

**Gabriel Fauré****1845-1924**

Barcarolle No. 6 in E-flat major, Opus 70	4:34
Barcarolle No. 3 in G-flat major, Opus 42	8:53
Barcarolle No. 1 in A minor, Opus 26	4:58
Nocturne No. 2 in B major, Opus 33 No. 2	7:03
Nocturne No. 4 in E-flat major, Opus 36	6:45
Nocturne No. 6 in D-flat major, Opus 63	8:23
Theme and Variations, Opus 73	14:53

**Claude Debussy****1862-1918**

Clair de lune (from Suite bergamasque)	4:28
From Préludes Book I and II:	
La fille aux cheveux de lin (The girl with the flaxen hair)	2:09
La Cathédrale engloutie (The engulfed cathedral)	5:54
“General Lavine” – excentric – Bruyères (Heath)	2:46
“Les fées sont d’exquises danseuses” (Fairies are exquisite dancers)	2:25
	3:25

## Bio-vignettes

It was not without trepidation that I walked down the Avenue de la Grande Armée from the Place de l'Étoile, in the fall of 1952, to take the elevator to the apartment of my new teacher, Marguerite Long.

Fortunately Mme Long was momentarily detained so I quickly got over my apprehension and was well into Brahms' second piano concerto (my *abitur* from the Conservatory) when she opened the door and confidently expressed her assessment that I would become a great pianist.

I had recently graduated from the Amsterdam Conservatory and this was the next step up the ladder, which I hoped would lead to mastery of the piano. I didn't know exactly what that meant and I was equally ignorant of what French music was about.

Marguerite Long immediately set out to remedy the latter and assigned me Fauré's sixth Barcarolle, the one the composer himself had given her when they first met.

When I came back for my first lesson I started with Beethoven's Sonata Opus 110, again receiving my teacher's approval, and then the dreaded moment arrived: Fauré's Barcarolle. I had absolutely no idea what to do with it and my professor must have realized then and there that I was a hopeless case and never assigned me another piece of French music.

I was also plagued by increasing tension in hands and fingers and Mrs. Long's prediction of a brilliant pianistic career came to naught.

But for three years I faithfully followed her weekly "*cours*" in the Rue Molitor and although during all that time I never really "understood" either Debussy or, especially, Fauré (I was temperamentally closer to Ravel), a seed was planted. Many years after I left the French capital that seed began to germinate to the extent that in the seventies and eighties I gave recitals devoted exclusively to French music.

In 1990 I made my debuts on the East Coast at Carnegie Recital Hall and the Kennedy Center, not exactly a child prodigy at age sixty, and received a glowing review in The Washington Post that concluded with "Those who love the French repertoire will look forward to this pianist's next visit." It seemed that the spirits that hovered over the rue Molitor were possessed of the "*longue patience*" which Rodin considered the sine qua non of an artist. My work on three late Beethoven sonatas took up most of my spare time after that but now, almost twenty years later, the same spirits have been nudging me once more for a hopefully last offer of appeasement.

It is again with a trepidation somewhat akin to what I felt almost sixty years ago, that I wanted, needed might be closer to the truth, to answer that call which resulted in this CD.

It is my hope that this performance may at times come close to capturing a precious instant of eternity, a moment out of *Chronos*-time, as was also Rilke's poetic ideal in his late works.

I am not totally sure why I chose a late 18<sup>th</sup> century painting signed by Greuze for the cover of the booklet. Certainly because of its beauty, possibly because it happens to be in my collection, but perhaps most appropriately because I see so many similarities between this Greuze work and the oeuvre of Fauré, who was able to combine in his art both gentleness and gravitas, lightness and profundity, delicacy and strength.

Jean-Baptiste Greuze died in Paris in 1805 at the age of 80. He is perhaps best known for the pious, moralizing canvasses that appealed to the French bourgeoisie and upheld their values of family life and moral rectitude.

There was however another side to the artist, which expressed itself in paintings of attractive ladies, occasionally in modest "*déshabillée*" where a veiled voyeuristic intent cannot be denied.

However I find none of that in his "*Découverte de la féminité.*"

It is the tasteful, psychologically profound, portrait of a young woman looking in the mirror on the table in front of her, absorbed in the wonder of her femininity, the marvelous mystery of "*l'éternel féminin.*"

What Schumann had done in celebration of German womanhood, Fauré does for the quintessential qualities of its French counterpart: intelligence, nobility and yes, sheer physical loveliness as in the Greuze work. It seems to me that the composer and the painter of this portrait looked at the world in much the same way, with the eyes of the *anima* rather than the *animus*.

Only lately have I begun to realize that my difficulty playing Fauré had much to do with my own inner psychic constellation, dominated as it was by "animus."

Fauré has been a beacon calling, as from a distant land, for the integration of "anima" – my shadow – and "animus." As with any process of individuation, it has been a demanding journey that perhaps would have been less complete without this composer's encouraging, insistent invitation.

## **Gabriel Fauré**

### **Barcarolles**

From the time of Louis XIV to the present day when the “Great Waters” at Versailles attract thousands, water, in its myriad shapes and forms, has been a source of endless fascination, alike for aristocrats, composers, artists and *le citoyen ordinaire*.

