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CLARE HAMMOND

Thursday 10 April, 7.30pm
Djanogly Recital Hall

PROGRAMME

Femmes de légende: 'Desdémona', 'Phoebe' and 'Mélisande'	Mélanie Bonis
Préludes: 'Les Collines d'Anacapri', 'La Puerta del Vino', 'Général Lavine' and 'Feux d'artifice'	Claude Debussy
Partita	Germaine Tailleferre
Sonatine	Maurice Ravel
Interval	
Images, Book 1	Debussy
Nocturne No.12 in E minor and No.8 in D flat major	Gabriel Fauré
Le Tombeau de Couperin	Ravel

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PROGRAMME NOTES

Three pieces from *Femmes de Légende* (Legendary Women) 'Desdémona', 'Phoebé' and 'Mélisande'

Mélanie Bonis (1858-1937)

Born in Paris, Bonis began learning the piano at an early age, and made rapid progress. In 1876, a family friend, who was a professor at the Paris Conservatoire, introduced her to César Franck. It was on Franck's recommendation that she gained a place at the Conservatoire the following year, studying harmony with Ernest Giraud and organ with Franck himself. She won second prize in harmony and accompaniment in 1879, and first prize in harmony in 1880. Marriage and family intervened, but she was able to begin composing regularly in the mid-1890s, producing works in a wide range of genres: choral pieces, orchestral, chamber, organ and solo piano works, and songs. Admired by Saint-Saëns, among others' her music was published under the pseudonym Mel-Bonis, which she adopted to disguise her gender. There seems no reason, now, why we should not give her back her full identity.

Desdemona, tragic victim of deceit and jealousy in Shakespeare's *Othello*, is suggested singing her lamenting 'Willow Song', an impression confirmed by the opening lines of a translation by French poet Maurice Bouchor which Bonis placed at the head of the score.

Phoebe is the moon-goddess of Greek mythology, also known as Selene. The music flows in a gentle, rather enigmatic, way. A brief episode features light, staccato writing, before we return to the mood of the opening, leading eventually to an unresolved final cadence. Bonis is known to have given a public performance in 1909.

Mélisande is the central figure – fey, waif-like, sensual – of Maurice Maeterlinck's play *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the basis of Debussy's only completed opera, and of works by Fauré, Sibelius and Schoenberg. She is depicted in high-lying melodic lines and surging arpeggio figures covering much of the keyboard, with a more thoughtful ending. Bonis wrote "my favourite" after the title.

Préludes:

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

'Les Collines d'Anacapri', 'La Puerta del Vino', 'Général Lavigne' and 'Feux d'artifice'

Debussy disliked the casual use of the term 'Impressionism' in reference to his music, and it can still create misconceptions, particularly if it is taken to imply merely something vague and misty. If the word means anything, it refers to impressions which creative artists (originally, of course, painters such as Monet) receive from the world around them and recreate through imagery that is clear and precise. This was Debussy's concern: "I have always been an observer, and I have tried in my work to put my observations to good account", he once remarked. His two sets of Preludes are responses-in-sound to all kinds of stimuli – landscape, the natural world, literary characters, legends, music-hall performers – expressed with utmost clarity and precision. In purely musical terms, impressionism might best be understood as referring to the use of instrumental and harmonic colour as important structural elements in their own right, not merely as incidental pictorial detail.

What is particularly striking is how often the immediate stimulus to his imagination seems to have been not direct observation but a picture or literary reference. Ever the armchair traveller, he usually found his inner world gave him all the resources he needed. "Memories", he once remarked, in connection with his orchestral score *La Mer*, "...are worth more than reality, which generally weighs down one's thoughts too heavily." By placing the titles of each individual prelude after the music, he would seem to have been trying to guard against weighing down the pianist's thoughts too heavily as well.

The twelve preludes of Book One were written between 1909 and 1910, though Debussy seems to have begun thinking about them some two or three years before; Book Two was written between 1910 and 1912. The first Prelude we hear this evening is from Book 1, the rest from Book 2:

Les Collines d'Anacapri (The Hills of Anacapri). Anacapri is a small town on the island of Capri, off the south-west Italian coast. Whether or not Debussy was prompted to write this prelude by the label on a bottle of Anacapri wine, as one story claims, there is no mistaking the sound of distant bells, the lively dance known as the tarantella, and snatches of Neapolitan song.

La Puerta del Vino. The Wine Gate is one of the entrances to the Alhambra Palace in Granada, southern Spain. Snatches of Andalusian *cante jondo* (a traditional style of singing associated with flamenco), strumming guitars and the underlying *habanera* rhythm combine in one of Debussy's most vivid evocations of Spain. He marked the piece to be played "with abrupt contrasts of extreme violence and passionate tenderness."

"General Lavine" – excentric. The American clown Edward Lavine appeared in Paris in 1910 and 1912. Marked 'In the style and tempo of a cakewalk', the music includes allusions to Stravinsky's ballet *Petrushka* – no doubt prompted by Lavine's puppet-like movements – and Stephen Foster's song 'Camptown Races'.

Feux d'Artifice (Fireworks). One of Debussy's most virtuosic pieces. The firework display is clearly a 14 July celebration, to judge by the distant snatch of *La Marseillaise* at the end.

Partita

Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983)

1. *Perpetuum mobile*;
2. *Notturmo*;
3. *Allegramente*.

Tailleferre had her first piano lessons from her mother, and began composing soon afterwards. In spite of her father's opposition to her musical ambitions (which prompted her to defiantly change her surname from Taillefesse), she began studying at the Paris Conservatory. Five of her fellow-students were Louis Durey, Francis Poulenc, Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric and Arthur Honegger. Together, they were later dubbed 'Les Six' (The Six) by a journalist. Erik Satie, whom most of the group regarded as a kind of elder statesman, described Tailleferre as his "musical daughter". She once disarmingly commented: "I write music because it amuses me. It's not great music, I know, but it's gay, light-hearted music which is sometimes compared with that of the 'petits maitres' [minor masters] of the 18th century. And that makes me very proud."

Partita is one of her later works, dating from 1957, and published in 1964 with a dedication to her daughter, Françoise. Without resorting to neo-classical pastiche, it is one of her many looks back to the world of the eighteenth-century 'petits maîtres' she so admired.

As the heading indicates, the first movement is constantly on the move, until it evaporates with a final trill. Stylistically, it sits somewhere between Ravel in his more classical vein, and Poulenc. The night-time musings of the second movement are interrupted briefly by more active figuration, which might be taken to represent a trickling fountain, and/or a nightingale singing. The toccata-like third movement bubbles along happily for the most part ('allegramente' = cheerfully). Though it turns a touch darker and more strenuous for a while in the middle, the episode quickly fades, and the music returns to its earlier mood. The ending is bracingly succinct, with not a note wasted.

Sonatine

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

1. *Moderé*;
2. *Mouvement de Menuet*;
3. *Animé*.

In 1903 the Anglo-French magazine *Weekly Critical Review* set up a competition for the first movement of a sonatina for piano. Shortly afterwards, financial difficulties forced the competition to be cancelled, by which time Ravel was the only one who had submitted an entry. In any case, he had exceeded the seventy-five-bar length stipulated in the rules.

Undeterred, he added the other two movements, and the first complete performance was given in Lyons on 10 March 1906, by Paule de Lestang, the future wife of the music scholar Léon Vallas. Afterwards Ravel wrote to Vallas: "I am very happy that the readers of *La Revue Musicale* [the magazine Vallas had founded three years earlier] liked my *Sonatine*, but on the other hand a bit startled by their objections to its difficulty." He dedicated the work to his friends Ida and Cipa Godebski, for whose children he would later write the first version, for piano duet, of *Ma Mère l'Oye* (Mother Goose).

Sonatine was Ravel's first piano work since the break-through of *Jeux d'Eau* (Fountains), of 1901, in which, with some justification, he claimed to have evolved a new way of writing for the piano, ahead of Debussy. By comparison, *Sonatine* appears to be a conscious look back at the classical style of the eighteenth century, not least in the second movement minuet. But something of the rippling figuration that characterises *Jeux d'Eau* also animates the first movement of *Sonatine*, punctuated by moments of breath-catching stillness.

