



# *French Sound Concert*



*This concert explores the sound world of French composers from Rameau to Poulenc and several great European and American composers influenced by their unique sound expression.*

*These pieces share a desire to express either the beauty of the natural world, the complexity of human emotion or abstract sound for its own sake.*

*The world of French sound is a departure from the German rigors, and structure of form and harmonic rules. A quest for atmosphere, sensuality and spiritual ether illuminate the uniqueness of these piano works.*

*Each composer in this program brings their own personal character and harmonic sensibilities to expressing the essence of French sound.*



# Concert Program

<b>Rameau</b> 1683-1764	Les Tendres Plaintes	TRACK 1
<b>Faure</b> 1845-1924	Romance III, Op. 17 No.3	TRACK 2
<b>Chopin</b> 1810-1849	Nocturne, Op.37 No.1	TRACK 3
	Berceuse	TRACK 4
<b>Ravel</b> 1875-1937	Pavane	TRACK 5
<b>Debussy</b> 1862-1918	Jardins Sous La Pluie	TRACK 6
	<i>Recorded live</i>	
	Claire De Lune	TRACK 7
	<i>Recorded live</i>	
<b>Satie</b> 1866-1925	Piccadilly March	TRACK 8
	Gymnopedie I	TRACK 9
<b>Rachmaninoff</b> 1873-1943	Lilacs, Op. 21 No. 5	TRACK 10
<b>Poulenc</b> 1899-1963	Melancolie	TRACK 11
<b>Mompou</b> 1893-1987	Four Impressions Intimate	TRACKS 12-15
	<i>Selected from Six Impressions</i>	
<b>Cage</b> 1912-1992	In A Landscape	TRACK 16
	<i>Recorded live</i>	



# Jean Philippe Rameau 1683-1764

TRACK 1

Jean Philippe Rameau was celebrated in his lifetime as one of the founders of music for the clavecin or harpsichord laying the foundations for harmonic rules and theories in his *Traite de l'harmonie*. Little is known about Rameau's personal life until he reached the age of 42 when he married an opera singer who premiered many of his operatic roles.

The intimate piece which opens this program, *Les Tendres Plaintes*, or *The Loving Lament*, was written as part of a collection of solo keyboard works to explore fingering possibilities at the harpsichord. These pieces were composed between 1724 and 1731 in Paris.

What is striking about this work is its emotionally descriptive intensity.

Rameau was not fond of formal education and was known to be verbally inarticulate, a complete contrast to the depth of visceral knowledge of emotion articulated in his music, an emotional depth of quality that Chopin reconnects with in the nineteenth century in his own piano works.

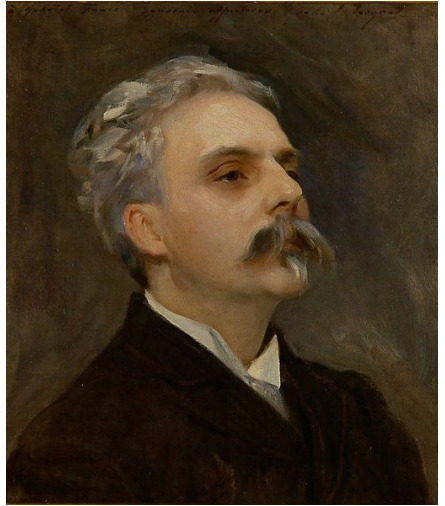


**Watercolor Portrait 1760** by Louis Carrogis

# Gabriel Faure 1845-1924

TRACK 2

Composer Gabriel Faure studied composition with Camille Saint-Saens, was influenced by Chopin and often wrote pieces reminiscent of Chopin's musical style, especially in Faure's early works. Faure's harmonic language consists of quiet dissonance, ancient modes, subtle coloristic chords, and a rejection of the extroverted heroism of much of his European contemporaries. Faure adopted the melodic clarity of the early French clavecin composers such as Rameau and Couperin.



