CHAMPS HILL
RECORDS
An
American
in Paris
Tamsin Waley-Cohen *violin* | Huw Watkins *piano*

## FOREWORD

Since before I can remember, the sound of the violin, so like the human voice, has held my fascination.

Song is one of the primary connections between all the works on this disc; folk songs, café songs, blues songs, traditional songs. I grew up with many of them: the Ives and the Gershwin, and even the *Blues* in the Ravel, from my American mother. Some, such as the café songs of the Poulenc, are part of my European heritage. The juxtaposition of the beauty of these songs with the sardonic humour and the macabre, which in particular inhabit both the Ives and the Poulenc, adds power and poignancy to the content of these works.

My European/American heritage, common to many of my generation, felt a natural starting point for my first disc. All the pieces are works that I have lived with and which have taken hold of my imagination for many years. Perhaps each one encapsulates the human experience of a moment in our history, and so each one speaks to a part of my inherited experience.

I could never have made the disc without Huw Watkins, my extraordinary duo partner, and friend. He has been a constant inspiration and the most insightful musical partner one could wish for.

I would like to thank David and Mary Bowerman for their support, kindness and generosity, for bringing this disc to life.

Produced and Engineered by Raphaël Mouterde

Edited and Mastered by Raphaël Mouterde

Recorded on 5th–7th November 2012 at the Music Room, Champs Hill, West Sussex, UK

Cover, p.2, reverse booklet cover and tray photographs by Patrick Allen

Executive Producer for Champs Hill Records: Alexander Van Ingen

Product Manager for Champs Hill Records: John Dickinson

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **SONATE POUR VIOLON ET PIANO** OP.119 \| FRANCIS POULENC *(1899-1963)* | |
| 1 | Allegro con fuoco | *6'31* |
| 2 | Intermezzo. Très lent et calme | *6'44* |
| 3 | Presto tragico | *5'43* |
| 4 | **DECORATION DAY** (S.64) (K.2C2) \| CHARLES IVES *(1874-1954)*<br>(as first composed by Ives for violin and piano. Edited by John Kirkpatrick) | *8'47* |
| 5 | **AN AMERICAN IN PARIS** \| GEORGE GERSHWIN *(1898-1937)* (trans. Jascha Heifetz) | *5'56* |
| | **SONATE NO.2 POUR VIOLON ET PIANO IN G** \| MAURICE RAVEL *(1875-1937)* | |
| 6 | Allegretto | *7'49* |
| 7 | Blues | *5'36* |
| 8 | Perpetuum mobile | *4'00* |
| | **FIVE SELECTIONS FROM PORGY & BESS** \| GEORGE GERSHWIN (trans. Jascha Heifetz) | |
| 9 | **SUMMERTIME & A WOMAN IS A SOMETIME THING** | *4'25* |
| 10 | **MY MAN'S GONE NOW** | *5'26* |
| 11 | **IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO** | *2'44* |
| 12 | **BESS, YOU IS MY WOMAN NOW** | *5'10* |
| 13 | **TEMPO DI BLUES** | *3'21* |

Total playing time: 72'15

In the heady days before the First World War, the *Paris Herald* kept wealthy Americans in touch with the latest fashions and fancies, the most important art exhibitions and cultural events and all the juiciest gossip from the French capital. The daily publication, an offshoot of the *New York Herald*, was unofficially known as the 'sauciest paper in Europe'. As such its circulation extended beyond *Belle Époque* Paris to reach the imperial court in St Petersburg, the crowned heads of Great Britain, Italy and Spain and a procession of aristocrats and social climbers from Biarritz to Budapest. Although the old European order and millions of lives were soon to be destroyed by war and revolution, the spirit of Paris as a place of creativity and innovation survived the dark age of 1914-18 and gathered momentum once again in the post-war decade, the 'Roaring Twenties'.

The *Paris Herald* also survived the firestorm of global warfare. The paper found a new market among the bright young things and flappers of the *années folles*, the so-called Crazy Years, during which all things modern found favour with consumers eager to erase memories of the recent past. It particularly appealed to a new wave of Americans in Paris, heavily populated with young expatriate artists, writers and musicians, many of whom were troubled by the insular worldview, institutionalised racism and 'thou shalt not' laws that attracted popular support from the moral majority back home. The composer and critic Virgil Thomson spoke for a generation when he observed that France appeared to be "a miracle spot like ancient Greece." Small wonder that the Café de la Nouvelle Athènes on the Place Pigalle, once watering hole of choice for Manet, Degas and Renoir, became a place of pilgrimage for aspiring artists, committed bohemians and refugees from American Puritanism. It was here in the early 1890s that Erik Satie, who regularly played piano at the Nouvelle Athènes, first met the teenage Maurice Ravel.

