**Program Notes for Masterworks 6: Music for Valentine’s Day**

Saturday, February 8, 2020 & Sunday, February 9, 2020

**JAMES LOWE, CONDUCTOR • ALLEN VIZZUTTI, TRUMPET**

- Debussy – *Nocturnes*
- Tomasi – Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra
- Ravel – *Daphnis et Chloe*, Suites No. 1 and No. 2

**Claude Debussy**

*Nocturnes*

**Composer**: born August 22, 1862, St. Germain-en-Laye, France; died March 25, 1918, Paris.

**Work composed**: 1897-1901. Dedicated to Debussy’s publisher, Georges Hartmann.

**World premiere**: Camille Chevillard conducted the first two movements in Paris on December 9, 1900. The first complete performance took place on October 27, 1901.

**Instrumentation**: Women’s chorus, 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, military drum, 2 harps and strings.

**Estimated duration**: 25 minutes.

The popular association of Claude Debussy’s music with the shifting lights and shadows of Impressionistic painting caused the composer no end of irritation, but it is a connection he himself encouraged, particularly with regard to his *Nocturnes*. Debussy’s title comes not from the musical nocturne popularized by Chopin, but more likely from the painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler, who created a series of paintings grouped under that name. As Debussy explained, “The title *Nocturnes* is to be interpreted here in a general and, more particularly, in a decorative sense. Therefore, it is not meant to designate the usual form of the Nocturne, but rather all the various impressions and the special effects of light that the word suggests.”

Debussy did not usually comment on his music, preferring to let it stand or fall on its own merits, but with the Nocturnes he gave audiences a rare glimpse into his thought processes: “Nuages (Clouds) renders the immutable aspect of the sky and the slow, solemn motion of the clouds, fading away in grey tones lightly tinged with white.” In a 1932 program of Debussy’s music, Debussy’s biographer Marcel Dietschy provided even more specific comments from the composer. According to Dietschy, Nuages portrays “night on the pont de Solférino, very late. A great stillness. I was leaning on the railing of the bridge. The Seine, without a ripple, like a tarnished mirror. Some clouds slowly pass through a moonlit sky, a number of clouds, not too heavy, not too light.”

Debussy wrote, “Fêtes (Festivals) gives us the vibrating, dancing rhythm of the atmosphere with
sudden flashes of light. There is also the episode of the procession (a dazzling fantastic vision), which passes through the festive scene and becomes merged in it. But the background remains resolutely the same: the festival with its blending of music and luminous dust participating in the cosmic rhythm.” Debussy told Dietschy that Fêtes takes place in the Bois de Boulogne, where he watches “the horsemen of the Garde Républicaine, resplendent, their arms and helmets lit by torches, and the bugles sounding their fanfare.” Debussy captures the anticipation of the crowd as they watch the magnificent parade go by, and the brasses lend pomp and brilliance to the spectacle.

In Sirènes (Sirens), Debussy “depicts the sea and its countless rhythms and presently, amongst the waves silvered by the moonlight, is heard the mysterious song of the Sirens as they laugh and pass on.” An ethereal women’s chorus gives voice to the Sirens’ alluring music, which lures unwary sailors to their doom.

**Henri Tomasi**
**Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra**

**Composer:** born August 17, 1901, Marseille; died January 13, 1971, Paris

**Work composed:** 1948. Dedicated to trumpeter Ludovic Vaillant, soloist with the French National Orchestra.

**World premiere:** November 13, 1948. Albert van Raalte led the Orchestra of Radio-Hilversum with trumpet soloist Jason Doets.

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes, 3 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, xylophone, celesta, harp, and strings

**Estimated duration:** 19 minutes

French-Corsican composer Henri Tomasi also pursued an equally successful career as a renowned conductor. He led radio orchestras, headed numerous opera productions, and conducted instrumental works with orchestras around the world. As a composer, Tomasi is best known for his operas and other theatrical music, as well as his series of solo concertos for various instruments, particularly winds and brasses.

In 1948, the Paris Conservatoire, Tomasi’s alma mater, asked him for a concerto for solo trumpet and orchestra. When the music faculty reviewed Tomasi’s concerto, they dismissed it as “unplayable;” Tomasi decided to prove them wrong. From its premiere on Dutch Radio and many subsequent performances in concert halls around the world, Tomasi’s Trumpet Concerto has become a standard addition to the trumpet repertoire, thanks to the efforts of many of the world’s great trumpeters, including David Bilger and Wynton Marsalis.

“If the style of my Concert for Trumpet is classic by its three movements, the content is not,” Tomasi declared in a 1949 magazine interview. “There is neither subject nor central theme. It is pure
music. I tried to make a synthesis of all the expressive and technical possibilities of the trumpet, from Bach up to the present, including Jazz. Up until this time the use of the trumpet was relatively unrefined. It was considered as a secondary instrument, while the interest here is in discovering all of its expressive resources.”

The Concerto’s three movements begin with a trumpet cadenza accompanied by snare drum. The melancholy Nocturne features an intricate chromatic melody tailor-made for the soloist’s variations, and the closing Finale features what one music publisher calls “a cheerful cartoon-music theme.”