Portrait 1889 by John Singer Sargent

Faure learned composition from Saint-Saens and would go on to teach Maurice Ravel and the great twentieth century theory professor, Nadia Boulanger.

Faure's repertoire consists of numerous masterpieces of the song or melodie genre, including his timeless *Requiem*. Solo piano works and smaller works for orchestra are also among his repertoire. *Romance III* is one of a set of romances for solo piano from the youthful Faure's songs without words that were inspired by Mendelssohn's famous *Songs Without Words*, yet remains within the language of Faure's Belle Époque period. This piece captures a fresh and intimate sentiment of young love and a private, inner mood of expression. Faure's music often expressed comfort for, and understanding of, life's complex emotions with an elevated level of refinement. Harold Schonberg wrote in *Lives of the Great Composers* that "Faure was a master whose delicately adjusted music lacks the grand gesture and excitement to give it mass popularity. The word "Hellenic" is often used to describe his music. It is music that contains the essence of everything Gallic—form, grace, wit, logic, individuality, and urbanity."

Faure's musical life was spent teaching at the Paris Conservatory, which he would later become the president of, and as church organist for the Madeleine in Paris in addition to a prolific composing career.

# Frederic Chopin 1810-1849

## Nocturne, Op. 37 No.1

TRACK 3

Frederic Chopin was known as a gentle, aristocratic, (both by birth and bearing), snobbish, brilliant, and an elegant artist.

Chopin was a child genius and began his musical education in his native Poland before traveling throughout Europe and finally settling in Paris, the intellectual and artistic capital of Europe in the nineteenth century. By the age of nineteen Chopin had written his two piano concertos, which would become imbedded in the piano repertoire from that time on.

Chopin's musical legacy is centered around the piano; perhaps the most intimate among his compositions was the nocturne, a musical form that he raised to great artistic expression. The Irish pianist and composer John Field created the form, which simply means "night song." Aptly, Chopin was known to compose late into the night when the world was still.

Chopin composed twenty known piano nocturnes employing Field's characteristic elements, but his gifts as a composer of great melodies and his new harmonic language raised the form to a more sophisticated level.

The nocturne in G minor Op. 37, No. 1, was composed in 1838. A work of youthful romance with sudden shifts from quiet lyricism to impassioned declarations, this piece has two sections. The first is melodic and displays Chopin's love of opera and the Bel Canto (or beautiful singing style). The second section is a chorale, or hymn form, literally a night prayer in the middle of the piece. The nocturne gently ends in G major with the repeat of the first section.



**Nocturne in Black and Gold 1875**  
by James Abbott McNeill Whistler

## Berceuse

TRACK 4

Chopin's *Berceuse* (French for lullaby) is an intimate jewel in the large body of work that is his legacy to the piano literature. Lullabies are often six-eight time (a combination of three beats divided into two groups) mimicking the rocking motion of the mother and child. The left hand accompaniment suggests the gentle rocking motion of a cradle, while the right hand spins out the melody. This piece can also be thought of as a character etude, or study. In Chopin's vast output the form of the etude was developed to the highest mastery and catapults the development of nineteenth



**Berceuse (date unknown)** by Paul Helleu

century piano technique. Many of the forms Chopin chose to compose in: the mazurka, the waltz, the polonaise, the nocturne, the barcarolle are types of miniature forms, which transport the listener to another place or evoke intimate life moments. Chopin drew widely from his Polish and French heritage when composing his works as well as his travels throughout Europe.

This piece is a lacework of fine note filigree in melodic figures spun out in various harmonic inventions. The overall effect is that the *Berceuse* becomes the ultimate nocturne, or night song, a prayer to protect a child as they slept. It was written in 1843, when infant mortality was high.

