

Works for violin, piano & cello



THE FAURÉ ALBUM

Works for violin, piano & cello

By Jessica Duchen

Fauré's achievement was to invent musical forms which attracted our hearts and senses without debasing them. He offered a homage to Beauty in which there was not only faith, but a discreet yet irresistible passion... The delicate precision of his architecture, the concision (without dryness) of his ideas will long guide us in our moments of anxiety'.

So wrote the composer Georges Auric in tribute to the subtle genius of Gabriel Fauré, a musician who had risen slowly from a modest background to become arguably the founding father of French music in the twentieth century.

Born in 1845 near Pamiers in rural south-west France, Fauré was the youngest son of a school-master's large family. His musical inclination showed itself early; when he was only nine years old his father was recommended to send him to the Niedermeyer School in Paris, which specialised in the training of church musicians. Here the somewhat dreamy, unambitious and homesick little Gabriel

might have grown up to be solely a church organist and choirmaster – jobs he did hold for much of his adult life at the prestigious Madeleine church in Paris. But among his teachers was the dynamic young Camille Saint-Saëns, who galvanised him into trying his hand at composition. Convinced of his pupil's gifts, Saint-Saëns took Fauré under his wing; he remained Fauré's closest friend and champion for the rest of their long lives.

It was through the well-connected Saint-Saëns that Fauré – by then working as a church organist while composing his early songs and instrumental pieces – came to know Pauline Viardot and her family. Viardot had been the greatest mezzo-soprano of her



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Works for Violin and Piano

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day, acquainted with many of the artistic luminaries of the nineteenth century, not least Chopin and George Sand. She had married the theatre director Louis Viardot in 1840, but when she performed in St Petersburg the Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev fell in love with her and followed her back to Paris. Turgenev subsequently spent most of his life in her household; her four children addressed him as 'uncle'. Saint-Saëns introduced Fauré to the family in 1872 – and the young composer was soon captivated by Viardot's youngest daughter, Marianne.

Fauré courted Marianne for four painful years. Turgenev, to whom Marianne was particularly close, liked Fauré and helped to convince her to accept his proposal. But the timid Marianne was, it seems, scared by the intensity of Fauré's passion for her and a few months later, in autumn 1877, she broke off the engagement, leaving him heartbroken.

In 1875, while he was still hoping for Marianne's hand in marriage, Fauré had composed his first *Violin Sonata Op.13*, dedicated to her violinist brother Paul Viardot. The four-movement sonata follows a conventional format, but its ardent emotional world is more personal than anything Fauré had written before. The first

movement, in sonata form, overflows with joie de vivre; the second movement features an unusual 'heartbeat' rhythm which Fauré used again in several different works (notably his seventh Nocturne). The scherzo is gossamer-light and playful, and the finale, like the first movement, alternates a sweet-natured intimacy with a passionate élan that recalls the music of Schumann, of which Fauré was especially fond.

Thanks to Fauré's friends Camille and Marie Clerc, with whom he often spent summers in Normandy, the Sonata became his first published chamber work; Camille Clerc sent it to the German publishing firm Breitkopf & Härtel, who agreed to print it, though without paying the composer any royalties. Fauré himself played the piano at the work's premiere in January 1877, with the violinist Marie Tayau, to an ecstatic audience response. 'There is no stronger work among those which have appeared in France and Germany over the past several years,' wrote Saint-Saëns after hearing it, 'and there is none with more charm'

Of Fauré's shorter works for violin and piano, the $Berceuse\ Op.16$ has always been the best loved. Its perfectionism, with no note extraneous to musical purpose, is characteristic of Fauré's finest compositions,

and its magical, hushed atmosphere renders it rather more than a 'cradle song'. Written in 1878-79, it was the work that convinced the Paris music publisher Julien Hamelle to take Fauré on (again without royalties). According to Fauré's biographer Jean-Michel Nectoux, Fauré himself attached 'no importance' to the *Berceuse*, but its beauty has always made it irresistible to violinists and listeners alike

