

Abîme des oiseaux (*Abyss of the Birds*) is the third movement from Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (*Quartet for the End of Time*). Messiaen wrote the quartet during World War II, when he was a prisoner of war in Silesia. He scored it for violin, clarinet, cello, and piano, so that he and fellow musicians among the prisoners could play the first performance in the camp. *Abîme des oiseaux* features the clarinet in solo. By way of explaining this movement, Messiaen states: "The abyss is *Time*, with its sadnesses and tediums. The birds are the opposite of time; they are our desire for light, for stars, for rainbows, and for jubilant outpourings of song!"

Considered by the distinguished English musicologist and writer on music Percy Scholes (1877–1958) to be the "greatest showpiece in the whole repertory of the clarinet," the *Grand duo concertant in E-flat Major, Op. 48*, by Carl Maria von Weber, is a tour de force for both the clarinetist and the pianist. The scintillating passages for each instrument are not for the faint-hearted. Enamored with the brilliant playing of the celebrated German clarinetist Heinrich Bärmann (1784–1847), Weber felt challenged to compose a work for him that would be worthy of his genius. The resulting duo not only added in its own day to the growing appreciation of the clarinet but has also stood the test of time to compete with the popularity of the works for clarinet by Mozart and Brahms. Speaking about the effectiveness of the work, clarinetist and writer Carlton Jackson remarks: "The *Grand duo* embodies every kind of [masterful] effect—melody, intense evocation of mood, and coloratura fireworks. The final movement alone shows off dare-devil leaps, diatonic and chromatic runs, and technical challenges of every sort in a rollicking climax hard to imagine (let alone perform) on any other instrument."

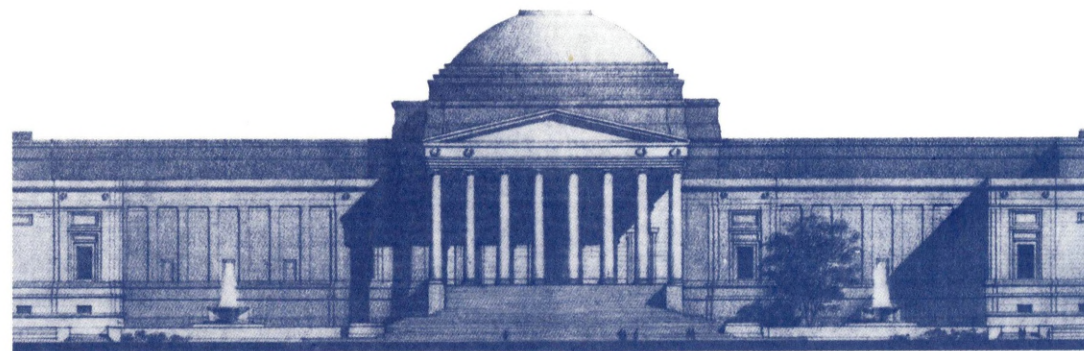
Programs notes by Elmer Booze

*For the convenience of concertgoers
the Garden Café remains open until 6:30 p.m.*

The Sixty-first Season of

THE WILLIAM NELSON CROMWELL and
F. LAMMOT BELIN CONCERTS

National Gallery of Art



2450th Concert

ALEXANDER FITERSTEIN, *clarinetist*

DAVID RILEY, *pianist*

Sunday Evening, 9 March 2003
Seven O'clock
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

among others. He has performed for dozens of radio broadcasts throughout North America on CBC National Radio, National Public Radio, and WQXR in New York City. This concert season Riley performs at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall on two occasions, at the Sonoklect Contemporary Music Festival in Virginia, and at Merkin Hall with the New York Philharmonic Chamber Players. He holds degrees from the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Eastman School of Music, where he studied with Anne Epperson and Jean Barr, respectively. Alexander Fiterstein and David Riley appear at the National Gallery by arrangement with Young Concert Artists, Inc., of New York City.

Program Notes

Ernest Chausson's *Andante and Allegro* for clarinet and piano reveals the interest he had in the clarinet from his student days and his willingness to explore its possibilities as a solo instrument. Chausson's only work in this genre, the sonata was composed during the first of three periods in his musical development. The period between 1878 and 1887 was for Chausson a time of experimentation and exploration. His music during those years reveals a personal image influenced by two of his mentors, César Franck (1822–1890) and Jules Massenet (1842–1912). Unique timbres and sonorous elements derived from the music of Richard Wagner (1813–1883) also color Chausson's works. It is probably no coincidence that during that same nine-year span Chausson amassed a significant collection of paintings by the emerging school of experimental French artists who came to be known as the impressionists.

As he composed the *Andante and Allegro*, Chausson was striving for perfection and recognition as a bona fide composer among the musical elite of his day. He had chosen music as a profession late in life, having previously earned a doctorate in law. In just two short movements, Chausson explores the wide range of the clarinet as well as the multifaceted hues found within its designated registers. In addition, "he employed shapely melodic lines, elegant harmonies and a style which, though sober, is more alive to pretty ideas than to depth of

feeling..." (*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*). Despite his late musical beginning, Chausson cultivated and maintained a characteristic style that eventually gained legitimacy for him in the composers' pantheon.

Schumann's *Three Romances, Op. 94*, for clarinet and piano were originally written for oboe and piano, with an alternate version for violin or clarinet. These three works began life in 1848, when Schumann experimented with writing for woodwind instruments. Other works for wind instruments followed in quick succession: *Phantasiestücke, Op. 73*, for clarinet and piano; *Adagio and Allegro, Op. 70*, for horn and piano; and *Märchenerzählungen (Fairy Tales), Op. 132*, for clarinet, viola, and piano. *Op. 94* was written during the continental revolutions of 1848 that began in France, where the issue was universal suffrage. Elsewhere in Europe, a series of political and economic revolts caused widespread unrest and anxiety. However, these *Romances* indicate no emotional strains on Schumann's part. On the contrary, as expressed by James Lyons in the *American Record Guide*: "In these fetching tableaux we hear only Schumann the poet, dreamily speaking of matters far beyond the temporal sphere."

Dedicated to his friend and colleague Arthur Honegger, Poulenc's *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano* was commissioned by and composed for the renowned American clarinetist and bandleader Benny Goodman (1909–1986). Goodman, with Leonard Bernstein as his accompanist, gave the premiere of the work April 1963 in New York City, two months after Poulenc's death. The composer was an iconoclastic member of Les Six, a radical group of French composers who turned their backs on conventional music writing in favor of a "new" or more "modern" sound. The opening movement (*Allegro tristamente*) favors the clarinet and carries with it an emotionally dispirited flavor that speaks of the "bluesy" nightclubs of the Tin Pan Alley days. The second movement (*Romanza*) is, as its title suggests, a hauntingly beautiful song of love and longing. The third movement (*Allegro con fuoco*) calls to mind a sardonically gleeful musical sprint. The mood is interrupted by a euphonious middle section containing a reminder of the first movement theme. The movement ends with an undisciplined coda.