

Les Siècles/François-Xavier Roth

La Belle Époque

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate end time: 9.40pm, including a 20-minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Programme

Claude Debussy *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*

Carl Maria von Weber (orch Hector Berlioz) *Invitation to the Dance*

Lili Boulanger *D'un soir triste*

Maurice Ravel *Daphnis et Chloé*

Part 1

Introduction

Danse religieuse

Vif – Danse générale

Danse grotesque de Dorcon – Scène

Danse légère et gracieuse de Daphnis

Lent [devant le groupe radieux que forment Daphnis et Chloé enlacés]

Danse de Lycéion

Scène [Les Pirates]

Nocturne [Une lumière irréaliste enveloppe le paysage]

Danse lente et mystérieuse des Nymphes

Interlude

Part 2

Introduction – Danse guerrière

Danse suppliante de Chloé

Lent [Soudain l'atmosphère semble chargée d'éléments insolites]

Part 3

Lever du jour – Scène

Pantomime [Daphnis & Chloé miment l'aventure de Pan et de Syrinx]

Très lent [Chloé figure par sa danse les accents de la flûte]

Chloé tombe dans les bras de Daphnis

Animé – Danse Générale

Les Siècles is an orchestra that has changed the way we listen to music of the 19th and 20th centuries. Tonight it and its founder François-Xavier Roth glory in the subtle soundscapes of masterpieces from their native France.

'Modern music was awakened by the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*,' said Pierre Boulez. For the 1894 Parisian audience who first heard that languid flute and those sensuous strings, the experience must have been unlike anything they'd previously encountered. Sitting among them was Stéphane Mallarmé, whose poem had inspired Debussy's music. He was 'deeply moved', he later wrote to the composer. 'A miracle! That your illustration of *L'après-midi d'un faune* should present no dissonance with my text, other than to venture further, truly, into nostalgia and light, with finesse, with uneasiness, with generosity ...'

Debussy said that his symphonic poem, which traces the desires and dreams of a faun in the heat of an afternoon, was designed to give a general impression of Mallarmé's text, although scholars have linked lines of text with specific bars of music. In 1912 the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* was reborn in another guise, with yet more layers added, thanks to the Ballets Russes. This was the dance company run by (in Debussy's words) the 'terrible but wonderful' Serge Diaghilev, who commissioned new works at a remarkable rate. His star male dancer, Vaslav Nijinsky, both played the faun and choreographed the ballet, pushing the story's erotic undertones to their limit. The French newspaper *Le Figaro* was scandalised; the second performance was a sell-out.

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This transparent, luscious score might have pointed to the future, but its orchestral colours were rooted in the past. Debussy once said Weber, the founder of German Romantic opera, was his model for orchestration, following in the footsteps of fellow French composer Berlioz. When Weber's *Der Freischütz* was staged at the Paris Opéra in 1841, Berlioz was roped in to help out. The company did not allow spoken dialogue on its stage, so – rather reluctantly because he believed his beloved Weber should be performed as originally intended – Berlioz agreed to compose recitatives for the opera, hoping his efforts would at least be better than others. He was even more troubled to be asked to provide a ballet for Act 2, as was the custom for French opera at that time. His solution was to orchestrate one of Weber's most popular piano pieces, the *Invitation to the Dance*, in a sympathetic style. The piece took on a life of its own, entirely separate from Weber's woodland opera, and was soon heard in Berlin and London. 'It is easy to play and will be performed everywhere, at concerts, at the theatre and at balls,' Berlioz wrote to a publisher. In 1911, it was also heard as *Le spectre de la rose*, in a ballet choreographed by Michel Fokine for the Ballets Russes.

Not three years after that came the outbreak of the First World War; its horror, and the torment of illness, lurk behind *D'un soir triste*, which Lili Boulanger completed in 1918, the year of her tragically early death at the age of just 24. She had been the first woman to win the coveted Prix de Rome in its 115-year history, and she left a small though potent legacy. Told by a doctor in 1916 that she had not long to live, Boulanger pressed ahead, completing all the music she could, alternating bursts of creativity with ever-less successful periods of recovery. Both *D'un soir triste* and its companion *D'un matin de printemps* began life as chamber pieces (duo and trio) before Boulanger orchestrated them. *D'un soir triste* is a marvel of colour and detail, its score the last she wrote by hand. With its dark mood and heavy tread, shocking bass drum and ghostly celesta, it feels like an elegy for both the world and for herself.

But before the war changed everything, there were more modern masterpieces to emerge from France. When the Ballets Russes arrived in Paris, Ravel was immediately in demand. In 1909 Diaghilev commissioned him to write a new work for the company, with choreography by Fokine, starring Nijinsky. It was to be based on an ancient Greek pastoral, telling the story of two foundlings, brought up by shepherds and goatherds, who fall in love. Ravel's dreams tended more to an 18th-century French idealisation of Greece, whereas Fokine preferred Ancient Greek drawings. Battlegrounds were drawn, and the birth of Ravel's 'choreographic symphony in three parts' was by no means straightforward. Rehearsals were fraught: Fokine couldn't speak French and Ravel could only swear in Russian. The dancers struggled, and the premiere, on 8 June 1912, was overshadowed by the scandal engulfing another ballet: Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. Diaghilev claimed *Daphnis et Chloé* was 'a masterpiece, but it is not a ballet. It is a painting of a ballet' – which is perhaps a compliment, albeit a backhanded one. Yet audiences have fallen for the heady score, with its vast orchestra including wind machines and wordless chorus, ever since. Stravinsky, no less, described it as 'one of the most beautiful products of French music'.

