

# Entente Musicale

Lunchtime concerts of enticing French and English chamber music  
at St John's Smith Square, London SW1P in October 2020



ST JOHN'S SMITH SQUARE

[www.sjss.org.uk](http://www.sjss.org.uk)

MARK BEBBINGTON piano

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

JAN LATHAM-KOENIG conductor

featuring RODERICK WILLIAMS baritone  
(2nd October only)



THE MASKED BALL

Music by Poulenc and Satie  
Friday 2nd October 2020, 1pm

STRINGS ATTACHED

English music for piano and strings  
Wednesday 21st October 2020, 1pm



## ENTENTE MUSICALE I: THE MASKED BALL

Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020, 1pm  
St John's Smith Square

Mark Bebbington, piano  
Roderick Williams, baritone  
Members of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra  
Jan Latham-Koenig, conductor

Poulenc *Aubade* 21 mins  
Satie *Gnossienne no 4* 3 mins  
Satie *Embryons desséchés* 7 mins  
Poulenc *Improvisation no XV 'Hommage à Edith Piaf'* 3 mins  
Poulenc *Sonata for Piano four hands* 6 mins  
Poulenc *Le bal masqué* 18 mins

*There will be no interval*

Concert promoted by Kestrel Music  
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## **FRANCIS POULENC (1899 – 1963)**

### **Aubade - concerto choréographique for piano and 18 instruments (1929)**

1. Toccata
2. Recitative: Diana's Companions
3. Rondeau: Diana with her Companions
4. Presto: Diana Dressing
5. Recitative: Introduction to Diana's Variation
6. Andante: Diana's Variation
7. Allegro feroce: Diana's Despair
8. Conclusion: Diana's Farewell and Departure

The archetypal 20th-century French composer, Poulenc combined grace and sparkling wit with a gentle nobility that encapsulated his desire for a 'return to simplicity'. The key to his creative world lies hidden in a biographical note sent to his English publisher when he had just turned 19: 'I studied composition almost solely through books because I was fearful of being influenced by a teacher... In general, I am very eclectic... I am a musician without a label.'

The Aubade's unusual scoring – piano, pairs of violas (no violins), cellos, double basses, flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, one trumpet and timpani – came about (at least in part) as the result of the outdoor staging required for the work's premiere. This took place at the private Parisian mansion of the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Noailles, who had commissioned Poulenc to compose a ballet score based on the Greek goddess of the hunt, Diana, originally with an all-female cast of dancers choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska (sister of celebrated dancer Vaslav Nijinsky).

A virtuoso toccata (1), hurtles us into the action as we see Diana's friends waking slowly as a new dawn arises (2). A lively rondeau (3) introduces Diana, who fears for her chastity as she has spotted an unsettlingly handsome stranger in the woods. At great speed (4) her companions help get her dressed and give her a bow as a symbol of her chastity (5), leaving her to dance away her problems (6). Casting aside her bow (7), she decides to accept her fate in the woods, but returns 'intact' (8), resolving that she will once again devote herself exclusively to the hunt.

## **ERIK SATIE (1866–1925)**

### **Gnossienne No.4 (1891)**

### **Embryons desséchés (1913)**

- 1 d'Holothurie
- 2 d'Edriophthalma
- 3 d'Podophthalma

Hidden away in Satie's memoirs is the heart-rending reflection that 'having started composing, all my troubles stemmed from there.' By the time Satie had drunk himself to death in the mid-1920s, Paris was the hub of a bohemian culture whose credo was 'anything goes'. A fore-runner of Dada and Surrealism, he briefly flirted with the idea of 'furniture music', advocating that his works should be regarded 'in the same way as a private conversation, a painting in a gallery, or a chair on which you may or may not be seated.' His works combine wistfulness and satirical wit that give them a unique, but distinctly French, flavour.

Satie was famed for his quirky piano pieces, with their mystifying titles and whimsical instructions to the performer, such as *en clignant l'oeil* ('with a wink') and *avec étonnement* ('with surprise'). The fourth of Satie's *Gnossiennes* typifies the series as a whole by dispensing with bar lines and possessing a strangely ritualistic feel, as though the music is a free incantation. The effect is enhanced by a series of harmonies which are spiced regularly with a dash of the Orient. The rather obscure title is an oblique reference to Gnosticism, an advanced study of the spiritual world and mystical philosophy. Composed over 20 years later, *Embryons desséchés* (literally 'desiccated embryos') has three movements with obscure titles which refer respectively to a type of sea-cucumber, a shrimp-like crustacean and a genus of crustaceans similar to the crab or lobster.