# Maurice Ravel 1875-1937

TRACK 5

Maurice Ravel's music is French sound contained in an exquisite timepiece. Ravel considered his compositions to be a continuation of the languages of Faure and Satie, whose works are also in this program. "Where Debussy was a sensuous composer, in the line from Chopin to Gounod to Massenet, Ravel was much the more objective, a precisionist whose line runs from Liszt to Saint-Saens to Faure." A quote which Harold C. Schonberg wrote in *The Lives of the Great Composers*. Ravel was a talented pianist, gifted composer and an extraordinary orchestral arranger.



**Pavane 1897** by Edward Austin Abbey

The pavane is an ancient court dance thought to be Spanish in origin and typically danced as a mournful remembrance of a passed loved one. Ravel's *Pavane* takes inspiration from this dance's meaning and form, but was not meant for a princess, it's rather an evocative fantasy. This imaginary world is expressed with a delicate dance rhythm in common time, or four four which carries an expansive melody of gentle melancholy. Lush orchestral chords combined with precise dance-step staccato pulse in the left hand articulate both grand gestures and intimate sentiment. Composed in 1899 when Ravel was 24, this piece looks to the Renaissance for harmonic and historic inspiration by using ancient modes or (keys) to create an impression of an imagined Spanish court at a ceremonial moment. Ravel orchestrated the *Pavane* in 1910.



# Claude Debussy 1862-1918

TRACKS 6,7

Debussy revolutionized the harmonic world inherited from Chopin; he created new ideas about musical form, leaving the classical period's strict structural designs in the past. Continuous sound worlds replace the high architecture of his predecessors. The sound itself became exquisite in its variety of color and nuance. As he performed, Debussy made a point to withhold the title of his works until the end of the piece so as to not influence the listener's experience.

Culturally, Debussy possessed great taste in his manner, his love of gourmet cuisine and his careful selection of clothing. These characteristics were all part of a supreme sensibility of beauty and refinement.

*Jardins Sous La Pluie* or "Gardens in the Rain" explores nature's effect on a garden. Debussy uses rhythm to create a cascade of sound to illustrate action in the garden: thunder, downpour, light, gentle rain.



**Claude Monet 1897** *Morning on the Seine in the Rain*



**Clair De Lune 1872** by James Abbott McNeill Whistler

Debussy quotes from two popular French children's songs at various points in this piece, bringing to light the pleasures that can be heard in a garden as children play.

Claire De Lune, perhaps Debussy's best-known piano work, is a masterpiece evocative of great beauty and evening light. As the first two iconic chords are played, mood and serene calm flow, creating for the listener an atmosphere of timeless beauty.

# Erik Satie 1866-1925

TRACKS 8,9

Erik Satie was a pianist, composer, philosopher, humorist, and an all around original thinker. He made his living as a cabaret pianist at the Chat Noir, a nightclub immortalized by the art work of Toulouse Lautrec. Satie is thought to be the founder of modern experimental music in the twentieth century, of which serialism and minimalism are direct descendants. Satie's experimental reactions to the music of Debussy, as well as the French establishment - musical, political, and spiritual - set him apart from all other composers of his time. Satie spent his life in spartan squalor in and around Paris.

Beginning in 1887 Satie composed exotic works known as *Gymnopédies* followed by the equally compelling *Gnossiennes*, collections inspired by ancient Greek and Egyptian artwork. Imagined sound lays the ground work for these haunting, seemingly infinite sound worlds. The musical effect of timelessness is achieved by

eliminating the bar lines, which erases strong rhythmic accents. The performer counts beats within the phrase and is not bound by a time signature. Nonsensical descriptions within the notations do not help the performer execute the piece, but provide curious humor to amuse. Satie befriended Debussy and often poked fun at his detailed musical instructions to the performer by mocking them in his own compositions.