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Produced by the Barbican

Performers

François-Xavier Roth conductor

Les Siècles

violin I

François-Marie
Drieux leader
Amaryllis Billet
Pierre-Yves Denis
Chloé Jullian
Jérôme Mathieu
Simon Milone
Sandrine Naudy
Emmanuel Ory
Sébastien Richaud
Laetitia Ringeval
Julie Rivest
Mathias Tranchant
Fabien Valenchon
Angelina Zurzolo

violin II

Martial Gauthier*
Hadrien Delmotte
Caroline Florenville
Albane Genat
Julie Hardelin
Matthieu Kasolter
Arnaud Lehmann
Jin-hi Paik
Charles Quentin
de Gromard
Rachel Rowntree
Ingrid Schang
Jennifer Schiller

viola

Carole Roth*
Hélène Barre
Catherine Demonchy
Hélène Desaint
Nicolas Louedec
Laurent Muller
Julien Praud
Jeanne-Marie Raffner
Lucie Uzzeni
Satryo Aryobimo
Yudomartono

cello

Sébastien van Kuijk*
Josquin Buvat
Pierre Charles
Guillaume François
Jennifer Hardy
Amaryllis Jarczyk
Lucile Perrin
Emilie Wallyn

double bass

Caroline Peach*
Alice Barbier
Rémi Demangeon
Lucas Faucher
Cécile Grondard
Lilas Réglat
Léa Yeche

flute

Marion Ralincourt*
Giulia Barbini
Anne-Cécile Cuniot
Anne Parisot

oboe

Hélène Mourot
Stéphane Morvan
Rémy Sauzedde

clarinet

Christian Laborie*
Benjamin Christ
Rhéa Rossello
Jérôme Schmitt

bassoon

Michael Rolland*
Cécile Jolin
Antoine Pecqueur
Aline Riffault
Jessica Rouault

horn

Rémi Gormand*
Yun-Chin Gastebois
Cédric Muller
Pierre Vericel
Cyril Vittecoq

trumpet

Fabien Norbert*
Emmanuel Alemany
Pierre Marmeisse Rodolph
Puechbroussous

trombone

Fabien Cyprien*
Jonathan Leroi
Damien Prado

tuba

Sylvain Min*

timpani

Camille Basle*

percussion

Sylvain Bertrand*
Eriko Minami
Matthieu Chardon
Camille Couturier
Nicolas Gerbier
Guillaume Le Picard
Sam Walton

celesta

Jean Sugitani*

harp

Mélanie Dutreil*
Sarah Betocchi

* *Principal*

London Symphony Chorus

soprano

Ranziska Braeumer
Anna Byrne-Smith
Carol Capper
Anjali Christopher
Harriet Crawford
Esther Elbro
Katharine Elliot
Lucy Feldman
Amy Fidler
Riva Grant
Joanna Gueritz
Isobel Hammond
Sally Ho
Emily Hoffnung
Alice Jones
Debbie Jones
Luca Kocsmarszky
Katy Lane
Marylyn Lewin
Doris Nikolic
Veronica O'Connell
Alexandra Ollendorff
Gill O'Neill
Maggie Owen
Victoria Parkin
Valeria Perboni
Carole Radford
Liz Reeve
Alison Ryan
Deborah Staunton
Eleanor Sterland
Hannah Wilkes
Rachel Wilson
Lizzie Webb

alto

Kate Aitchison
Enid Armstrong
Gina Broderick
Jo Buchan
Sheila Cobourne
Janik Dale
Maggie Donnelly
Lynn Eaton
Linda Evans
Amanda Freshwater
Yoko Harada
Edda Hendry
Elisabeth Iles
Jill Jones
Vanessa Knapp
Gilly Lawson
Anne Loveluck
Aoife McNerney
Jane Muir
Caroline Mustill
Dorothy Nesbit
Beth Potter
Susannah Priede
Lis Smith
Erika Stasiuleviciute
Alison St-Denis
Rafaela Tripalo
Snezhana Valcheva
Kathryn Wells

tenor

Paul Allatt
Matteo Anelli
Erik Azzopardi
Paul Beecham
Philipp Boeing
Oliver Burrows
Kevin Cheng
James David
Colin Dunn
Andrew Fuller
Patrizio Giovannotti
Rajiv Guha
Matthew Journee
Robert Kozak
Jude Lenier
John Marks
Matthew McCabe
Davide Prezzi
Mattia Romani
Peter Sedgwick
Malcolm Taylor
James Warbis
Robert Ward
Leonard Wong

bass

Aitor Almaraz
Simon Backhouse
Roger Blitz
Andy Chan
Steve Chevis
Harry Clarke
Matthew Clarke
Damian Day
Robert Garbolinski
John Graham
Bryan Hammersley
Robert Hare
Elan Higuera
Anthony Howick
Mark Jardine
Douglas Jones
Alex Kidney
George Marshall
Hugh McLeod
Alan Rochford
Jesus Sanchez Sanzo
Rod Stevens
Daniel Thompson
Robin Thurston

chorus director

Simon Halsey cbe

associate chorus directors

Lucy Hollins
David Lawrence
Barbara Höfling
Mariana Rosas

accompanist

Benjamin Frost

vocal coaches

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