with Debussy he developed a style known as Impressionism of which the Rapsodie Espagnole is an early example.

Ravel composed a Habenera for two pianos in 1895 which became the third movement of the Rapsodie. The three other movements of the suite were completed as a two piano version and then fully orchestrated in February 1908. The suite was premiered on 15 March 1908 by the Colonne Orchestra, conducted by Edouard Colonne, its founder. The orchestra is large and calls for a large percussion contingent, including a celesta and castanets.

The first movement *Prelude a la nuit* is in A major and triple time. It is a quiet movement never rising above mezzo forte and evocative of the Spanish night. The strings are muted and the piece opens with a descending 4 note motif which dominates the piece, it ends quietly on a chord of A major.

The second movement *Malaguena* is a flamenco dance in $\frac{3}{4}$ time and alternates between A major and A minor. It ends quietly with a statement of the 4 note motif from the first movement.

The Habenera is alleged to have been influenced by Bizet's Carmen it is a slow movement which has a dream like quality. The rhythm alternates between duple and triple time.

The last movement in contrast to the previous three is much more lively and is evocative of a Spanish Fiesta. It has a slow middle section. However the festive mood returns. It makes prominent use of the castanets and the four note motif from the first movement makes a reappearance. It ends in a riot of orchestral colour.

Although Ravel wasn't very prolific due to illness, he wrote a number of pieces which have become part of the concert repertoire including the Mother Goose suite and two Piano concertos, one of which was for left hand only. He died in 1937.

Saint Saens 2nd Piano Concerto

- 1) *Andante Sostenuta*
- 2) *Scherzo*
- 3) *Tarantella*.

Saint-Saens (1835 – 1921) was a well trained organist and pianist and also a prolific composer. His music encapsulates a French love of order and clarity elegantly expressed. He represents a return to the pre romantic idea of a composer as a craftsman such as Haydn, rather than the tormented individual so beloved of the romantic ideal. He became a serious editor of earlier French music. In 1869 he founded the Société nationale de musique with the aim of establishing a distinct French style which would be an alternative to the allegedly dominant Germanic musical tradition. It's slogan was *Ars Gallica* (Art for the French)

Saint-Saens soon acquired a reputation as a leader in contemporary French music. He wrote five symphonies, the most famous being the third symphony known as the organ symphony, five piano concertos three violin concertos and numerous other orchestral works including the *Danse Macabre*. He also wrote many operas including Samson and Delilah. He also taught for a while and influenced composers such as Cesar Franck and Gabriel Faure.

Of the piano concertos the 2nd in G minor Op 22 is still performed with some regularity. It was commissioned by the Great Russian pianist Anton Rubenstein who mentored Tchaikovsky. Rubinstein wanted a piece that he could conduct so that he could expand his performance horizons. Saint -Saens completed the concerto in only seventeen days and it was first performed on 13 May 1868 in Paris. Saint–Saens was the soloist and Anton Rubnstein conducted the piece. It generally met with a cool reception, however Franz Liszt thought it worthwhile.

The concerto in G minor is in three contrasting movements and has been described as going from Bach to Offenbach. The first movement *Andante Sostenuto* is a slow movement and opens with a Bach like toccata over a G pedal point. A brief orchestral fanfare leads to the pianos presentation of the first theme in a declamatory

style. A contrasting theme in B flat major makes use of syncopated rhythms. Much use is made of the soloist, which has an extremely demanding virtuosic role to play whilst the orchestra plays a subordinate part. A long cadenza based on the first theme heralds the end of the movement which ends with a restatement of the opening toccata accompanied by soft sustained string support.

The second movement is a Scherzo evocative of Mendelsohn's *Midsummer night's dream* fairy music. The movement is in E flat major. The timpani begin the movement with a jumpy dance rhythm that is often repeated particularly by the piano. A lyrical second theme in E flat major provides a contrast to the first theme and the two themes are played in succession, almost like a rondo interspersed with flourishes for the soloist. The music ends quietly almost as if the fairies have tripped away to sleep.

The final movement is a tarantella (Wild dance) in the key of G minor. The soloist is prominent throughout. In the middle section the soloist plays a trill motif set against the background of a Bach like chorale in the orchestra.

Saint Saens died in 1921 (outliving Debussy) and set himself against the Impressionist trend that Debussy and Ravel had initiated.