The Romance On 28 was written in 1877: the decorative style of its first theme akin, perhaps, to the languid curlicues of Art Nouveau - contrasting with a more sweeping incisive mood in the second section in G minor Fauré wrote that its first performance at the Viardot's home in Bougival succeeded 'to the accompaniment of grinding teeth'. The Viardots disapproved of Fauré's working methods, notably that he wrote slowly ('You must take less trouble and get on with it!' Louis Viardot advised); also that he was writing chamber music and songs rather than opera, the only medium in which a composer could achieve fame and fortune in Paris at the time. Eventually Fauré came to understand that his break with Marianne might have been for the best: he told his vounger son. Philippe, that 'in the dear surroundings of the Viardot home I would have been persuaded to alter my course'.

Fauré was already finding his most consistent success in his songs: three of which feature here in instrumental arrangements: their sinuous melodies, set over evocative piano parts, enable them to work almost as well on a violin or cello as a human voice. Sérénade toscane, which Fauré wrote in the aftermath of his broken engagement, is a sweet vet acid-tinged work steeped in the frustration of unrequited love. Its words are by the poet and singing teacher Romain Bussine, a close friend of Fauré's So, too, are those of the contemporaneous Après un rêve, apparently 'after a Tuscan poem', though their apposite and timely nature makes one wonder whether this is truly the case. The song describes with aching poignancy the disillusionment upon discovering that a passionate dream was merely an illusion.

Clair de lune, written some ten years later in 1887, demonstrates a new sophistication in Fauré's songs, resulting not least from his choice of poetry by Paul Verlaine: the great French Symbolist poet's polished, sensual language matched Fauré's music to perfection and Fauré's Verlaine settings are consistently among his most masterful songs. Clair de lune pictures a Watteau-esque scene of eighteenth-century courtly love. Its vocal line interweaves with a delicate



Brinton Smith, cello

Hailed for his 'extraordinary musicianship' and by Gramophone as a 'hugely eloquent, impassioned soloist', American cellist Brinton Averil Smith began his musical studies at the age of five.

At the age of ten he was admitted to Arizona State University, where he took courses in mathematics and German and completed a B.A. in mathematics. He was a scholarship student of Eleonore Schoenfeld at the University of Southern California, and subsequently relocated to New York to study with cellist Zara Nelsova at The Juilliard School, where he received a Doctor of Musical Arts degree, writing on the playing of Emanuel Feuermann.

Brinton Smith has performed with many of the USA's leading symphony orchestras. He was recently appointed principal cellist of the Houston Symphony, and prior to this was a member of the New York Philharmonic. Brinton Smith is a member of the faculty at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University and has also served as a professor at Columbia University.

An active chamber musician, Smith has collaborated with members of the Beaux Arts Trio and the Guarneri, Emerson, Juilliard, Cleveland, and Berg quartets, as well as performances with The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the New York Philharmonic Chamber Series, the Aspen Music Festival Winter recital series, the Marlboro Music Festival and the Linton series in Cincinnati. He was a prize winner at the Leonard Rose International Cello Competition and was honored in several Juilliard and Aspen Music Festival concerto competitions. While at Juilliard, he received the Melini Award for excellence in performance and was invited to perform at the American Cello Congress.



Akira Eguchi, piano

Acclaimed for his extraordinary artistry, maturity and intelligence, Akira Eguchi has captivated audiences and critics throughout the world as a solo pianist and chamber musician.

Born in Tokyo Akira Eguchi received a degree in Music Composition from Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music and a Master's Degree in Piano Performance from the Juilliard School. He has studied with Herbert Stessin, Samuel Sanders Hitoshi Toyama, Shin Sato, Akira Kitamura Ichiro Mononohe and Akiko Kanazawa, Since making his highly acclaimed New York recital debut in 1992. Mr. Eguchi has performed at major venues across the United States Europe and the Far East, including Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., the Vienna Musikverein. London's Barbican Centre, and the Theatre des Champs-Elysées in Paris.