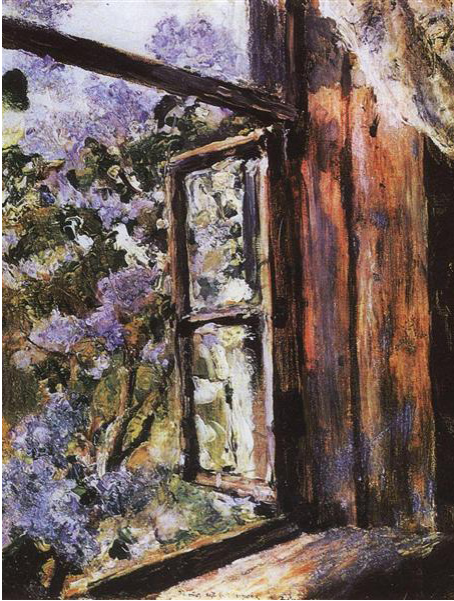


**Orpheus 1960** by Jean Cocteau

# Sergey Rachmaninoff 1873-1943

TRACK 10

Sergey Rachmaninoff was one of the great Russian composers of the twentieth century. In addition to composing, Rachmaninoff made his living as one of the great pianists of his time. Rachmaninoff was born into a wealthy family, but over time their fortune was depleted. Fortunately, Sergey was an industrious student and excelled at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. The Rachmaninoff family spent their summers at Ivanovka, a summer house that provided the young composer quiet solitude to compose and rejuvenate from the stresses of the city.



**Open Window, 1886** by Valentin Serov

These long, productive summers filled with the beauty of the countryside inspired Rachmaninoff to write the song for piano and voice *Lilacs*, Op. 21 No. 5 in 1902, which he later transcribed for solo piano in 1914 and revised in 1941. The poem by Ekaterina Beketova that Rachmaninoff set to music encapsulates the use of nature as the setting of the romantic's longing for love, and in Rachmaninoff's circumstance, the melancholy he experienced as an emigre to America.

Rachmaninoff's musical influences were primarily his Russian forefathers, especially Tchaikovsky, but in *Lilacs* the listener senses the strong influence of the great French composer Debussy. Rachmaninoff paints the text of the poem with sound and creates an emotional and atmospheric aura for the listener. These affects are achieved by Chopinesque filigree and cross rhythms in subtle chromatic movement. A rich palette of color is achieved by the use of A flat Major.

Rachmaninoff composes the world around and within the worlds of the poem creating an exquisite melodic melancholy. He transcribed the piece for solo piano in 1914 and revised in 1941.

The background of the page is a painting of a wooden window frame. The frame is made of dark, weathered wood. Outside the window, there are dense clusters of purple lilacs in full bloom. The painting style is somewhat impressionistic, with visible brushstrokes and a soft, dappled light. The overall mood is peaceful and nostalgic.

## LILACS

*In the morning, at daybreak,  
over the dewy grass,  
I will go to breathe the crisp dawn;  
and in the fragrant shade,  
where the lilac crowds,  
I will go to seeking happiness...  
In life, only one happiness  
it was fated for me to discover,  
and that happiness lives in the lilacs;  
in the green boughs,  
in the fragrant bunches,  
my poor happiness blossoms...*

*~Ekaterina Beketova*

# Francis Poulenc 1899-1963

TRACK 11

The great pianist, composer, and “enfant terrible” Francis Poulenc embodies mid twentieth century French classical music. Poulenc was influenced by Mozart and Stravinsky, as well as a close group of colleagues making up “Les Six.” Poulenc’s primary French influence was Erik Satie. *Melancholie*, which evokes a wistful atmosphere, is a luxurious work written at the beginning of WWII, when Poulenc was likely nostalgic for pre-war Paris. Poulenc once wrote... “music is my portrait,” but above all, do not analyze my music; love it.” Christopher Heddington captures the essence of Poulenc’s art: “It may be said that in an age of musical theories and weighty propaganda, he instead offers clarity, vivacity, persuasiveness and tenderness of a quality and consistency that are in the finest traditions of French thought.”