Debussy Prelude L'Après Midi D'un Faun

Debussy was born in 1862 at St Germain en Laye. His early childhood was unsettled as his father was imprisoned after the Paris commune of 1871, and he received no formal education until he entered the Paris Conservatoire in 1872. There he showed early promise as a virtuoso but he became more interested in composition winning the Prix de Rome in 1884 with his cantata *L'Enfant prodigue*. A few years later he composed his first great piece *Prelude a L'Après Midi D'un Faun*. This short piece was inspired by a poem by Mallarme and depicts the futile attempts of a faun to chase after two nymphs who elude his capture.

Debussy was attempting to move away from classical harmony which had dominated music for almost 200 years. He did this by experimenting with various scales most notably the Pentatonic scale and more importantly for this piece the whole tone scale. In this scale each note is separated by a tone and there are no semi-tones. This means unlike music based on traditional tonality, there is no sense of a discordant chord having to resolve onto a consonant one. However the scale is based on the interval of an augmented fourth or tritone, which in traditional music was called the devil in music (*Diabolous in Musica*) and every student of classical harmony is told to avoid this interval like the plague. The use of the whole tone scales gives the music a dream like static quality, each chord standing alone by itself with no contrast between the tonic chord and the dominant chord.

The piece has a basic tri-partite structure ABA' with a coda. . It is scored for a full complement of stings, two Harps, Wind Instruments including a Cor Anglais, 4 French horns, and tuned cymbals. It is nominally in the key of E major but for most of the piece it is tonally ambiguous with only a few islands of tonal stability

A solo flute opens this piece with two bars outlining the Tritone formed from a descent of C# to G which is then repeated. This will form a Leitmotif which is subject to variations throughout the piece and represents the Faun. The solo ends on an unstable chord a brief

pause is followed by a dialogue between the two horns and the opening theme is now fully harmonised in the key of D major. A 3 note ascending motif is introduced and the first climax of the piece is reached. A solo clarinet introduces the opening theme for a third time which is harmonised in the home key of E major. This fragments to create another mini climax. The music becomes more agitated and a variant of the opening theme is introduced by the clarinet which includes a whole tone scale. A new yearning theme is introduced by the oboe, taken up by the violins and this fragments to introduce a climax which fades away bringing the first section to a close.

The woodwinds introduce section B by a descending theme in D flat major over a bass line which oscillates between the notes of the tritone formed by the notes Db and G. This is then taken up by the strings in a section which introduces many rhythms in quick succession.(a technique which Stravinsky would become a master of). The music fragments until the violins rise up ending the section.

The last section begins with a restatement of the first theme, only this time the descent is that of a 4th from C to G rather than of the tritone.. This section is more conventional and is for the most part firmly in E major (the home key). Prominence is given to the harps which play a number of E major chords. An agitated theme by the oboe interrupts the mood which is followed by a cascade down through the orchestra. The antique cymbals sound the notes B and E (the dominant and tonic of E major) reinforcing the conventional harmonic nature of this section. The theme is heard again for the 7th and final time and a perfect cadence in E major is heard accompanied by chromatic notes on the harps. A final flute entry outlining the initial tritone ends the piece.

The piece has been described as the first truly modern piece of music by Boulez and Bernstein. In it's creative use of the Tritone, the augmented fourth can no longer be seen as the Devil in Music.

Debussy went on to write other works for Orchestra including *La Mer* and *Images*. He also wrote many works for piano including two books of Preludes and an Opera *Pelleas and Melisande*. He died of cancer in 1918.

Chant D'Auvergne Extracts

Joseph Canteloube (1879 – 1957)

- 1) **La-haut, sur le rocher (Up there on the Crag).**
- 2) **Le Bossu (The Hunchback).**
- 3) **Malourous qu'o uno fenno (Unhappy is he who has a wife).**
- 4) **Baïlèro**
- 5) **Trois Bouree Three Bouree's.**

5a) L'aïo dè rotso (Water From The Spring)

5b) Ound' onorèn gorda?

(Where will we watch over our flock ?).

5c) Obal din loi Limouzi (Down Below in Limousin).