In great demand as a chamber musician, Akira Eguchi has performed at the Aspen, Ravinia and Newport festivals in the United States, Nagano-Aspen and Pacific in Japan, the Japan Festival in London, the Verbier Festival in Switzerland, and La Folle Journée in France. He has recorded for, amongst others, Deutsche Grammophon, Philips, BMG and Vanguard Classics.

Mr. Eguchi was the recipient of the prestigious William Petchek Award and the William Schuman Prize from the Juilliard School, first prize at both the Gina Bachauer International Scholarship Competition and the Brahms Piano Concerto Competition at Juilliard, and the Aleida Schweitzer Award for outstanding accompanist at the International Wieniawski Violin Competition in Poland.

Currently living in New York City and on the faculty of CUNY Brooklyn College, he also has been appointed a guest professor of Senzoku-Gakuen Music College in Tokyo.

counterpoint on the piano, perhaps mirroring moonlight in the waters of the fountain. Fauré orchestrated the song the following year and incorporated a voiceless version into his *Suite Bergamasque* in 1919.

Fileuse and Sicilienne are drawn from another orchestral suite: Fauré's incidental music to Pelléas et Mélisande, the Symbolist drama by Maurice Maeterlinck on which Claude Debussy based his operatic masterpiece. Fauré wrote most of the Pelléas incidental music in 1898 for a production in London featuring the actress Mrs Patrick Campbell for which Debussy had refused point blank to adapt any of his own music. After seeing this production. Maeterlinck wrote to Mrs. Campbell declaring that it 'filled me with an emotion of beauty the most complete, the most harmonious, the sweetest that I have ever felt to this day'. Fileuse is a spinning song, a delicate melody over a rapid, murmuring accompaniment; the sombre, graceful Sicilienne actually had its origins in Fauré's incidental music for Le bourgeois gentilhomme, dating from 1893.

Fauré was never shy of recycling good musical material in this way. Following the success of his First Violin Sonata, he had embarked on a concerto for the instrument in 1879, but abandoned it unfinished –

extended orchestral forms were never his favourite medium. It is likely that he originally composed the tranquil *Andante Op.75* for the slow movement of the ill-fated concerto, reworking it for the Andante only in 1897. The opening movement of the concerto itself has since been resuscitated; it is intriguing to see that Fauré reused its main theme in his very last work, his *String Quartet*.

Fauré was appointed director of the Paris Conservatoire in 1905. During his long reign there – during which he was nicknamed variously 'The Archangel' and 'Robespierre' – he occasionally composed pieces for use in the institution's exams and competitions. One such was the *Morceau de lecture à vue* – literally, 'short piece for sight-reading'. Fauré's harmonic sleight-of-hand makes him a terrifying composer to sight-read at the best of times, but the engaging lyricism of these few pages are such that scared students might well forget their fright upon discovering it.

In 1920 Fauré was asked to retire as director of the Conservatoire – to his chagrin at first. Before long, however, he discovered that despite his poor health and severe deafness, he was now free to dedicate himself entirely to composition for the very first time. A tremendous flowering of late masterpieces

ensued, among which the *Piano Trio Op.120* is perhaps first among equals.

Throughout his life, Fauré had found it easiest to compose away from the stresses of life in Paris. He was particularly fond of peaceful waterside locations and in 1918 he discovered the beauties of Annecy-le-Vieux, where he rented a house for the summer several times. In September 1922 he wrote to his wife, Marie, from Annecy: 'An important section of the Trio was begun a month ago and is now finished. The trouble is that I can't work for long at a time... My worst tribulation is perpetual fatigue'. He eventually completed the work the following February.