Illusion and delusion played principal parts in shaping the collective myth of French liberty and the artistic superiority of Paris. France was, in reality, deeply troubled by political instability and social unrest during the inter-war decades. And yet Paris, like London today, remained the place to be. All human life came to 'gay Paree' between the wars to be seduced by the city's sensuous pleasures. The influx of outsiders introduced Paris to many new thrills, the neon-lit brilliance of American advertising signs offering clear evidence of modernity's arrival from overseas. "This summer Paris is neither hot nor cold nor rainy; it is American," noted Joseph Roth in August 1925 in his column for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. "Everywhere you go, you hear the twang of American English, everywhere you encounter lanky figures in flat shoes, with big horn-rimmed glasses – the women as much as the men – extra-wide suits, red Baedeker guides in their hands, and lots of walking sticks and umbrellas." While Roth's report poked gentle fun at American tourists, Parisian musicians of all varieties made their way to the city's cabaret bars and café-concerts to catch the infectious sounds of Dixieland jazz. Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes company and its impressive post-war rival, the Ballets Suédois, helped stoke the modernist melting pot with vibrant new dance works that absorbed and celebrated jazz influences. Paris, meanwhile, provided a haven for jazz bands visiting from America.

Francis Poulenc's twenties coincided more or less neatly with the Roaring Twenties. The young composer, raised in a world of *Belle Époque* comfort, made his mark as a member of the Parisian avant-garde with works such as *Trois mouvements perpétuels* for solo piano, clearly inspired by the music of Erik Satie. Poulenc's jazz-inflected Sonata for clarinet and bassoon of 1922 and sparky contribution to the 1921 Ballets Suédois production, *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, project what the composer referred to as the 'naughty-boy side' of his nature. His melancholic side holds the spotlight in the Sonata for violin and piano. Poulenc drafted and destroyed two violin sonatas before creating his only surviving essay in the genre. "To tell the truth," he recalled, "I don't like the violin in the singular. In the plural, it's quite different."

The Violin Sonata was written while its composer was coming to terms with the realities of life under occupying Nazi powers in the north of France and Marshall Pétain's collaborationist Vichy regime in the south. In keeping with his pre-war custom, Poulenc continued to spend extended periods away from Paris at his country retreat in the village of Noizay in the Loire valley. It was here in the summer of 1942 that he began work on a new violin sonata; he completed the score in Noizay on Easter Sunday the following year. The composition was dedicated to the memory of Federico García Lorca, the poet and playwright whose murder by nationalist forces following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 deeply affected Poulenc.

In a series of interviews with the musicologist Claude Rostand, the composer explained that he found inspiration in García Lorca's famous metaphor, 'The guitar makes dreams weep'. The line appears at the head of the Violin Sonata's *Intermezzo*, described by its composer in self-deprecating terms as "a sort of vaguely Spanish *Andante-cantilena*". Poulenc drafted the work's slow movement first. "Then I imagined as a finale a *Presto tragico* whose lively rhythmic *élan* would suddenly be broken by a slow, tragic coda. A fiery first movement was to set the tone." Poulenc accompanied Ginette Neveu in the Sonata's premiere, given at the Salle Gaveau in June 1943. He proved to be its harshest critic, revising the score six years later after declaring the original to be "an utter failure". It appears that the composer had the violin sonatas of Brahms in mind when measuring the value of his memorial to García Lorca. Poulenc's dismissive comment certainly did little to promote the cause of a score tinged with bitter-sweet melodies and bound together with great ingenuity and imagination.

Maurice Ravel, a shy, intensely private man, displayed his emotions in public almost exclusively through his music. "These little outbursts of flame," observed the musicologist and composer H.H. Stuckenschmidt, "exert the strongest fascination in the study of a style that … displays the same spotless and elegant exterior as did the outward appearance of the man who created it." The Sonata for violin and piano contains long periods of refined, rather reserved music punctuated by moments of full-blooded passion. The work evolved gradually between 1923 and 1927, written during Ravel's visits to his country home in the Ile de France. "It won't be difficult," he wrote to his close friend, the violinist Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, "and it won't sprain your wrist." The composition's perpetuum mobile, however, presents technical challenges that are, if not wrist breaking, certainly challenging. It also stands as the extrovert conclusion to an otherwise reflective work.

Ravel's fascination with sound and tonal contrasts surfaces throughout his Violin Sonata. In the first movement, for instance, the violin and piano reveal their different strengths through characteristic melodies and accompaniment figures. The composer sought advice on matters of violin technique from Jourdan-Morhange. Their mutual passion for jazz led the violinist to encourage Ravel to cast his Sonata's second movement as a blues. Although charmed by the harmonic and melodic flavours of the blues he heard played by the Dixieland bands in Paris in the early 1920s, Ravel was never tempted to write pastiche blues. In a 1928 lecture entitled 'Contemporary Music', he explained to his American audience that "while [in the Violin Sonata] I adopted this form of your music, I venture to say nevertheless that it is French music, Ravel's music, that I have written."

