

Program Notes for Sunday, July 24  
Edgar M. Bronfman *In Focus* Series  
Alasdair Neale, Conductor

Debussy/Schoenberg	<i>Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun</i>
Rameau	Suite No. 2 in E Minor from <i>Pièces de Clavessin</i> Le Rappel des Oiseaux Musette en rondeau
Berlioz	Le spectre de la rose from <i>Les nuits d'été</i> , Opus 7
Poulenc	Presto giocoso from Sonata for Flute and Piano
Saint-Saëns	The Swan from <i>Carnival of the Animals</i>
Franck	Allegretto poco mosso from Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano
Ravel	Introduction and Allegro

***Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun* (1892-1894, arr. 1920)**  
**Claude Debussy (1862-1918)**  
**Arranged by Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)**

The Prelude, with its subdued passion and shimmering beauty, can be called the first genuine orchestral example of Impressionism, and it came at a time when audiences were hungry for just such an innovation. Concert-goers took to the understated, sensuous work immediately (the full house at the premiere demanded that it be played again as an encore), and Debussy soon became a kind of musical savior for many French music lovers who saw in him an antidote to the massive excesses of Wagner, whose Ring cycle had premiered just 16 years earlier. The Prelude is a musical representation of Stéphane Mallarmé's poem, which relates the dreamlike visions of a faun on an intoxicating summer day. Debussy's Prelude is not programmatic in the strict sense; it aims to evoke the poem's mood rather than its specific events. Mallarmé was at the center of the group of artists, poets and musicians, including Debussy, who met at his apartment in Paris on Tuesday evenings. Artistically, Debussy derived great artistic and intellectual stimulation from these weekly conversations, and almost certainly consulted Mallarmé on the setting of his poem. Debussy invited him to the premiere of the work in a letter: "Need I tell you what joy I shall have if you will be so kind as to indulge with your presence the arabesques which I have been led to believe, through a pride perhaps reprehensible, were inspired by the flute of your Faun?" Mallarmé accepted the invitation and embraced Debussy's new style, sending him a poem:

Oh forest god of breath primeval  
If your flute be true,  
Listen now to all the light  
Debussy will breathe through you.

Schoenberg's chamber arrangement of the *Prelude* was completed for performance during one of his Viennese salon concerts. The Society for Private Musical Performance gave over 350 concerts from 1918-1922 designed to offer the small audiences an intimate way to experience and study modern masterworks. Schoenberg's arrangement (which may have actually been

completed by his students at the Society) maintains as much of the original as possible, with the keyboards and crotales (antique cymbals) providing much of the color. The hovering, expressive melody of the flute that opens the *Prelude* is marvelously evocative. Through the course of the work, that melody is colored by flowing combinations of instruments and harmonies. The gently falling melodies in the clarinet and oboe appearing at the midpoint in the *Prelude* are artfully derived from the flute's original line.

**Excerpts from Suite No. 2 in E Minor from *Pièces de Clavessin* (1724)  
Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)**

Along with François Couperin, Rameau was the most important of the second wave of French Baroque composers (after Lully). His influence now is most deeply felt in the realm of music theory—he pioneered the analysis of chordal identity based on the root-third-fifth model which we take for granted today. But he also produced a wide body of compositions including over 25 operas all written after he turned 50. In addition, he composed four books of pieces for harpsichord (some with accompaniment), considered to define the French keyboard style of the time, along with Couperin's oeuvre. Tonight we hear two of the nine movements from the E minor Suite in the second of these books.

The *Musette en rondeau* consists of a main theme that is repeated four times, interspersed with three varying episodes that become increasingly ornamented as the movement progresses. The charming *Le rappel des Oiseaux* ("The Call of the Birds") uses repeated arpeggios and quick grace note ornaments to evoke birdsong, with the two hands often representing two birds in rapid fire chattering conversation (punctuated by occasional awkward lulls!).

**Le spectre de la Rose (The Ghost of the Rose) from *Les nuits d'été* (Summer Nights),  
Opus 7 (1840-41, orch. 1855)  
Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)**

Unlike the other composers in this program and the rest of the *In Focus* series, Berlioz is a figure in French music who seems to exist in isolation, drawing on his predecessors only indirectly and exerting only modest influence on the French composers who would come after him. Indeed, his style was more Germanic, with a Beethovenian harmonic vocabulary that served an expressive agenda that certainly had an effect on Liszt and Wagner, who were admirers. Berlioz scholar Hugh Macdonald writes, "Debussy and Ravel repudiated [Berlioz] on technical grounds.... In sum, it is a sorry tale of rejection and isolation. Berlioz has inspired many by the sincerity and energy of his music, but in his lifetime the opportunity of absorbing even part of an idiosyncratic style was missed."

*Les nuits d'été* is a setting of six poems by Théophile Gautier, all of which he later orchestrated. Berlioz never conceived them as a cycle, but rather as separate settings, and tonight we hear the second song in the set. Berlioz biographer W.J. Turner wrote, "in [Le Spectre de la Rose], Berlioz's subtlety of melodic expression is a source of inexhaustible pleasure." Remarkable here is Berlioz's very careful treatment of a text—the lament of a plucked rose—that does not necessarily suggest emotional weight. Indeed, Berlioz's transformative setting conveys deeper meaning to a text that could otherwise be dismissed as comical.

