

EMILE SOUVAGIE AND HAMISH BROWN

CLARINET AND PIANO

📅 Wednesday 10 July 🕒 11:15am – 12:15pm

📍 St John's Church

Emile Souvague is the principal clarinetist of Opera Ballet Flanders. In 2023, he won the Gold Medal in the Royal Over-Seas League's Annual Music Competition. Last season he was an academist with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam, working with conductors including Klaus Mäkelä, Maxim Emelyanov, Barbarfa Hannigan, Daniel Harding and Sir John Eliot Gardiner.

Hamish Brown is a British pianist, arranger, composer and conductor based in London. An award-winning and versatile artist, Hamish has performed as a vocal accompanist, chamber musician, orchestral pianist and soloist at numerous venues across the UK and abroad.

Fantasiestücke, Op. 73

1. Zart mit Ausdruck – 2. Lebhaft, leicht – 3. Rasch und mit Feuer *Robert Schumann (1810-1856)*

Schumann wrote these three 'Fantasy Pieces' in 1849, when, for the first time, he began exploring the combination of a single melody instrument and piano.

They were designed as a unified sequence, with cross-references between themes in the three pieces. This was a particular concern for Schumann throughout much of his career. So the clarinet's opening phrase in the first piece is unobtrusively absorbed into the main theme of No. 3, while that of No. 2 is derived from the piano's counter-melody to the start of No. 1, and is, in turn, quoted in the coda of the final piece.

The three pieces are marked to be played without a break. The gently lyrical first piece ('Sweetly, with expression') is followed by a scherzo and trio ('Lively, light'), whose final section is marked 'More and more tranquil'. The ending of the final piece ('Quickly and with fire'), on the other hand, is twice marked 'quicker', bringing the *Fantasiestücke* to a vigorous and flamboyant conclusion.

Four Pieces for clarinet and piano, Op. 5

1. Mässig; 2. Sehr langsam; 3. Sehr rasch; 4. Langsam *Alban Berg (1885-1935)*

Composed in 1913, and lasting together, no more than about eight minutes, these are Berg's only instrumental pieces to explore the extreme brevity and concision that Anton Webern (who, like Berg, studied with Arnold Schoenberg) was drawn to, as, for a time, was Schoenberg himself.

No. 1 begins quietly, with the clarinet alone. The piano enters shortly afterwards, and the piece rises to a vehement climax before subsiding. No. 2 is the slowest of the four, a single arching line for the clarinet, book-ended by soft repeated chords on the piano. It is followed by the shortest and fastest, a scherzo with a brief slow middle section, and ending with the clarinet's precipitate fall to the bottom of its range. Finally, the longest moves from its slow, quiet beginning to a strident climax that takes the clarinet to its highest note in the four pieces, and the piano to its lowest, ending with a brief, hushed fade-out.

Clarinet Sonata

1. Allegro tristamente; 2. Romanza; 3. Allegro con fuoco *Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)*

Poulenc composed his Clarinet Sonata in 1962, for Benny Goodman who, as well as being a leading force in jazz, was a notable interpreter of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto and Quintet, and works written for him by Bartók, Copland and Hindemith. He gave the first performance, with Leonard Bernstein, in April 1963, three months after Poulenc's death. The first movement's paradoxical marking ('tristamente' = sadly) neatly sums up the music's emotional ambiguity. The short punchy introduction, ending with a quiet trill low on the clarinet, leads to a



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main section whose themes share a similar wide arching shape. The music seems to run out of steam, and a quieter middle section ('very calm'), begins with a new theme floating gently upwards then, like the others, descending in a flurry of quicker notes. The opening music returns, and the movement ends with brief hints of the introduction.

The Romanza is a slow triple time piece whose grave, introspective theme is decorated with occasional brief flourishes.

Poulenc's irrepressible sense of fun takes over in the finale, though also suggesting a defiant determination to shrug off the second movement's melancholy at all costs. There is a broader, more song-like second theme, and the movement ends with a last extravert squeal from the clarinet and a thump from the piano.

Canzonetta, Op. 19

Gabriel Pierné (1863-1937)

Born in Metz, Eastern France, Pierné studied at the Paris Conservatoire – composition with Massenet and organ with Franck. He succeeded Franck as the organist at the church of Ste Clotilde, Paris, but left after eight years to concentrate on composing and conducting. Among the works whose premieres he conducted was Debussy's *Images*.

He wrote music in a wide range of genres, from large-scale oratorios to instrumental miniatures, including operas, ballets, orchestral and chamber works. As well as his teachers, Saint-Saëns was a major influence as, later, were Debussy, Ravel and Roussel.

He wrote his elegantly lilting, relaxed *Canzonetta* in 1888, and dedicated it to his clarinetist friend Charles Turban, Turban was also a friend of Saint-Saëns, and took part in the private first performance of *Carnival of the Animals*. He was appointed professor of clarinet at the Paris Conservatoire in 1900.

Three Preludes

1. Allegro ben ritmato e deciso; 2. Andante con moto e poco rubato; 3. Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

George Gershwin (1899-1937), transcribed by Charles Neidich

For a number of years, Gershwin had been accumulating sketches for short piano pieces which he called 'Novelettes'. In 1925 he began a new notebook, headed 'Preludes'. In December the following year he played a group of five pieces as part of a New York recital by singer Marguerite d'Alvarez. We don't know to what extent these drew on the earlier material, or how much was newly composed.

The three preludes Gershwin published make an effective group – two fast rhythmic dances (he used to call the first one the 'Spanish' prelude) and, in between, a moody night piece which he described as 'a sort of blue lullaby'.