The minuet itself is graceful and elegant for the most part, but with a couple of darker outbursts which ruffle the music's equilibrium without unsettling it.

The finale is even closer to the world of *Jeux d'Eau*. Ravel told the pianist Henriette Faure, who studied the work with him, that this movement should be played "without prudence or mercy." The impetuosity is balanced by a classical clarity and poise in a way that is typical of the composer, and helps to give the *Sonatine* its enduring fascination.

Images, Book 1

Claude Debussy

Debussy wrote three sets of pieces with the title *Images*, two for piano and one for orchestra. The first set for piano was composed between 1904 and 1905, and Book 2 followed in 1907.

1. *Reflets dans l'Eau* (Reflections in the water) is one of Debussy's most subtly evocative water-pieces. The generally placid surface is occasionally broken by sudden ripples, "pebbles thrown from an unseen hand" as Ravel's biographer Roger Nichols aptly describes them. Debussy marked the florid central passage 'quasi cadenza'.

2. *Hommage à Rameau*. Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) was arguably the greatest French composer of the baroque period. In 1903 Debussy saw a revival of his opera *Castor et Pollux*, and later published an article describing him as "one of the surest musical foundations". *Hommage à Rameau* is not a conscious imitation but a tribute in Debussy's own musical language. It is in the slow triple time of the sarabande, a stately dance frequently used in baroque instrumental suites, and often introspective in mood.

3. *Mouvement*. Debussy marked this to be played "with a fantastical but precise lightness." The motion is rapid and buzzing but, like a spinning top or gyroscope, the object itself stays more or less in the same place. The energy evaporates at the end.

Two Nocturnes

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Fauré's thirteen Nocturnes span virtually the whole of his mature composing career. The first dates from around 1875, when he was beginning to establish himself as a significant figure in French music; the last was completed at the end of 1921, less than three years before he died. They naturally reflect the development of his compositional style, from the elegance and charm of the early pieces, though the rich textures of his middle years, to the refinement and concentration of his late work, in which everything is pared down to its essentials. As his younger son, Philippe, commented, we should not read too much into the title 'Nocturne'. These pieces are "not necessarily based on rêveries or on emotions inspired by the night. They are lyrical, generally impassioned pieces, sometimes anguished or wholly elegiac..."

No.12 in E minor, Op.107. *Andante moderato – allegro ma non troppo*. Though written in August and September 1915, this reflects something of Fauré's earlier manner. His biographer Robert Orledge describes this dark, unsettled piece as "perhaps the nearest Fauré comes to Brahms". It moves between the rhythmically elusive opening and less ambiguous running figures, finally subsiding on the hesitation between major and minor that has been a recurrent feature.

No. 8 in D flat major, Op.84 No.8. *Adagio non troppo*. Much the shortest of Fauré's Nocturnes, this is the last of the set of *Huit Pièces Brèves* (Eight Short Pieces) written over a period between 1869 and 1902. It was Fauré's publisher who also numbered it as one of the Nocturnes when, against the composer's wishes, he gave all the eight pieces titles. It stands apart from the other Nocturnes, inhabiting as it does a more self-contained world of untroubled serenity.

Le Tombeau de Couperin

Maurice Ravel

1. *Prélude*;
2. *Fugue*;
3. *Forlane*;
4. *Rigaudon*;
5. *Menuet*;
6. *Toccata*.

Neo-classicism in music was not yet a trend, or even a formulated concept, when Ravel began work on *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. Works such as Grieg's *Holberg Suite* and Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme* paid tribute to the music of the eighteenth century, but the 'back-to-Bach' spirit of the 1920s had yet to take hold of composers like Stravinsky and Hindemith.

Writing to a friend in October 1914, Ravel mentions ideas for a 'French suite' for piano ("not what you think; it won't contain *La Marseillaise*"). Completed in 1917, it consisted of a Prelude, Fugue, three dance movements and a final Toccata. Two years later, he orchestrated four of the movements (omitting the Fugue and Toccata), slightly changing their order.

