

**STRAVINSKY
POULENC
DEBUSSY**

**AMALIE STALHEIM
CELLO**

**CHRISTIAN IHLE HADLAND
PIANO**



The music of the *Suite Italienne* originated in **IGOR STRAVINSKY's** ballet score *Pulcinella* of 1920. The music for this ballet, scored for three solo voices and chamber orchestra, was arranged by Stravinsky from various 18th-century pieces which for many years were believed to be by the Italian composer Pergolesi (1710-36). However, subsequent research has shown that about half of these attractive pieces are actually by other composers such as Gallo, Chelleri, Parisotti and "Anon". Masterminded by Serge Diaghilev, the ballet was premiered at the Paris Opera in May 1920. Stravinsky arranged a suite of several orchestral movements from the original ballet score, then in 1925 he produced a version for violin and piano. This came about when Stravinsky and the violinist Samuel Dushkin were preparing a recital programme and Stravinsky decided to arrange a selection of movements from the *Pulcinella* ballet as "Suite Italienne". Collaborating with the virtuoso cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, he subsequently (1932) completed a quite different cello-and-piano selection of music from *Pulcinella* – again entitled *Suite Italienne*. As Dushkin observed, Stravinsky was never interested in routine arranging, but always "rewrote or recreated the music in the spirit of the new instrument" – whether violin or cello. The jaunty Introduzione (Allegro moderato), in which Stravinsky uses music originally composed by Domenico Gallo is from the overture to the original ballet. It is followed by the melancholy Serenata (Larghetto), based on an aria from

an opera by Pergolesi. This was a tenor solo in the full ballet and Stravinsky transcribed the movement for oboe in the orchestral Pulcinella Suite. The following Aria (Allegro alla breve) is cheekily playful and boisterous – not at all in the cantabile style which one might well expect. Even in Bach's time, "aria" (or air) simply indicated a movement which did not employ the distinct rhythm and character of one of the traditional dance forms such as allemande, courante, minuet or gigue. Stravinsky injects into this aria, and indeed into all the faster movements of the suite, his inimitable humour, while also creating an imaginative textural variety. There is one lyrical episode (Largo) and near the surprisingly subdued ending Stravinsky quotes from the previous movement. Believed to be based on music by Fortunato Chelleri, the Tarantella (Vivace) is brilliant and relentless, ending with a brusque fortissimo, staccatissimo. The suite continues with a stately minuet (originally by Pergolesi), sung by three solo voices in the Pulcinella ballet. Marked Moderato and with a profusion of double-stopping, this leads directly into the vigorous Molto vivace finale (originally by Gallo). While Stravinsky generally retains the original eighteenth-century melodies and bass lines, he extends phrases – often by means of his characteristic partial repetition – and realigns the inner harmonies to create tension with the melody. With his characteristic pungency and sense of fun, he presents this infectiously tuneful music in a completely new way.

FRANCIS POULENC's most frequently performed works include the Organ Concerto, his ballet score *Les biches* and a setting of the Gloria, but he also composed three operas, much choral music and concertos for piano, two pianos and harpsichord. He was among the outstanding 20th-century composers of songs and he wrote many fine pieces for solo piano. His extensive list of works does feature chamber music, but these compositions favour wind or brass, rather than strings. There are several duo-sonatas with piano – for flute, clarinet, oboe, violin and cello respectively, as well as sonatas for two clarinets; clarinet, bassoon and piano; oboe, bassoon and piano; and horn, trumpet and trombone. Poulenc admitted to struggling when writing for solo strings – he even destroyed two early violin sonatas – but nevertheless the mature sonatas for violin and cello are both attractive and characteristic works.

Poulenc completed his cello sonata in 1948, though his sketches date from eight years earlier. Having advised on the cello part, the distinguished soloist Pierre Fournier gave the premiere with Poulenc on 18th May 1949 in the Salle Gaveau in Paris. In this sonata we find juxtaposed the typical contrasts – between flippancy and melancholy – found in many of Poulenc's works. In the opening bars a forceful idea quickly dissolves into lyricism, setting up a duality – deeply characteristic of Poulenc – which is maintained throughout this episodic movement. Lyri-

cism is the stronger of the two impulses, jollity often giving way to ravishingly beautiful passages. The ending is witty and unexpected. The Cavatine is tender and deeply touching, a marvellous example of Poulenc's outstanding melodic gift. Long rapturous phrases for the cello belie the composer's admission of difficulties when writing for solo strings. Indeed, this gloriously expressive music is ideally suited to the cello.

The brief third movement (the term Balabile is derived from the same root as the word ballet) is delightfully relaxed and insouciant. The finale begins with grandiose chords for both instruments, answered by a mysterious passage of cello tremolo, before a faster tempo brings a forthright, uncomplicated melody. Again this movement is episodic. As so often in Poulenc's music, a seemingly unconnected succession of ideas and moods proves to be unexpectedly satisfying.

At the very end Poulenc returns to his opening chordal gesture to conclude this fine but inexplicably neglected work.

