



Carter Simmons, Music Director
presents

“TALES AND IMPRESSIONS”

Sunday, November 10, 2019
2:00 PM

The Pabst Theater
144 E Wells St

CLAUDE DEBUSSY *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un Faune*
(1862-1918) (*Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun*)

Petite Suite
I. *En Bateau*
II. *Cortège*
III. *Menuet*
IV. *Ballet*

INTERMISSION

MAURICE RAVEL *Pavane pour une Infante défunte*
(1875-1937) (*Pavane for a Dead Princess*)

Ma mère l'oye (Mother Goose Ballet)
Prélude
I. *Danse du Rouet et Scène*
II. *Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant*
III. *Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête*
IV. *Petit Poucet*
V. *Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes*
VI. *Le jardin féerique*

CARTER SIMMONS, MUSIC DIRECTOR



Festival City Symphony Music Director, Carter Simmons, is a long-time member of Milwaukee's close-knit arts community. The well-known Artistic Director of the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra (MYSO) has served for 25 years with the organization that has nurtured, challenged, and inspired young people since 1956. During his association with MYSO, the organization has grown to serve 6,000 students and received recognition as an awardee of the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, the nation's highest honor for out-of-school arts and humanities programs.

Mr. Simmons has been invited to work with the Milwaukee Ballet, the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, the Starry Nights Orchestra featuring artists of Milwaukee's Florentine Opera, and the Wisconsin Philharmonic among other orchestras. He has conducted the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra throughout China, most notably in Beijing's Forbidden City Concert Hall, and also in Orchestra Hall in Chicago's Symphony Center. He has also accompanied the orchestra for its performances in New York's Carnegie Hall, Valencia's Palau de la Música, Prague's Dvořák Hall, Budapest's Béla Bartók National Concert Hall, in Argentina and Uruguay, and the Musikverein, home of the Vienna Philharmonic.

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Claude Debussy

b. August 22, 1862; St. Germain-en-Laye

d. March 25, 1918; Paris

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un Faune

With his miniature masterpiece, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un Faune*, inspired by Stéphane Mallarmé's brief pastoral poem "The Afternoon of a Faun" (1876), Debussy created a musical realization of the artistic concepts of the Symbolists and the Impressionists. Originally, Debussy planned a more extensive work; a *Prélude, Interlude et Paraphrase Final pour "L'après-midi d'un Faune."* However, as the concert date of December 22, 1894, approached, Debussy abandoned the fragmentary sketches of the other sections and concentrated on polishing the *Prélude*. The work was an immediate success and soon entered the world's orchestral repertory.

When Mallarmé first heard the work in a piano reduction, he wrote to Debussy: "This music prolongs the emotion of my poem and fixes the scene much more vividly than color could have done." A scribbled notation in the manuscript, thought to be in the composer's hand, suggests that the work portrays "the successive scenes of the Faun's desires and dreams on that hot afternoon." Choreographed and danced by Nijinsky, the work became the basis for a slightly scandalous ballet during the 1912 Paris season of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.

Although this warmly scented score is very familiar through recordings, its subtleties only come into full bloom through live performances. From the languid opening flute solo to the gentle ebb of the final measures, this work richly deserves its reputation as one of the masterpieces of the modern orchestral tradition.

Debussy's biographer Edward Lockspeiser writes:

Certain interpretations that have been made of Mallarmé's poem go far beyond its theme of abduction. Buried in its abstruse language is a philosophical treatise on the life of the senses and the psychology of sublimation. It is also an exploration of the borderlands between the conscious and the half-conscious, the waking state and the state of reverie....There is a difference between the dreams of sleep and the musings of reverie. The latter are considered by Mallarmé to be adolescent and even impotent. And from one viewpoint the faun, too, is the adolescent artist anxious to make amorous conquests but remaining more truly a poet....

The heart of the poem is in a definition of sublimation. Mallarmé attempts to trace the process in which desire first vanishes into the dream and is then transformed into music....In the end *L'après-midi* is seen to be a poem about how a poem, or indeed, music, is written.

