

CHAN 6589

CHANDOS COLLECT

Rapsodie



Roussel Aria
Poulenc Sonata
Saint-Saëns Sonata
Milhaud Duo concertant
Debussy Première Rapsodie
Ravel Pièce en forme de habanera

Janet Hilton *clarinet*
Keith Swallow *piano*

Rapsodie

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

Sonata

14:06

for Clarinet and Piano

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|------|
| 1 | I Allegro tristamente (Allegretto) | 5:27 |
| 2 | II Romanza (Très calme) | 5:05 |
| 3 | III Allegro con fuoco (Très animé) | 3:27 |

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|------|
| 4 | Pièce en forme de habanera | 3:15 |
|---|----------------------------|------|

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

- | | | |
|---|-------------------|------|
| 5 | Première Rapsodie | 9:07 |
|---|-------------------|------|

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921)

Sonata in E flat major, Op. 167

18:16

for Clarinet and Piano

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|------|
| 6 | I Allegretto | 5:23 |
| 7 | II Allegro animato | 2:22 |
| 8 | III Lento | 4:34 |
| 9 | IV Molto allegro | 5:49 |

Albert Roussel (1869–1937)

10

Aria

2:54

Arranged by Arthur Hoérée (1897–1986)

Darius Milhaud (1892–1974)

11

Duo concertant, Op. 351

6:40

TT 54:59

Janet Hilton clarinet

Keith Swallow piano

Rapsodie: French Music for Clarinet and Piano

Not so very long ago... the name of a living French composer on a poster was sufficient to frighten away any would-be concert-goer. So wrote Camille Saint-Saëns on the inauguration of his brainchild, the Société nationale de musique, on 25 February 1871, an enterprise designed to right this wrong. Its chosen motto, *Ars Gallica*, might have seemed ironic in view of the fact that a few days later Prussian troops were marching down the Champs-Élysées, France was plunged into three months of civil strife, and Saint-Saëns himself had fled to England. By May, however, the Commune had fallen, exiles returned, and once again the threads of musical life in Paris were taken up and the less dangerous activities of musical and literary polemics recommenced. On 17 November 1871, at the Salle Pleyel, a concert of contemporary French works, arranged by the Société nationale, was given:

From then onwards, French names appeared on concert programmes where previously no one had dared admit them. The barriers were down.

French music is the product of artistic values and an intellectual objectivity alien equally to German, Italian and English ideals and taste. On the negative side, 'it lacks... a strongly flavoured emotional content, either

moral and uplifting as in Beethoven or introvert and lowering as in Tchaikovsky', as Martin Cooper so cogently puts it in the introduction to his *French Music*; on the positive, it has long revelled in 'the art of arranging sounds in agreeable and intellectually satisfying patterns' in search of perfection.

Saint-Saëns: Sonata

Saint-Saëns (1835–1921) was a man of restrained tastes and classical idealism. A prodigy pianist (he played a concerto by Mozart in public at the age of eight), he yearned towards the career of a composer and to that end wrote symphonies, concertos and, of course, operas: works of fine craftsmanship, great charm, balance, occasional genius, and a lack of pretentiousness, which were seminal in the formation of the new French musical ideology of the latter part of the century. With indefatigable energy he combined the life of virtuoso, composer, writer, astronomer, pedagogue and, latterly, traveller, surviving domestic tragedy and professional setbacks with an implacable stoicism. About the time of his eighty-fifth birthday he set out on a recital tour of Belgium and Switzerland (fingers as supple as ever, by all accounts), followed by his

customary winter visit to Algiers. Here he composed his last works: the sonatas for oboe, for clarinet, and for bassoon, all works in the classical spirit but with characteristic individualities. In the ternary opening movement, *Allegretto*, of the Clarinet Sonata the initial E flat major theme and its warbling accompaniment return in the reprise in the unexpected key of G minor, restlessly modulating to F minor/major and touching on increasingly chromatic harmonies before arriving back in the tonic. In the second movement, *Allegro animato*, the short clarinet phrases are charmingly completed by the piano. The amazing agility of the clarinet which so enraptured Mozart on his visit to Mannheim in 1778 is here generally exploited in Saint-Saëns's writing for the instrument. In his slow movement, *Lento*, however, Saint-Saëns does the reverse and writes a part within a very small compass, first in the clarinet's lowest register, then higher up. Piano arpeggios link with the finale, *Molto allegro*, which concludes with, first, a return of the movement's main theme, then with the sonata's opening E flat theme – which, of course, explains the composer's tactics in the earlier avoidance of it.

Debussy: Première Rapsodie

Claude Debussy (1862–1918) himself benefitted by the concerts of the Société nationale: *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*

was one among several of his works to be performed under its auspices. Debussy's highly personal style derives partly from the earlier experiments of composers like Liszt and Mussorgsky with scale patterns other than major/minor; partly from the treatment of dissonant chords as complete in themselves; partly from a systematic fragmentation of motifs and blurring of contours. As a student, asked what rules he followed, Debussy answered, 'Mon plaisir'. Recognition came after the success of his only opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, first performed in 1902; later he was appointed to the *Conseil supérieur* at the Conservatoire and wrote the *Première Rapsodie pour clarinette* in 1909–10 as a test piece for the students' *concours* (the contest of wind instrumentalists). He later orchestrated it and referred to it as 'one of the pleasantest pieces I have ever written'. A slow introduction, *Réveusement lent*, is followed by a fast movement.

Roussel: Aria

Albert Roussel (1869–1937) came to music late after a career in the navy. He developed a personal language which in its simplicity, rhythmic vitality and diatonicism anticipated Poulenc and Milhaud. The *Aria* on this CD is an arrangement of the second of two *Vocalises* dating from 1927 and 1928. It was originally a vocal study in legato phrasing and

control of nuance. It is sometimes heard in an orchestral version.

Ravel: Pièce en forme de habanera

The *Pièce en forme de habanera* by Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) is also an arrangement of a vocalise, the *Vocalise-étude en forme de habanera* of 1907. This short movement, marked *Presque lent et avec indolence*, is one of many popular cross-fertilisations of Spanish folk idiom and French sophistication written in the early part of the century. Ravel later reworked it for orchestra.

Milhaud: Duo concertant

With Darius Milhaud (1892–1974) French music reached the period of the famous *Groupe des Six*, a group of young composers, totally unlike stylistically yet caught at this moment of time, 1919, in the net of Jean Cocteau's enthusiasm for a new and simpler music: a music purged of foreign influence, purged above all of the influence of Wagner. Milhaud was one of *Les Six*. A particularly self-aware

musician of great technical facility, he wrote an enormous number of works. The *Duo concertant* of 1956 is in a single movement, *Vif* sections enclosing a more expressive *Modéré*.

Poulenc: Sonata

The music of Francis Poulenc (1899–1963), the youngest of *Les Six*, achieves the elegance and clarity that typify the French ideal:

I have sought neither to ridicule nor to mimic tradition, but to compose as I felt compelled to.

As in the case of Saint-Saëns (and also Debussy), his last works were instrumental sonatas: this Clarinet Sonata and a sonata for oboe and piano. Of the Clarinet Sonata's three movements, the first, unusually marked *Allegro tristamente*, has, at its centre, a change of tempo and a melody of restrained nostalgia; the *Romanza (Très calme)* evolves from a little rising clarinet figure; the ternary *Allegro con fuoco* is typical of the impetuous and life-affirming attitude of the composer.

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