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**Program Notes**  
**by Will Hertz**

**Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)**  
**Carlos Salzedo (1885-1961)**  
**Sonata en Trio in F Sharp Minor**

This is an arrangement of a piano *Sonatine* composed by Ravel in 1903-05 and transcribed for flute, cello and harp by the great French-born harpist Carlos Salzedo. Salzedo, who settled in the United States in 1909 to serve in the Metropolitan Opera orchestra, became an influential harp teacher at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, at Juilliard, and at his own harp colony in Camden, Maine. He was a prolific producer of original music and transcriptions for the harp, and this transcription was approved by Ravel.

The *Sonatine* was one of two piano works composed by Ravel while he was still a student at the Paris Conservatoire to demonstrate different sides of his emerging musical personality. *Miroirs* was an effort to build on more recent concepts of harmony and structure, particularly the sensuality of Liszt and the pictorial impressionism of Debussy. In contrast, the *Sonatine* emphasized Ravel's desire to revive the elegance and structural clarity of late 18<sup>th</sup> century French music.

The *Sonatine's* composition had a strange history. Ravel composed the first movement for a contest for a one-movement work of 75 measures maximum sponsored by an Anglo-French arts magazine. The contest was then canceled because Ravel was the only entrant and the magazine was on the verge of bankruptcy. Ravel then added two movements of modest size.

The *Sonatine's* three short movements are marked by an austerity of textures and clarity of musical lines. The first movement, *Modéré*, is in a closely knit sonata form with two contrasting themes, the first presented against a murmuring accompaniment and the second graver and structured on static chords. The movement is dominated by the interval of a descending fourth, which then appears in the two subsequent movements.

The second movement, *Mouvement de menuet*, has the embellishments and modal inflections of an antique dance or processional. The third movement, *Animé*, is in perpetual motion with *agitato* passages and ornamented with figurations and trills.

**Ernest Chausson (1855-1899)**  
**Pièce in C Major for Viola and Harp, Op. 39**

If you were an artist, composer or writer in Paris in the 1880s, it is quite likely that you frequented a luxurious apartment at 22 Boulevard de Courcelles – or at least aspired to be invited. The apartment was the residence of M. and Mme. Ernest Chausson and the site of Paris's most famous weekly salon. There the Chaussons welcomed such leading figures in Parisian cultural life as the poets Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine, the painters Claude Monet and Paul Cézanne, and the composers César

Franck, Isaac Albéniz and Claude Debussy.

Chausson himself was the product of Paris's salon life. The son of a prosperous public-works contractor, he obtained entrance to various Parisian salons at the age of 15, rubbing shoulders with Paris's cultural elite. Already a talented young musician, he broadened his musical knowledge at these gatherings to encompass the great chamber works of Schubert, Schumann and Mendelssohn as well as Beethoven's symphonies played as piano duets.

At his family's urging, Chausson was initially trained as a lawyer, earning a doctorate in laws at the Sorbonne. However, the gravitational pull of music was too great to resist. In the same year, 1877, that he was sworn in as a barrister, he wrote his first song, and at the relatively advanced age of 24, he enrolled in the Paris Conservatory to study composition with Massenet. With a sizable private income, he then devoted the rest of his life to composition and the company of fellow artists.

At the conservatory, Chausson fell under the influence of César Franck, who had introduced Wagnerian harmonic freedom and flexibility into French music. For some years, he was a prominent member of the Franck circle, writing major stage and orchestral works in a highly dramatic style inherited from Wagner. With experience, however, he concluded that the true spirit of French music was in classical subtlety and restraint, and these characteristics mark his mature compositions.

Chausson's output was modest, reaching only 39 opus numbers. Free from economic pressures but concerned about being dismissed as a wealthy amateur, he labored hard and long over his music, refining and reworking his manuscripts at length before permitting their performance.

As things turned out, his career ended prematurely at the age of 44, when, like his teacher Franck, he was fatally injured in a freakish accident. Franck was struck by a streetcar in Paris, and Chausson lost control of his bicycle and ran into a stone wall near his country home.