## **FRANCIS POULENC**

### **Improvisation No.15 in C minor - 'Hommage à Edith Piaf' (1959)**

Satie lent his unstinting support and influence to a group of young composers coined popularly in the press as 'Les Six', of whom Francis Poulenc was one. Although each had their own indelible musical personality – the others were Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Germaine Tailleferre and Georges Auric – they shared a common view that the old Romantic order had outlived its usefulness and that contemporary music needed a good spring-clean.

The essential simplicity of Poulenc's writing, when compared to the heightened complexity of many contemporary scores, can be sensed unmistakably in the series of 15 improvisations he composed for solo piano between 1932 and 1959. The series climaxes in a haunting miniature composed in homage to Edith Piaf, the celebrated French chanteuse, who in 1959 underwent a series of operations for a stomach ulcer that many at the time suspected she might not survive.

## **FRANCIS POULENC**

### **Sonata for Piano, Four Hands (1918, rev.1939)**

1. Prélude
2. Rustique
3. Finale

'I know perfectly well that I'm not one of those composers who have made harmonic innovations like Igor [Stravinsky], Ravel or Debussy,' wrote Poulenc in 1942, 'but I think there's room for new music which doesn't mind using other people's chords. Wasn't that the case with Mozart and Schubert?' Of all the composers Poulenc might have chosen to make his point, they were especially apposite as the tantalising emotional thrust of his music, which at times appear to hover midway between elation and despair, brings those particular composers immediately to mind. Just three years before, Poulenc had revised his early Sonata for piano (four hands), whose finger-crossing intricacies were reputedly designed to subtly enhance his contact with a student of whom he was particularly fond at the time.

## FRANCIS POULENC

### **Le Bal Masqué - secular cantata on poems by Max Jacob (1932)**

1. Préalable et Air de bravure
2. Intermède
3. Malvina
4. Bagatelle
5. La dame aveugle
6. Finale

Poulenc encapsulated the essence of his style in just two words: 'Mon plaisir'. Basking in the creative hothouse that was 1920s Paris, he forged a unique style that magpie-like honed in on the musical jewels of yesteryear. These acted as springboards for his own fertile imagination which was constantly refuelled by his exposure to some of the most iconic figures of the age, including Jean Cocteau, Igor Stravinsky, Maurice Chevalier, Ernest Hemingway, Coco Chanel and Christian Dior.

*Le Bal Masqué* is a deliriously wacky work, whose stream-of-consciousness scenario (based on the poems of symbolist-surrealist Max Jacob) and quick-fire musical happenings almost defy description. Little wonder Poulenc declared excitedly that 'by the end of the piece, the audience should be stupefied and exhilarated as though they'd just got off a merry-go-round.' The Preamble (1) establishes the riotous atmosphere, as Madame de Dauphine is pursued by the Count of Artois as he tots things up on the roof! A gentle interlude (2) is followed by Malvina (3), who goes to a ball in blue stockings, where she is assailed by a discussion about Nietzsche. Poulenc described the Bagatelle (4) as 'an unusual Paganini-style caprice for violin', while *La Dame aveugle* ('The Blind Lady', 5) depicts 'an astonishing, very rich woman, who used to frequent the Ile de Beauté in Nogent-sur-Marne around 1912.' The Finale (6) is intended as a musical portrait of Max Jacob himself. In Poulenc's words it 'should be stupefying and almost terrifying.'

## MARK BEBBINGTON, PIANO

The critical plaudits which have greeted Mark Bebbington's performances and recordings have singled him out as a British pianist of the rarest refinement and maturity ("Bebbington is without doubt one of Britain's finest pianists." wrote Michel Fleury recently in *Classica*).

Internationally recognised as a champion of British music, in particular, Mark has recorded extensively for the Somm label to critical acclaim, with no fewer than nine of his recent CDs awarded 5\*\*\*\*\* by BBC Music Magazine. His most recent CDs include three British Piano Concertos with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, an all-Gershwin album with Leon Botstein and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra ('Recording of the Month' from MusicWeb International). A CD of Concertos by Grieg (including the premiere of his sketches for a Second Piano Concerto, edited by Robert Matthew-Walker) and Delius with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Jan Latham-Koenig was released in April 2018 and became 'CD of the Week' in *The Times* and *Mail on Sunday*.

