

Songs and Chamber Music of Reynaldo Hahn and Francis Poulenc

In 2013 I was asked to curate a series of three concerts at the Brighton Festival and I chose to focus on the chamber music and songs of Poulenc and Hahn.

“Les chansons instrumentales”

The series was partly a commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Poulenc, and partly a study in the contrasting musical styles, and wholly a celebration of French music.

It was a wonderful opportunity to explore the relatively unknown chamber music and songs by Reynaldo Hahn, a composer that I have always admired and whose compositional style I feel suits my artistic temperament. We had a wonderful time performing his songs, the epic piano quintet and charming piano quartet as well as some works for flute and piano, and flute, viola and piano.

The series was very popular with the audience, and we received a lot of feedback, especially to say how much the audience enjoyed the unusual pieces by Hahn.

Les Chanson Instrumentales:

Part 1:

Wednesday 15 May 2013

Partly a commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Poulenc, partly a study in contrasting musical styles, and wholly a celebration of French music, this series of chamber concerts reunites many of the artists who began their careers in our Lunchtime concerts. Curated by the pianist James Baillieu, who made a big impression in last year's Festival, it is a chance to explore the charm and originality of the French chamber music repertory.

The Irish soprano Ailish Tynan is noted for the breadth of her repertory, and is a noted exponent of French song. James Baillieu, winner of the accompanist category at the Wigmore Hall Song Competition and the Das Lied International Song Competition, is a fast-rising star among young accompanists. Together they open the celebration of Poulenc and Hahn in scintillating style.

Ailish Tynan (soprano) and James Baillieu

Poulenc

Airs chantés

Trois Poèmes de Louise de Vilmorin

La Courte Paille
Fiançailles pour rire

Hahn

Venezia – Chansons en dialecte Venetian
À Chloris
'En Sourdine' from Chanson Grises
Fêtes galantes

Part 2:

Friday 17th May 2013

The second concert in James Baillieu's exploration of the work of François Poulenc and Reynaldo Hahn turns from songs to orchestral chamber music, as James is joined by three other leading instrumentalists from the Young Classical Artists Trust.

Perhaps nostalgia is a theme of these chamber works. Poulenc's Cello Sonata draws on classical and Baroque styles; and while Hahn's fresh and unpretentious style remained true to 19th-century Romanticism, his music redolent of his Belle Epoque heyday right up until his death in 1947. While the Flute Sonata is one of Poulenc's most popular works, the rest of this programme provides an opportunity to explore the delightful but lesser-known repertory of early 20th-century chamber music.

James Baillieu piano
Philip Higham cello
Adam Newman Viola
Adam Walker flute
Bartosz Woroch violin

Poulenc

Cello Sonata
Flute Sonata

Hahn

Variations sur un thème de Mozart
Danse pour une déesse
L'enchanteur
Piano Quartet

Part 3:

In the final instalment of the Poulenc-Hahn concert series curated by James Baillieu, we go back to the very beginning of Poulenc's career. Poulenc destroyed his first efforts at composition; the Rapsodie nègre of 1917 is his earliest surviving work. We also hear his only violin sonata, whose melancholic tone reflects the circumstances of its composition in Nazi-occupied France. The selection of works by Hahn evokes a calmer world. Mostly written between 1901 and 1910, they conjure all the beauty and confidence of turn-of-the-century Paris.

Jonathan McGovern baritone
Bartosz Woroch violin
Adam Newman viola
Philip Higham cello
Adam Walker flute
Mark Simpson clarinet
James Baillieu piano

Poulenc

Rapsodie nègre
Violin Sonata
Clarinet Sonata
Songs

Hahn

Romanesque for flute, viola and piano
Piano Quintet in F sharp minor

REVIEWS:

Les chansons instrumentales: part 1: All Saints: Brighton Festival: Review

Posted On 18 May 2013 By : Eric Page

“Partly a commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Poulenc, partly a study in contrasting musical styles, and wholly a celebration of French music, this series of chamber concerts reunites many of the artists who began their careers in the Festival Lunchtime concerts. Curated by the pianist James Baillieu it was a chance to explore the charm and originality of the French chamber music repertory.

