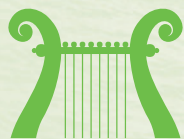


FREE



Glasgow
Orchestral
Society



DEBUSSY

NOCTURNES

WITH LES SIRÈNES FEMALE CHAMBER CHOIR

RAVEL

MOTHER GOOSE
SUITE

MUSSORGSKY

ARR. RAVEL
PICTURES AT
AN EXHIBITION
(EXCERPTS)

CONDUCTOR STEPHEN BROAD

SUN 20 MAR 2016 7.30 PM

ROYAL CONSERVATOIRE OF SCOTLAND

WELCOME TO OUR SPRING CONCERT

In this special anniversary season, we are celebrating 130 years since ladies were first invited to join the orchestra as playing members (they were becoming “proficient instrumentalists” according to contemporary accounts) and Glasgow Orchestral Society has never looked back. As you can see, our women members make up more than half of our playing strength nowadays and we all work very hard in our weekly rehearsals, together with all our male members, to prepare the works for each concert so that we can present you with a fantastic musical experience!

In our first two concerts this year, we featured females as soloists with the orchestra. Tonight, we are joined by a large group of talented women, the singers of Les Sirènes Female Chamber Choir who join us for our performance of the Debussy Nocturnes which features a wordless chorus in its last movement, which is entitled Sirènes. As mermaids luring sailors to a watery death, you are sure to find them extremely seductive!

Stephen Broad returns as our guest conductor tonight and we are delighted to have him back with us – you may remember the excellent concerts in recent seasons when he conducted us in Shostakovich's 5th Symphony, Aaron Copland's 3rd Symphony and in the hugely entertaining journey Around The World In Eighty Days!

Please give him a very warm welcome, sit back and enjoy the concert!

Ann Westwood, President

MEET THE CONDUCTOR

STEPHEN BROAD

Stephen Broad grew up on the Isle of Mull, and was introduced to orchestral music by Radio 3 and an inspirational teacher called Kenneth Way. He later joined the Music School of Douglas Academy in Milngavie and was lucky enough to conduct the whole school in a composition of his own, aged 17. University studies at Glasgow and then Oxford seemed to allow plenty of time for more conducting, and some teaching too – including several years' work for Community Education Strathclyde at the wonderful East Glasgow Music School.

During this time, conducting became a special passion. Through Glasgow University Wind Band, he realised that he wanted as many people as possible to play, enjoy and care about music. Later, a two-year stint as conductor of the talented players of Oxford University Sinfonietta



helped develop his conducting skills further.

In a parallel life, Stephen is Head of Research at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, with research interests in music history and education. He is especially proud of being one of the authors of *What's Going On?*, the report that started the Scottish Government's Youth Music Initiative.

LES SIRÈNES FEMALE CHAMBER CHOIR

Les Sirènes was established in 2007 by Musical Director Andrew Nunn and its thirty vocalists are all students and graduates of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. The choir won the BBC Choir of the Year award in October 2012, and as winners, Les Sirènes commissioned a new choral work *Autumn Evening*, by celebrated composer Paul Mealar. The world première was given in June 2014 and broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

In 2013 the choir released their début CD, *There is No Rose*; they performed Gustav Holst's *The Planets* with the Royal Conservatoire Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Garry Walker; and they reached the semi-final stage of the Europe-wide choral competition Let the Peoples Sing.

In 2015 the choir performed Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Glasgow City Halls with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. The concert was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and received a five star review

in The Herald. Les Sirènes also made a recording of favourite repertoire for an upcoming CD release and in December 2015 they performed live on BBC Radio Scotland's *Classics Unwrapped* programme.

Les Sirènes performs regularly across Scotland and beyond, in venues such as Glasgow Cathedral, the Scottish Exhibition & Conference Centre, Dunkeld Cathedral, Paisley Abbey, Queen's Hall Edinburgh, Glasgow Royal Concert Hall and London's Cadogan Hall.

As the choir approaches its tenth season in 2017/18, future engagements include recordings for the Albion and Nimbus record labels.