His premiere recordings include one of Arnold Bax's Piano Concertino coupled with John Ireland's Piano Concerto and *Legend*, and premieres of Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia* and William Mathias's first two Piano Concertos (Ulster Orchestra). In addition to concerto recordings, Mark completed his John Ireland and Frank Bridge solo piano series and released a CD of piano works by William Alwyn in 2017. As well as his BBC Music Magazine success, he has won Gramophone Magazine's 'Editor's Choice' International Record Review's 'Outstanding' accolade and many others. *International Piano Magazine* wrote of him, "Bebbington's revivals of British piano music are second to none; he could well be dubbed the concert pianists' Richard Hickox. Bebbington has almost single-handedly demonstrated that 20th-century British piano scores have an exciting role to play in the concert hall and recording studio".

Over recent seasons Mark has toured throughout Central and Northern Europe and in the United States (both as recitalist and as soloist with some of the world's leading orchestras), as well as the Far East and North Africa. In 2017 he made his Carnegie Hall debut with Leon Botstein and the American Symphony Orchestra and also appeared with the Buffalo Symphony Orchestra and on tour with the Israel Camerata and Czech National Orchestra. Within the UK, he has appeared in concertos with the London Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic and Philharmonia Orchestras, Flanders Symphony Orchestra, the London Mozart Players, Orchestra of the Swan and BBC Concert Orchestra. He has featured both as soloist and recitalist on BBC Television and Radio and also on major European Television and Radio networks.

Mark studied at the Royal College of Music where he was a recipient of numerous international awards and prizes, including a Leverhulme Scholarship, a Winston

Churchill Fellowship and the Ivan Sutton Recording Prize – the latter awarded to the one outstanding graduate of the combined London Music Colleges. He later studied in Italy with the legendary Aldo Ciccolini.

Mark's programming demonstrates a commitment to the music of our time and he regularly includes contemporary composers as diverse as Takemitsu, Julian Anderson, John McCabe, David Matthews, Pierre Boulez and Elliot Carter in his recital series.

[www.markbebbington.co.uk](http://www.markbebbington.co.uk)

## **RODERICK WILLIAMS, BARITONE**

Roderick Williams is one of the most sought-after baritones of his generation. He performs a wide repertoire from baroque to contemporary music, in the opera house, on the concert platform and is in demand as a recitalist worldwide.

He enjoys relationships with all the major UK opera houses and has sung opera world premieres by David Sawer, Sally Beamish, Michael van der Aa, Robert Saxton and Alexander Knaifel. Recent and future engagements include the title role in Eugene Onegin for Garsington, the title role in *Billy Budd* with Opera North, Papageno for Covent Garden, and productions with Cologne Opera, English National Opera and Netherlands Opera.

Roderick sings regularly with all the BBC orchestras and all the major UK orchestras, as well as the Berlin, London and New York Philharmonic Orchestras, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Ensemble Orchestral de Paris, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, Cincinnati Symphony, London Symphony and Bach Collegium Japan amongst others. His many festival appearances include the BBC Proms (including the Last Night in 2014), Edinburgh, Cheltenham, Bath, Aldeburgh and Melbourne Festivals.

Roderick Williams has an extensive discography. He is a composer and has had works premiered at the Wigmore and Barbican Halls, the Purcell Room and live on national radio. In December 2016 he won the prize for best choral composition at the British Composer Awards.

In 2015 he started a three year odyssey of the Schubert song cycles culminating in performances at the Wigmore Hall in the 17/18 season and is now in the process of recording them for Chandos.

He was Artistic Director of Leeds Lieder in April 2016, is Artist in Residence for the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra from 2020/21 for two seasons and won the RPS Singer of the Year award in May 2016. He was awarded an OBE in June 2017.

## **JAN LATHAM-KOENIG, CONDUCTOR**

Jan Latham-Koenig studied at the Royal College of Music in London and started his career as a pianist, before he decided to devote himself wholly to conducting. From 1989 to 1992, he was music director of the Orchestra of Porto, which he founded at the request of the Portuguese government.

In 1988, he made a sensational debut as an opera conductor with *Macbeth* at the Vienna State Opera and became its permanent guest conductor from 1991. He now regularly conducts in the world's leading opera houses, including Covent Garden, the Opéra National Paris-Bastille and the operas of Berlin, Hamburg, Rome, Lisbon and Santiago in Chile.

Jan Latham-Koenig was Music Director of both the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg and Opéra National du Rhin from 1997 to 2002. In 2005, he was appointed Music Director at the Teatro Massimo in Palermo, the first British conductor to hold such a post at one of the major Italian theatres.

