

Kristin Lee

Debussy

Violin Sonata in G minor, L. 140

- I. **Allegro vivo**
- II. **Intermède: fantasque et léger**
- III. **Finale: très animé**

Fauré

Violin Sonata No. 1 in A Major, Op. 13

- I. **Allegro Molto**
- II. **Andante**
- III. **Scherzo: Allegro vivo**
- IV. **Finale: Allegro quasi presto**

Poulenc

Violin Sonata, FP 119

- I. **Allegro con fuoco**
- II. **Intermezzo**
- III. **Presto tragico**

Lili Bouanger

Nocturne

Ravel

Violin Sonata No. 2

- I. **Allegretto**
- II. **Blues. Moderato**
- III. **Perpetuum mobile. Allegro**

*This program will be performed without intermission
and conclude at approximately 9:00 PM*

Program Notes

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

A lyrical, melancholy opening belies the first movement's designation **Allegro vivo**, but its rhapsodic utterances in the first section erupt into

lively passages. The quiet second group of themes is especially memorable for a sultry violin melody complete with glissandos (slides) and syncopated chordal accompaniment; a brief folkish tune, alternating with a high violin melody with rippling piano accompaniment; and a slightly exotic tune with more glissandos. Following a return of opening materials, a frenzied buildup leads to a grand Gypsy-like improvisation over repeated chords and an abrupt end. The capricious opening of the second movement reminds us of the *commedia dell'arte* figure of the Harlequin/Pierrot, which runs like a thread through all three late Sonatas—the earlier Cello Sonata was in fact once called *Pierrot fâche avec la lune* (Pierrot angered at the moon). In the present movement, which is to be played “with fantasy and lightness,” the motives and textures change with seamless flexibility. In contrast to the many delightful quicksilver gestures, Debussy also offers a passage in which the haunting melody is doubled two octaves apart, accompanied all the while by insistent, repeated treble chords.

Emerging from an agitated piano opening, the violin’s first utterance in the Finale quotes the main theme of the first movement. Debussy colorfully noted the cyclic nature of this theme, saying that it “ultimately leaves the impression of an idea turning back upon itself, like a snake biting its own tail.” Improvisatory-sounding passages liven up the proceedings and again we hear a succession of variegated ideas, both fast and slow. One slow passage begins with a ringing low tone in the piano and a seductive violin melody again with glissandos. Several times his repeated-note accompaniment gives the impression of Spanish guitar figuration. A fascinating section near the end has the violin playing a high repeating pattern while the piano plays the melody in single notes, the whole interrupted twice with brilliant flourishes. A final wind-up produces wild trills in the violin, bold descending octaves in the piano, and one last impudent gesture.

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Gabriel Fauré was a lyricist who excelled in small, intimate forms: piano pieces, chamber music, works for small chorus, and songs. In the larger forms, he left a famous Requiem and two rarely heard operas, *Prométhée* and *Pénélope*. The sonata we hear this afternoon, composed in 1876 and lasting nearly half an hour, is one of his largest pieces.

Fauré himself said that his music exemplified “the eminently French qualities of taste, clarity and sense of proportion.” He hoped to

express “the taste for clear thought, purity of form and sobriety.” To these qualities, we might add meticulous workmanship, elegance, and refinement, for in all these respects his Violin Sonata Op. 13 certainly conforms.

“Schumannesque” is often used to describe the opening movement, not only for the music’s impassioned urgency, but for its sophisticated rhythmic layering, pervasive use of syncopation, and intricate mingling of the voices. The second movement, a barcarolle in D minor, offers some much-needed relief. The third movement is a scherzo in all but name: stylish, witty, brittle, epigrammatic, and crackling with electricity are just a few of the descriptions that have been applied to this undeniably appealing music. The finale is another sonata-form movement with an unorthodox sequence of keys (again the Schumann influence).

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Francis Poulenc belonged to a group of French composers, also including Milhaud and Honegger, who in 1920 were dubbed “The Six.” This group helped to turn French music away from stultifying formality, elevated pretense and empty pomp.

Poulenc’s most widely known chamber music involves wind instruments, not strings. He discarded two violin sonatas before he composed this one, which was a long time in reaching its final form. He originally wrote this sonata in 1942 and 1943, for the magnificent young French violinist Ginette Neveu, who lost her life in a plane crash at the age of thirty, in 1949. Poulenc decided to revise the sonata in that year, especially making many changes in the last movement. The sonata recalls the composer’s memory of the great Spanish poet Federico García Lorca (1899–1936), who was shot by the Fascist Falangists soon after the outbreak of civil war in his country.

This Romantic and melodic work is infused with tragedy that is expressed in the opening *Allegro con fuoco* in a musical language related to that of the best-known French sonata, one by César Franck. Poulenc headed his second movement, an *Intermezzo*, with a quotation from García Lorca, “The guitar makes dreams weep,” an allusion to the poet’s guitar arrangements of Spanish folk and popular songs. The third movement carries the uncommon indication, *Presto tragico*, calling for a very quick beat but a tragic mood. The sonata progresses lyrically, yet speedily, to its close.

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)

The nocturne is composed in the Impressionistic style. It is unclear whether a teacher influenced Lili to write this piece for either solo flute or violin; however, it seems to fit each instrument equally. The flute soars above the piano and brings a singing quality to the melody. The violin blends in more with the accompaniment, but still shines beautifully within its own melodic line. The piece was first written for flute or violin and piano but had been orchestrated in another version that included strings, plus harp and clarinet. (Impressionistic composers tended to favor the woodwinds and the harp to bring a lilting quality to their works.) Unfortunately, the orchestral transcription was never published and has been lost.

