



## DEBUSSY

Fantaisie for Piano and Orchestra

## FAURÉ

Ballade for Piano and Orchestra Op. 19

## RAVEL

Piano Concerto in G

VALERIE TRYON piano

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

JAC VAN STEEN conductor

SOMMCD 258



DDD

### Debussy – Fantaisie (24:43)

- |   |   |      |
|---|---|------|
| 1 | 1. Andante ma non troppo – Allegro giusto | 8:43 |
| 2 | 2. Lento e molto espressivo               | 7:59 |
| 3 | 3. Allegro molto                          | 8:01 |

### 4 Fauré – Ballade Op. 19 15:26

### Ravel – Piano Concerto in G (22:37)

- |   |                 |      |
|---|-----------------|------|
| 5 | 1. Allegrement  | 8:48 |
| 6 | 2. Adagio assai | 9:31 |
| 7 | 3. Presto       | 4:18 |

Total duration: 63:15

Recorded at the Henry Wood Hall on 7 & 8 September 2014

Piano: Steinway Concert Grand, Model 'D'

Recording Producer: Siva Oke Recording Engineer: Ben Connellan

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**DEBUSSY:** Fantaisie for Piano and Orchestra  
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**D**EBUSSY WAS IN HIS LATE TWENTIES when he began work on his *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra in October 1889. While Tchaikovsky and Brahms were writing large scale piano concertos in the grand virtuoso manner, French composers eschewed the form, favouring shorter works, often of one movement. The mid 1880s produced a number of successful works in this genre and these undoubtedly influenced Debussy. Probably the most famous of these is the *Variations Symphoniques* by the Belgian composer Cesar Franck from 1885. A year before this Saint-Saëns published his *Rhapsodie d’Auvergne* swiftly followed by his Caprice-Valse *Wedding Cake* but it was in 1886 that Vincent d’Indy wrote his *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français* which is probably the closest in style to Debussy’s work.

Debussy dedicated his work to the pianist René Chansarel who was to give the first performance in 1890 but he withdrew the score at the last moment apparently because the conductor, Vincent d’Indy, only had time to rehearse the first movement. After that, although he made revisions to the score, Debussy forbade performance or publication of the work so that the first performance was given a year and a half after his death in November 1919. The stellar artists on this occasion were Alfred Cortot as soloist with Albert Coates conducting

the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at Queen’s Hall in London. The programme was an extraordinary mix of disparate works – *The Battle of Kerzhenetz* by Rimsky Korsakoff, *Variations Symphoniques* by Franck, *Ulalume* (a poem for orchestra) by Holbrooke, *Fantaisie* by Debussy and to end, a Coates favourite, *The Divine Poem* by Scriabin. One critic thought “the *Fantaisie* – written before Debussy contracted the whole-tone madness, and while he still believed in the work of his predecessors (to wit, in this case Berlioz) – marks a line which would have been better worth pursuing”.

The work, variously described as being in two, three or four movements is actually in three movements with a linking passage between second and third. It is therefore more in the model of the regular piano concerto than the works mentioned above written by Debussy’s contemporaries. However, because the work is nearly all based on the opening theme the motivic cohesiveness gives a feeling less of the three separate movements of a regular piano concerto. One reason for the lack of popularity of this work could be that the piano is treated more as an integral part of the orchestra rather than a heroic soloist, often providing decoration and harmonic support.

At the end of his life when almost seventy-five years of age Fauré published, as Op. 111, his own *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra in the same key of G major. By coincidence, it was the year in which Debussy’s work made its debut, but fifty years earlier, in the late 1870s, Fauré had worked on his *Ballade* for solo piano Op. 19, being thirty-two when it was published with

a dedication to Saint-Saens in 1877. A few years later he played it for Franz Liszt who may have suggested adding orchestral accompaniment and indeed the work became better known in its orchestral version of 1881. Reminiscent of his Nocturnes and Barcarolles, the whole work has a feeling of nostalgia and wistfulness. It is an extended work in four sections with the theme from each appearing in the succeeding section as a secondary idea. The work begins with a beautiful theme in F sharp major followed by the original piano imitation now on flute and strings. The second section is marked Allegretto moderato and is in the relative minor (D sharp enharmonically changed to E flat minor) with the theme from the first section heard on the violins. A short Andante with a gentle lilting melody in 6/8 time leads to an Allegro in 4/4. This reverts to the Andante idea which is now extended to a full section to complete the work.

