# Bertrand Chamayou – solo piano

## Friday 1 March 2024 1–2.05pm Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke’s

**Maurice Ravel** Jeux d’eau; Gaspard de la nuit

**Unsuk Chin** Piano Études Nos 4 to 6

**Maurice Ravel** Selections from ‘Miroirs’

**Bertrand Chamayou** piano

# Jeux d’eau

## Maurice Ravel

1901

6 minutes

As a student at the Paris Conservatoire, Maurice Ravel was seen as an impulsive, uncontainable hothead – his piano teacher observed that he acted ‘not always with full control’. He proved so unwilling to commit himself to the Conservatoire’s methods that he was dismissed from classes in 1895. Nonetheless, he returned two years later to study composition with Gabriel Fauré, who saw Ravel’s talent and encouraged him to develop his unique voice. This must have been quite a confidence boost for the young Ravel – this, his first major piano work, is dedicated ‘to my dear tutor Gabriel Fauré’.

Meaning something like ‘playing water’, Ravel said that Jeux d’eau was ‘inspired by the noise of water and by the musical sounds which make one hear the sprays of water’. When it premiered, its rippling arpeggiations and constantly shifting harmonies caused a scandal. Nobody had heard anything like it before. Fellow composer Camille Saint-Saëns denounced it as ‘total cacophony’, but history has agreed with the writer Léon-Paul Fargue, who heard it as ‘a revelation’.

This piece not only established the foundations of Ravel’s style, but it also helped give shape to one of the 20th century’s most important musical movements: Impressionism.

# Gaspard de la nuit

## Maurice Ravel

1908

22 minutes

1. Ondine
2. Le gibet
3. Scarbo

By 1908, Ravel still had a firebrand status and was regularly attacked by institutions and critics. But he had also gained an increasingly large group of supporters – not least the powerful patron Winnaretta Singer, Princesse de Polignac. Many of Ravel’s works were premiered in her salon, including ‘Ondine’, before the full suite was heard at the Salle Érard the next day.

Gaspard de la nuit was inspired by a collection of prose poems by Aloysius Bertrand with the same title – ‘Gaspard’ coming from the Persian meaning a guard of royal treasures. In ‘Ondine’ a water nymph sings to seduce passers-by, Ravel using similar techniques to Jeux d’eau to create her murky, liquid world. ‘Le gibet’ (The Gibbet) gives a view of a desert where ‘the corpse of the hanged one’ is visible on the horizon, ‘reddened by the setting sun’. All that can be heard is ‘the bell that tolls from the walls of a city.’

Finally, the suite ends with the night-fiend ‘Scarbo’, who ‘pirouettes’ through the room, cackling and grating his fingernails. Famous as one of the piano repertoire’s most challenging pieces, Ravel said of ‘Scarbo’ that he had intended ‘a caricature of romanticism. Perhaps it got the better of me.’

# Nos 4 to 6 from Six Piano Études

## Unsuk Chin

1995–2003

10 minutes

1. Scalen
2. Toccata
3. Grains

Today’s programme is defined by virtuosity. Each piece broke new ground in some way when it was written – but also owes something to pianist and composer Franz Liszt, whose challenging works and reputation for almost superhuman technique have made him synonymous with pianistic difficulty.

Jeux d’eau references Liszt’s Jeux d’eau à la Villa d’este. Of these études, Chin says that she was ‘very much attracted by the boundary-crossing, ‘transcendental’ (Liszt) aspect on which all important études are based: the idea that the pianist is prepared to push themselves to – or past – their limits.’

Each étude focuses on a different idea and technique. No 4 has a relatively strong orientation on the piano music of classical modernism’. In No 5 ‘a very dynamic forward motion dominates’, and the set closes with an étude titled ‘Grains’.

Chin explains that this refers to ‘elementary digital sonic particles’ in electro-acoustic music, ‘obtained by dissection of recorded sounds, and combined into new sounds by granular synthesis. In ‘Grains’ I attempted to simulate this concept on the keys of the piano.’

# Selections from ‘Miroirs’

## Maurice Ravel

1904–05

15 minutes

3. Une barque sur l’océan

4. Alborada del gracioso

These two pieces come from Miroirs, a fivemovement piano suite that Maurice Ravel composed in 1904–05. He dedicated each movement to a member of Les Apaches: a group of avant-garde artists of which he was a member. As with many of the piano works of Ravel’s near-contemporary Claude Debussy, Miroirs is intensely pictorial.

‘Une barque sur l’océan’, the third movement, depicts a boat sailing on a calm ocean. Cascading arpeggios portray the surging waves, while bell-like figuration in the piano’s upper register illustrates sunlight glinting on the waters. Ravel uses the whole range of the piano to give a sense of the sea’s vast expanse.

‘Alborado del gracioso’ is the suite’s penultimate movement. The Spanish title roughly translates as ‘jester’s morning song’. (Ravel observed that the Spanish jester is a more benign figure than in many other traditions.) The piece’s spirited outer sections evoke strumming guitars and the rhythms of the seguidilla (a moderately fast triple-time dance from southern Spain); its central episode is more lyrical and romantic.

Miroirs was given its premiere in 1906 by Ravel’s great friend and fellow-Apache Ricardo Viñes. Ravel subsequently made successful orchestral versions of both ‘Une barque sur l’océan’ (in 1906), and ‘Alborado del gracioso’ (in 1919).

# Bertrand Chamayou

## Piano

Bertrand Chamayou was born in Toulouse and studied at the Paris Conservatoire with Jean-François Heisser. He completed his training with Maria Curcio in London.

Chamayou performs regularly at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, the Lincoln Center and Wigmore Hall. He has appeared at festivals including New York’s Mostly Mozart Festival, the Lucerne Festival, Salzburg Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, Rheingau Musik Festival and Beethovenfest Bonn.

Engagements during 2024 include recitals both solo and with cellist Sol Gabetta, flautist Emmanuel Pahud and soprano Barbara Hannigan; Grieg’s Piano Concerto with the Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine under Emmanuel Villaume; Ravel’s Piano Concerto for the Left Hand with the Filarmonica della Scala under Philippe Jordan; Unsuk Chin’s Piano Concerto and Ravel’s Piano Concerto in G with the London Symphony Orchestra under François-Xavier Roth and Sir Antonio Pappano respectively and Scriabin’s Piano Concerto with the Sinfonieorchester Köln under Andris Poga in Cologne.

As a chamber musician, he has recently worked with Renaud and Gautier Capuçon, Quatuor Ébène, Antoine Tamestit and Sol Gabetta, and appeared in the Lincoln Center’s Great Performers Series and at Salzburg Easter Festival, Schleswig Holstein Musik Festival, the Berlin Philharmonie and the Hong Kong Arts Festival.

Chamayou’s many successful recordings include Naïve, a disc of music by César Franck, which was awarded several accolades. For his recording of Camille Saint-Saëns’ Piano Concertos Nos 2 and 5 he was awarded the Gramophone Recording of the Year Award 2019. The only artist to win France’s prestigious Victoires de la Musique on four occasions, he has an exclusive recording contract with Warner/Erato and was awarded the 2016 ECHO Klassik for his recording of Ravel’s complete works for solo piano.

# London Symphony Orchestra

## On Stage

**Leader**Name

**First Violins**Name  
Name