

## CLAUDE DEBUSSY

*composer, pianist, conductor*

(1862, St. Germain-en-Laye, near Paris — 1918, Paris)

### ***DANSE SACRÉE ET DANSE PROFANE FOR HARP AND STRING ORCHESTRA***

*COMPOSED: 1904*

*PREMIERED: November 6, 1904 in Paris, conducted by Édouard Colonne with Lucille Wurmser-Delcourt as soloist*

*DURATION: ca. 11 minutes*

*SCORING: strings*

#### *Overview*

The harp is among the most ancient of instruments. Its existence in Mesopotamia is documented as far back as 3,000 B.C., and it was known virtually from the dawn of recorded history in Egypt, Israel and Greece. Harps were common throughout Christian Europe; it is still the heraldic symbol of Ireland. The instrument remained essentially unchanged in its construction until about 1810, when the Parisian piano maker Sébastien Érard introduced a system of pedals to chromatically alter the pitches of the open strings. Though this instrument could effectively negotiate every note within its range, it was somewhat clumsy of operation, and various attempts were made to simplify the harp's mechanics. At the end of the 19th century, Gustave Lyon developed a "chromatic harp," a pedal-less instrument in which a single string was devoted to each chromatic note. The Parisian instrument-making firm of Pleyel put Lyon's invention into production in 1897, in direct competition with Érard et Compagnie and its long-established harp. By the turn of the century, Pleyel was casting about for ways to win some business from Érard, who, as the supplier of pianos and harps to the Paris Conservatoire, enjoyed immense prestige across the Continent. In 1904, Pleyel succeeded in having a course devoted to their chromatic harp instituted at the Brussels Conservatory, and the company's officials asked Claude Debussy to compose a work specifically for the new instrument that would serve both as a test piece for the students and as a demonstration of their harp's potential to prospective buyers. In the spring of 1904 Debussy composed a matched pair of dances, one "sacred" and one "profane," for chromatic harp and string orchestra. The work was first heard at a Parisian concert conducted by Édouard Colonne on November 6, 1904; Lucille Wurmser-Delcourt was soloist. It should be added that Lyon's chromatic harp, with its vast curtain of strings, found little favor, and that it is Érard's double-action pedal harp which remains the standard instrument to this day.

#### *What To Listen For*

The *Danse sacrée et Danse profane* comprises two brief works joined as one. The *Danse sacrée* is said (by the conductor Ernest Ansermet) to have been suggested to Debussy by a piano piece of his friend, the Portuguese composer and conductor Francisco de Lacerda (1869-1934). According to no less an authority than Manuel de Falla, the *Danse profane* (which shares a melody with "La Sérénade interrompue" from the *Preludes for Piano*) is colored by the influence of Spanish dance and techniques of melodic embellishment. Concerning the relation between the two sections of the work, Joseph Braunstein wrote, "The title is somewhat intriguing since there is not much difference between the sacred dance and its profane counterpart. Both display small melodic phrases, a transparent texture, shifting harmonies, and richness of dissonances, and at the same time arresting effects are obtained by the harp in combination with the sonorities of the string orchestra."

## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

*composer, pianist*

(1770, Bonn — 1827, Vienna)

### **SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN D MAJOR, OP. 36**

*COMPOSED: 1802*

*PREMIERED: April 5, 1803 in Vienna, conducted by the composer*

*DURATION: ca. 32 minutes*

SCORING: woodwinds, horns, and trumpets in pairs, timpani and strings

### Overview

In the summer of 1802, Beethoven's physician ordered him to leave Vienna and take rooms in Heiligenstadt, today a friendly suburb at the northern terminus of the city's subway system, but two centuries ago a quiet village with a view of the Danube across the river's rich flood plain. It was three years earlier, in 1799, that Beethoven first noticed a disturbing ringing and buzzing in his ears, and he sought medical attention for the problem soon after. He tried numerous cures for his malady, as well as for his chronic colic, including oil of almonds, hot and cold baths, soaking in the Danube, pills and herbs. For a short time, he even considered the modish treatment of electric shock. On the advice of his latest doctor, Beethoven left the noisy city for the quiet countryside with the assurance that the lack of stimulation would be beneficial to his hearing and his general health.