Lili Boulanger was greatly influenced by Impressionist Claude Debussy and German composer Richard Wagner. What is interesting is that within the nocturne are allusions to works by both composers. Lili took the first few notes of Debussy's *Prelude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, and inserted them into her own composition. She also took short phrases from Wagner's *Tristan* and employed them into her piece. The few familiar notes, however, work well within the nocturne, and make one sit up and listen, wondering if there are more allusions to come. Whether Lili wrote these phrases consciously or subconsciously is not known. What is known is that the nocturne is a brilliant composition by a young composer who had yet to fulfill her destiny.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Ravel's second sonata for violin and piano had a four-year gestation, possibly the longest of any of his works. The reason he had difficulty completing this piece is not entirely clear. During the same period, he completed an opera (*L'Enfant et les sortilèges*) and wrote another now wildly popular violin piece (*Tzigane*). At least he managed to get some pedagogical mileage out of his struggle with the sonata: he used the occasion of his throwing into a burning fire the manuscript of a completed movement, now lost forever, to demonstrate to one of his students that he could be as critical of his own efforts as he was of others'.

Ravel himself played the piano part at the first performance of the sonata in 1927, with violinist Georges Enesco. Enesco, like Ravel, was a former composition student of Faure. The venue was the Salle Erard, Paris, where many of Ravel's earlier compositions (not to

mention Liszt's) had first been publicly heard. Violinist Joseph Szigeti, who gave the American premiere of the sonata the following year, describes Ravel's piano playing as nonchalant, as if communicating in real-time was unimportant compared to the process of writing the notes on the page for posterity. (One witness to the American premiere recalls Szigeti's bow getting stuck between two violin strings in the third movement because he was unprepared for Ravel's quicker-than-rehearsal tempo, a story not recorded in Szigeti's memoirs.)

Ravel's biographer Roger Nichols describes the sonata as incorporating the tension between "diatonic/modal lyricism", as in the first movement, and "propulsive rhythms, where harmony and melody are in some cases secondary", as in the third. These outer movements, different though they are in character, share a unifying motif and are further connected by the middle movement, Blues, which is both lyrical and propulsive. This middle movement is the most adventurous of the three for its time. Jazz was still young and had only recently achieved some popularity in Paris, and Ravel had not yet been to America, wherein 1928 he would meet Gershwin and visit New Orleans. The sonata's integration of jazz into European high culture is now seen as one of the first vehicles on a two-way street. Many pioneering jazz artists credited Ravel, Debussy and others with being direct influences. "Classical" music and jazz have been infusing each other ever since.

Kristin Lee, violin

A recipient of the 2015 Avery Fisher Career Grant, as well as a top prizewinner of the 2012 Walter W. Naumberg Competition and the Astral Artists' 2010 National Auditions, Kristin Lee is a violinist of remarkable versatility and impeccable technique who enjoys a vibrant career as a soloist, recitalist, chamber musician and educator. She is the co-founder and artistic director of Emerald City Music in Seattle and was recently appointed to the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music faculty as Assistant Professor of Violin.

Lee has appeared as a soloist with leading orchestras including The Philadelphia Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, New Jersey Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Ural Philharmonic of Russia, Korean Broadcasting Symphony, Guiyang Symphony Orchestra of China, and Orquesta Sinfonica Nacional of Dominican Republic. She has performed on the world's finest concert stages, including Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, the Kennedy Center, Kimmel Center, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Ravinia Festival,

the Louvre Museum, the Phillips Collection, and Korea's Kumho Art Gallery. An accomplished chamber musician, Lee is a member of both the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and Camerata Pacifica in Santa Barbara, sitting as The Bernard Gondos Chair.

Born in Seoul, Lee began studying violin at age five and within one year won First Prize at the Korea Times Violin Competition. In 1995, she moved to the US to continue her studies under Sonja Foster and in 1997 entered The Juilliard School's Pre-College. In 2000, Lee was chosen to study with Itzhak Perlman. Lee holds a master's degree from The Juilliard School. For more information, visit www.violinistkristinlee.com.

Kwan Yi, piano

Pianist Kwan Yi has performed throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia in such venues as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Kimmel Center, Kennedy Center, Chicago Symphony Center, Mann Performing Arts Center, Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, Library of Congress, Metropolitan and Isabella Stewart Gardner Museums, Großer Sendesaal des Hessischen Rundfunks, Auditorium du Louvre, Suntory Hall, and Seoul Arts Center. Yi has appeared as a soloist with the Russian National Orchestra, Houston Symphony Orchestra, and the Brevard Festival Orchestra under the batons of Hans Graf, Julian Kuerti, and Mikhail Tartanikov. As a recitalist and masterclass instructor, he has completed residencies at the BGSU College of Musical Arts, MSU College of Music, and the UGA Hugh Hodgson School of Music. As a chamber musician, he has collaborated with Itzhak Perlman, Miriam Fried, and Roberto Diaz on national tours and was invited to perform at the Kronberg, Ravinia, Trondheim, and the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern festivals as well as Carnegie Hall Presents, Curtis Presents, CIM Mixon Hall Masters, and Peoples' Symphony Concert series. He has recorded for Hänssler and FHR labels with violinist Itamar Zorman.

A recipient of many honors and prizes, Yi's awards include Mieczyslaw Munz Prize, the National Federation of Music Clubs Award, and major prizes at the Fourth Sendai International Piano Competition. Yi is a graduate of the Curtis Institute, Juilliard School, and the Peabody Institute where he worked with Leon Fleisher and Robert McDonald. He currently serves as an assistant professor of piano at the ECU School of Music.