



The Sixty-third Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,528th Concert

Orchestre de Chambre Français
Brian Suits, *conductor*
with Kyung Sun Lee, *violinist*

Presented in honor of
Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre

March 20, 2005
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

Music Department
National Gallery of Art
Sixth Street and Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC

Mailing address
2000B South Club Drive
Landover, MD 20785

www.nga.gov

For the convenience of concertgoers
the Garden Café remains open until 6:00 pm.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the
performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones,
pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

Program

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Petite suite (1889)

(Arranged by Brian Suits)

En bateau

Cortège

Menuet

Ballet

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

Pavane pour une infante défunte (1899)

(Arranged by Christian Raverdel)

Benjamin Godard (1849–1895)

Canzonetta from *Concerto romantique* op. 35 (1876)

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921)

Romance in C Major op. 48 (1876)

(Arranged by Christian Raverdel)

INTERMISSION

Guillaume Lekeu (1870–1894)

Adagio for Strings in C minor (Les fleurs pâles du souvenir) (1891)

(Arranged by Christian Raverdel)

Debussy

La fille aux cheveux de lin (1882)

(Arranged by Christian Raverdel)

Saint-Saëns

Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso op. 28 (1870)

The Musicians

ORCHESTRE DE CHAMBRE FRANÇAIS

Acclaimed as one of France's best chamber orchestras, the Orchestre de Chambre Français is based in the city of Senlis, about forty kilometers north of Paris. Many of the musicians are ardent string quartet players and bring to the ensemble the energy, technique, and attentiveness to other players that chamber music requires. Heard frequently in Paris, the orchestra has appeared in the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, the Palais de Congrès, and the Eglise de Saint-Germain-des-Prés. The orchestra has performed with such illustrious French soloists as trumpeter Maurice André, pianist Jean-Claude Pennerier, and cellist Raphaël Pidoux. The ensemble has to its credit concert tours of France, Switzerland, Holland, and Italy, and has received special acclaim in Spain, where it returns regularly to the Santander International Festival, the Montserrat International Music Week, and the international festivals of Palencia and Gandia.

BRIAN SUITS

In addition to his work with the Orchestre de Chambre Français, Brian Suits is extremely active as a guest conductor, having directed most recently the Prime Philharmonic and SangRok symphony orchestras in Korea, the Cadenza Chamber Orchestra, and the 21 Chamber Players. Suits is often engaged as a pianist in collaboration with other musicians and as a composer. His works run the gamut from *Concertpiece* for violin and orchestra (2002), *Romance* for violin and orchestra (2004), and a piano concerto (2003), to jazz and popular songs. He has produced many arrangements, among them a treatment of George Gershwin's *I Got Rhythm* that met with great success when it was recently premiered in Cleveland by Kyung Sun Lee. Brian Suits was a member of the faculty of the Yale School of Music from 1990 to 2002.

KYUNG SUN LEE

A prize winner in the 1994 Tchaikovsky Competition, a bronze medalist in the 1993 Queen Elisabeth of Belgium Competition, and a first prize winner of the Washington and D'Angelo International Competitions, violinist Kyung Sun Lee has enjoyed ever-increasing popularity as a performer. Enthusiastic critical praise of her playing extols its "exceptional tonal suavity and expressive intensity in equal measure" (*Strad* magazine) and "fluidity and grace; pathos and emotion" (*Palm Beach Post*). In great demand as a soloist, Kyung Sun Lee is also a member of the Oberlin String Quartet, with which she will tour the United States West Coast in early 2005. Lee records and performs nationwide with her husband, pianist Brian Suits, as well as with pianist HaeSun Paik, the KumHo/Asiana String Quartet, German pianist Peter Schindler, guitarist Sung-Ho Chang, and soprano Jennifer Aylmer. A graduate of Seoul National University and the Peabody Conservatory, Kyung Sun Lee also attended the Juilliard School in the professional studies program. Her teachers have included Nam Yun Kim, Sylvia Rosenberg, Robert Mann, Dorothy DeLay, and Hyo Kang. She plays a Joseph Guarnerius violin made in 1723.

The Exhibition

Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre, which opened today in the East Building of the National Gallery, focuses on artists' fascination with the decadent spirit and glamour of bohemian life in the Parisian district of Montmartre at the turn of the twentieth century. More than 250 works, primarily by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901), include paintings, drawings, posters, prints, sculptures, zinc silhouettes from the Chat Noir cabaret, and printed matter, such as illustrated invitations, song sheets, advertisements, and admission tickets. Themes of the exhibition include dance halls, *cafés-concerts*, and cabarets (featuring a section devoted to the Chat Noir); entertainment stars, including singers Aristide Bruant and Yvette Guilbert; and song and dance performers Jane Avril, May Belfort, May Milton, Loïe Fuller, and Marcelle Lender. The artist loved the music and entertainment these performers provided and enjoyed a close personal relationship with several of them.

Among the works by contemporaries of Toulouse-Lautrec that are included in the exhibition is *Erik Satie (El bohemio; Poet of Montmartre)*, 1891, by Ramón Casas. It was in the early 1890s that the painting's composer subject, shown impeccably attired and casting a quizzical sideways glance at the viewer, began frequenting Montmartre in the company of his close friend, the poet Contamine de Latour. The two men took up lodgings there, but neither could afford the gentlemanly lifestyle to which Satie was accustomed. Eventually he exhausted his resources and, to make ends meet, began to play regularly in the *cafés-concerts*, an uncomfortable fit for a composer whose aspirations were formed in the Paris Conservatoire. Satie's bohemian lifestyle continued until 1905, when French publishers and audiences, influenced to a great extent by Debussy and Ravel's enthusiasm for his work, were finally ready to accept his iconoclastic music.