In his controversial 'psychoanalytic' biography of Charles Ives, Stuart Feder connects the 'Decoration Day' movement from the composer's *Holidays Symphony* with his father and 'personal hero', George Ives. The junior Ives started work on the orchestral version of *Decoration Day* in September 1912, incorporating music from an earlier organ piece into its middle section ("the poorest part of the movement", in the composer's opinion) and repeatedly echoing strains of David W. Reeves's *Second Regiment Connecticut National Guard Quickstep* ("as good a march as Sousa or Schubert ever wrote, if not better"). Ives appended to his score a part-fictional, part-autobiographical recollection of childhood holidays in New England, evoking the annual springtime ritual by which local towns were decorated with freshly gathered

flowers. References in the music and the prose postface to military marches and the 'Yankee stimulant', Reeves's *Second Regiment Quickstep*, lend support to Feder's contention that *Decoration Day* represents an idealised memorial to the late George Ives, "in his son's fantasy, the greatest hero of the [American] Civil War".

It is clear that *Decoration Day* is woven from the stuff of personal memories; the Reeves march, among former bandmaster George's favourite tunes, returns throughout to haunt and finally silence Ives's own musical thoughts. Ives included a part for 'extra' violin in his original composition, a quiet yet dissonant 'shadow' voice. The solo instrument stands at odds with the rest of the strings, usually set apart from them at the distance of a major seventh. "It should always be kept at a much lower intensity than the other parts," Ives recorded in a footnote to his score. "It stands in the background as a kind of shadow to the other strings." The performance direction fits neatly with Stuart Feder's proposal that the part "may be a concrete representation of George [Ives], who played the violin … and seemed to have been practising it during the first years of Ives's life."

Ives's version of *Decoration Day* for violin and piano, arranged by the composer after 1919, was reconstructed by the pianist and scholar John Kirkpatrick from surviving sketches. Daniel Stepner and Kirkpatrick presented the work's premiere in an all-Ives recital at Yale University School of Music in October 1973. It was first performed outside the United States by Tamsin Waley-Cohen and Gregorio Nardi in July 2007.

George Gershwin was among the last century's true musical pioneers. He was born in Brooklyn, New York, to poor Russian emigrants. When the Gershwins bought an upright piano, young George took to the keyboard and showed such natural talent that the family found the means to pay for formal music lessons. He revealed a natural gift for writing melodies, which eventually brought him work as a Tin Pan Alley 'song-plugger'. Gershwin's first published song appeared in 1916. He went on to write numbers for Broadway shows before creating his first musical, *La-La-Lucille*, in 1919. The following year Al Jolson's recording of Gershwin's *Swanee* proved a mass-market hit and established its composer's reputation as a tunesmith with the Midas touch.

In the summer of 1928, Gershwin visited Paris. During his stay he attended a performance of his *Rhapsody in Blue* given by French musicians and met, among other composers, Ravel, Poulenc, Prokofiev and Berg. The trip to France left its mark on the tone poem *An American in Paris*; it also contributed to the expansion of Gershwin's creative horizons, which flourished in 1934 when he began work on his opera *Porgy and Bess*. The work, based on DuBose Heyward's novel about the tough lives and passionate loves of the black inhabitants of 'Catfish Row' in Charleston, South Carolina, received a Broadway-style production in the autumn of 1935 at New York's Alvin Theater. Although *Porgy and Bess* attracted mixed reviews, songs such as the lullaby *Summertime*, 'Sportin' Life's secular sermon *It ain't necessarily so* and the heartbreaking *My man's gone now* became instant hits. The Russian-born violinist Jascha Heifetz greatly admired Gershwin's music and invited the composer to write a concert work for him. While Gershwin's early death prevented the delivery of a new violin piece, in 1947 Heifetz harnessed his legendary virtuosity and considerable skills as an arranger to the transcription of a half dozen numbers from *Porgy and Bess* for violin and piano.

*Andrew Stewart*

***"Tamsin Waley-Cohen ... held us rapt with daring and undaunted performances."***
*The Times*, Hilary Finch

Tamsin Waley-Cohen is currently associate artist with Orchestra of the Swan and performs as a soloist with others including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra of St John's, London Concert Orchestra and London Chamber Orchestra, and the Brighton Philharmonic, under conductors including Andrew Litton, José Serebrier, Shlomo Mintz and Nicolae Moldoveanu. She has played at the Cadogan, Queen Elizabeth and Barbican halls in London, Symphony Hall Birmingham, Bridgewater Hall Manchester, the Liszt Academy Hall, Budapest and in venues across the UK and the continent. This season will see performances at the Wigmore Hall and Cadogan Hall in London, as well as concerto and chamber music concerts in Italy, France and Sweden.