**Blue Mozart (date unknown)** by Raoul Dufy

# Frederic Mompou 1893-1987

TRACKS 12-15

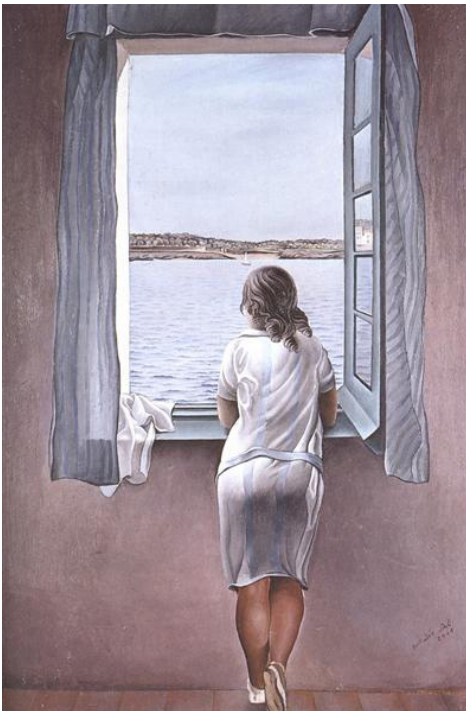
Mompou was born into a family of bell manufacturers and spent his childhood surrounded by the sound of bells. At their essence bells connect us to the primitive activation of sound, and their vibrations provide peace, warning, mystery, and healing - all concepts Mompou explores by careful placement of their sound in his piano music.

Mompou began his music studies in Barcelona and continued to study in Paris where he remained until the Second World War. The roots of Mompou's music are inspired by Spanish and Catalan melos, or ancient melodies, which pre-date Isabelle and Ferdinand's rule in Spain.

Modern harmonic language is applied to the ethos, or sentiment, of these melos. Chopin was among the French composers who influenced Mompou. Mompou wrote a set of variations on a theme from Chopin's *Twenty-four Preludes*.

*Six Impressions Intimate* are youthful works Mompou composed for piano between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one. The four

pieces in the program from this collection encapsulate the character of Mompou's musical personality: he strives to capture the essence of childhood with its innocence, wonder, imagination, and continuous discovery of one's self and the non prejudiced perspective that youth can offer. Mompou writes these early pieces in the ancient Greek modes with minimal chromaticism. The influence of Satie, Stravinsky, and Ravel are clearly evident, but his fully-formed musical personality is present and confident. Mompou would revisit and edit these pieces in 1959.



**Lady In a Window 1925** by Salvadore Dali

# John Cage 1912-1992

TRACK 16

More than any other working creative artist of the second half of the 20th century, American John Cage was a true Renaissance man: composer, philosopher, poet and visual artist. He was aesthetically involved with such luminaries as dance pioneer Martha Graham and visual artists Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst and Willem de Kooning. Cage's most personal and professional collaboration was with the great modern dance choreographer Merce Cunningham.

Cage cited Edvard Grieg, Erik Satie and Claude Debussy, among others, as musical influences, but perhaps the most important was Arnold Schoenberg, with whom Cage studied at UCLA during the 1930's. During the 1940s Cage was composing music with a system he called the "gamut of sounds," which James Pritchett describes as "not simply a collection of pitches, theme, motives, or scales, but a collection of sounds of varying character and complexity." *In A Landscape* was a direct influence of Debussy's revolutionary use of the piano pedals and the deconstruction of musical form.

He wrote *In A Landscape* in 1948 while studying at the innovative and experimental Black Mountain College. At the time, Cage was fascinated with the music and compositional aesthetic of French composer Erik Satie.

Remarkably *In A Landscape* was choreographed by Merce Cunningham before he heard the music—he and Cage developed the music and dance based on numerical phrase structure and later introduced the sound.

*In A Landscape* uses the sostenuto pedal and the una corde pedal uninterrupted throughout the work and employs a set collection of notes (sounding much like the d minor scale). Cycling through



**New River Water Color, Series IV, #4 1988**  
by John Cage

a fixed phrase structure of 5 measures, 7 measures and 3 measures, the work evokes a world that perhaps resonates with Cage's philosophy that the "purpose of music is to sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences."