

By 1905, the date of the *Barcarolle No. 7 in D minor, Op. 90*, Fauré's life had changed very considerably. Sixty in May, in June he had been appointed director of the Conservatoire after the *affaire Ravel* and the resignation of Théodore Dubois. The darker-hued new *Barcarolle* was written in August and dedicated to the wife of the pianist Isidore Philipp. The first public performance was given in February the following year at the Salle Erard by Arnold Reitlinger. 1906 brought *Barcarolle No. 8 in D flat, Op. 96*, dedicated to the daughter of the composer Alfred Bruneau, a further example of Fauré's later, more rigorous style, with what, in earlier terms, are harmonic experiments, with less attention to singable melody. *Barcarolle No. 9 in A minor, Op. 101*, dedicated to the wife of Charles Neff, was first performed at the Salle Erard in the year of its completion, 1909, by Marguerite Long in a Fauré recital that included *Impromptu No. 5* and the *Ballade*, with the composer playing the second piano. His reaction to Marguerite Long's performance on this occasion, quoted by the leading Fauré scholar Jean-Michel Nectoux in his study of the composer, seemed cool enough: *Voilà pour moi une chose réalisée*. Marguerite Long had assumed a proprietary relationship to Fauré's piano music, claiming his authority for her brilliant style of performance. With the death of her husband in the early days of the war the direct relationship with Fauré, weakened by his appointment of Cortot as successor to her teacher Marmontel at the Conservatoire some years earlier, came to an end.

Barcarolle No. 10 in A minor, Op. 104, No. 2, was written in 1913, after the completion and first performance in Monte Carlo of his opera *Pénélope*. The *Barcarolle* is imbued with a mysterious melancholy. It was dedicated to Mme Léon Blum. The same year saw the composition, during summer weeks at Lugano, of *Barcarolle No. 11 in G minor, Op. 105*, dedicated to the daughter of Fauré's friend, the Spanish composer Albéniz, who had died in 1909. From a sombre opening the work develops, in textures of some complexity, to a final G major coda. *Barcarolle No. 12 in E flat major, Op. 106 bis*, was written in 1915 and dedicated to the pianist Louis Diémer, Fauré's near contemporary, who gave the first performance at the Concerts Jacques Durand in November 1916. The piece has reminiscences of an earlier style of writing, but developed to meet the techniques of the composer's maturity. It was among the piano pieces of Fauré

that Saint-Saëns liked best. The last of the series, the *Barcarolle No. 13 in C major, Op. 116*, was completed at Nice in February 1921, while Fauré was still working on his *Piano Quintet No. 2*. Dedicated to Mme Soon-Gumaelius, the *Barcarolle* moves now into waters of greater limpidity, as the choice of key suggests, although mystery lurks in the depths below.

Fauré's *Ballade in F sharp major, Op. 19*, is an early work, the source of the later version for piano and orchestra. It was probably in 1882 that he played the piece to Liszt, a composer whose piano music strongly influenced him at the time. Liszt, as Fauré reported, sat down at the piano to sight-read the *Ballade*, but then turned to Fauré and asked him to continue, since he had "run out of fingers". The work was written in 1879 and dedicated to Camille Saint-Saëns. It was first performed in its fuller version, with the composer as soloist, at a concert of the Société Nationale de Musique in April 1881, with the conductor Edouard Colonne. The work falls into three sections and continues to exercise a charm and fascination, felt, among others, by Marcel Proust, whose central character, Swann, is carried away by a snatch of such music, a phrase that leads him to unknown horizons.

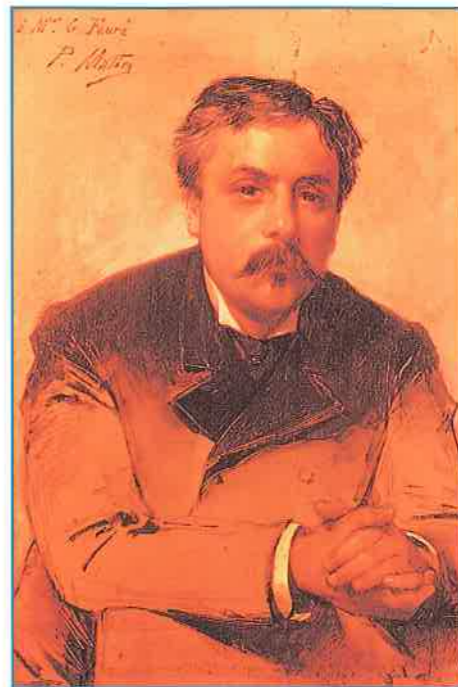
Pierre-Alain Volondat

This first disc devoted to the music of Gabriel Fauré marks the return to recording of one of the greatest of contemporary pianists, Pierre-Alain Volondat. Born in 1962 at Vouzon, Loir-et-Cher, he studied at the Orléans Conservatoire and then at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris, where he won first prizes in harmony, chamber music and piano in 1982 and 1983 respectively. The following year, at the age of twenty, he won the First Grand Prix, the Queen Fabiola Prize and the Audience Prize at the Queen Elisabeth of the Belgians Competition and since then has enjoyed a career that has taken him to success in most countries of Europe as well as in the Far East. In technique and musical understanding Pierre-Alain Volondat acknowledges a debt to Vera Moore, continuing the tradition of Clara Schumann. His wide repertoire extends from Bach to Xenakis and he is also a composer.



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FAURÉ

Barcarolles
(Complete)

Ballade
(Original Solo Piano Version)

Pierre-Alain
Volondat,
Piano

Gabriel Fauré (1845 - 1924)

Barcarolles (Complete)

Barcarolle No. 1 in A minor, Op. 26

Barcarolle No. 2 in G major, Op. 41

Barcarolle No. 3 in G flat major, Op. 42

Barcarolle No. 4 in A flat major, Op. 44

Barcarolle No. 5 in F sharp minor, Op. 66

Barcarolle No. 6 in E flat major, Op. 70

Barcarolle No. 7 in D minor, Op. 90

Barcarolle No. 8 in D flat major, Op. 96

Barcarolle No. 9 in A minor, Op. 101

Barcarolle No. 10 in A minor, Op. 104, No. 2

Barcarolle No. 11 in G minor, Op. 105

Barcarolle No. 12 in E flat major, Op. 106bis

Barcarolle No. 13 in C major, Op. 116

Ballade in F sharp major, Op. 19 (Original version for piano solo)

The sixth and youngest child of a father with some aristocratic connections, a former teacher, employed in the educational inspectorate and then as director of a teachers' training college, Gabriel Fauré was encouraged by his family in his early musical ambitions. His professional training, designed to allow him a career as a choirmaster, was at the Ecole Niedermeyer in Paris, where, by good fortune, he met Saint-Saëns, who taught the piano at the school. This was the beginning of a relationship that lasted until the death of Saint-Saëns in 1921.

Fauré completed his studies at the Ecole Niedermeyer in 1865 and the following year took up an appointment as organist at the church of St Sauveur in Rennes, turning his attention increasingly, during four years of this provincial exile, to composition. After similar less important appointments in Paris, in 1871 he became assistant organist at St Sulpice, later moving to the Madeleine as deputy to Saint-Saëns and subsequently as choirmaster, when Théodore Dubois succeeded Saint-Saëns in 1877. Marriage in 1883 and the birth of two sons brought financial responsibilities that Fauré met by his continued employment at

the Madeleine and by teaching. At the same time he wrote a large number of songs, while remaining, as always, intensely critical of his own work, particularly with regard to compositions on a larger scale.