PROGRAMME

IN THE LATER 1800s, FRANCE BECAME A MAJOR CENTRE OF MUSICAL INNOVATION.

At its core were Fauré, Debussy and Ravel. All made significant contributions to the solo piano and song repertory. And though none was prolific in the area they, with Saint-Saëns and Franck, collectively left an important chamber music legacy too. Meanwhile in the German speaking world most composers of stature, Brahms excepted, showed less interest in these forms of expression and gravitated to large scale orchestral composition, notably Bruckner, Mahler, Strauss and to some extent Schoenberg (Strauss alone was a major song writer). With orchestral music, the general tendency was toward using increasingly large forces. Here a divergence also emerged, with Debussy and Ravel in particular placing great emphasis on texture, sonority, rhythmic ambiguities and on being concise in form.

MAURICE RAVEL (1875 - 1937)

MA MÈRE L'OYE (MOTHER GOOSE) SUITE

- 1 Pavane de la Belle au bois Dormante (Sleeping Beauty's pavane)
- 2 Petit Poucet (Hop o'my thumb)
- 3 Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes (Little Ugly, Empress of the Pagodas)
- 4 Les Entretiens de la Belle et la Bête (Conversations of Beauty and the Beast)
- 5 Le Jardin Féerique (The Fairy Garden)

Ravel was both a master orchestrator and a miniaturist and *Ma Mère l'Oye* is an outstanding example of both aspects. His longest works such as *Daphnis and Chloe* last less than an hour. He was a meticulous worker, composing a relatively small quantity of very highly regarded music in a variety of genres. His solo piano music in particular is recognised as an outstanding contribution to the late 19th and early 20th century repertory. *Ma Mère l'Oye* originated in 1910 as a suite of "cing pièces enfantines" for piano duet to entertain the children of friends.

Ravel orchestrated it the following year and the orchestral suite is its most frequently heard guise. He then composed additional material to produce a continuous score for a ballet, produced early in 1912. The short movements of the Suite do not attempt to tell full stories and aim more to express character. They are also a tribute to the 17th and 18th century French literary tradition of retelling of fairy tales: in the score, the middle three movements are headed with quotations from classic stories by Perrault (*Petit Poucet*), Mme. Aulnoy (*Laidronette*) and Mme. Leprince de Beaumont (*La Belle et la Bête* – this story also inspired Jean Cocteau's classic 1946 film). The opening *Pavane* creates an atmosphere of repose, while the meandering melodic line and constantly changing bar length of *Petit Poucet* suggests the child looking for the trail of crumbs he's left in the wood (in fact they were eaten by the birds you can hear chirping). *Laidronette* uses a pentatonic scale for oriental effect. Both the sound of the gamelan and Ravel's love of mechanical toys are perhaps also apparent here. In the story, the pagodas are a miniature people and Mme Aulnoy describes the princess taking a bath while being entertained with music played on tiny theorbos and viols made from nutshells. The double bassoon gets a charming solo representing the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* (this instrument also gets a melodic solo in one of Ravel's last works, the Piano Concerto for the Left Hand). Finally, the fairy garden is a generalised tone picture not referring to a particular story, and perhaps closing a gate on "once upon a time".

MODEST MUSSORGSKY (1839 - 1881)

PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

(ORCH. RAVEL) (EXCERPTS)

Mussorgsky's early death from alcoholism robbed Russian music of one of its most distinctive voices. Mussorgsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Balakirev and the largely forgotten Cui were hailed as "the mighty handful" of nationalist composers in the second half of the 19th century. Mussorgsky's

reputation rests on a body of characterful songs for solo voice and piano, his two completed historical operas *Khovantschina* and *Boris Godunov*; and some shorter works and unfinished pieces including a further opera. After his death much of his music was edited for publication by Rimsky-Korsakoff, to make it more accessible. Original versions only became available well into the twentieth century.