From 2007 to 2010 Jan Latham-Koenig was Music Director at the Teatro Municipal of Santiago in Chile. In different years he enjoyed directorship with the Wrocław Symphony Orchestra in Poland, the Wroclavia Cantans International Festival, artistic directorship of the Cantiere Internazionale d'Arte di Montepulciano and of the Young Janacek Philharmonic; he was also Principal Guest Conductor of the Filarmonica del Teatro Regio in Turin; Artistic Director of the Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM in Mexico City (2012–2015). From 2013, he was Artistic Director of the Flanders Symphony Orchestra in Bruges (Belgium).

Jan Latham-Koenig is greatly in demand as a guest conductor. He has appeared with orchestras worldwide and performs regularly in Italy, including with the orchestras of the Teatro Comunale in Florence, RAI Turin and the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome. Recent appearances include the Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa, New Japan Philharmonic and Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, and in China the Beijing Symphony Orchestra, Hangzhou and Qingdao Philharmonic. He has conducted the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Dresden Philharmonic and Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra.

Jan Latham-Koenig started to work with the Novaya Opera Theatre in 2008 when he conducted the Kasper Holten production of Wagner's *Lohengrin*. In April 2011, he was appointed Chief Conductor of the Novaya Opera. Since January 2019, he has been chief guest conductor of the theatre. Since March 2013 he has been acting as the Head of the Artistic Board, and he has participated in the company's tours throughout the world.



# ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

As the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) approaches its seventy-fifth anniversary in 2021, its mission to enrich lives through orchestral experiences that are uncompromising in their excellence and inclusive in their appeal, places the RPO at the forefront of music-making in the UK. Performing approximately 200 concerts each season and with a worldwide audience of more than half-a-million people, the Orchestra embraces a broad repertoire that enables it to reach the most diverse audience of any British symphony orchestra. Whilst artistic integrity remains paramount, the RPO is unafraid to push boundaries and is equally at home recording video game, film and television soundtracks and working with pop stars, as it is performing the great symphonic repertoire.

The RPO collaborates with the most inspiring artists and looks forward to welcoming its new Music Director, Vasily Petrenko, in September 2021. Vasily Petrenko will join a roster of titled conductors that includes Pinchas Zukerman (Principal Guest Conductor), Alexander Shelley (Principal Associate Conductor) and Grzegorz Nowak (Permanent Associate Conductor).

Cadogan Hall in London has been the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's home since 2004. Here it performs an annual season of concerts, many of which are subsequently toured to its seven principal residency venues. In addition, the Orchestra promotes more than forty-five concerts each season at partnership venues across the country, several of which are in areas where access to live orchestral music is very limited. In London, the Orchestra also promotes a season of symphonic concerts at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall and a popular series at the iconic Royal Albert Hall, where it has recently been appointed as the Hall's Associate Orchestra.

The RPO is recognised as being the UK's most in-demand orchestra, an accolade that would have pleased Sir Thomas Beecham, who founded the RPO in 1946. His mission was to lead a vital revival of UK orchestras after World War II and form an ensemble that comprised the finest musicians in the country. The Orchestra has since attracted a glittering list of principal conductors, including Rudolf Kempe, Antal Doráti, Walter Weller, André Previn, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Yuri Temirkanov, Daniele Gatti and Charles Dutoit.

The RPO aims to place orchestral music at the heart of contemporary society, collaborating with creative partners to foster a deeper engagement with communities to ensure that live orchestral music is accessible to as inclusive and diverse an audience as possible. To achieve this, in 1993 the Orchestra launched



RPO Resound, which has grown to become the most innovative and respected orchestral community and education programme in the UK and internationally. The programme delivers bespoke, pioneering education, community and talent development projects to a wide range of participant groups, including homeless people, children, young people and stroke survivors, always with the overarching objective to leave a lasting legacy.

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra has always been entrepreneurial and in 1986 it was the first UK orchestra to launch its own record label. The RPO has gone on to embrace advances in digital technology and now achieves nearly thirty million downloads of its recorded music each year. The Orchestra is increasingly active online ([www.rpo.co.uk](http://www.rpo.co.uk)) and on social media (@rpoonline) providing audiences with the opportunity to engage with the RPO and enjoy 'behind-the-scenes' film clips and photographs.

Passion, versatility and uncompromising artistic standards are the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's hallmarks, and as it looks forward to an exciting future with its new Music Director, Vasily Petrenko, it will continue to be recognised as one of the world's most open-minded, forward-thinking and accessible symphony orchestras.

[www.rpo.co.uk](http://www.rpo.co.uk)