The composer himself once wrote: "The music of this *Prelude* is a very free illustration of the beautiful poem of Mallarmé. By no means does it claim to be a synthesis of the latter. Rather there are successive scenes through which pass the desires and dreams of the faun in the heat of this afternoon. Then, tired of pursuing the fearful flight of the nymphs and naiads, he succumbs to intoxicating sleep, in which he can finally realize his dreams of possession in universal Nature."

While musing upon his personal contacts with Ravel, the French composer-conductor, Manuel Rosenthal (1904-2003) recalled: "Near the end of his life--it was after lunch and Ravel was feeling a bit sad--I asked impetuously what he would choose to be played at his funeral. It was a foolish question, but Ravel took it seriously, immediately replying, *Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun*. I asked what kind of piece is that for a funeral. He simply responded that it was the only perfect piece of music in the world. 'Everything else sounds as if it were worked over very hard, but the prelude sounds like it was improvised just a moment before you hear it!'"

Claude Debussy

Petite Suite

Although music for piano occupies an important position in Debussy's career, he seemed to have a love-hate relationship with the instrument during his early years. His teacher Marmontel once said: "Debussy isn't very fond of the piano, but he loves music." "Among the varied accounts of his playing," writes biographer Roger Nichols, "agreement is reached on only two points: that it was like nobody else's, and that it had about it an orchestral quality. At all events, the two approaches outlined above, at the extremes of boldness and refinement, both display an unwillingness to treat the piano as it had been treated in the past, and a determination to subdue it to his will."

On Debussy's way to finding his personal voice amid the overt virtuosity of late-19th-century piano music, he created a handful of charming and unpretentious character pieces that include *Reverie*, *Clair de lune* (from the *Suite bergamasque*) and the *Petite Suite*, composed in early in 1889 for piano four-hands. Published in February, 1889, the work was first performed a few weeks later at a musical salon by the composer and one of his publisher's sons, Jacques Durand.

Perhaps best known through the orchestration of Henri Büsser, this four-movement suite begins with *En Bateau* ("In a Boat"), whose gentle barcarolle melody is contrasted by two somewhat stormy episodes. The perky march rhythms of the *Cortège* are balanced by the classic grace of the *Menuet*. Concluding the suite are the vigorous rhythms of a finale entitled *Ballet*.

Maurice Ravel

b. March 7, 1875; Ciboure

d. December 28, 1937; Paris

Pavane pour une Infante défunte

Written as a piano solo at the age of 24 (1899), the *Pavane for a Dead Princess* was among Ravel's first compositional successes. A warm, lyric outpouring of poised emotion, this salon work remains one of the French composer's best-known efforts. Dedicated to the Princess Edmond de Polignac, it was orchestrated by Ravel in 1910; in that form it was introduced in Paris under the baton of composer Alfredo Casella on December 25, 1911.

Aware that a *Pavane* is a stately Spanish dance, some have tried to devise a tale about the tragic demise of a Spanish princess. Rarely given to direct explanations about his music, Ravel denied that there was any story behind his *Pavane*, saying that the only thing that interested him upon creating its title was "the pleasure of alliteration."

Accessible to a pianist of modest abilities, this work was inflicted upon the composer by legions of well-intentioned performers. In later years Ravel lamented: "I no longer see its virtues from this distance, but, alas, I can perceive its faults only too well: the influence of Chabrier is much too glaring, and the structure is rather poor. The remarkable interpretations of this inconclusive and conventional work have, I think, in great measure contributed to its success." Upon hearing a particularly listless performance by a young pianist, Ravel once said: "Listen, my child, what I wrote is a *Pavane for a Dead Princess*, not a *Dead Pavane for a Princess*."

Maurice Ravel

Mother Goose Ballet (*Ma mère l'oye*)

In 1908, Ravel wrote a set of four-hand piano pieces as an affectionate gift for the children of some good friends. Entitling the set *Mother Goose*, Ravel later orchestrated this music as a suite and, in the following year, added material to create a ballet. Ravel's source of these children's stories were not the same as our American *Mother Goose*, but rather were based upon Charles Perrault's *Contes de ma mère l'oye* of 1697. The American *Mother Goose* was one Elizabeth Goose (actually the name was originally Vergoose or Vertigoose) whose daughter published her collection of rhymes in a book of 1719, entitled *Songs for the Nursery, or Mother Goose's Melodies for Children*.