The French composer Joseph Canteloube was born in the mountainous province of Auvergne in 1879. This region was named after the Gallic tribe of the Arveni, who managed to defeat Julius Caesar under their leader Vercingetorix. It was conquered by the French Lord Phillippe Auguste in 1190 becoming a crown territory in the sixteenth century. Canteloube took lesson in piano and composition in Paris after the death of his mother in 1900. He studied with Vincent d'Indy and entered his Schola Cantorum a school which encouraged the study and development of regional musical traditions.

Whilst he wrote a number of compositions including two operas and a number of small orchestral works. He is mainly remembered today for his folk song arrangements stating that the songs of peasants often reached the purest art in feeling and expression if not in form. His interest in folk music followed a trend established by many composers such as Bartok and Vaughan Williams.

Canteloube compiled and arranged five volumes of folk songs for voice and instrumental ensembles. The first two were written in 1924, the third and fourth in 1927 and 1930 and the last in 1955. Making a total of 27 altogether. The songs are written the ancient language of Occitan (Languè d'oc) and are essentially pastoral in nature many of them being dialogues between a shepherd or shepherdess and their lovers. Canteloube orchestrates the settings in a late romantic style and the shepherds calls to each other are represented by woodwind instruments such as the oboe and the cor-anglais. His orchestration is

influenced by Debussy and Ravel and he eschewed the developments of the modernists such as Stravinsky and Les Six

The first song in this recital is *La-haut, sur le rocher* (*Up there on the Crag*). It is taken from the 5th book of the series and is in French rather than Occitan. It uses a full orchestration with an unusually expressive accompaniment, not at all folk like. It also features the celeste. A young shepherdess is met by a young man returning from the Army and who is looking for a wife. He sits by her and asks her whether or not she is married. She replies alas I am but not happily, my husband is mean and jealous. The young man says let him come I will defend us with my pistol and loaded rifle.

The second song *Le Bossu* (the hunchback) is a slightly menacing dialogue between a shepherdess Janneton and a hunchback. The hunchback is represented by scurrying sounds reminiscent of the music accompanying Wagner's dwarf *Mime* in *Siegfried*. The hunchback menacingly claims that Janneton will be his. Janneton replies only if you cut off your hump to which he replies that he would rather keep his hump, thank you.

The third song *Malourous qu'o uno fenno* (*Unhappy is he who has a wife*), features bag pipe sounds, a tambourine and eventually tympani. It is a humorous reflection on the irony that a man who has a wife doesn't want one, whilst conversely a man who doesn't want one. As for women happy are they who have a man they wanted. But even happier are those women who aren't married.

The fourth song *Bailero* was the first song in the series that Canteloube wrote on a train journey in 1923. It is the most famous of the songs and the setting is extremely evocative of the French country side. It is a dialogue between a shepherdess and a shepherd separated by a stream. The shepherdess entreats the shepherd to come over to her side of the stream. To which the shepherd replies that the pasture is better for his flock on his side. The shepherdess points out that she cannot cross the stream, to which the shepherd replies don't worry I will come and fetch you.

The final songs in this selection are three interlinked songs *Trois Bourree*. The Bourree was an Auvergnat dance with a simple phrase structure either in duple or triple time. Canteloube making use of percussion instruments to represent the finger clicking of the dancers. The songs are connected by the use of wind solos beginning with an a slow improvisatory oboe solo which livens up into a dance. The first song in the series *L'aïo dè rotso (Water From The Spring)* warns a young woman not to drink water from the stream as it will kill her. She should drink wine instead as that will make her a better lover. The setting involves lots of runs and glissandi imitating the running of the stream and the pouring of the wine. Another improvisatory interlude by the oboe introduces the second song in the series *Ound' onorèn gorda? (Where will we watch over our flock ?)*. A motif in imitation of a hurdy gurdy is heard through out the song. A shepherd encourages a shepherdess to leave the flocks to fend for themselves whilst they make love all day. A clarinet solo introduces the final song of the three *Obal din loi Limouzi (Down Below in Limousin)* which contrasts the men of Limousin with those of the Auvergne, whilst the men in Limousin may be more Galant, the Auvergne men are more loving and faithful.

Canteloube became associated with *Action Françoise* a movement which had a conservative moral, political and social Agenda. During the Second World War, after the German occupation of France he became closely associated with the Vichy Government of Petain. He continued the revival of interest in Folk music. He died in Auvergne in 1957.

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