

CHARLES OWEN began his musical studies at the Yehudi Menuhin School with Seta Tanyel and continued at the Royal College of Music under the guidance of Irina Zaritskaya. While at the college he won all the major piano prizes before completing his studies with Imogen Cooper. He received the Silver Medal at the Scottish International Piano Competition (1995) and was a finalist in the 1996 London Philharmonic/Pioneer Young Soloist of the Year competition. In 1997 he won the prestigious Parkhouse Award in partnership with violinist Katharine Gowers.

Charles has performed in many of Britain's leading concert halls including the Barbican, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Wigmore Hall and Symphony Hall, Birmingham. Internationally, he has appeared at the Lincoln Center and Carnegie/Weill Recital Hall in New York, the Brahmsaal in the Vienna Musikverein, the Paris Louvre, the St Petersburg Philharmonic and the Moscow Conservatoire.

Charles has performed with celebrated orchestras including the Philharmonia, Royal Scottish National, English Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Łódz Filharmonia and the Moscow State Academic Symphony. He has also collaborated with many outstanding artists including violinists Antje Weithaas, Chloe Hanslip, Henning Kraggerud, Jack Liebeck, Renaud Capucon and Catherine Leonard as well as cellists Adrian Brendel, Natalie Clein, Guy Johnston, Paul Watkins and Tim Hugh. In addition, Charles has appeared in performances with the Wihan, Vertavo and Vogler quartets and the Haffner Wind Ensemble.

As a solo recitalist and chamber musician he has played for numerous concert societies and established festivals in the UK and internationally including the Homecoming Festival in Moscow, Ireland's West Cork Chamber Music Festival and the Vogler Spring Festival in County Sligo, the Perth International Music Festival in Western Australia, the Oxford Chamber Music Festival, the Elverum Festival in Norway, the Leicester International Festival, Sheffield's Music in the Round, the Worcester Three Choirs Festival and festivals in Bath, Cheltenham, Chester and Harrogate.

His first solo disc, featuring the piano music of Leos Janáček was listed as a "key" recording in The Penguin Good CD Guide. A highly acclaimed disc of works by Poulenc was selected as Editor's Choice in the June 2004 edition of Gramophone and was subsequently nominated for a Classical Brit Award in 2005. An EMI Classics for Pleasure recording of cello and piano sonatas by Brahms and Schubert, with Natalie Clein, won a Classical Brit Award in 2005. His most recent recording, again with Natalie Clein, features works by Rachmaninoff and Chopin.

A recording for ASV of Richard Strauss' Lieder, with soprano Patricia Rozario, will be released later this year. A disc of the 13 Nocturnes by Fauré, on the Avie label, was released in Spring 2008.

Charles Owen is a Professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Stour Valley Arts & Music

Fifty-eighth
season
2008-9

8.00 pm
Friday
30 January 2009

Constable Hall
East Bergholt



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Charles Owen, *piano*

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 -1750)
Partita No 5 in G

Preambulum
Allemande
Corrente
Sarabande
Tempo di Menuetto
Passepied
Gigue

Claude Debussy (1862 -1918)
Images II

Cloches à travers les feuilles
Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut
Poissons d'or

Gabriel Fauré (1845 – 1924)
Three Barcarolles

No 2 in G major
No 3 in G flat major
No 6 in E flat major

INTERVAL

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)
Sonata in B minor, Op. 58

Allegro maestoso
Scherzo-Molto vivace
Largo
Finale-Presto non tanto

Programme Notes

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 'the strict musical meaning of the term *partita* is a variation, the total composition being *partite*. But the ungrammatical custom of applying *Partita* to a composite work, such as a suite, developed from the 6 Keyboard Partitas in Bach's *Klavierübung* (1731).' Perhaps surprisingly, these six partitas were the first works **Bach** published, after more than twenty years of composing. They were, he wrote, 'offered to music lovers in order to refresh their spirits'. They were an immediate success, becoming core repertoire for keyboard players both professional and amateur. The partita was the most popular harpsichord genre of the time, and usually contained a suite of dance movements. Each of Bach's partitas begins with a large-scale movement, each differently titled and each in a different style. *Allemande*, *courante* (here named in Italian) and *sarabande* are usual, after which the choice of dances can vary, though it was usual to close with a *gigue*. The contrapuntal writing of this example is full of subtle details, the ear noticing something delightfully different on each new hearing. It offers quite a virtuosic challenge to the performer, the fugue-like section midway through being especially demanding on the fingers.