Tynan, the Irish soprano Ailish Tynan is noted for the breadth of her repertory, and is a celebrated exponent of French song. Together they open the celebration of Poulenc and Hahn in scintillating style.

James Baillieu playing anything is worth queuing for, when he’s linked up with such a charming and sophisticated soprano as Irish delight Ailish Tynan then we know we are in for a treat and this delightful duet of songs and chamber music from Poulenc and Hahn was just that, a real treat.

Baillieu accompanies like an over attentive lover, all hesitancy and enthusiasm in equal measure unpinning Tynan’s expressive voice with just the right amount of emotional support and tension echoing the sentiment in the lyric and her voice as it glows and rolls around the grand acoustic space of All Saints Church hove.

A well thought out placement of the stage ensued the sound quality was perfect and with the huge stained glass as a back drop this was as easy on the eye as on the ear.

Baillieu took turns with Tynan to talk about the songs and music and also a little about the men behind these lovely soft romantic and fun pieces. It was

nice to see young Mr James so chatty and secure as I've seen him a few times and he's always been quiet, he's becoming as accomplished on stage as he is on the keyboard, the delightfully witty and understated Ms Tynan lit the place up and teased out some depth with the warm clarity of her voice to the Hahn piece that their apparent frivolous nature might have hidden. She simply has great diction and is superb. They were also obviously having a great deal of fun this evening and that shone through in this warm and witty performance."

Les Chansons Instrumentales part 2, James Baillieu (piano) & Friends

Posted in Brighton Festival Reviews, Classical Reviews

"It's not often that we go to a concert for the accompanist but James Baillieu attracts such excellent friends. Philip Higham astonished and delighted us in equal measure with Poulenc's Cello Sonata, a work so difficult that most cellists avoid it. Then Bartosz Woroch charmed us with Hahn's exquisite 'Nocturne for Violin and Piano'.

Adam Walker stepped up for Poulenc's popular Flute Sonata, and after the interval they played Hahn's 'Variations sur un thème de Mozart'. Flute and piano seemed as one. To conclude, Adam Newman (viola) joined the other strings for Hahn's Piano Quartet No.3, a rarely performed jewel."

Les Chansons Instrumentales part 3, James Baillieu (piano) & Friends

Posted in Brighton Festival Reviews, Classical Reviews

"James Baillieu, one of the faces of this year's Festival, delivered another rich selection of extraordinary new talent, intriguing repertoire and very special musical collaborations. He led the ensemble, Jonathan McGovern (baritone), Bartosz Woroch, Viktor Stenhjem (violins), Adam Newman (viola), Philip Higham (cello), Adam Walker (flute) and Mark Simpson (clarinet), in Poulenc's exquisite 'Rapsodie nègre'.

There were delightful songs and sonatas, Hahn's entrancing 'Romanesque' and Piano Quintet. Some were high-spirited, others delicate and sensuous, with almost a competition for who could play the quietest.

If 'salon music' means fascinating harmonies, subtlety and unashamed beauty of sound, then just play on!"

Les Chansons Instrumentales, Morning After, James Baillieu with Andrew Comben

Posted in Brighton Festival Reviews, Classical Reviews, Latest 7

"...we were rewarded with details of how James Baillieu prepared this intriguing selection of songs and chamber. An accomplished soloist in his own right, he prefers to collaborate with others. This essentially French repertoire, once spitefully labelled 'salon music', is rich and varied enough to provide many hours of concert programmes. This concert series has certainly not

exhausted the supply. Poulenc and Hahn are only the first of many. Next year we may hope to hear Baillieu's selection of Polish chamber works and song."