*Patrick Allen*

In demand as a recitalist, Tamsin's partners include Huw Watkins, Tom Poster and Tim Horton. She has worked with artists such as Andreas Haefliger, Heinz Holliger and Anssi Karttunen and premiered works by composers including Torsten Rasch and Richard Causton; at a recent Presteigne festival she gave the premiere of a new "Concertino" written for her by Huw Watkins. Tamsin values her experience as a chamber musician and has formed the Honeymead Ensemble, resident at the Tricycle Theatre in London as well as the Honeymead Festival on Exmoor. In its first four years it has included Adrian Brendel, Guy Ben-Ziony, Leon McCawley, Thomas Carroll, and Sarah-Jane Bradley. Tamsin has performed in many festivals – Cheltenham, Accademia San Felice, Florence Chamber Music, The Red Violin, The Two Moors, Stift and Presteigne, three years ago making her American debut with the Mendelssohn Concerto in the Bowdoin Festival.

Tamsin Waley-Cohen was born in London in 1986. She became a Foundation Scholar, studying with Itzhak Rashkovsky, at the Royal College of Music where she won all available awards, including – twice – the concerto competition, and was their String Player of the Year in 2005. Numerous competition successes include winning the 2005 Royal Overseas League String Prize and the 2007 J&A Beare Bach competition.

Tamsin has been a regular participant at the International Musicians' Seminar at Prussia Cove since she was 16. She has also participated in master classes given by Ida Haendel, Igor Ozim, and Ruggiero Ricci, the latter describing her as "the most exceptionally gifted young violinist I have ever encountered."

She is the Artistic Director of London's Tricycle Theatre's Chamber Music Series, and Director of Music at the Bargello Chamber Music Festival in Florence, Italy. Since 2007 she has played the 1721 ex-Fenyves Stradivarius violin.

***"What an amazing musician Watkins is, this unfailingly dependable and musical pianist who seems to be everywhere. If he caught a cold most of Britain's summer festival season would collapse."*** *The Telegraph*

Huw Watkins was born in Wales in 1976. He studied piano with Peter Lawson at Chetham's School of Music and composition with Robin Holloway, Alexander Goehr and Julian Anderson at Cambridge and the Royal College of Music. In 2001 he was awarded the Constant and Kit Lambert Junior Fellowship at the Royal College of Music, where he now teaches composition.

As a pianist, Huw Watkins is in great demand with orchestras and festivals including the London Sinfonietta, Britten Sinfonia, the BBC orchestras and Aldeburgh and Cheltenham festivals. Huw has also developed a strong relationship with the Orchestra of the Swan where he is 'Composer in the House' and with whom he has performed regularly over the years. Strongly committed to the performance of new music, Huw has given premieres of works by Alexander Goehr, Peter Maxwell Davies, Michael Zev Gordon and Mark-Anthony Turnage. He recently presented a programme of Hans Werner Henze's piano works at the BBC's Total Immersion day at the Barbican.

A favourite partner for chamber collaborations, Huw Watkins performs regularly with his brother Paul Watkins, as well as Alina Ibragimova, James Gilchrist, Daniel Hope, Nicholas Daniel, Sebastian Manz, Mark Padmore, Carolyn Sampson, and Alexandra Wood. Recently Huw has featured as both Composer in Residence and pianist at festivals including Presteigne and Lars Vogt's 'Spannungen' Festival in Heimbach, Germany.

Huw Watkins is one of Britain's foremost composers. His music has been performed throughout Europe and North America".

Huw's works have been performed and commissioned by the Nash Ensemble, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Belcea Quartet, Elias Quartet, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra and Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra. Highlights include his acclaimed Violin Concerto premiered at the BBC Proms by Alina Ibragimova and the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Edward Gardner, Piano Concerto premiered by BBC NOW, *London Concerto* premiered to mark the London Symphony Orchestra's centenary, Double Concerto premiered at the BBC Proms with BBC NOW conducted by Jac van Steen and *In My Craft of Sullen Art* for tenor and string quartet premiered at the Wigmore Hall by Mark Padmore and the Petersen Quartet.

Huw Watkins is regularly featured on BBC Radio 3, both as a performer and as a composer. His recordings include a disc of Mendelssohn's cello and piano works with his brother Paul Watkins (Chandos), British sonatas for cello and piano with Paul Watkins (Nimbus), Alexander Goehr's piano cycle *Symmetry Disorders Reach* (Wergo), and Thomas Adès' song cycle *The Lover in Winter* with the countertenor Robin Blaze (EMI Classics). Most recently, NMC Records have released a disc dedicated to Huw Watkins' work entitled *In My Craft of Sullen Art* (NMC). The disc showcases Huw's 'outstanding pianism' (Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*) and reveals him as 'one of the most rounded composer-musicians in the UK' (Andrew Clark, *Financial Times*).