Four years after his marriage to Lilly Texier (a fashion model) in the autumn of 1899, **Debussy** met Emma Bardac, an amateur singer and the wife of a banker. When Debussy went to live with Emma in 1904, Lilly attempted suicide: a drama which led to the rupture of several friendships. To escape the scandal, Debussy and Emma temporarily left Paris, finding refuge in the perhaps somewhat unlikely surroundings of the Grand Hotel, Eastbourne. Despite the social upheaval, Debussy was composing at a considerable rate (it was in Eastbourne that he completed his magnificent symphonic poem *La Mer*), whilst in Paris his music was becoming more widely performed. The application of the term "impressionist" to Debussy and the music he influenced has long been a matter of intense debate within academic circles. One side argues that the term is a misnomer, an inappropriate label which Debussy himself opposed. In a letter of 1908, he wrote "I am trying to do 'something different'...an effect of reality...what the imbeciles call 'impressionism', a term which is as poorly used as possible, particularly by the critics, since they do not hesitate to apply it to Turner, the finest creator of mysterious effects in all the world of art." The opposing side argues that Debussy may have been reacting to unfavourable criticism at the time, and the negativity that critics associated with impressionism: it can be argued that he would have been pleased with application of our modern definition of impressionism to his music. At all events, in the ten years following 1903 he composed forty-five piano pieces, of which all but six have titles evocative of specific scenes, sounds, or even scents. The second set of three *Images* for piano appeared in 1907. Edward Lockspeiser conjectures No 1 ('bells through the leaves') to be 'a study in the contrast of clear and muffled sonorities, designed to convey the slumbrous atmosphere of an autumn landscape, with an illusion of distant chimes emerging from beyond the screen of rustling leaves.' The title of No 2 ('the moon sets over the ruined temple') was suggested, after the piece's composition, by Debussy's friend Louis Laloy, a prominent critic and scholar and the composer's first French biographer. A central melody sounds almost like an English folk-song, except that its accompaniment often employs sounds reflecting Debussy's interest in the metallic chimes and gongs of the Balinese gamelan. No 3 ('goldfish') is said to have been suggested by a golden fish motif on a Chinese lacquered screen, although Debussy's piano textures can just as easily

suggest to the listener a live fish exploring the limits of its glass bowl.

At nine years of age, Gabriel **Fauré** set out with his father from their home in Pamiers, south of Toulouse, on the three-day journey to Paris. Assisted by a scholarship from the Bishop of Pamiers, Fauré was to spend eleven years as a boarder at the newly-established Ecole Niedermeyer, a music school which specialised in the training of organists and choirmasters. There he met Saint-Saëns, who taught piano at the school - the start of a relationship that was to last until the death of Saint-Saëns in 1921. After four years as organist in Rennes, Fauré obtained a similar appointment in Paris, eventually moving to the Madeleine as deputy to Saint-Saëns and subsequently as choirmaster. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Fauré became inspector of French provincial conservatories and principal organist at the Madeleine. (Incidentally, he had an affair with Emma Bardac before she met Debussy - the *Dolly Suite* is dedicated to her daughter Dolly, later to become Debussy's stepdaughter). He also found employment as teacher of composition at the Conservatoire, of which in 1905 he became director, a post he held until he was seventy-five. Time for composition was initially limited by administrative responsibilities, but as time went on he enlarged the repertoire of French song, chamber music and works for piano. The French word *Barcarolle* is adapted from the Italian *barcarole*, the songs sung by the gondoliers of Venice, much noted by visitors to the place when on the fashionable eighteenth century Grand Tour. Its principal musical characteristic lies in its rocking rhythm, most famously reflected in the Venetian scene in Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*. The genre appears in piano music, notably in Chopin's single *Barcarolle* and in three of Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words*. Other examples were written by the later nineteenth century Russian composers, but many believe it is in Fauré's thirteen examples that the *barcarolle* reaches its most significant peak.

Chopin's third and last piano sonata dates from 1844 – his last year of relative happiness with the writer George Sand (Aurore Dudevant) before disagreements about her children and his own failing health began to take serious toll of his creative energy. The structure of the sonata is easy to follow – an initial movement contrasting a heroic first idea with a broad lyrical second subject; a quicksilver *Scherzo* with a thoughtful *Trio* section; a slow movement, and a *bravura* finale. Each movement demands virtuosic performance capabilities, though never merely for show. In an age when spectacular and forceful playing were greatly admired, Chopin achieved most of his effects through a more subtle and restrained style. The *Daily News* of 10th July, 1848, put it thus: 'He accomplishes enormous difficulties, but so quietly, so smoothly, and with such constant delicacy and refinement that the listener is not sensible of their real magnitude. It is the exquisite delicacy, with the liquid mellowness of his tone, and the pearly roundness of his passages of rapid articulation which are the peculiar features of his execution'.

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Forthcoming events

Friday 20 February 2009 8 pm Constable Hall: **Illustrated Lecture** on Renaissance Art in Venice by Mary Hawkins

Sunday 22 March 4 pm at St. Mary's Church East Bergholt:
Badke Quartet: String quartets by Haydn, Schumann and Beethoven