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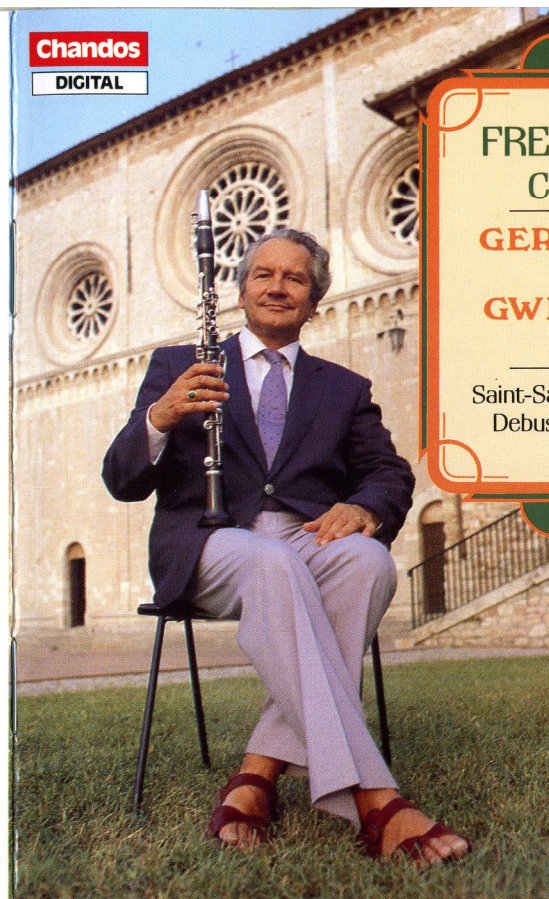
**CHAN 8526**



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Printed in West Germany / Imprimé en Allemagne  
**CHANDOS RECORDS LTD, LONDON, ENGLAND**

**Chandos**

**DIGITAL**



**FRENCH MUSIC FOR**  
Clarinet and Piano

**GERVASE DE PEYER**

Clarinet

**GWENNETH PRYOR**

Piano

Saint-Saëns Sonata · Poulenc Sonata  
Debussy · Ravel · Pierné · Schmitt

**1. SAINT-SAËNS:  
Sonata for Clarinet  
and Piano Op.167 (15:01)**

- 1 I Allegretto (4:04)
- 2 II Allegro animato (2:00)
- 3 III Lento (3:49)
- 4 IV Molto Allegro (4:59)

5 **2. DEBUSSY: Première Rhapsodie (8:08)**

**3. POULENC: Sonata for Clarinet and Piano (12:38)**

- 6 I Allegro tristamente (Allegretto) (4:40)
- 7 II Romanza (très calme) (4:53)
- 8 III Allegro con fuoco (très animé) (2:58)

9 **4. SCHMITT: Andantino Op.30 No.1 (3:13)**

10 **5. RAVEL: Pièce en forme de habanera (2:45)**

11 **6. DEBUSSY: Arabesque No.2 (3:15)**

12 **7. DEBUSSY: The girl with flaxen hair (2:07)**  
(Preludes Book I, No.8)

13 **8. PIERNÉ: Canzonetta Op.19 (2:48)** TT = 50:35

**GERVASE DE PEYER** *clarinet*  
**GWENNETH PRYOR** *piano*

Saint-Saëns is much the earliest of these composers, born in 1835, and almost the longest living. In fact his Clarinet Sonata was probably written in 1921, the year of his death. Towards the end of the nineteenth century he had begun to lighten the texture of his music, and the Clarinet Sonata illustrates the concern with clarity, precision and order that had become so apparent in his critical writings. Saint-Saëns was against the Romantic aesthetic which had prevailed throughout most of his life, and pieces like this now seem to be harbingers of the reaction against Romanticism, to which most French composers subscribed in the 1920s.

Although the piano writing is varied and effective, interest centres on the clarinet, which always carries the main thread of the argument. This is especially so in the opening *Allegretto*. The pace quickens with the following *Allegro animato* but the music retains its air of objectivity and the third movement, a *Lento*, is almost like a chorale. This leads into the *Molto allegro*, which ends with a restatement of the *Allegretto*'s opening material, the clarinet line the same, the key-board subject to modest alterations.

Born in 1862 and '63 respectively, Debussy and Pierné were members of the next generation. Pierné died in 1937, the same year as Ravel, and outside France was known chiefly as a conductor. He occupies a secure footnote in musical history as director of the first performance of Stravinsky's *L'Oiseau de Feu* in 1910, but wrote prolifically in many genres, gaining most acceptance in opera and ballet. It may be, however, that Pierné's musical personality is best defined in his chamber music, and the *Canzonetta* found here is a small chip from that particular workshop. A lightly stepping piece in 6/8, it is deft, melodious, graceful.

Debussy's *Arabesque* is the second of two such items composed in 1888-91 for piano and here arranged for clarinet by Alfred Piguet. Essentially it is a salon piece, echoing the style of ballet music by such composers as Delibes. Yet the *meno mosso* section hints at later Debussian languor, and, when the tempo picks up, at the *Golliwog's Cakewalk*. Though obstinately described as *Première Rhapsodie* on the sheet music and in listings of his works, Debussy wrote only one such piece, in 1909-10 for some Paris Conservatoire examinations. The initial

marking, *Rêveusement lent*, exactly describes how it starts, though it gathers surprising force later. Inevitably dwarfed by major works being written during that time, such as the orchestral *Images* and piano *Préludes*, the *Rhapsodie* is a thoroughly characteristic product of Debussy's best period. He thought well of it, and prepared an orchestral version that emphasises the music's sensuous impact. *La Fille aux cheveux de lin* (*The girl with flaxen hair*) is No.8 of the first book of *Préludes*, arranged for violin by Arthur Hartmann and adapted by Gervase de Peyer. Again Debussy's marking, *Très calme et doucement expressif*, is more than just an indication of tempo and tells us something about the music's nature. It has suggestions of a pre-Raphaelite atmosphere, though its pentatonic features glance towards the Javanese gamelan music he had heard in 1889.

