

BOLÉRO

7.30PM, Thursday 2 April
Auckland Town Hall

Programme Notes

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

orch. Henri Busser (1872-1973)

Printemps (1887; orch. 1912)

- I. *Très modéré*
- II. *Modéré*

DURATION: c.15'

In 1884, Debussy won the coveted *Prix de Rome*; the prize was artistic residency at the Villa Medici. Debussy was underwhelmed: despite the prestige of the prize, he felt deeply isolated and homesick during his residency, where he composed *Printemps* (Spring), a two-movement exploration of colour and orchestral textures. The manuscript was lost and only reconstructed from the piano score (with Debussy's blessing) in 1912 by Henri Busser – another *Prix de Rome* winner.

Michael Norris (b.1973)

Violin Concerto 'Sama' (2018)

- I. *Ard*
- II. *Fada*
- III. *Semazen*

DURATION: c.22'

Award-winning New Zealand composer Michael Norris' works have been performed across the globe, and his Violin Concerto 'Sama', premiered in 2018 by Amalia Hall with Orchestra Wellington, won Norris his third of four SOUNZ contemporary awards. He writes: 'Sama' (Arabic for 'listening') is a Sufi ceremony that includes elements of ritual, singing, dancing, music, poetry and prayers. The Mevlevi Order in Turkey have a particularly remarkable version... the dancers (known as 'dervishes' or 'semazen') whirl around the space in ecstatic devotion. Throughout the dance, the left foot of the dancers remains anchored to the ground ('ard' – earth) ... while at the same time the other hand is raised palm-up, to face the expanse of the universe ('fada' – cosmos) and the light of God. The dancers' trancelike spinning acts as a conduit between these two realms, and as they quicken their rotation, their long skirts expand out fully into open circles, creating a remarkable visual spectacle.

"This violin concerto tries to capture this sense of two vast realms – the earth and the sky – with the dancers whirling ecstatically between them."

The motif introduced by the soloist in the first movement *Ard* is developed as the movement progresses, "representing the growth and fecundity of the earth." The soloist's line in the second movement *Fada* hangs suspended over the orchestra, which "opens up a vast space of cosmic proportions", while in the final movement *Semazen* the soloist whips up "frenetic whirling estures."

INTERVAL

Conductor Eivind Aadland
Violin Amalia Hall

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Masques et bergamasques (1919)

- I. *Ouverture: Allegro molto vivo*
- II. *Menuet: Tempo di menuetto – Allegretto moderato*
- III. *Gavotte: Allegro vivo*
- IV. *Pastorale: Andantino tranquillo*

DURATION: c.14'

When the 74 year-old Fauré was commissioned by Prince Albert of Monaco to provide incidental music for a 'choreographic divertissement', he drew inspiration from 18th-century Italian *Commedia dell'arte*. Fauré's score also looked backwards to the 18th-century dance suite – fellow composer Reynaldo Hahn described the overture as sounding like 'Mozart imitating Fauré'.

The resulting *Masques et bergamasques* proved enormously successful as a stage work, with the Paris Opéra-Comique seeing over 100 performances in a 30-year period. Fauré excerpted four numbers as a standalone musical suite.

The *Menuet* typifies the stateliness of that dance while the *Gavotte* is lively without ever being rustic. All of these were reworkings of earlier works; the lush *Pastorale* is the only movement written specifically for the 1919 commission.

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

orch. Charles Koechlin (1867-1950)

Pelléas et Mélisande: Sicilienne (1898)

- I. *Ard*
- II. *Fada*
- III. *Semazen*

DURATION: c.4'

It should come as no surprise that Fauré's incidental music for a production of Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* at Prince of Wales Theatre in London also drew on existing works, including his *Sicilienne* for cello and piano. On this occasion, Fauré outsourced all of the orchestrations to his pupil, Koechlin.

As befits its origin, the orchestral version of the *Sicilienne* also stands alone. Fauré loved nature and the *Sicilienne*'s lilting melody with rippling harp accompaniment echoes a moment of perfect calm.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Boléro (1928)

DURATION: c.13'

In 1928, dancer and impresario Ida Rubenstein decided to create her own ballet company. In contrast to the existing Ballet Russes of Diaghilev (with whom Ida first performed in Paris) which centred the male dancer, Les Ballets de Madame Ida Rubinstein centred the female dancer.

Programme Notes cont.

With the renowned choreographer Bronislava Nijinska at her side, Rubenstein commissioned new works from leading French composers, where she would star as the prima ballerina.

Rubenstein's style was influenced by the 'barefoot' dancer Isadora Duncan, a pioneer of contemporary dance; and Nijinska's choreography centred Rubenstein elevated on a table surrounded by admirers who "spring to life and spin around the table always dominated by the tall figure whose inner energy creates the rhythmic twisting that magnetises the space."

Writing under a deadline, Ravel constructed *Boléro* out of the minimum musical materials: a melody and a rhythmic idea. Ravel excelled at orchestration and from these scant materials fashioned an overwhelmingly compelling study in orchestral crescendo as the musical tension heightens unrelentingly until the final collapse.

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