In 1915 **CLAUDE DEBUSSY** planned a series of six sonatas for different combinations of instruments. Seriously ill with cancer, he lived to complete only the violin and cello sonatas and the sonata for flute, viola and harp. The latter indicates a new interest in unusual instrumental groups, which Debussy intended to further pursue in the other sonatas –



for oboe, horn and harpsichord, and for trumpet, clarinet, bassoon and piano. Debussy is just one of many composers who have shown classical tendencies – a new clarity, economy and simplicity – in their late works, and he would also have been aware of Saint-Saëns’ determination to revive the dominance of classical forms in French music. Debussy’s Cello Sonata is an elusive work of wide expressive range, its 11-minute duration encompassing frequently changing moods and tempo fluctuations. When he described his new work to his publisher the composer stressed “The proportions are almost classical ... in the best sense of the word.” Nevertheless, there is no development of themes in the conventional manner. The sonata begins with a noble, declamatory figure in the piano (which plays a more accompanying role thereafter), before the cello plays florid arabesques. A sad theme is introduced by the cello, before an increasingly animated passage culminates in a big crescendo. The cello recalls the declamatory opening bars, the sad melody returns, and the movement ends peacefully.

Debussy initially considered the sub-title “Pierrot Angry With the Moon” for the strangely frustrated Sérénade. (Pierrot, the sad, naïve clown, is a character from the Commedia dell-Arte, an Italian troupe of travelling players originating in the 16th century.) The mood here is restless and rather disgruntled. Debussy’s expression markings reveal much: the opening

is marked “fantasque et léger” (whimsical and light), while subsequent directions include “ironique” and “fuoco” (fiery). Initially the cello’s guitar-style pizzicato dominates. In the faster middle section (Vivace) the cello’s pizzicato is replaced by arco and a more sustained flow. A brief recall of the opening bars leads to a diminuendo, and the lively finale follows without a break. Here a Spanish flavour – not uncommon in Debussy’s music generally – adds piquancy. One passage marked “Con fuoco ed appassionato” (with fire and passion) leads to a brief slower section (“con morbidezza” – with tenderness), before the resumption of the original tempo. A brief cello solo is abruptly dismissed by the violent final chords.

– Philip Borg-Wheeler



AMALIE STALHEIM CELLO

Award winning cellist Amalie Stalheim (b. 1993) is known for her technical brilliance, personal expression and unique tone and has appeared as a soloist with orchestras such as the Gulbenkian Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Oulu Symphony Orchestra, the Norwegian Radio Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, the Swedish Radio Orchestra, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and Iceland Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to performing the traditional cello concertos, Amalie is very passionate about commissioning and playing contem-

porary classical music. She is collaborating with some of the biggest composers today, resulting in several new cello concertos being dedicated to her.

In 2023 Amalie started a collaboration with the International Festival in Bergen as initiator and mentor of “Classical Link”, a new mentoring program for outstanding, upcoming musicians in the Nordic countries.

Amalie is the winner of the Norwegian Soloist Prize 2021, the Swedish Soloist Prize 2018, the Ljunggren Competition 2015, and the Nicholas A. Firmenich Prize 2015 at the Verbier Festival.

Amalie began playing the cello in Bergen, Norway at the age of 6, and later contin-

ued her studies in Sweden with professor Torleif Thedeen at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm/Edsberg Manor, and with professor Kathryn Stott at the Norwegian Academy of Music.

Amalie performs on a Francesco Ruggieri cello (Cremona, 1687) generously lent to her by the Anders Sveaas’ Charitable Foundation.

CHRISTIAN IHLE HADLAND PIANO

Christian Ihle Hadland has established himself as a true craftsman of the piano, a musician whose delicate, refined playing and individual touch have led him to the most prestigious stages in the world.

Christian came to international attention in 2011 as a BBC New Generation Artist. As an NGA he performed with all four of the BBC’s symphony orchestras and broadcast solo and chamber recitals for the corporation in London. He also made his debut at the BBC Proms in London where he was praised by critics for his ‘pearly’ and ‘otherworldly’ sound.

Christian was born in Stavanger in 1983 and received his first piano lessons at the age of eight. At the age of eleven he entered the Rogaland Music Conservatory, and in 1999 began lessons with Professor Jiri Hlinka, both privately and at the Barratt Due Institute of Music in Oslo. He made his professional concerto debut at the age of 15 with the Norwegian Radio Orchestra (KORK). He has since performed with all the major orchestras in Scandinavia including the Swedish Radio and Danish National Symphony Orchestras, and the Royal Stockholm,

Helsinki and Oslo Philharmonics and the Swedish Chamber Orchestra. In the UK he has appeared as a soloist with the Hallé Orchestra, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Manchester Camerata, in addition to his work with the BBC orchestras.

Christian is highly sought after as a chamber musician. He has been Artistic Director of the International Chamber Music Festival in Stavanger, his hometown, since 2010 and is a frequent guest at Wigmore Hall. Christian has performed at the BBC Proms Chamber Music Series and in 2015 gave a three-week tour of Australia with the Australian Chamber Orchestra and mezzo soprano Susan Graham. In 2006, he performed with soprano Renée Fleming at the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony in Oslo.



IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882–1971)
Suite Italienne (1932)

1. I. Introduzione 02:17
2. II. Serenata 02:59
3. III. Aria 05:12
4. IV. Tarantella 02:18
5. V. Minuetto 01:57
6. VI. Finale 02:03

FRANCIS POULENC (1899–1963)
Cello Sonata, FP 143 (1948)

7. I. Allegro – Tempo di Marcia 05:32
8. II. Cavatine 06:08
9. III. Ballabile 03:27
10. IV. Finale 06:15

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)
Cello Sonata in D minor, L. 135 (1915)

11. I. Prologue: Lent,
sostenuto e molto risoluto 04:26
12. II. Sérénade:
Modérément animé 03:01
13. III. Final:
Animé, léger et nerveux 03:20

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