Fauré’s thirteen Barcarolles share and further shape that tradition.

Characteristic of this form is the 6/8 time signature, suggestive of a gently rocking Venetian gondola (*barca*) that has given this musical genre its name. Fauré is fond of adding to that time signature, basically a two-beat, the ambiguity of a superimposed triple meter, creating thus the irregular movement of waves simultaneously contracting and expanding.

The first Barcarolle on this disk – the one that caused me so much discomfort – feels like a brisk wind propelling us to some enchanted island. The second one is quite removed from any noticeable water–imagery. It could have been modeled after the Greuze painting with which it shares the moving vision of another world, where time stands still and yet is moving, where the secrets of the human soul are offered to our silent contemplation, where art’s highest ideal is realized, the conquest of time by time (T.S. Eliot). The third one, in a minor, returns us to a meditation upon the water, tinged with sadness.

### **Nocturnes**

Fauré’s Nocturnes build on those created by Chopin half a century earlier and inhabit the same romantic domain. Do not expect any sleep-inducing night music the name might suggest. As in their Chopin prototype, they run the gamut of emotions from gentleness and tenderness to torrents of wild abandon. Chopin called the *sostenuto* pedal the soul of the piano and Fauré shares with him the ability, by its subtle and refined use, to enlarge the piano’s color palette so it could express the myriad of emotions the instrument became capable of. The outstanding hallmark of Fauré’s style, omnipresent in all of the composer’s work, and much in evidence here, is a melody so closely wedded to harmony that it becomes almost an academic exercise when we try to distinguish one from the other.

### **Theme and Variations**

Fauré’s Theme and Variations is loosely modeled after Schumann’s Symphonic Etudes. There are eleven variations, one shy of Schumann’s 12 (a subtle homage?), and they fall under the heading of the so-called

character, rather than ornamental, variation. This also means that detailed analysis is often needed to trace the variations to their thematic origin, which of course is always present.

I have already referred to Fauré in relation to his German counterpart. Contemporary credible accounts attest to Fauré as a foremost interpreter of Schumann's music and it is worth mentioning that Fauré as well as Debussy, were formidable pianists. (Schumann himself was not that fortunate: an early practice-induced injury to the fourth finger curtailed his career as a performer.)

Needless to say, Fauré's virtuoso capabilities as a pianist are fully on display in this, his major work for solo piano.

### **Claude Debussy**

I have not written notes for the works by Debussy on this CD. They are all "character" pieces and their semi-programmatic content is sufficiently alluded to by the titles the composer supplied. More detailed information is readily available on the Internet.

There is a possibly good case to be made for Arthur Rubinstein's *bon mot* when asked by a high society lady if he could explain to her what Beethoven's Sonata Appassionata was really about. Rubinstein answered that he would be happy to oblige, turned around to the piano and started playing the work again. "A rose is a rose is a rose." All that is required to understand any work of art is (learn to) look and listen with attentiveness. Admittedly it is an arduous task in this world of *Chronos* where we are, in T.S. Eliot's felicitous phrase, "distracted from distraction by distraction."

### **Willem Ibes**

A frequent performer in solo recitals and as soloist here and abroad, Ibes made his Carnegie Hall and Kennedy Center debuts in 1990. Commenting on that debut in Washington, D.C., Joseph McLellan of The Washington Post wrote he "could not help wondering why his arrival has been delayed so long." On the occasion of his repeat performances on the East Coast The Washington Post welcomed Ibes back as "an artist of the highest quality." Willem Ibes graduated from the Amsterdam Conservatory in 1952, with a degree for solo-performance under Willem Andriessen, and spent the next three years as a student of Marguerite Long in Paris.

In 1957 he began teaching at St. John's University in Minnesota. During the university's January term he often led groups of students in Zen study and meditation.

Mr. Ibes holds the equivalent of the Doctorate in Musical Arts and earned a degree in philosophy from St. John's University.

Since 1991 he has traveled almost every year, during the university's summer holidays, to China and Japan to teach, lecture and concertize.

The latest of his six previous CD's, "A Beethoven Triptych," was issued in May 2006 and contains the recording with in-depth analysis of three late Beethoven sonatas.

In November of 2008 Willem Ibes celebrated the 60th anniversary of his professional debut (as soloist in Grieg's piano concerto with the St. John's Symphony Orchestra in 1948) in a Gala concert, together with former students and friends.

### **Dedication**

I dedicate this CD to Davia Borde, née de Fer, whose stage and big-screen pseudonym, *de rigueur* for the daughter of a retired French army general and her mother the daughter of an Italian count, was Claude Arlan. I only met her when we were both in our early twenties, but I am certain that at age sixteen or thereabouts she would have been the ultimate "girl with the flaxen hair" portrayed by Debussy in the Prélude of that name. She can again be seen as Marie-Thérèse in the re-issue on DVD of "*Uniformes et grandes manoeuvres*" released in 1950, starring Fernandel. Since the moment we met, Davia became, and has remained for me, the embodiment of French femininity, intelligence and esprit. May she accept what is to follow with my "tender excuses."

### **Acknowledgment**

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