'Le tombeau de Couperin' literally means 'Couperin's tomb', but also has the sense of 'monument'. François Couperin (1668-1733) was one of the leading figures in French music in the early eighteenth century. Later generations of French musicians admired his music for its classic Gallic virtues of grace, clarity and elegance. Ravel's work also links into the tradition, particularly common in the eighteenth century, of composers writing music in honour of deceased colleagues. Couperin himself wrote works in memory of both Lully and Corelli. Ravel transcribed a forlane by Couperin as a preparation for writing his piece, but *Le Tombeau de Couperin* pays tribute not only to Couperin in particular, but also to the spirit of eighteenth-century French music in general.

Of the three dances following the Prelude and Fugue, the Forlane, with its lazily skipping rhythm, is Slavonic in origin, and came into French baroque music via Venice, where it was a popular street dance. The lively Rigaudon came originally from Provence. The Minuet was seen as particularly representing classical French grace and elegance; Ravel's example adds a wistful vein, which turns distinctly melancholy at the climax. The bustling, energetic Toccata ends the piano version in a more extrovert style

Ravel dedicated each movement to the memory of a friend killed in the First World War, which reveals another impulse behind the work. By erecting his monument both to them and to classical French culture, he quietly asserted his belief in civilised values amid a world which seemed to have turned its back on them.

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CLARE HAMMOND

Acclaimed as a “pianist of extraordinary gifts” (Gramophone) and “immense power” (The Times), Clare Hammond is recognised for the virtuosity and authority of her performances and won the Royal Philharmonic Society’s Young Artist Award in 2016.

Last year saw her debuts at the BBC Proms, Konzerthaus Berlin, and Salle Bourgie in Montreal, and return visits to the Wigmore Hall, London’s National Gallery, and Raritäten der Klaviermusik in Husum. Clare recorded a disc of concertos by Britten, Tippett and Walton with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and George Vass, performed Rachmaninov with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Tom Fetherstonhaugh, and Hesketh with the Ulster Orchestra and Anna Rakitina. She gave the second ever performance of the recently revived Fantasia by Andrzej Panufnik, more than sixty years after its premiere, with the Filharmonia Poznańska and Łukasz Borowicz. In 2025, Clare makes her debut at the Royal Albert Hall, performing Rachmaninov’s Second Piano Concerto with the Philharmonia and Christopher Warren-Green, and premieres a new concerto by Ninfea Cruttwell-Read with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and Emilia Hoving.

Contemporary music is at the core of Clare’s work. She has given over 50 world premieres, including those of major works by Arlene Sierra, Robert Saxton and Michael Berkeley, and her discography includes world premiere recordings of over twenty works. In 2019, she gave the world premiere of Kenneth Hesketh’s *Uncoiling the River* with Martyn Brabbins and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. In 2022, she premiered Graham Fitkin’s new piano quartet with Fitkin, Ruth Wall and Kathryn Stott at the Aldeburgh Festival, and opened the Southbank Centre’s 22/23 season at the Queen Elizabeth Hall with the work.

Clare has recorded six discs for BIS, most recently releasing an album of Etudes by visionary French composer Hélène de Montgeroult, launched in a special concert at London’s National Gallery and featured extensively on BBC Radio 3’s Composer of the Week and Essential Classics. The disc was selected as Editor’s Choice in Gramophone. Reviewers noted the historical importance of the etudes and the ideal match with Hammond’s virtuosic and lyrical abilities. She previously recorded a disc of etudes by Unsuk Chin, Nikolai Kapustin, Sergei Lyapunov and Karol Szymanowski which won her an Opus d’Or from Opus HD magazine and 5 diapasons from Diapason. Youth, an album of music written for Clare by Edmund Finnis won an Edison Klassiek Award and Presto Classical’s ‘EP of the Year’ Award in 2024. In December 2025, Clare will record repertoire by Ravel, Tailleferre, Bonis, Barraine and Chaminade for BIS Records.

Clare completed a BA at Cambridge University, where she obtained a double first in music, and undertook postgraduate study with Ronan O'Hora at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and with Professor Rhian Samuel at City University London. She completed a doctorate on 20th-century left-hand piano concertos in 2012. In 2014 Clare was paired with French pianist Anne Queffélec on the Philip Langridge Mentoring Scheme run by the RPS.