The solo piano suite *Pictures at an Exhibition* commemorated the work of the artist Viktor Hartmann (1834 – 1873) at least two of whose pictures Mussorgsky owned. A major virtuoso piano composition in its own right, “Pictures” refers to specific paintings or drawings by Hartmann. However it is best known in the orchestration by Ravel of the Rimsky piano version (years before the composer’s original version was published). The great Russian-American conductor Serge Koussevitsky commissioned this orchestration in 1922 as a showpiece for the Boston Symphony Orchestra (the many other orchestrations have failed to gain currency). Koussevitsky sometimes conducted selections from the full suite. Tonight we perform five numbers: *The Old Castle*; *Gnomus* (design for a grotesque nutcracker); *Bydlo* (the ox cart); *Baba-Yaga* (in Russian folklore, the child-eating witch who lurks a hut on fowl’s legs but sometimes takes flight) and the concluding *Great Gate of Kiev* (an unrealised architectural project for a ceremonial archway).

INTERVAL

CLAUDE ACHILLE DEBUSSY (1862 – 1918)

TROIS NOCTURNES

(ARR. FOR STRINGS BY PHILIP LANE)

- 1 *Nuages* (Clouds)
- 2 *Fêtes* (Festival)
- 3 *Sirènes* (The Sirens)

Like Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Mahler, Debussy died in his 50s having made a tremendous contribution to music, and one can only wonder how he would have continued to develop (his last

works were striking a new path in chamber music). His piano music is one of the great bodies of music for that instrument but he also wrote a small number of purely orchestral works, characterised by extreme intricacy of scoring and, in slower and moderate tempo sections, subdivision of the beat to create a kind of rhythmic ambiguity. He also explored the richness of highly sharpened or flattened keys and used whole tone scales. Playing instructions for the strings are detailed even to the extent of specifying which part of the bow should be used and its position on the string. The famous *Prélude à l'Après Midi d'un Faune*, (1894), after a Mallarmé poem, was a breakthrough work popular with early audiences. Subsequent orchestral pieces ranging through the three *Nocturnes* (1898), *La Mer* (1903-05), the three *Images* for orchestra (completed 1909) and the remarkable and compressed ballet score *Jeux* (1912) show increasing subtlety and detail of scoring.

It has been said that in the *Nocturnes*, Debussy may have been thinking more of the painter Whistler than earlier music of that name (Chopin; Fauré). The suite consists of contrasting sound-pictures, the outer movements at a gently flowing tempo and the inner one brisk. *Nuages* clearly represents slowly passing clouds in an evening sky. The lively *Fêtes* represents a night-time festival of some kind, with a tripartite structure. The outer dance-like sections, in compound rhythm, frame a dupe time central section suggesting a torchlit procession. The final and most complex movement *Sirènes* refers to the Sirens of Greek mythology, whose singing lures sailors to run ships onto the rocks. This movement is particularly complex in its scoring, with string sections mostly subdivided. The wordless female chorus, sometimes humming, is an integral part of the texture, both suitably mysterious and alluring (did this inspire Holst for Neptune in *The Planets*?). The gently rocking rhythm of this movement makes it clear that the sea itself is not the hazard here. It also looks forward to aspects of *La Mer*. The enigmatic close suggests we’ve evaded shipwreck after all.

Alastair Whitelaw, February 2016

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Barbara Dunlop
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Katharine Muir
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Laura Stewart
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Donald Gibson
Claire Hollingworth
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Nicky MacEwan
Nga Macrow
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Judith Mitchell*
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Stephen Webster^*

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GOS ON TOUR

You will have seen our collection buckets as you arrived tonight – in July this year we are going on Tour to the Czech Republic, based in Prague. The orchestra is almost complete and over sixty musicians and around thirty friends will take part. We are offering financial support to some of our musicians, including students. Some of you have given very generously at our last two concerts and we appreciate it very much! We hope you will all give generously tonight – all donations, of whatever size, will be gratefully received!



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AND LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AGAIN!

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of our next concert
in your diary:

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Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

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Walton – Viola Concert

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