This piece was Chausson's last composition, written in 1897. It was originally for cello or viola and piano, with the piano version recently transcribed for harp by the contemporary French harpist Xavier de Maistre. The harp opens the piece with a strain in 5/4 time, marked by a slight rhythmic figure on the last beat of the first two measures. The viola then picks up the strain, and an agitated contrasting section expands on that rhythmic figure before the return of the opening strain.

### **Arnold Bax (1883-1953)**

#### ***Elegiac Trio for Flute, Viola and Harp***

Sir Arnold Bax was a leader of the British musical establishment, receiving in addition to his knighthood the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society, an honorary doctorate from Oxford, and the title of Master of the Queen's Music (roughly the equal of Poet Laureate). Trained at the Royal College of Music, he wrote some 250 works, including seven symphonies and dozens of choral, chamber and piano works.

But his heart lay elsewhere – in Ireland. At an early age, he read the poetry of William Butler Yeats and, as he recalled later, “the Celt within me stood revealed.” He taught himself Irish Gaelic so that he could read traditional Irish authors, spent a good part of his remaining years in Ireland, embraced Irish political ideals, and moved in the literary and nationalist circles of Dublin.

Further, he set to music poems by James Joyce and J. M. Synge, and many of his best orchestral works were by inspired by Irish folk lore or scenery. At the height of his success in London, Bax bought a retirement home on the west coast of Ireland and eventually died in the city of Cork. The Irish influence never left him, and he is often thought of – completely in error – as an Irish composer.

In musical terms, the Irish influence was most apparent in Bax's songs, many of which are settings of Irish folk poetry. But Irish folk-idioms also pervade much of his instrumental music. Among other things, he was fascinated by the Irish harp, which is smaller than its mainland European cousin and has its own shape, tradition and tone quality. While Bax did not use the Irish harp in his own music, he wrote nine works involving the conventional harp to convey an Irish pastoral atmosphere.

Bax composed the *Elegiac Trio* in 1916 to memorialize the Eastern Rebellion in Ireland. In that tragic event, the Irish Republican Brotherhood organized an uprising against British rule on Easter Monday. With about 1,800 men, the group seized the General Post Office and other strategic points in Dublin, and proclaimed the birth of the Irish Republic. British troops arrived, suppressed the rebellion in a week of street fighting, and executed the leaders. These executions excited a wave of revulsion against the British, turned the Irish leaders into martyrs, and led to the birth in 1921 of the Irish Free State.

Bax was shocked by the event, particularly by the execution of Padraig Pearse, one of the Irish leaders and a personal friend. He poured his feelings into this one-movement work, one of poignant eloquence rather than a funereal dirge.

### **Sofia Gubaidulina (1931-)**

#### ***Garden of Joys and Sorrows* for Flute, Viola, Harp and Narrator**

While still not a household name outside Russia, Sofia Gubaidulina has won a wide following in European and American musical circles since 1986 when, at the age of 55, she was finally permitted by Soviet authorities to travel to the West. Even within the Soviet Union, her strong Christian faith and the deeply religious character of her music alienated Soviet authorities, and her works were often treated with suspicion and even suppressed. While her music is now welcomed in Russia, since 1992 she has made her home in Germany.

Gubaidulina was born in Chistopol, in Tataristan, of mixed Russian and Tatar background. The Tatars are a minority ethnic group of some 10 million descended by birth or conversion from 13<sup>th</sup> century Mongol invaders. While most of the Tatars are Sunni Muslims, a scan of her family's religious beliefs by musicologist Fay Neary reveals a diverse collection of faiths, including Judaism, Islam, Russian Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. Although Gubaidulina is Russian Orthodox, she believes that all religions have meaning, and her diverse background accounts for the spiritual richness of her music. -

Gubaidulina studied composition and piano at the Kazan Conservatory, graduating in 1954, and then continued her studies at the Moscow Conservatory. Her music was labeled "irresponsible" for its exploration of alternate tunings and her interest in folk instruments, but she was supported by Shostakovich who encouraged her to continue down her "mistaken path."