In Heiligenstadt, Beethoven virtually lived the life of a hermit, seeing only his doctor and a young student named Ferdinand Ries. In 1802, Beethoven was still a full decade from being totally deaf. The acuity of his hearing varied from day to day (sometimes governed by his interest — or lack thereof — in the surrounding conversation), but he had largely lost his ability to hear soft sounds by that time, and loud noises caused him pain. Of one of their walks in the country, Ries reported, "I called his attention to a shepherd who was piping very agreeably in the woods on a flute made of a twig of elder. For half an hour, Beethoven could hear nothing, and though I assured him that it was the same with me (which was not the case), he became extremely quiet and morose. When he occasionally seemed to be merry, it was generally to the extreme of boisterousness; but this happens seldom." In addition to the distress over his health, Beethoven was also wounded in 1802 by the wreck of an affair of the heart. He had proposed marriage to Giulietta Guicciardi (the thought of Beethoven as a husband threatens the moorings of one's presence of mind!), but had been denied permission by the girl's father for the then perfectly valid reason that the young composer was without rank, position or fortune. Faced with the extinction of a musician's most precious faculty, fighting a constant digestive distress, and unsuccessful in love, it is little wonder that Beethoven was sorely vexed.

On October 6, 1802, following several months of wrestling with his misfortunes, Beethoven penned the most famous letter ever written by a musician — the "Heiligenstadt Testament." Intended as a will written to his brothers (it was never sent, though he kept it in his papers to be found after his death), it is a cry of despair over his fate, perhaps a necessary and self-induced soul-cleansing in those pre-Freudian days. "O Providence — grant me at last but one day of pure joy — it is so long since real joy echoed in my heart," he lamented. But — and this is the miracle — he not only poured his energy into self-pity, he also channeled it into music. "I shall grapple with fate; it shall never pull me down," he resolved. The next five years were the most productive he ever knew. "I live only in my music," Beethoven wrote, "and I have scarcely begun one thing when I start another." Symphonies Nos. 2-5, a dozen piano sonatas, the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Triple Concerto, *Fidelio*, and many songs, chamber works and keyboard compositions were all completed between 1802 and 1806. Of all these works, the Second Symphony is the one that most belies the difficult year of its birth.

### What To Listen For

The Symphony opens with a long introduction moving with a stately tread. The sonata form begins with the arrival of the fast tempo and the appearance of the main theme, a brisk melody first entrusted to the low strings. Characteristic Beethovenian energy dominates the transition to the second theme, a martial strain paraded by the winds. The development includes two large sections, one devoted to the main theme and its quick, flashing rhythmic figure, the other exploring the possibilities of the marching theme. The recapitulation compresses the earlier material to allow a lengthy coda to conclude the movement.

Professor Donald Tovey thought the *Larghetto* to be "one of the most luxurious slow movements in the world"; Sir George Grove commented on its "elegant, indolent beauty." So lyrical is its principal theme that, by appending some appropriate words, Isaac Watts converted it into the hymn *Kingdoms and Thrones to God Belong*. The movement is in a full sonata form, with the first violins giving out the second theme above a rocking accompaniment in the bass.

Beethoven labeled the third movement "Scherzo," the first appearance of this term in his symphonies, though the comparable movement of the First Symphony was a true scherzo in all but name. Faster in tempo and more boisterous in spirit than the minuet traditionally found in earlier symphonies, the scherzo became an integral part not only of Beethoven's later works, but also of those

of most 19th-century composers. A rising three-note fragment runs through much of the scherzo proper, while the central trio gives prominence to the oboes and a delightful walking-bass counterpoint in the bassoons.

The finale continues the bubbling high spirits of the scherzo. Formally a hybrid of sonata and rondo, it possesses a wit and structure indebted to Haydn, but a dynamism that is Beethoven's alone. The long coda intensifies the bursting exuberance of the music, and carries it along to the closing pages of the movement.