Ravel undertook a successful four month tour of North America in 1928 appearing as soloist and conductor. He was greatly influenced by the music he heard there, particularly Negro spirituals and that newest form, jazz. Appearing only ten years before, jazz had taken America by storm and Ravel was not able to resist. On his return to Europe he began work on his Piano Concerto in G major in 1929. The musical climate of Paris in the late 1920s and early 30s was alive with the influence of jazz affecting amongst others Darius Milhaud, Erik Satie, and Francis Poulenc; Ravel's concerto is one of the major jazz inspired works to come out of that era. He stated himself that it took two years of hard work to complete the composition, eventually

choosing Marguerite Long as soloist for the premiere which he conducted in January 1932.

The work opens with a whipcrack and this sets the driving rhythm in motion. The second idea is a blues inflected theme with its characteristic flattened third. The driving rhythm returns, incorporating the blues idea and after a piano solo passage, the main theme is heard again. A dreamlike section with harps and string harmonics leads to a piano cadenza and the movement concludes with a gradual crescendo beginning in the bass of the piano.

In the Adagio assai Ravel uses a rhythmic trick in which six beats are divided into two groups of three rather than three groups of two. It is the first time we hear the piano without the orchestra for an extended period and it creates a welcome feeling of complete calm after the hectic end to the first movement. Clouds blot the sun briefly as rising minor scales build in the orchestra. The return of the theme, now taken up by the cor anglais, is accompanied by harmonic and scalic figuration on the piano of equal note values until the final concluding extended trill.

The Presto is a short movement beginning and ending with the same chords. It is rumbustious and noisy with the piano part in the fashion of a toccata.

After three years at the Royal Academy of Music in London, Valerie Tryon went to Paris to continue her piano studies with Jacques Février (1900-1979).

It was Février's father who had been a colleague of Ravel at the Conservatoire in Fauré's composition class and Jacques studied and played Ravel's works with the composer throughout his life. Ravel requested that Février play his Concerto for Left Hand and remembered that "When Marguerite Long was learning the Concerto in G major I accompanied her on the second piano. Ravel was behind me and I still remember exactly what he asked of her". Tryon has said that Février "had definite ideas as to how this repertoire should be interpreted. He was quite strict on matters of tempo and mood, and he made me change a number of interpretations I brought to him.....Février also taught me the French *jeu perlé* playing".

Jonathan Summers © 2015

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## VALERIE TRYON

**Valerie Tryon's** career as a concert pianist began while she was still a child. Before she was twelve she had broadcast for the BBC and was appearing regularly before the public on the concert platform. She was one of the youngest students ever to be admitted to the Royal Academy of Music where she received the highest award in piano playing and a bursary which took her to Paris for study with Jacques Février.

Her place among Britain's acknowledged artists was assured when a Cheltenham Festival recital brought her the enthusiastic acclaim of the country's foremost critics. Since then she has played in most of the major concert halls and appeared with many of the leading orchestras and conductors in Britain. Her career has taken her to North America where she has appeared in such cities as Toronto, Montreal, Boston, Washington, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. She now lives in Canada but spends a part of each year in her native Britain.

Her repertoire is enormous and ranges from Bach to contemporary composers; it includes more than sixty concertos and a vast amount of chamber music. Among British composers, both the late Alun Hoddinott and John McCabe have dedicated works to her. She is well known for her sensitive interpretations of the romantics – Chopin, Liszt, and Rachmaninov in particular. She also has an extensive discography ranging from Scarlatti Chopin, Rachmaninov and Liszt to Debussy, Ravel and Ignaz Friedman.