Until she was over 50 she was all but unknown outside the Soviet Union. In the early 1980s, however, her music became known abroad through Gidon Kremer's championing of her violin concerto *Offertorium*, now one of her most popular works. She made her first visit to North America in 1987, and, now a frequent visitor, has received commissions from the Chicago, New York Philharmonic, Boston, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh Symphonies, and the Library of Congress..

According to Neary's study of the piece, *Garden of Joys and Sorrows* was dedicated to the 20<sup>th</sup> century German poet Francisco Tanzer and was inspired by two literary works reflecting contrasting spiritual worlds. These works were the exotic prose poem *Sayat-Nova* by Ivan Oganov of Moscow and the more philosophical verses of Tanzer himself.

As the title of the piece implies, the trio was strongly influenced by the colorful imagery of Oganov's text, which includes such phrases as "The revelation of the rose", "The ordeal of a flower's pain", "The peal of the singing garden grew", "the lotus was set aflame by music", and "The white garden began to ring again with diamond borders." In contrast, the verses of Tanzer (which are recited *ad libitum* at the end of the piece) stress the concept of the world's eternity: "When is it really over? What is the real end?... tomorrow we shall play another game."

These two themes operate not as opponents, but as philosophies of independent origin with a potential for congruency. The "blooming garden" symbolizes an Islamic paradise, in which the lotus flower blooms; it is also an oriental term for the "world" in general and its flourishing life. Further, the choice of instrumentation also has symbolic associations – antique instruments like the harp and the flute figure prominently in both oriental and occidental poetry.

Three main musical elements, Neary continues, are heard in the early stages of the work. The first is a chromatic melody in the flute, moving symmetrically on either side of a central pitch, "A". The second is the same note (A), sustained in the harp and, meandering by a semitone in both directions by means of long *glissandi* obtained by the tuning key. The third element appears in the viola part – after some duration, an arpeggiated *glissando* of natural harmonics, on the D string.

These three elements interact, transforming themselves into one another, aided by certain potential commonalities inherent within them. The whole work can be divided into three sections – an exposition of these elements, their long development and their recapitulation. The work then ends with a recitation of Tanzer's verse:

When is it really over?  
What is the true end?  
All borders are driven  
into the earth

as if with a stick of wood  
or with the heel of a shoe.

Until then...  
Here is the border.  
All that is artificial.  
Tomorrow we'll play  
Another game.

### **Claude Debussy (1862-1918)** **Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp**

During World War I, Debussy conceived the idea of composing six sonatas of various instrumental combinations as an expression of his intense patriotic feeling and as a contribution to the war effort. "I want to work," he wrote to his publisher, "not so much for myself but to give proof, no matter how small, that if there were 30 million *Boches*, they would not be able to destroy French thought, even though they tried to degrade it before annihilating it." However, he was fatally ill with cancer, and he died after completing only three of the six works.

His intent in the sonatas was to blend his language of musical impressionism with a return to the classical French forms and idioms of the 17th and 18th centuries. The second sonata was initially planned for flute, oboe and harp, but Debussy substituted a viola for the oboe to tinge the work with melancholy. "It is terribly sad," he wrote, "and I do not know whether one ought to laugh or cry at it. Perhaps both."

The impressionistic elements are readily apparent in the unusual instrumentation, the exotic harmonies and Debussy's preference for melodic fragments rather than hummable themes. The classical French influences are harder to pin down – the use of arabesques and other ornamentation, the casting of the second movement in minuet tempo, and a pervasive sense of clarity, restraint and balance.

To a point, the first movement, "Pastorale," is cast in sonata form. There is a slow-moving exposition with a first theme consisting of a series of related phrases and a second theme in the dominant key. Instead of a formal development, however, there is a faster, more rhythmic middle section. The exposition is restated, but with the themes reversed so that the movement closes with an expansion of the opening phrase.

The main section of the second movement, "Interlude," is marked *tempi di minuetto*, but the rhythm is too ambiguous for a true dance movement. The middle section is in 4/4 time, and is followed by brief returns of both sections.

The "Finale" is similar to the first movement in design, but is more spirited. The work closes with a brief recollection of the "Pastorale" and a brilliant coda.