The last decade of the nineteenth century brought Fauré more public recognition. In 1892 he became inspector of French provincial conservatories and four years later principal organist at the Madeleine, in the same year finding, at last, employment as teacher of composition at the Conservatoire, the way now open to him after the death of the old director Ambroise Thomas, who had found Fauré too much of a modernist for such a position. His association with the Conservatoire, where his pupils over the years included Ravel, Charles Koechlin, Georges Enescu and Nadia Boulanger, led, in 1905, to his appointment as director, in the aftermath of the scandal that had denied the Prix de Rome to Ravel. He remained in this position until 1920, his time for composition initially limited by administrative responsibilities, although he was later able to devote himself more fully to this, adding yet again to the repertoire of French song, with chamber music and works for piano. His musical language bridged a gap between the romanticism of the nineteenth century and the world of music that had appeared with the new century, developing and evolving, but retaining its own fundamental characteristics. Fauré's harmonic idiom with its subtle changes of tonality and his gift for melody, combine with an understanding of the way contemporary innovations might be used in a manner completely his own. His contribution to French music as a composer must lie chiefly in his songs, his piano music and his chamber music, although works like the poignant *Requiem* have an unassailable place in liturgical and choral repertoire.

The French word *Barcarolle* is adapted from the Italian *barcarole*, the songs sung by the gondoliers of Venice, a popular object for collection by visitors to the place as part of the fashionable eighteenth century Grand Tour. Its principal musical characteristic lay in its rocking rhythm, generally 6/8, reflected in songs of an aquatic nature by Schubert, not least in his setting of his friend Mayrhofer's poem *Der Gondelfahrer*, and in the famous Venetian barcarolle in Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*. The form appears in piano music notably in Chopin's single *Barcarolle* and in three of Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words*. Other examples occur in

piano music, particularly from the later nineteenth century Russian composers, but it is to Fauré that the barcarolle owes its most significant treatment, its apotheosis.

Fauré was himself a pianist and the piano was his favourite instrument. In his primary vocation as a composer, he wrote music first at his desk, although all his music for the piano is essentially in a pianistic idiom that suited, at least, his own very personal piano technique, something that is not necessarily the case with the music of those who choose to compose at the keyboard. The first of his *Barcarolles*, the *Barcarolle in A minor*, tentatively dated to 1880 or 1881, was first performed by Saint-Saëns at a concert of the Société Nationale de Musique, an important association formed in 1871 by Fauré, together with Vincent d'Indy, Lalo, Duparc and Chabrier. The delicately conceived piece, with its gently swaying rhythm, was dedicated to the pianist Caroline de Serres, Mme Montigny-Rémaury.

Barcarolle No. 2 in G major, Op. 41, a more extended work, with its excursions into 9/8 from the opening 6/8, was written in 1885, as was *Barcarolle No. 3 in G flat major, Op. 42*. The first was dedicated to the pianist Marie Poitevin, to whom César Franck dedicated his *Prélude, choral et fugue*, and the second, with its acknowledgement of Chopin's figuration, to Henriette Roger-Jourdain, wife of Fauré's friend, the painter Roger Jourdain. The following year brought *Barcarolle No. 4 in A flat major, Op. 44*, in which Fauré again recalls Chopin in piano texture and figuration. This last was dedicated to the wife of Ernest Chausson. *Barcarolle No. 5 in F sharp minor, Op. 66*, was written in 1894, at a time when he had begun to win a more significant measure of success and to master the feelings of depression he had sometimes entertained in the previous decade. 1894 had brought the completion of *La bonne chanson*, settings of Verlaine dedicated to Emma Bardac, Debussy's future second wife, after the wonderful Venice songs, the *Cinq mélodies*, Verlaine settings that he had dedicated to Princess Edmond de Polignac, the American sewing-machine heiress, Winnie Singer. The *Barcarolle*, with its characteristic shifts of harmony, was dedicated to the wife of Vincent d'Indy. This work was followed, in 1895 or 1896, by the masterly *Barcarolle No. 6 in E flat major, Op. 70*, dedicated to the pianist Edouard Risler, who gave the first performance at a Société Nationale de Musique concert in April 1897.