**Maurice Ravel**  
*Daphnis et Chloé: Symphonie chorégraphique en trois parties* (Choreographic Symphony in Three Parts)

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<tr>
<th>Composer: born March 7, 1875, Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, France; died December 28, 1937, Paris</th>
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<td><strong>Work composed:</strong> Ravel began composing in June 1909, and completed a first draft of the piano score on May 1, 1910. Ravel struggled to complete the final scene of <em>Daphnis</em>; it took him another 18 months, during which time he orchestrated and made other substantial revisions and expansions to the ballet through 1911. Ravel finished the orchestral score on April 5, 1912.</td>
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<td><strong>World premiere:</strong> Pierre Monteux conducted the Ballets Russes’ first performance at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, on June 8, 1912.</td>
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<td><strong>Instrumentation:</strong> SATB chorus, 3 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), alto flute, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, castanets, crotales, cymbals, field drum, glockenspiel, snare drum, triangle, tambourine, tam-tam, wind machine, xylophone, celesta, 2 harps, and strings.</td>
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<td><strong>Estimated duration:</strong> 30 minutes</td>
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When Serge Diaghilev asked Maurice Ravel to write a ballet for Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in 1909, Ravel had no idea what creative frustrations awaited him. Ravel was no stranger to ballet music – a substantial number of Ravel’s compositions were written for or later transformed into ballets – but in this instance, it was Diaghilev and his choreographer Michel Fokine, not Ravel, who chose the subject: the ancient Greek tale of Daphnis and Chloé. After a financially disastrous 1908 season, Diaghilev sought to boost attendance by commissioning music from French composers. For his part, Ravel viewed Diaghilev’s request as a great opportunity to boost his compositional bona fides.

Trouble began when Ravel found himself in an artistic standoff with Fokine. The two men had entirely different and incompatible ideas about how to interpret the story, which led to a number of arguments. Ravel opted for “a vast musical fresco, less concerned with archaism than with faithfulness to the Greece of my dreams, which is similar to that imagined and depicted by French artists at the end of the 18th century.” The paintings to which Ravel refers portray an invented, imaginary ancient Greece, where innocently naked nymphs and shepherds gambol in lush countryside in an atmosphere of chaste
purity. In contrast, Fokine wanted an erotic, carnal portrayal, taking his inspiration from the frankly sexual images found in ancient Greek art. Both men knew the original version of Daphnis and Chloé, written by the 2nd century Greek poet/novelist Longus, only via a 1559 French translation by Jacques Amyot.

Not long after he began working on *Daphnis*, Ravel wrote to a friend, “I have to tell you that I’ve just had an insane week: preparation of the libretto for a ballet to be performed for the next Russian season, work every night until three in the morning. Things are even more complicated because Fokine doesn’t know a word of French, and all I know of Russian is how to swear in it … you can imagine the atmosphere of these meetings.” Fokine eventually, and with some difficulty, moderated his viewpoint to align with Ravel’s version. Some years after the premiere of Daphnis and Chloé, Fokine wrote in his memoirs, “I loved the score from the first time I heard it … but I must admit that in some places I somehow felt a lack of virility which, in my opinion, was necessary for a projection of the world of antiquity.”

Ravel sketched out a one-act ballet in three scenes, or tableaux, which he described as “a choreographic symphony in three parts.” The first two tableaux proceeded relatively smoothly, but Ravel found himself stymied by the finale. Eighteen months passed before he was able to complete the music, which meant Diaghilev had to postpone his planned 1910 premiere until June of 1912.

For his part, Diaghilev had such grave doubts about the “symphonic” nature of the score, fearing it unsuitable for ballet, that he considered scrapping the whole project; he thought the music heavy on atmosphere at the expense of action. Ravel’s belated completion of the score meant the dancers did not get enough rehearsals before the premiere. Even with sufficient time, Ravel’s music still presented formidable challenges: the dancers had difficulty with Ravel’s use of unconventional time signatures (7/4 and 5/4), as well as his penchant for off-beat accents and abrupt tempo changes. Add the fact that Diaghilev cut the original four scheduled performances to two, and it is no surprise that *Daphnis and Chloé* attained only moderate success as a ballet.

In the first scene, shepherds worship at an altar dedicated to three nymphs, while shepherdesses dance seductively around Daphnis. This kindles Chloé’s jealousy; in naïve retaliation, she responds to the amorous attentions of the cowherd Dorcon. Dorcon and Daphnis then compete in a dance contest (*Dance générale*); the winner gets a kiss from Chloé. Dorcon’s clumsy attempts provoke mockery from the watchers, while Daphnis’ graceful display earns him victory. After Chloé bestows her kiss, Daphnis becomes distracted by the seductive dance of the shepherdess Lyceion. Without warning, pirates attack and kidnap Chloé, who begs the nymphs in vain for help; Daphnis arrives too late to rescue her. The watching nymphs offer Daphnis solace and send for the god Pan. The second tableau opens in the pirates’ enclave, where they unload their booty and display their prowess in a pugilistic dance. When the pirates exhaust themselves, their leader commands Chloé to dance; she uses the opportunity to attempt an escape. A group of satyrs encircle the pirates, who then flee when they see Pan approaching. In the third scene, Chloé is reunited with Daphnis, and they dance in joy and gratitude as the golden glow of
sunrise lightens the sky. Daphnis and Chloé’s dance becomes amorous, recalling Pan's love for the nymph Syrinx. As their passion grows, the surrounding shepherds and nymphs join in a wild, celebratory bacchanal.

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