

Bernard

Divertissement
Op. 36

Françaix

Neuf pièces caractéristiques
Dixtuor à vent

Gounod

Petite Symphonie
Op. 216

21 October 2023
7:30pm

St. Anne's Church
Highgate
N6 6AP

For tickets visit: www.academyofstmarylebow.com
£14 Adult, £12 Under 30/Conc., £7 students

Welcome

Good evening and welcome to tonight's concert. We are delighted to be visiting St Anne's, Highgate for the first time for this evening's performance and to bring some Academy of St Mary-le-Bow music-making to north London! Tonight, we showcase our orchestra's fantastic wind players in a programme of French music for wind dectet. I've especially enjoyed swapping my baton for oboe in this project and joining the ensemble; it's always a joy to make chamber music and perform in a way that gives every player an input into how the music takes shape.

This concert marks the start of our 2023/24 season, and we have some very exciting concerts lined up. On the 2nd of December, we'll be kicking off the festive season in true ASMLB fashion with a magical performance of Tchaikovsky's music from *The Nutcracker*, reimagined with a narrator to transport you to the land of sweets. Then, on the 3rd of February next year, the orchestra will be joined by a massed choir of 150 singers and acclaimed soloists Harry Thatcher and Jessica Cale to perform Vaughan Williams' magnificent *Sea Symphony* in the wonderful surroundings of St John's Smith Square. We hope you'll join us for both of these future events!

Alex Fryer
(ASMLB Artistic Director)

The Players

Flute

Tom Baird
Epsie Thompson (picc.)
Sophie Miller-Molloy
Becky Pozzuto

Oboe

Charlotte Evans
Alex Fryer

Clarinet

Steph Bissell
Dan Mort
Alexander Card

Bassoon

Grace Harvey
Charlotte Wyatt
Grace Meadows (contra.)

Horn

Tom Allard
Ben Horton
Lizzie Baumberg
(guest)

Programme

9 Pièces Caractéristiques (9 characteristic Pieces)

J. Françaix
(1912 - 1997)

- I. Prélude
- II. Fugato
- III. Rustique
- IV. Marche
- V. Valse lente
- VI. Presto
- VII. Nocturne
- VIII. Scherzo
- IX. Final

Petite Symphonie Op. 216

C. Gounod
(1875 - 1937)

- I. Allegretto
- II. Andante cantabile
- III. Scherzo: Allegro
- VI. Finale: Allegretto

- Interval -
(20 mins)

Divertissement Op. 36

E. Bernard
(1843 - 1902)

- I. Andante sostenuto - Allegro molto moderato
- II. Allegro vivace
- III. Andante - Allegro non troppo

Programme Notes

Françaix

9 Pièces Caractéristiques

Jean Françaix (1912-1997) was a prominent figure in 20th-century French music. Born in Le Mans, France, he came from a musical family: his father, François-Adrien Françaix, was a composer and pianist. This early exposure to music laid the foundation for his remarkable talent. Alongside his compositional studies at the Paris Conservatoire, Françaix also embarked on a career as a concert pianist, and later taught at the Ecole Normale de Musique.

Françaix's compositions are characterized by their playfulness, wit, and a deep connection to the French musical tradition. He was a prolific composer, renowned for his works in various genres, including orchestral, chamber, and piano compositions. Despite close ties with Francis Poulenc and *Les Six*, Françaix never committed to any particular ideology, and this individuality is evident in much of his musical output.

Written in 1945, *9 Pièces Caractéristiques* is a captivating representation of the spirit of post-war France. This was a period of recovery and rejuvenation for the nation, marked by a strong desire for artistic expression and cultural revival. French composers of the time were seeking to rebuild and reaffirm the country's rich musical heritage, while also embracing the innovations of the 20th century and looking to the future with optimism.

Published in 1973, each piece in this collection reflects both the charm of French music and Françaix's personality and humour:

- I. **Prélude – Presto** - The lively prelude serves as a musical introduction, setting the stage for the character pieces to follow.
- II. **Amoroso** - Initially a gentle and pastoral evocation of French countryside in a lilting 5/8, the increasingly chromatic harmony suggests a setting sun as dusk falls on our scene.
- III. **Notturmo** - A serene and dreamy nocturne reflects the introspective side of Françaix's music. It takes the listener on a peaceful, moonlit journey, echoing the influence of French Impressionism.
- IV. **Subito Vivo** - A vibrant and playful movement featuring energetic and syncopated ideas.
- V. **Allegro** - A lively and spirited march exudes the festive spirit of a parade in a French town square.
- VI. **Andantino** - Following the energetic Allegro, a simple repeated refrain passed between the oboes imparts a sense of quiet religiosity.
- VII. **Leggierissimo** - This nimble miniature is a whirlwind of musical ideas, showcasing Françaix's technical brilliance and a playful sense of humour.

- VIII. **Moderato** - The lyrical dialogue between oboe and clarinet conjures imagery of a quiet evening strolling down a Parisian street.
- IX. **Finale** - The collection concludes with a joyful and vibrant finale, which recalls the spirited energy of the opening prelude.