Florent Schmitt (1870-1958) was from Lorraine, was a pupil of Massenet and Fauré, and was enormously productive of large and small works, most of which are at present rarely heard. He had strong leanings towards German Romanticism and his big orchestral pieces are thick-textured and of great intensity, driving forward with a ruthlessness that is uncommon in French music. *La Tragédie de Salomé* (1907) is a good and highly coloured example. The little *Andantino* from his Op.30 also dates from the early years of the century and reveals Schmitt in a rather different light. Its combination of refinement and underlying vigour, and its exact craftsmanship, are, however, in their way typical.

Also a pupil of Fauré, Ravel (1875-1937), like Debussy, said a lot about his music in the directions he gave for its performance. The *Pièce en forme de Habanera*, for instance, is headed *Presque lent et avec indolence* and it seems to murmur through a mysterious summer haze. This piece, or *Pièce*, has taken a number of forms, but it started as one of the two movements of a work for two pianos called *Sites Auriculaires*, dating from 1895. It prompted Debussy's *La Soirée dans Grenade* and, presumably by suggesting further potentialities within the Spanish idiom, led Ravel himself to compose the orchestral *Rhapsodie Espagnole* (1907), of which it forms the penultimate movement. What is performed on the enclosed record is an arrangement of the original version done by an

unknown hand and adapted by Gervase de Peyer.

Like Saint-Saëns, Poulenc (1899-1963) wrote his Clarinet Sonata near the end of his life, in 1962. Also like Saint-Saëns, he composed an Oboe Sonata at about the same time. Poulenc intended these two works to be part of a larger set which, as in Debussy's case, he never lived to complete. The movements of the Clarinet Sonata follow his usual fast-slow-fast pattern and, as ever, melody is the most important single element. The main theme of the first movement is a good instance, yet better still is the melody of the *Romanza*, which exemplifies the gift that made Poulenc the most distinguished French composer of songs since Fauré.

From the beginning his music always had simplicity and directness, these qualities in no way contradicting others that were quite unexpected. He made new discoveries in areas that might have been thought exhausted so that his works have an entirely personal accent with regard to harmony, rhythm, texture. And they are often mischievous: the piano's sudden interjection of a dotted-note figure just before the end of the opening movement is a characteristic Poulencian gesture. Rather puzzlingly, this movement is headed *Allegro tristamente* but its initial tempo direction is *Allegretto*. It sounds best if taken, as in the present performance, rather briskly. The finale, headed *Allegro con fuoco* with the further marking *très animé*, is likewise full of rhythmic life.

MAX HARRISON 1987

**Gervase de Peyer** is world famous as a clarinettist, and his distinguished personal style of playing has done much to establish the clarinet as a popular solo instrument in the grand tradition.

Born in London into a musical family, he progressed rapidly in his piano and clarinet studies, giving his first broadcast with his school orchestra in Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. He won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music where he was awarded many prizes including the Worshipful Company of Musicians Medal.

He was a founder member of the famous Melos Ensemble in 1951, joined the London Symphony Orchestra as principal clarinet in 1956 and, as a soloist,

acquired a formidable reputation throughout Britain and Europe. He is the most recorded clarinetist in the world, with at least 30 discs to his credit, some of which have won major international awards.

In 1969 Gervase de Peyer was invited to join the newly-created Chamber Music Society of the Lincoln Center, New York, and he now commutes between Europe and the USA as soloist or participant in chamber music performances with other artists of world renown including Barenboim, Rostropovitch, Menuhin, Perlman and the Amadeus Quartet.

In recent years he has added a new dimension to his career, as a conductor: he has worked with many orchestras including the English Chamber and the London Symphony Orchestras, and for two years he was Conductor-in-Residence of the Victoria International Festival in British Columbia. His current international touring schedules regularly include a series of master classes.

**Gwenneth Pryor**, Australian born pianist living in London, has established an enviable reputation for her recitals, concerto appearances, chamber music playing and LP recordings. One London reviewer described her as 'one of the finest pianists of her generation performing in this country, an artist of the widest stylistic sympathies and of exceptional technical control.'

She graduated from the Sydney Conservatorium with the prize for the most outstanding student of her year, and then won a scholarship to study at the Royal College of Music in London, which awarded her the Hopkinson Gold Medal and sponsored her highly successful début at the Wigmore Hall. At this time she made her first recording, of Beethoven Sonatas with Carlos Villa, which became a best-selling classical record of its year and received glowing reviews. Since that time she has performed in most of the major musical centres of the world, worked with many eminent conductors and made several gramophone records.

Gwenneth Pryor has a wide-ranging repertoire embracing standard classical and contemporary works, some of which have been dedicated to her. She maintains a

keen interest in teaching, giving weekly master classes at Morley College. Her duo with Gervase de Peyer has now been established for over fifteen years.

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**Recording Producer: James Burnett**  
**Sound Engineer: Bob Auger**  
**Recorded in Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead, London in 1982-83**  
**Front cover photo by Glauco Cortini**  
**Sleeve Design: Christopher Sims; Art Direction: Janet Osborn**

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