In order to create the ballet, Ravel added a *Prelude*, a new first scene (*Spinning Wheel Dance and Scene*) and created connecting interludes. Gabriel Grovlez led the first ballet performance in Paris at the Théâtre des Arts on January 21, 1912.

Prelude. Filled with gossamer fanfares, this introductory music seems to shiver in anticipation of the tales to be told.

Spinning Wheel Dance and Scene. This music suggests the tale of Princess Florine, the Sleeping Beauty, who, upon entering a room where an old woman is working at a spinning wheel, stumbles, pricks her finger on the spindle, and falls into a magical sleep.

Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant ("Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty"). A brief, twenty measure dance, this music suggests the stately tranquility that surrounds the sleeping princess.

Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête ("The Conversations of Beauty and the Beast"). With some clever musical characterization, Ravel uses the clarinet to convey Beauty's voice and assigns the role of Beast to the contrabassoon. As the two converse in waltz time, Beauty's voice is shifted to flute and then oboe. A crash of cymbals marks the breaking of the spell; the former beast now speaks through the voice of the cello and Beauty becomes a solo violin.

Petit Poucet ("Tom Thumb" or "Hop o' My Thumb"). The father of a starving family took some of his older children into the woods and attempted to lose them in an effort to keep the rest of his family alive. Ravel made a musical description of the cleverest of the children. The score bears this quotation from Perrault: "He believed he would easily find his way back by means of his bread crumbs, which he had scattered as he passed along; but to his surprise he could not find a single crumb, for the birds had come and eaten them up." An oboe solo suggests the winding path of the children; the birds are heard in the middle section.

Laideronette, impératrice des pagodes ("Little Ugly One, Empress of the Pagodas"). This movement was derived from Marie Catherine d'Aulnoy's tale, "The Green Serpent." Having been made ugly by a witch's spell, the princess Laideronette hides away in a remote castle. There, she meets a huge green serpent who is actually a prince suffering under a spell from the same witch. Embarking on a series of adventures, the two "uglies" come to a land inhabited by living, jeweled pagodas. Ravel evokes this scene with a pentatonic march filled with subtle quasi-oriental effects. (In the original story, the two regain their regal good-looks, marry and live happily.)

Le jardin féerique ("The Fairy Garden"). The exquisite conclusion of this work occurs in a portrayal of Sleeping Beauty's awakening. A rush of orchestral color accompanies the opening of her eyes, as she finds herself in a warm, sun-filled room. It is difficult to imagine a more "happily-ever-after" ending.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Holiday Pajama Jamboree

Monte Perkins, Conductor

Jayne Perkins, Host

Wednesday, December 4, 2019 7:00 PM

Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, in the Bradley Pavilion

****Use 929 N. Water Street entrance****

FREE ADMISSION

Festival City Symphony will begin its Pajama Jamboree season with a FREE Holiday Pajama Jamboree concert on Wednesday, December 4, 2019, at 7:00pm in the Bradley Pavilion of the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts. The concert will feature traditional holiday favorites, including performances by the Whitefish Bay High School Choir. To help celebrate the season, the concert will conclude with FCS's traditional holiday sing-along. **FCS encourages attendees to bring a nonperishable food donation for Milwaukee's HUNGER TASK FORCE.**

Winter Pajama Jamboree

Monte Perkins, Conductor

Jayne Perkins, Host

Wednesday, February 12, 2020 7:00 PM

Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, in the Bradley Pavilion

****Use 929 N. Water Street entrance****

FREE ADMISSION

Festival City Symphony will present a FREE Winter Pajama Jamboree concert on Wednesday, February 12, 2020, at 7:00pm in the Bradley Pavilion of the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts. Let FCS help cure your winter blues as the orchestra performs music to cheer up an especially dreary time of year! The concert will also feature a guest performance by students of the Milwaukee High School of the Arts Orchestra.

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