

LSO St Luke's

CHAMBER MUSIC



Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

SAINT-SAËNS' CIRCLE: ASHLEY RICHES & JOSEPH MIDDLETON

Friday 18 March 2022 1pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

Saint-Saëns La brise, Au cimetière and
Tournoiement from 'Mélodies persanes'
Duparc La vague et la cloche; Phidylé; Sérénade
Debussy Nuit d'étoiles; Beau soir
Debussy En sourdine, Fantoches and Clair de lune
from 'Fêtes galantes'
Ravel Histoires naturelles

Ashley Riches bass-baritone
Joseph Middleton piano

Mélodies persanes Op 26

Camille Saint-Saëns

- 3 La brise
- 5 Au cimetière
- 6 Tournoiement

Ashley Riches opens his recital with three songs by Camille Saint-Saëns, who, like many late 19th-century French composers, was obsessed with exotic themes – in later life, he spent many holidays in the French colony of Algeria. His first published set of six songs appeared in 1872 under the title *Mélodies persanes* (Persian Songs), Op 26. The texts evoke clichéd 'Arabian Nights'-style visions of languid desert nights, with lovers lounging under silken tents shaded by palm trees. Ashley Riches sings the third, fifth and sixth from the set. 'La brise' (The Breeze) is marked *Allegretto lusingando* (caressingly), as a woman performs a sultry dance for her sultan lover.

In 'Au cimetière' (At the Cemetery), two lovers sit on a white marble tomb, pitying its occupant who may have died unloved, but realising that death waits for all. Saint-Saëns dedicated it to the young artist Henri Regnault, who lost his life in 1871 during the Franco-Prussian War. 'Tournoiement' (Whirling), with its frantic *moto perpetuo* accompaniment, describes an opium-fuelled dream in which the singer is whisked as if on a magic carpet from Eastern slave-markets to distant planets.

La vague et la cloche; Phidylé; Sérénade

Henri Duparc

Henri Duparc (1848–1933) was a great friend of Saint-Saëns, with whom he helped to found the Société nationale de la Musique to promote contemporary French music in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. A talented composer, he experienced mental health problems and stopped composing altogether at the age of 37. He later went blind, and destroyed much of his work: only 17 songs survive. *La vague et la cloche* (The Wave and the Bell), composed when he was 25 to a text by François Coppée, is a terrifying dream sequence in which the singer imagines himself first cast out in the dark on a stormy sea, then clinging desperately to a giant, swinging bronze bell.

Phidylé, composed in 1882, is one of Duparc's loveliest songs. Dedicated to his friend Ernest Chausson, it sets a charming love poem by Leconte de Lisle with an extended piano postlude, and is clearly influenced by Wagnerian chromaticism.

Sérénade is an earlier song, dating from 1869. Gabriel Marc's text uses images of nature to depict the agonies of young love.



Nuit d'étoiles; Beau soir

Claude Debussy

Next we hear five songs by Claude Debussy (1862–1918), beginning with two teenage compositions. *Nuit d'étoiles* (Starry Night) was Debussy's first published piece, appearing in 1880, when he was an 18-year-old student at the Paris Conservatoire. Théodore de Banville's poem is a tale of lost love, and the piano imitates a lyre in Debussy's melancholic setting.

Beau soir (Fine Evening), a setting of a poem by Paul Bourget composed two years earlier, is also tinged with sadness as a sunset scene induces the realisation that life is brief.

Fêtes galantes

Claude Debussy

En sourdine
Fantoches
Clair de lune

Many *fin de siècle* French song composers were drawn to the subtle musicality of Paul Verlaine (1844–96), the Symbolist poet whose exquisite verses could capture 'the sound of a flute in the moonlit shadows, the flutter of a silk dress in the wind, the trembling of glass or crystal on a sideboard ...' When the young Debussy reluctantly left Paris to study in Rome in 1885, he took with him a copy of Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes*, its verses evoking the atmosphere of paintings by Watteau or Fragonard in which beribboned gallants serenade their ladies in idyllic landscapes. Debussy left behind his married mistress, the amateur singer Marie-Adélaïde Vasnier, for whom he composed his first settings of three of Verlaine's poems, 'En sourdine' (Muted), 'Fantoches' (Marionettes), and 'Clair de lune' (Moonlight). Six years later he recast these same settings, the dreamy ambience of the first and third contrasting with the brittle agility of the second.

Programme notes by Wendy Thompson

Histoires naturelles

Maurice Ravel

- 1 **Le paon (The Peacock)**
- 2 **Le grillon (The Cricket)**
- 3 **Le cygne (The Swan)**
- 4 **Le martin-pêcheur (The Kingfisher)**
- 5 **La pintade (The Guinea-fowl)**

Maurice Ravel wrote this witty song cycle in 1906. He took his texts from Jules Renard's *Histoires naturelles*, a collection of prose-poems depicting the animal kingdom. The songs' conversational vocal style captures the directness the composer admired in Renard's poems. The piano accompaniment, meanwhile, provides vivid musical portrayals of each creature.

