

No discussion of early twentieth-century French music is complete without serious mention of Claude Debussy (1862-1918), whose characteristic tonal ambiguity and sensory depiction are frequently defined as impressionistic (a term, incidentally, that Debussy despised). His two piano arabesques, composed while still in his twenties, contain many of the idiomatic features that came to define Debussy's later style: The first arabesque, performed here as a transcription for harp, also includes a variety of staccato figurations and dance-like figures. It introduces us to themes revisited repeatedly in Debussy's work: the use of triplets against a competing rhythm and as well as the pentatonic scale. It has the Impressionist feeling, initially of flowing water, but also a strong melodic line that is sweet without being saccharine.

The last of Francis Poulenc's *a cappella* motets, for men's voices, the *Laudes de Saint Antoine de Padoue* (Praises of St. Anthony of Padua) were composed between 1957-1959, in tribute to one of his favorite saints. The text is taken from the Office of St. Anthony by the poet and musician Julian of Speyer. The reason for the creation of this music is unusual. Poulenc, as a child, was given a strict Catholic upbringing, but turned his back on religion after the death of his father in 1917. As it turned out, it was not a complete break. A change of heart followed the sudden death of a good friend and colleague. After a period of intensive musical study, including motets by Monteverdi, and a visit to the tomb of the black Madonna in Rocamadour, a well known place of pilgrimage, Poulenc's renewed religious inspiration had become a reality. This turned out to be the impulse for the production of a considerable number of works for a *a cappella* choir, ranging widely in character, style, and dramatic power, but unmistakably characteristic in their very typical color and intimacy. The last work in this style is the *Laudes de Saint Antoine de Padoue* for male chorus. These *Laudes* are in fact a group of four hymns of praise to St. Anthony of Padua, a saint whom Poulenc greatly admired and respected because of the apparently effortless synthesis between social engagement and lofty mysticism which characterized his personality. The melodies are magnificent, and the harmonies are full and often singularly contemporary for sacred music.

Strongly influenced by Debussy's works, André Caplet (1878-1925) distinguished himself early as a composer, orchestrator, and conductor. After conducting the Boston Opera from 1910-1914, he returned to France to enlist in the war, sustaining injuries that would eventually cause him his life. As a composer he embraced Impressionism wholeheartedly, and his exceptional skill in writing vocal music has gone largely unrecognized. His approach to melody resembles that of the late Romantics, apparent in the long arching phrases of *Panis Angelicus* and the extended chromaticism in *Inscriptions Champêtres*. "O Salutaris" is the last movement from Caplet's only Mass, composed near the end of his life and exemplary of his devout interest in Catholic mysticism.

Cantique de Jean Racine is a work for mixed chorus and piano or organ by Gabriel Fauré. Written by the nineteen year old composer in 1864-5, the piece won Fauré the first prize when he graduated from the École Niedermeyer and was first performed the following year on August 4, 1866, with accompaniment of strings and organ. It was first published around 1875 or 1876 (Schoen, Paris, as part of the series *Echo des Maîtrises*) and appeared in a version for orchestra (possibly by the composer) in 1906. The accompaniment has also been arranged for strings and harp by John Rutter.

The text, "Verbe égal au Très-Haut", is a French translation, by the 17th century French dramatist Jean Racine (*Hymnes traduites du Bréviaire romain*, 1688) of a medieval Latin hymn for Tuesday matins, *Consors paterni luminis*. When Gabriel Fauré set the translation to music, he gave it the title *Cantique de Jean Racine*, rather than the title of the original hymn.

Gabriel Fauré: *Requiem* (Op. 48)
notes:

— excerpted from John Rutter's

It is one of musical history's mischances that the Fauré *Requiem* has in this century been known and performed only in a version with full orchestra for which Fauré was very possibly not responsible; the composer's original version of the work with chamber ensemble has only recently been published and performed.

Fauré began work on the *Requiem* in 1887 purely, in his own words, "for the pleasure of it," although the death of his father in 1885 and of his mother two years later may well have lent impetus to the composition. He was 42 years of age, choirmaster at the fashionable Church of the Madeleine in Paris, and gaining a growing reputation as a composer. He completed the work early in 1888 and directed the premiere on January 16 of that year; the occasion was a funeral service at the Madeleine. This "first version" (of "Introit et Kyrie," "Sanctus," "Pie Jesu," "Agnus Dei," and "In Paradisum" - a personal selection of texts laying emphasis on rest and peace with no reference to the Day of Judgment. The instrumentation is restrained and mellow: divided violas and cellos, basses, harp, tympani and organ, with a solo violin in the "Sanctus." The strings - probably no more than a handful at the first performance - mostly double the organ, which plays throughout, like a Baroque continuo.

In 1893, Fauré presented an expanded version which included two extra movements, the "Offertoire" written in 1889 and "Libera Me" written in 1877 as an independent composition. The instrumentation was also expanded by adding horn and trumpet parts to the earlier manuscript and, in "In Paradisum," violins. The horns have an essential role in the "Libera Me" and a useful one elsewhere; their fanfare-like figure in the "Sanctus" is hard to imagine left out.

In contrast to the usually-heard symphonic version of 1900, the nature of the *Requiem* music itself seems to call for the intimacy and clarity of a chamber ensemble, rather than the full symphonic forces which would swamp a choir such as the modest-sized group of boys and men at the Madeleine for whom the work was written. The two extra movements in the 1893 version are a wonderful inclusion and the added horn parts also seem to represent genuine second thoughts of Fauré's part. At the same time, the 1893 *Requiem* remains a liturgical work for modest forces to perform in church, which is how the composer conceived it.