



Hannah Laurens, viool & Tom McCoy, piano

## ***The French Connection***

**Music from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

De Fransche School, Zondag 15 April 2018, 12 uur

**Lili Boulanger**  
(1893 – 1918)

**Deux morceaux**  
I. Nocturne  
II. Cortège

**Maurice Ravel**  
(1875 – 1937)

**Jeux d'eau**

**Jean Françaix**  
(1912 – 1997)

**Sonatine**  
I. Vivace  
II. Andante  
III. Thème varié

**Gabriel Fauré**  
(1845 – 1924)

**Berceuse, Op. 16**

### ***Interval***

**Francis Poulenc**  
(1899 – 1963)

**Sonate**  
I. Allegro con fuoco  
II. Intermezzo. Très lent et calme  
III. Presto tragico



Born into a musical family, **Lili Boulanger** was an extraordinarily precocious child. When she was just two years old, Gabriel Fauré, a friend of the family, observed that she had perfect pitch, and only a few years later she was sight-singing his songs, sitting in on music theory classes at the Paris conservatoire and receiving organ lessons from Louis Vierne. She also studied piano, violin, cello and harp.

The Nocturne was composed over two days in 1911, a time when Lili was working for the prestigious Prix de Rome. With its floating harmonies the Nocturne displays Lili's admiration for the impressionist music of Debussy – the falling chromatic line in the coda is a possible direct reference to his *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. Wagner's influence also makes its presence felt in the ever-growing chromatic progressions, and the noticeable *Tristan* chord towards the end.

Lili had to withdraw from the competition because of ill-health, but returned the following year, coming joint first with her cantata *Faust et Hélène*. She was the first woman to achieve this accolade, and received a bursary to study in Rome. Whilst there, Lili composed the *Cortège*; it depicts a jubilant procession, with a tuneful melody accompanied by a bustling piano part. The plucked chords, the passing of the melodic line throughout the texture, and the use of exotic scales (Phrygian and whole-tone) all create a colourful atmosphere.

Alongside Debussy, **Maurice Ravel** ranks as one of the pre-eminent French composers of the early 20th century. Originating from the Basque country, his family moved to Paris when he was three years old, and he went on to study at the conservatoire in 1889.

Ravel had some early success at the conservatoire, earning First Prize for piano in 1891, but having not gained a prize for three years, was expelled in 1895. Ravel returned in 1897 to study composition with Fauré, who noted his 'wealth of imagination', but unfortunately this view was not shared by the Director, Théodore Dubois, who disliked both Ravel's music and his progressive political outlook. Accordingly, by 1900 Ravel had still failed to earn any further prizes and was dismissed once more, only 'sitting in' on Fauré's classes without active participation. In 1901 Ravel composed *Jeux d'eau* and dedicated it to Fauré.



*Jeux d'eau* is a highly original work, pre-dating the impressionist piano works of Debussy. It takes its inspiration from Liszt's *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa Este*, both pieces depicting garden water features through colourful rippling arpeggio figurations, principally in the piano's upper register. Ravel's piece is particularly remarkable for its advanced harmony, exploring a variety of sumptuous unresolved sonorities. The harmonic juxtapositions culminate in the distinctive bitonal chord of the cadenza (F# major and C major), which would be taken up by Stravinsky in his ballet *Petrushka*.

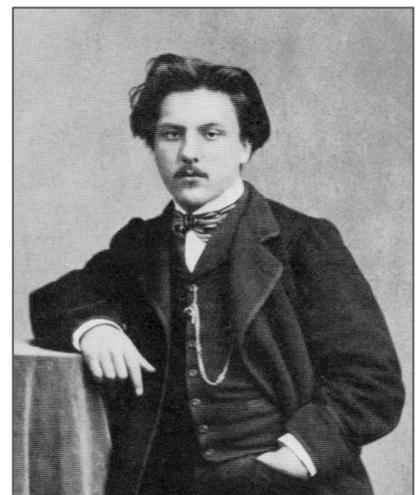


**Jean Françaix** began composing at a young age in a style indebted to Ravel, and his youthful efforts were given praise by both Ravel himself and Nadia Boulanger (older sister of Lili), his teacher in Paris. In contrast to Ravel, whose own output is relatively small, Françaix composed prolifically throughout his life for a wide range of media.

Françaix graduated from the Paris Conservatoire with a first prize in piano, and went on to travel widely as a concert pianist, frequently performing his own works. His sparkling *Concertino* for piano and orchestra (1932) was a huge success, and established the hallmarks of Françaix's witty, neo-classic style: short, repeated melodic phrases, with interplay between different instruments, surprising harmonic turns, and sectional forms contrasting scintillating delicate textures with more reflective interludes. These features are shared by the *Sonatine* for violin and piano, written two years later.

**Gabriel Fauré** studied at the École Niedermeyer in Paris, an institution with a strong focus on church music. One of his teachers was Camille Saint-Saëns, who became a lifelong friend, and who, upon Fauré's graduation in 1865, enabled Fauré to procure work as a church organist and, later, gain teaching positions.

Saint-Saëns also introduced Fauré to the Parisian high society, which inspired him to compose piano music, songs, and pieces for chamber ensembles. Composed at this time in 1879, the *Berceuse* exemplifies Fauré's distinctive melodic gift and luxurious harmonic language.





**Francis Poulenc** first found renown as one of *Les Six*: a name coined in the 1920s for a group of young French composers working in Montparnasse, whose spirited and witty music represented a reaction to the grandiose style of the late romantic era and the seriousness of impressionism.

In his early years, Poulenc was taught by his mother, and was exposed to a wide range of music: notably Debussy, Mozart, Schubert and Stravinsky, but also cabaret and dance (what

Poulenc would later describe as 'adorable bad music'); all these influences, and others, can be heard in his own compositions.

The Violin Sonata was composed in 1942 and 1943, and is dedicated to the memory of the poet Federico Garcia Lorca, who had been killed in the Spanish Civil War. As such, the music of the first movement is unsettled, expressing anger, nostalgia and resignation. This is followed by a beautiful intermezzo, which exploits guitar-like sonorities on both instruments and brings a more extended period of calm. The final movement begins in the agitated vein of the first movement, but starts to become more light-headed and joyous. After a cataclysmic interruption there is an enigmatic ending.

**Hannah Laurens** studied at the 'Jong Talent-klas' of the Utrecht Conservatorium and completed her studies at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama (BA & MA). As a soloist, she won 2<sup>nd</sup> prize in the National Dutch Violin Competition 'Davina van Wely', gave performances of the Mozart 5, Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky violin concerti, and performed live on Dutch radio and television. Hannah plays a Montagnana/Cerutti violin, Cremona, dated 1740/1880.

In addition to her musical activities, Hannah pursues an academic career in philosophy. She is currently doing a PhD at the University of St Andrews and gave talks at Princeton University, the Vrije Universiteit, and Boğaziçi University, Istanbul.

**Tom McCoy** read Music at the University of Bristol, majoring in piano performance, before continuing his studies with an MMus at Royal Holloway, the final dissertation on the harmonic language of Rachmaninoff. From 2006, Tom worked at the Marlborough School, Woodstock, where he led the choir on foreign trips and directed the music for numerous concerts and shows. In addition to performing with Hannah, Tom teaches piano in three schools, Stowe, Oxford High and Kingham Hill, and is the Director of Music at St. Martin's Church, Bladon.

For more information on Tom & Hannah, please visit: [www.laurensandmccoy.co.uk](http://www.laurensandmccoy.co.uk)