The peacock makes his entrance to pompous dotted rhythms inspired by the courtly Baroque 'French overture' – but spoils the effect with his characteristic screech. The next song evokes the tiny cricket's industry through delicate textures, a high-lying vocal line and fidgety little piano motifs. The rich harmonies and rippling piano figuration of 'The Swan' create a dreamy atmosphere – until the humorous closing bars jolt us back to reality. In the fourth song, slow, hushed chords and a pensive vocal line capture a fisherman's wonder at seeing a kingfisher perch on his rod. Its peaceful mood is shattered by the fifth and final song, where explosive piano ornaments, strutting figures and rapid bursts of text convey the aggression of the guinea-fowl who 'never stops screaming her discordant cry'.

Programme note by Kate Hopkins

Ashley Riches

bass-baritone

Bass-baritone Ashley Riches studied at King's College, Cambridge and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and was later a Jette Parker Young Artist at the Royal Opera House and a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist.

On the operatic stage he has sung Figaro and Count Almaviva (Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*), Don Giovanni (Mozart), Escamillo (Bizet's *Carmen*), Schaunard (Puccini's *La bohème*) and the Pirate King (Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance*) at houses including the Royal Opera House, English National Opera, Glyndebourne, Garsington, the Grange Festival and Opera Holland Park.

Highlights on the concert platform in the 2021/22 season include Tippett's *Midsummer Marriage* with Ed Gardner/London Philharmonic Orchestra, Haydn's *The Creation* with Laurence Cummings/Academy of Ancient Music, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* with the Helsinki Baroque Orchestra, a US tour of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* with Richard Egarr/Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, a European tour of Handel's *Messiah* with Paul McCreech/Basel Chamber Orchestra, Handel's *Solomon* with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and Bach's St John Passion with Trevor Pinnock/the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam.

In recital, he has collaborated with pianists including Graham Johnson, Iain Burnside, Julius Drake, Joseph Middleton, Anna Tilbrook, James Baillieu, Simon Lepper, Gary Matthewman and Sholto Kynoch.

Ashley has a fast-growing discography including the *BBC Music Magazine* 2020 Recording of the Year, Purcell's *King Arthur* with Gabrieli and *Wonderful Town* with the LSO and Sir Simon Rattle. Most recently he released his debut solo disc for Chandos, *Musical Zoo*.

Joseph Middleton

piano

Pianist Joseph Middleton specialises in the art of song accompaniment and chamber music and has been internationally acclaimed within this field. Described in *BBC Music Magazine* as 'one of the brightest stars in the world of song and Lieder', he has also been labelled 'the cream of the new generation' by *The Times* and 'a perfect accompanist' by *Opera Now*.

Joseph enjoys fruitful partnerships with internationally established singers including Sir Thomas Allen, Louise Alder, Ian Bostridge, Dame Sarah Connolly, Iestyn Davies, Fatma Said, Samuel Hasselhorn, Wolfgang Holzmair, Christiane Karg, Katarina Karnéus, Angelika Kirchschrager, Dame Felicity Lott, Christopher Maltman, John Mark Ainsley, Ann Murray, James Newby, Mark Padmore, Miah Persson, Allan Clayton, Matthew Rose, Carolyn Sampson and Roderick Williams. He collaborates with rising stars from the younger generation and regularly programmes his own series for BBC Radio 3.

Recent seasons have taken him to London's Wigmore Hall, Royal Opera House and Royal Festival Hall, the Vienna Konzerthaus, Amsterdam Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw, Köln Philharmonie, Strasbourg, Frankfurt, Lille and Gothenburg Opera Houses, Berlin Boulez Saal, Paris Musée d'Orsay, Zürich Tonhalle, deSingel Antwerp, Luxembourg Philharmonie, Bozar Brussels, Tokyo's Oji Hall and New York's Alice Tully Hall. He regularly appears at festivals in Aix-en-Provence, Aldeburgh, Edinburgh, Munich, Schubertiade Schwarzenberg and Hohenems, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Ravinia, Japan, San Francisco, Toronto and Vancouver as well as the BBC Proms.

His fast growing discography on Harmonia Mundi, BIS, Chandos and Signum Records has won him a Diapason D'or, Edison Award, Prix Caecilia as well as numerous *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine Award* nominations.

Joseph Middleton is director of Leeds Lieder, musician in residence at Pembroke College Cambridge and a Professor and Fellow at his alma mater, the Royal Academy of Music. He was the recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society's Young Artist of the Year Award in 2017.

Coming Up

SAINT-SAËNS' CIRCLE: PAVEL KOLESNIKOV & SAMSON TSOY

Friday 18 March 2022 6pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

Saint-Saëns The Swan from 'The Carnival of the Animals'
Rameau La Boucon from 'Pièces de clavecin en concerts'
Saint-Saëns arr Debussy Pavane from 'Étienne Marcel'
Saint-Saëns Variations on a Theme of Beethoven Op 35
Saint-Saëns Berceuse Op 105
Bizet Selections from 'Jeux d'enfants'
Fauré Selections from 'Dolly Suite'
Leonid Desyatnikov Du côté de chez Swan

Pavel Kolesnikov piano
Samson Tsoy piano

NASH ENSEMBLE

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

Saint-Saëns Caprice sur des airs danois et russes
Saint-Saëns Tarantelle in A minor Op 6
Fauré Piano Quartet in G minor Op 45

Nash Ensemble

GOULD PIANO TRIO

Friday 25 March 2022 6pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

Fauré Piano Trio in D minor Op 120
Saint-Saëns Piano Trio No 2 in E minor

Gould Piano Trio