Gounod

Petite Symphonie, Op. 216

Charles Gounod (1818-1893) was a prominent composer in 19th century France, known for his contributions to opera, choral music, and instrumental works. Born into an artistic and musical family in Paris, he studied at the Paris Conservatoire and won France's most prestigious musical prize, the *Prix de Rome*. He was influenced by Bach, and by Mendelssohn, who he met while studying in Prussia. He was deeply religious, and briefly considered becoming a priest; this religiosity is evident in his prolific output of liturgical music.

The *Petite Symphonie*, composed towards the end of Gounod's career in 1885, reflects the changing musical landscape of late 19th-century France, where different styles and trends were emerging. By this time, France was firmly entrenched in the *Belle Époque*, a period characterised by artistic innovation, along with the arrival of iconic Parisian landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower and the Moulin Rouge. Whilst impressionism led the way in visual arts and music, with the emergence of prominent figures including Claude Monet and Claude Debussy, Romantic style was giving way to new and diverse musical trends, and that sense of exploration is evident in the *Petite Symphonie*.

Scored for a woodwind 'nonet', the addition of a flute to the traditional wind octet is a nod to Paul Taffanel, one of the most acclaimed flautists of the 19th century. Taffanel's popularity, along with Theobald's Boehm's revolutionary improvements to the design of woodwind instruments, led to a resurgence of wind music. Taffanel sought new woodwind compositions from several prominent composers, including Gounod, resulting in the *Petite Symphonie*.

This work consists of four movements, mirroring the structure of a typical Classical symphony:

- I. **Allegretto** - The opening movement sets a joyful and sprightly tone, with elegant melodies and a sense of optimism typical of Gounod's work.
- II. **Andante cantabile** - The second movement is lyrical and reflective, with a beautiful flute solo showcasing Gounod's melodic writing at its best.
- III. **Scherzo: Allegro** - Playful and lively, featuring spirited dialogues between instruments, this movement evokes a rustic hunting scene.
- IV. **Finale: Allegretto** - The work concludes with a cheerful and vivacious rondo, filled with melodic invention.

Bernard

Divertissement, Op. 36

Born in Marseille, Emile Bernard (1843-1902) studied at the Paris Conservatoire and was appointed organist of the church of Notre-Dame des Champs in Paris from 1887 until his retirement in 1895. Bernard was not a prolific composer; however his serious and reflective disposition can be heard in many of his works, including his *Divertissement*.

Composed in 1888, *Divertissement* was dedicated to, and commissioned by, the *Société de musique de chambre pour instruments à vent* (Society of Chamber Music for Wind Instruments) which was founded by renowned flautist Paul Taffanel some years earlier in 1879. Following Boehm's revolutionary improvements to the design of woodwind instruments during the 19th century, wind music had made a resurgence, with Taffanel's society promoting the existing body of Mozart and Beethoven's wind ensemble music, whilst also commissioning new works.

Following its Parisian premiere, the *Divertissement* was played at least three times by the Longy Club of Boston between 1900 and 1905. A critic for the Boston Transcript wrote of the Club's 1904 performance: "[The work is] so well written that the lack of strings does not make itself so clearly felt as usual."

The French term *divertissement* (*divertimento* in Italian) was frequently used in the 18th and 19th century to identify an instrumental composition written in a light vein and used primarily for entertainment. Over the years the *divertimento* has evolved into many different styles and forms. Emile Bernard's *Divertissement* is a sparkling three-movement wind symphony in a late Romantic style.

Consisting of an opening movement in *sonata-allegro* form; a sprightly *scherzo*, and a final movement featuring contrasting themes and a lively *allegro* section, Bernard's *Divertissement* showcases a mastery of symphonic form within the parameters of the wind ensemble. Whilst not as widely known as other chamber works of the time, the *Divertissement* is an important contribution to the repertoire, and a reminder of Paul Taffanel's impact on late-Romantic era French music.

Programme notes by Charlotte Evans

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- Entrance into a prize draw to win free concert tickets
- 2 discounted tickets per concert (if you don't win the draw)
- A free drink per concert
- A special acknowledgement in our programme
- Reserved seating (upon request)

If you're interested in becoming a friend, please visit our website or email friends@academyofstmarylebow.com

Many thanks to our current friends: Martine and Paul Allard, Julia Caddick, Charles Durose, Stephen and Jackie Fryer, Janet High, Steve and Nandita Nelson, Limei Pidduck, Anne Harvey.

Our 2023/24 season

2 Dec 2023, 6:30pm – St John's, Waterloo

The orchestra returns to St John's, Waterloo for a magical evening of music. Original narration will bring to life the music from Tchaikovsky's festive Ballet, *The Nutcracker*. Grab a glass of mulled wine and join Clara as she is transported to the mystical world of sweets!

3 Feb 2024 - 7:30pm – St John's Smith Square

The Academy of St Mary-le-Bow join forces with The Cantus Ensemble, Covent Garden Chorus and Constanza Chorus to perform Vaughan Williams' epic *Sea Symphony* in the stunning surroundings of St John's Smith Square. The orchestra will be joined by two outstanding soloists, baritone Harry Thatcher, and soprano Jessica Cale, for this incredibly special performance.