Valerie Tryon has been awarded several distinctions for her services to music. She was an early recipient of the Harriet Cohen Medal. More recently the Liszt Memorial Medal was bestowed on her by the Hungarian Minister of Culture in recognition of her lifelong promotion of Franz Liszt's music.

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## JAC VAN STEEN

**Jac van Steen** was born in The Netherlands and studied orchestral and choral conducting at the Brabants Conservatory of Music. Since participating, in 1985, in the BBC Conductors' Seminar led by Sir Edward Downes, he has enjoyed a very busy career as conductor of the best orchestras in The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Germany. These have included the posts of Music Director and Chief Conductor of the National Ballet of The Netherlands, the orchestras of Bochum and Nürnberg, the Staatskapelle, Weimar, the Opera and Philharmonic Orchestra of Dortmund (Germany) Musikkollegium Winterthur (Switzerland) and the post of Principal Guest Conductor for several years at the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and from 2013-14, the Prague Symphony Orchestra. In 2014-15 he assumed the position of Principal Guest Conductor of the Ulster Orchestra, Belfast.

Jac van Steen has participated in many recordings for the BBC, as well as live broadcasts of his concerts. There are a substantial number of CD recordings of his work with various orchestras (a.o. Dabringhaus & Grimm, SOMM, Bridge Records, NMC).

In addition to conducting the finest Dutch, German and UK orchestras, he is dedicated to teaching and is Professor of Conducting at the Royal Conservatory of Music in The Hague, where he has recently developed his brainchild: the National Masters for Orchestral Conducting (NMO) which

will give young master student conductors the chance to work with the best Dutch Orchestras. He also works regularly with the Royal Northern College of Music and Chetham's School of Music (Manchester) as well as the Royal Academy and Royal College of Music (London) and the City of Birmingham Youth Orchestra.

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## ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Formed in 1946 by Sir Thomas Beecham, the **Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO)** has enjoyed more than sixty-five years of success, giving first-class performances of a wide range of musical repertoire all over the world with artists of the highest calibre. Under the inspired leadership of Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Charles Dutoit, the Orchestra maintains and builds on a demanding schedule of performances, tours, community and education work, and recordings.

Throughout its history, the Orchestra has been directed by distinguished conductors including Rudolf Kempe, Antal Doráti, André Previn, Vladimir Ashkenazy and Daniele Gatti. Today the Orchestra continues to enjoy the support of high-ranking conductors such as Pinchas Zukerman, Grzegorz Nowak and Daniele Gatti.

Central to the RPO's thriving concert schedule is its prestigious annual series at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall. At the Orchestra's London home Cadogan Hall, the intimate and luxurious surroundings provide the perfect concert atmosphere in an idyllic location. Completing the Orchestra's London programme of concerts, the iconic Royal Albert Hall provides the ideal setting for a varied series of monumental performances, ranging from large-scale choral and orchestral works to themed evenings of familiar repertoire.

The Orchestra offers a comprehensive regional touring programme, with established residencies in Croydon, Northampton, Lowestoft, Reading, Crawley, Ipswich, High Wycombe, Aylesbury and Dartford. Internationally the Orchestra is in high demand, undertaking several major tours each season. Recent tours have included performances in the USA, Canada, China, Russia, Azerbaijan, Spain, Italy, Germany and Japan.

The Orchestra's vibrant community and education programme, RPO resound, involves specially trained musicians from the Orchestra, alongside accomplished project leaders, delivering pioneering projects where music is used as a powerful and inspirational force.

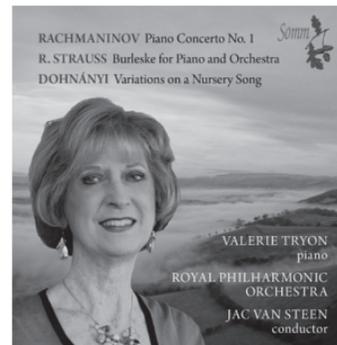
Frequently found in the recording studio, the Orchestra records extensively for film and television as well as for all the major commercial record companies.

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