## **MAURICE DURUFLÉ**

*composer, organist*

(1902, Louviers, France — 1986, Paris)

### **REQUIEM FOR CHORUS, ORCHESTRA AND ORGAN, OP. 9**

*COMPOSED: 1947*

*PREMIERED: Premiered in November 1947 in Paris, conducted by Roger Desormière.*

*DURATION: ca. 40 minutes*

*SCORING: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, harp, organ and strings*

#### *Overview*

Maurice Duruflé belongs to that small band of reticent masters, notably his teacher Paul Dukas and the Russian miniaturist Anatoly Liadov, who, despite excellent talent, left only a tiny handful of works to posterity: six pieces for organ, two brief orchestral scores, a pair of solo piano numbers, one chamber composition, and three choral works, including a set of Latin motets, a Mass and an exquisite Requiem. Duruflé's compositions show the variety of his musical interests and background: the undulating lines and flowing rhythms of Gregorian chant; the supple voice leadings of Renaissance polyphony; the nobility of Franck; the harmonic opulence and shimmering sonorities of Debussy; the refined sensibility of Fauré; the meticulous craftsmanship of Ravel and Dukas. Duruflé's works are both timeless and fresh, simultaneously preserving and renewing the great traditions of French music, both ancient and modern.

Maurice Duruflé was born on January 11, 1902 in Normandy, in the town of Louviers, just south of Rouen, whose cathedral was the subject of Monet's incomparable series of light studies a decade earlier. At the age of ten, Duruflé joined the Rouen Cathedral choir and entered its school, where he studied general subjects as well as piano, organ, voice and theory for the next six years. In 1919, he moved to Paris to study organ privately with Charles Tournemire, one of Franck's last pupils, and he served as Tournemire's assistant for eleven years. In 1920, Duruflé entered the Paris Conservatoire, going on to earn first prizes in organ, harmony, accompaniment, fugue and composition at that institution. He also studied organ with Louis Vierne, and deputized for him at Notre Dame between 1929 and 1931; in 1930, Duruflé was appointed chief organist at St. Etienne-du-Mont. In 1942, he substituted at the Conservatoire for Marcel Dupré, and the following year he was appointed professor of harmony at the school, a position he held until 1969. Throughout his life, he also appeared widely as an organ virtuoso. He died on June 16, 1986 in Louveciennes, near Paris, a year after sustaining severe injuries in a car accident that ended his professional career.

Duruflé's Requiem grew from a suite for organ based on the traditional Gregorian chant melodies of the Mass for the Dead. Just as that piece was being formulated immediately after the end of the Second World War, the composer received a commission from his publisher, Durand, for a Requiem Mass for chorus and large orchestra. The sketches for the organ work, including the chant quotations, were transferred to the new piece, which was completed in September 1947. The score is dedicated to the memory of the composer's father. (Duruflé returned twice to the Requiem in later years, reducing the orchestral requirements to more modest proportions to facilitate the work's performance in situations with limited resources.) Since it was premiered under the direction of Roger Desormière in November 1947, the Requiem has remained Duruflé's most frequently performed composition.

#### *What To Listen For*

Though more modern in its harmonic palette and richer in the variety of its orchestral colors, in expression and technique Duruflé's Requiem is deeply indebted to the one by Gabriel Fauré, written sixty years before. Unlike Verdi and Berlioz, who exploited the strong dramatic implications inherent in portions of the Requiem text, especially in that for the *Dies Irae* ("Day of Wrath"), Fauré and Duruflé created works of consolation and optimism. Except for its closing lines (*Pie Jesu, dona eis requiem* — "Merciful Lord Jesus, grant them rest"), Fauré and Duruflé both omitted the *Dies Irae* completely, and ended their works with the comforting text of the antiphon, *In Paradisum* ("May the Angels lead you into Paradise"). Both settings begin and end with the word *Requiem* ("Grant them peace"). Much of the orchestral accompaniment is gentle and rippling and peaceable. Indeed, Fauré's words about his Requiem could apply equally to that of Duruflé: "It has been said that my Requiem does not express the fear of death; someone has even called it a lullaby of death. But it is thus that I see death: as a happy deliverance, an aspiration toward happiness above ..."

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