

LSO St Luke's

CHAMBER MUSIC



Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

SAINT-SAËNS' CIRCLE: NASH ENSEMBLE

Friday 25 March 2022 1pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

Camille Saint-Saëns *Caprice sur des airs danois et russes*

Camille Saint-Saëns *Tarantelle in A minor*

Gabriel Fauré *Piano Quartet No 2 in G minor*

Nash Ensemble

Benjamin Nabarro violin

Lars Anders Tomter viola

Adrian Brendel cello

Philippa Davies flute

Gareth Hulse oboe

Richard Hosford clarinet

Alasdair Beaton piano

Caprice sur des airs danois et russes Op 79

Camille Saint-Saëns

Camille Saint-Saëns, a child prodigy, wrote his first violin sonata at the age of seven. 'I like nothing better than chamber music', he once said, and it weaves a continuous thread throughout his life, ending with three woodwind sonatas written shortly before his death at the age of 86. His *Caprice sur des airs danois et russes* (Caprice on Danish and Russian themes) for piano, flute, oboe and clarinet dates from a visit that the composer paid to St Petersburg at Easter 1887 to give a series of seven concerts under the auspices of the Red Cross. He was accompanied by three distinguished colleagues: flautist Paul Taffanel, oboist Georges Gillet and clarinetist Charles Turban. They joined him in a new piece dedicated to the Danish-born Tsarina Maria Feodorovna, wife of Tsar Alexander III.

Saint-Saëns' *Caprice* is based on one Danish and two Russian airs. It begins with a bravura Introduction featuring piano with all three wind instruments: then the Danish air is introduced as a flute solo, accompanied by piano, followed by

four variations. After a short piano interlude, ending in a pause, the oboe declaims the first Russian air as a plaintive solo, repeated on clarinet, which subsequently introduces the fast-moving second Russian air. These two themes are themselves subjected to variation treatment covering a range of moods and speeds before all instruments join in a final coda to end. The *Caprice* proved a great success, and was later repeated in Paris and London.

Tarantelle in A minor Op 6

Camille Saint-Saëns

Thirty years earlier, on 28 April 1857, the 21-year-old Saint-Saëns had joined two other colleagues, flautist Louis Dorus and clarinetist Adolphe Leroy, on the stage of the Salle Pleyel in Paris for the premiere of his *Tarantelle in A minor* Op 6. The audience was greatly pleased by this capricious piece with its lyrical central section: fellow composer Gioachino Rossini even invited the performers to his Paris home to give further performances at his evening soirées.



Piano Quartet No 2 in G minor Op 45

Gabriel Fauré

- 1 **Allegro molto moderato**
- 2 **Allegro molto**
- 3 **Adagio non troppo**
- 4 **Allegro molto**

In the early 1860s Saint-Saëns taught for a few years at the École Niedermeyer, an institution that focused on training church musicians. His pupils there included the young Gabriel Fauré, who worshipped his teacher, and the two developed a lifelong friendship. Saint-Saëns introduced Fauré both to fashionable French society, and to other important French musicians later associated with the newly-formed Société Nationale de Musique Française, which Fauré joined in 1871. Many of his chamber works had their first performances at Société Nationale concerts, including both his Piano Quartets.

The second of these, in G minor, had its premiere on 22 January 1887, with the composer at the piano. It is Fauré's only major work to incorporate the cyclic principle beloved of Franz Liszt and César Franck, by means of a connecting thread – a motif unveiled at the start of the first movement, which reappears in various guises throughout the piece until its final echo at the end of the finale.

The Quartet is designed on Classical lines. Its energetic first movement is propelled by ostinato piano figuration, and is constructed on two contrasting themes, one dynamic, the second more lyrical. The following movement derives its *moto perpetuo* character from a constantly running, syncopated piano part, over which the strings discuss fragmentary variants of the 'motto' theme. In contrast, the serene slow third movement, which opens with a duet for viola and piano, conjures up a memory of evening church bells in the village of Cadirac in the Ariège district, where Fauré grew up. The agitated finale is pitilessly driven forward until it finally emerges into a triumphant restatement of the second subject, now in the bright key of G major, and crowned by an ecstatic coda ending.

Notes by Wendy Thompson

The Nash Ensemble

The Nash Ensemble, Resident Chamber Ensemble at Wigmore Hall since 2010, is acclaimed for its adventurous programming and virtuoso performances. It presents repertoire from Haydn to the avant-garde, and is a major contributor towards the recognition and promotion of contemporary composers. As from the end of the 2019/20 season the group had given premieres of more than 300 new works by 225 different composers, of which 215 were specially commissioned.

The Ensemble's impressive collection of recordings illustrates the same varied and colourful combination of classical masterpieces, little-known neglected gems and important contemporary works. The Nash Ensemble's acclaimed recordings of contemporary music include chamber works by Harrison Birtwistle and Julian Anderson. Notable recordings for Hyperion include a series of works by British composers of the first half of the 20th century, including Benjamin Britten, Arnold Bax, Frank Bridge and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Other recordings include Mozart and Beethoven string quintets, chamber works by Schumann and Saint-Saëns, works by Czech composers incarcerated in the Theresienstadt concentration camp between 1941 and 1945, and a CD of Bruch's string quintets and octet, which was nominated for a *Gramophone* award.

Since 1979 the Ensemble has presented an acclaimed series every season at Wigmore Hall exploring the many facets of the chamber music and vocal repertoire. In the 2021/22 season the group celebrates the extraordinary legacy of the renowned pianist Dame Myra Hess and her famous National Gallery lunchtime concerts during World War II. Their annual Nash Inventions concert on 22 March 2022 focussed on the 90th birthday year of the eminent composer Alexander Goehr, and included a new work commissioned by Wigmore Hall especially for the occasion.

Recent highlights for the Ensemble have included concerts in Turkey, France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. The Ensemble broadcasts regularly for the BBC including appearances at the BBC Proms.

The Nash Ensemble has won numerous accolades including The Edinburgh Festival Critics award 'for general artistic excellence' and two Royal Philharmonic Society awards in the chamber music category 'for the breadth of its taste and its immaculate performance of a wide range of music'.