Program Notes

The *Petite suite* of Claude Debussy began life as one of several successful compositions for piano four hands, others including the *Danse* and the *Marche écossaise*. The work is in the charming style of the young Debussy, who had not yet begun to adopt those musical devices—whole-tone scales, chords moving in parallel motion, and a lessened emphasis on melody—by which future scholars would identify him as an impressionist. Rather, we are treated to the delightful and charming language of the French romantics, enhanced by Debussy's own exquisite taste and unwillingness to indulge in excessive sentimentality. Debussy's friend, Henri-Paul Busser, arranged the work for full orchestra. I made this string arrangement from the original four-hand piano version, but borrowed an idea or two from the excellent Busser.

Composed when Ravel was twenty-four, *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (Pavane for a Dead Princess) is the most familiar of his works. The composer professed not to care particularly for the work; nonetheless, he orchestrated it and performed it frequently, both on piano and as a conductor, for the rest of his life. The *Pavane* is so heartbreakingly appealing, it is really of no consequence whether Ravel cared for it or not.

Benjamin Godard, a rather successful and popular composer in his day, has been virtually forgotten in our time. Many have speculated on the reasons for this, citing his failure as a composer of opera (which has not, however, hampered the musical legacy of certain other composers), or noting the relative “lightness,” in an emotional sense, of his output. It is probably most accurate to say that, while he was skilled at writing melody and had a developed sense of harmony, his sense of musical proportion was lacking. He seems to have had an Achilles heel where endings are concerned, and he wrote in a somewhat antiquated style, compared to the standards of his contemporaries. Godard's output, while admittedly spotty, contains quite a few works worthy of hearing, over and above the famous

Berceuse from *Jocelyn*. Among these is the *Concerto romantique*, from which the *Canzonetta* movement is the most famous. Insouciant in the best sense, the solo violin dances lightly over an accompaniment of plucked strings. The arrangement for string orchestra differs in only one minor way from the original: two small woodwind parts were given to the concertmaster to play.

Camille Saint-Saëns, the elder statesman of French romantic music, not only composed more than three hundred works, but was also a playwright, poet, philosopher, and essayist; he authored a book on Roman archaeology, treatises on ancient music, and several papers on astronomy. Saint-Saëns was not a tormented soul, as the world expects of its composers; rather he composed, as he put it, “as an apple tree produces apples.” He was a natural melodist, and so sure in his craft that music flowed from his pen with seeming effortlessness. Therefore, he may not have taken exception, had he been aware of it, to one famous commentator's remark that he was “the only great composer who was not a genius”: an apt description, if we define genius as that quality that propels art from one period to the next. Even in light of this caveat, Saint-Saëns' contributions to the repertoire were prodigious. His *Romance*, less frequently tasted than many of his musical “apples,” is typically delightful. The charming main theme alternates with quicker sections, with predictably pleasing results.

One might not make a more stark contrast between the lives of two composers than those of Saint-Saëns and the Walloon composer Guillaume Lekeu. Saint-Saëns lived to a very old age; Lekeu died in his early twenties. The name of Saint-Saëns is familiar to virtually every music lover; that of Lekeu is almost unknown. Saint-Saëns composed happily and with ease, and his music tends to be light and breezy, while Lekeu represents the embodiment of the tortured creative spirit, and his works are brooding. His

Adagio for Strings, subtitled “the pale flowers of remembrance,” presents the expressive chaos, complete harmony, sweetest phrase, and heartbreak of the artist. Above all, it represents the struggle to unite these disparate parts into a cohesive whole. The excellent arrangement by Christian Raverdel (director of the Orchestre de Chambre Français) is divided into eleven parts—ten ensemble parts plus a solo violin.

Contemporary listeners who are familiar with piano music know *La fille aux cheveux de lin* (The Girl with the Flaxen Hair) as the eighth of Debussy’s *Preludes for Piano*, Book I, composed in 1910. It was also the title of an unpublished song, based on a poem of Leconte de Lisle, that Debussy composed in 1882. It is worth noting that, in the publication of the *Preludes for Piano*, Debussy specified that the titles be placed in parentheses at the end of the music—thereby putting the focus squarely on the music itself, and not on any preconceived associations called to mind by the titles.

During his lifetime, Saint-Saëns enjoyed stature not only as a composer, but also as a virtuoso pianist. The early 1860s were some of the happiest years of his life, for he concertized frequently and successfully. Living at home with his mother and his great aunt, he was pampered shamelessly. The *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* op. 28 dates from these halcyon days, undoubtedly accounting in some part for the work’s infectious exuberance. It was composed in 1863 for Pablo de Sarasate, the Spanish violinist and wunderkind. Sarasate was as much of a child prodigy as Saint-Saëns had been, and at age fifteen he was already commissioning leading composers to write works for him. The first composer he approached was Saint-Saëns who, in 1859, composed his *Concerto No. 1 in A major* for Sarasate. Four years later, Saint-Saëns wrote the *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso*, and Sarasate performed it for the first time in Paris on April 4, 1867. The work contains many Spanish elements; undoubtedly Saint-Saëns was delighted to write for a Spaniard, given the love of French romantic composers for Spanish music.

Program notes by Brian Suits