**Presto giocoso from Sonata for Flute and Piano (1957)  
Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)**

Poulenc came from the generation of French musicians after Debussy and Ravel. Identified as "Les Six", Poulenc's close knit group of young composers coalesced in the 1920's with a loosely shared aesthetic of countering the excesses both of Wagnerian Romanticism and the florid

coloration of Impressionism. Their goal was not so much a rejection of the past as a desire to find their own voices. For Poulenc, simplicity and clarity were paramount, and establishing a new musical grammar was secondary, as he wrote: "I know perfectly well that I'm not one of those composers who have made harmonic innovations like Igor, Ravel, or Debussy, but I think there's room for new music which doesn't mind using other people's chords. Wasn't that the case with Mozart-Schubert?"

Poulenc began touring the United States after World War II, and the Sonata for Flute and Piano was written on commission from the Coolidge Foundation in the States, dedicated to the memory of the Foundation's patron, Elizabeth Coolidge. Upon receiving this commission, he excitedly phoned famed flautist Jean-Pierre Rampal, exclaiming, "You know you've always wanted me to write a sonata for flute and piano? Well, I'm going to!" The two would premiere the piece later that year.

We hear the last of the three movements tonight. In this episodic finale, structured flexibly as a rondo, we find Poulenc has not lost a bit of his youthful exuberance, even managing to work in references to the first movement of the work just before the final repetition of the joyful main theme.

### **The Swan from *Carnival of the Animals* (1886) Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)**

Before the formation of the highly influential *Société Nationale de Musique* in 1871 by Camille Saint-Saëns and Romain Bussine, there was no forum for the regular performance of French chamber music in Paris. During the same year that he wrote his iconic *Carnival of the Animals*, however, Saint-Saëns broke from his *Société* after the committee decided to begin playing music of non-French composers. The split may have had more to do with personality conflicts than ideology, as Saint-Saëns had been an early champion of Wagner and maintained a close friendship with Liszt. Saint-Saëns wrote *Carnival* for the private enjoyment of his friends, and Liszt got to hear the piece before he died later that year. But Saint-Saëns would not allow publication or public performance of the delightful musical depiction during his lifetime, with the exception of the penultimate movement, "The Swan", scored for solo cello and two pianos (also arranged for cello and single piano). The cello's graceful melody represents the swan gliding over the water, with the gentle ripples on the surface depicted in the accompaniment.

### **Allegretto poco mosso from Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano (1886) César Franck (1822-1890)**

Without the *Société Nationale*, it is quite possible that the world would never have been given the highly original and influential chamber works of Franck, including this evening's Violin Sonata, as well as the three quartets by Fauré, Debussy and Ravel which we will hear over the next few nights. Franck's music and composition classes left a lasting impression on this younger group of French composers.

This evening, we will hear the finale from the sonata. In rondo form, (**ABABACA** ending with a coda) it contains what many consider to be the most beautiful canon ever written. The canon melody begins in the piano and is imitated by the violin one measure later and one octave higher. When the canon returns (the second **A** section), the roles of the players are reversed and the violin leads. The **B** sections, which present new themes, also interchange the roles of the instruments, while the **C** section is freer and recalls material from earlier in the piece. The coda extends the canon of the previous **A** section leading to a brilliant finish.

### **Introduction and Allegro (1905)**

### **Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)**

In 1905, Ravel tried one final time to win the prestigious composition competition the Prix de Rome. His four previous attempts had failed, and the age limit for the winner was 30. His fifth entry did not even make it past the preliminary round, creating a heated public outcry in Paris where he was already established as a leading composer of his generation. Accusations of corruption and favoritism were not unwarranted and led to a scandal at the Paris Conservatoire resulting in a number of faculty resignations including the director (who was replaced with Ravel's close friend Gabriel Fauré).

Ravel composed his Introduction and Allegro during this period of uproar, but the work shows little evidence of strife or frustration (scholar Mark DeVoto notes its "sheer amiability and relaxed sensuousness"). The piece was commissioned by the Erard harp company in an attempt to outdo its rival Pleyel, which the previous year had commissioned Debussy to write for its ultimately doomed chromatic harp. It was Ravel's first major commission, and he responded with what is essentially a one movement harp concerto, in chamber music form.

The title of the piece is somewhat misleading, as the two sections of the piece blend seamlessly into one whole. The lush and luxuriant Introduction immediately presents two themes, the first in the winds and the second in the strings, which will feature prominently throughout the piece. The second of these is modified to become the primary theme of the Allegro, brightly ushered in by the harp. The first, disguised by compressing the melodic intervals, becomes the second theme of the Allegro, heard initially in the winds (helping to connect it to the Introduction). Ravel also brings back the melodies from the Introduction in their original forms, creating a tapestry of related ideas. The movement is loosely in sonata form, with a wistful harp cadenza coming between the development and abbreviated recapitulation.