

ANSERMET CONDUCTS

Fauré and Debussy

The Petite Suite is made of four individual movements, each one constructed in such a way as to give more or less equal opportunities to both pianists, not that the work is especially demanding to play, a further indication, perhaps, that Debussy intended these pieces for the amateur market. As in several of his early piano works, the prevailing style owes much to the lighter idioms of Delibes and Massenet, though in a sense, this genre was one which suited Debussy's highly personal language quite naturally. The first movement, "En bateau," also shows the clear influence of the equivalent movement of Fauré's Dolly Suite, composed some years earlier, in the sensitive and alluring disposition of the parts, as a sublime melody is floated above a broken chordal accompaniment. A passage toward the close is doubly prophetic, firstly because it employs a whole-tone scale, and also (writes Dawes) "in the little pattern of semi-quavers contributed by the secondo player, very like things in the later music used to symbolise ripples, eddies and whirlpools in water."

The next movement, "Cortège," is a brilliantly evocative processional, suggesting a marching band on a festival day (as does "Fêtes" in Debussy's Images for orchestra), while the penultimate movement, "Menuet," is generally regarded as the high point of the work. With its particularly subtle interplay, especially between the middle voices, it (writes Frank Dawes) "begins with suggestions of elfin pipes and horns...and the magical vanishing trick at the end has fairy horn-calls echoing faintly around the main melody in a way that suggests that Debussy's piano music was by now beginning to find a place in his unique dream-world." The final movement of Debussy's Petite Suite, entitled "Ballet," is an energetic dance, with a contrasting central section rooted in the world of French popular theatre music of the day.



Pelléas Et Mélisande - Pénélope Prelude
 Masques Et Bergamasques - Petite Suite

In 1898, the celebrated actress Mrs. Patrick Campell commissioned incidental music from Gabriel Fauré for a London production, in English, of *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Fauré composed this music between May 16 and June 5, 1898, and conducted it in the Prince of Wales Theatre at London on June 21. Fauré asked Charles Koechlin to orchestrate 17 cues (including a borrowed *Sicilienne* from 1893). After London, Fauré himself re-scored three of them as a concert suite, adding the *Sicilienne* a decade later. It is his masterpiece for orchestra -- tasteful, sweetly charming, expressively "proper" and basically chaste, as befits a play that depends on mood for its effect rather than on events.

The "Prélude" depicts the forest in which Golaud discovers fragile, amnesiac *Mélisande*. Beginning in G major, Quasi adagio, until Golaud's hunting horn approaches, it returns to G for a quiet close. "La fileuse" is the music before Act III, depicting *Mélisande* at her spinning wheel with *Pelléas* in rapt attendance -- same key and 3/4 time as the "Prélude." The tempo is Andantino quasi allegretto for its oboe and horn solos amid gently whirring strings. *Sicilienne*, from Act II of the play, is Fauré's portrait of *Mélisande*, no matter that he borrowed and re-scored it for solo flute, harp, and strings. The tempo is slightly quicker (*Allegretto molto moderato*), the key B flat major, the rhythm 6/8. "La mort de *Mélisande*" accompanied her cortège in Act V -- muted, poignant music marked *Molto adagio* that was played at Fauré's funeral in 1924.

Pénélope is an opera in three acts by the French composer Gabriel Fauré. The libretto, by René Fauchois is based on Homer's *Odyssey*. It was first performed at the Salle Garnier, Monte Carlo on 4 March 1913. The piece is dedicated to Camille Saint-Saëns.

Fauré's last, inwardly turning manner -- spare, abrupt, arching toward ever finer gradations of luminosity -- had been embarked upon for more than a decade when Prince Albert I of Monaco asked him in 1918 (at Saint-Saëns' prompting) for a brief *divertissement* to be performed at the Monte Carlo theater, which would become known as *Masques et bergamasques*. In collaboration with theater director Raoul Gunsbourg and René Fauchois, librettist of *Pénélope*, Fauré was

to provide music for a *fête galant* in the spirit of Verlaine, drawing largely upon his earlier works. In the upshot, only the orchestrated version of the *mélodie Clair de lune*, from 1888, contained verse by "the Faun" (as Verlaine was known to his *café cronies*), though the *Pavane* for chorus and orchestra of 1887 featured lines by Count Robert de Montesquiou deliberately imitative of Verlaine's style. Madrigal for chorus and orchestra (1884) and the *mélodie Le plus doux chemin* (1904) to poems by Armand Silvestre dovetailed well with the spirit of the thing. The slender conceit of the scenario, in which the *commedia del arte* characters who flit through Verlaine's early verse appear in person to observe and mock the eighteenth century lords and ladies accustomed to being entertained by them, owes as much to Watteau -- who inspired the *décor* -- as to the poet.

For the Overture and two orchestral numbers, Fauré revised movements of an abandoned symphony dating from 1869 -- his 24th year -- to which he added a *Pastorale*, the only newly composed music for *Masques et bergamasques*. The latter revives his *galant* style with a loving, old-masterly touch. While the Overture is not pastiche, the young Fauré was obviously moved by classical models -- Reynaldo Hahn disarmingly suggested "Mozart imitating Fauré." Likewise, the *Gavotte* and *Menuet* were inspired by an even more remote era. Following the horrors of the Great War, and taken together, the oddments of this elegant trifle loomed larger than their sum. They still evoke a grand nostalgia, not merely for the *belle époque*, but for the eternally enchanted *paysages* that haunt Verlaine's early verse. And the freshly felicitous first orchestral essays, indeed, seem predestined for just this use. The *Pastorale* was Fauré's last orchestral work -- in its brief magic there is something of Prospero's "Our revels now are ended." The Monte Carlo production opened April 10, 1919, scoring an immediate success, which led to it being re-staged at the Paris Opéra-Comique on March 4, 1920. As a theater piece, *Masques et bergamasques* has frequently been revived in France, while the suite of orchestral numbers drawn from it -- Overture, *Gavotte*, *Menuet*, and *Pastorale* -- has achieved an enduring popularity the world over.

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Pelléas Et Mélisande - Pénélope Prelude

Masques Et Bergamasques - Petite Suite

Pelléas Et Mélisande - Incidental Music, Op.80

1 Prélude 5:40

2 La Fileuse 3:00

3 Molto Adagio 4:05

4 Sicilienne 3:40

5 Pénélope - Prélude 7:45

Masques Et Bergamasques, Op. 112

6 Ouverture 3:24

7 Menuet 2:38

8 Gavotte 3:07

9 Pastorale 4:08

Petite Suite

10 En Bateau 3:47

11 Cortège 2:58

12 Menuet 3:14

13 Ballet 3:22

Producer: Michael Bremner Engineer: Roy Wallace
Recorded by Decca 22-24 Feb 1961 at Victoria Hall, Geneva



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admin@highdeftapetransfers.com
or visit our website:
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