The *Trio* is rapt and autumnal in mood, its harmonic language – combining traditional tonality with modal inflections and enharmonic traces – strongly characteristic of Fauré's late style, as are its spare textures and reflective atmosphere. The first movement is lyrical and flowing, its melodic lines concentrated into statements etched as delicately yet strongly as a drawing by Matisse; the coda, blending the movement's two principal ideas, seems to contain echoes of distant bells that Fauré spoke of remembering, and incorporating almost unconsciously into his music, from

his childhood in the countryside. The slow movement enters a tender, resigned world. the violin and cello exchanging long phrases. over a steady, pulsing piano accompaniment - again with a deceptive simplicity that perhaps could only spring from a composer working at the sum total of his powers. The finale soars ahead however with Fauré's perennial élan, the stringed instruments in declamatory unison contrasting against upward cascades in the piano, building up to a positive energetic conclusion. The Trio was first performed on Fauré's 78th birthday at the Societé Nationale de Musique: sadly the composer was too ill to attend, 'If he lives to be a hundred, how far will be go?' his friends. mused on hearing this astonishing work for the first time

Fauré did not live to be a hundred; he died in November 1924 at the age of 79, leaving behind him one of France's most exquisite treasuries of chamber music and song. 'I did what I could,' he said to his sons on his deathbed. 'Now let God be my judge'.



Christian Steiner

Gil Shaham, violin

Gil Shaham is internationally recognized as one of today's most virtuosic and engaging artists.

He is sought after throughout the world for concerto appearances with celebrated orchestras and conductors, as well as for recital and ensemble appearances on the great concert stages and at the most prestigious festivals.

In addition to his many orchestral engagements, Mr. Shaham regularly tours in recital with pianist Akira Eguchi. He enjoys bringing together friends and colleagues in chamber music, and also has the good fortune to enjoy musical collaboration with his family, including his wife, violinist Adele Anthony, his sister Orli Shaham and his brother-in-law, conductor David Robertson. Among his more than two dozen concerto and solo CDs are a number of international best-sellers. These recordings have earned prestigious awards including multiple Grammys, a Grand Prix du Disque. a Diapason d'or and Gramophone Editor's Choice

Mr. Shaham was born in Illinois in 1971, and later moved to Israel where at the age of seven he began violin studies at the Rubin Academy of Music. In 1981 he returned to the USA and began studies with Dorothy DeLay and Jens Ellerman at Aspen. In 1982, after taking first prize in Israel's Claremont Competition, he became a scholarship student at Juilliard, where he also worked with Hyo Kang. He has also studied at Columbia University.

Gil Shaham was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant in 1990. He plays the 1699 'Countess Polignac' Stradivarius, and lives in New York City with his wife and their two children.



GABRIEL FAURÉ

(1845 - 1924)

Sonata No.1 in A major for violin and piano, Op.13	25:58
1. Allegro molto	9:08
2. Andante	7:22
3. Allegro vivo	3:55
4. Allegro quasi presto	5:33
5. Romance, Op.28	6:04
6. Fileuse (Spinning Song), Op.80 No.2 Transcribed by Leopold Auer from Pelléas et Mélisande	2:23
7. Sicilienne from Pelléas et Mélisande, Op.78	3:37

Gil Shaham violin Akira Eguchi piano Brinton Smith cello (13-16)

8.	Berceuse, Op.16	3:40	
9.	Sérénade toscane	3:15	
	Transcribed by F. Ronchini		
10	. Andante, Op.75	4:57	
11	. Clair de Lune, Op.46 No.	2 3:03	
12	. Morceau de lecture à vu	e 1:50	
Tri	o for piano, cello	20:01	
an	d violin, Op.120		
13	. Allegro ma non troppo	6:06	
14	. Andantino	9:33	
15	. Allegro	4:22	
16	. Après un rêve	3:03	
Transcribed for trio by Akira Fauchi			



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Transcribed for trio by Akira Equchi Total playing time 77:53

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