

LSO St Luke's

CHAMBER MUSIC

BBC
RADIO 3

SOLO PIANO
BERTRAND CHAMAYOU

Friday 12 April 2024 1-2.05pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

Erik Satie Gymnopédie No 1
John Cage All Sides of the Small Stone (for Erik Satie)
Erik Satie Gnessienne Nos 1 to 3
John Cage In a Landscape
Erik Satie Rêverie de l'enfance de Pantagruel
Veritables Preludes flasques (pour un chien)
Gymnopédie No 2
Le Bain de Mer
Gnessienne Nos 4 to 6
Gymnopédie No 3
Gnessienne No 7
John Cage Dream

Bertrand Chamayou piano

Recorded for future broadcast on **BBC Radio 3**

LSO

Today's Programme

In 1948, avant-garde composer John Cage organised a festival of Erik Satie's music. It consisted of 25 after-dinner concerts, some with accompanying talks. In one talk, Cage expounded on his thoughts about musical structure. 'With [Ludwig Van] Beethoven, the parts of a composition were defined by means of harmony', he explained. 'With Satie and [Anton] Webern they were defined by means of time lengths. The question of structure is so basic, and it is so important to be in agreement about it, that one might ask: Was Beethoven right or are Webern and Satie right? I answer immediately and unequivocally, Beethoven was in error, and his influence, which has been as extensive as it is lamentable, has been deadening to the art of music.'

At a time when Cage was experiencing a period of artistic crisis, disillusioned with not only his own music but that of his contemporaries and predecessors, it's unsurprising that Satie provided meaningful inspiration. Cage was grappling with questions about how – and if – music could communicate, and few composers explored this question more thoroughly than Satie. A notoriously perplexing character with an anti-establishment reputation in his own lifetime, Satie wrote *Furniture Music* that was intended to be heard but not listened to; humorous music to amuse and provoke; and the

ethereal, languorous *Gymnopédies* and *Gnossiennes* that have become ubiquitous on relaxation playlists, but were revolutionary in their day because of their rejection of traditional harmonic and formal conventions. Satie's France was a place of artistic experimentation, and he stood alongside composers Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Igor Stravinsky; artist Pablo Picasso; and writer Jean Cocteau as one of the figures pushing contemporary art in new directions.

Satie declined to explain the reasoning behind his titles *Gnossiennes* and *Gymnopédies*. Both, though, have their origins in Greek words for dances. The *gymnopodeia* was an annual Spartan festival which featured groups of naked youths dancing and singing in chorus, while the *gnossienne* perhaps stems from a ritual dance from Knossos, home of the Minotaur. The *Gymnopédies* came first, in 1888. Each is headed by a sparse performance instruction – the first, 'slow and painful', the second 'slow and sad', and the third 'slow and grave'. The following *Gnossiennes* were more experimental, largely dispensing with bar lines altogether to create the impression of free-flowing timelessness. The performance markings, too, became more abstract: in the third, the pianist is instructed to 'equip yourself with clairvoyance'.

The *Rêverie*, *Preludes*, and 'Le Bain de Mer' come from Satie's comic output. The first depicts the childhood of Pantagruel, a grotesque, over-eating giant from a satirical novel by François Rabelais. The ironically titled *Veritables Preludes flasques (pour un chien)* meanwhile, are three short and intricately constructed pieces: a severe reprimand to a misbehaving hound, followed by a period alone at home and then playtime. 'Le Bain de Mer' comes from *Sports et divertissements*, a series of 21 short pieces that combine music and text on the theme of sport and pastimes. In sea bathing, a man and woman have a vacuous conversation over the arpeggios representing waves— the kind of conversation for which Satie would later create Furniture Music, to be played in the background to spare people 'the trouble of paying attention to their own banal remarks.'

Cage wrote all three of the works here as responses to Satie. Like the *Gnossiennes* and *Gymnopédies*, 'All Sides of the Small Stone' seems to view a single point from multiple perspectives, and the piece's rhyming subtitle calls it a 'koan', meaning riddle or mystery. *In a Landscape* and *Dream* were both written in 1948, and build on the profoundly enigmatic atmosphere of Satie's earlier works.

PROGRAMME NOTE WRITER

Leah Broad is an award-winning music writer, historian, and broadcaster. Leah holds a DPhil from the University of Oxford and writes about 20th-century cultural history, particularly women in music. *Quartet*, Leah's award-winning first book, is a group biography of four women composers: Ethel Smyth, Rebecca Clarke, Dorothy Howell AND Doreen Carwithen.

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Please make sure that digital watch alarms and mobile phones are switched off during the performance.

Bertrand Chamayou

piano



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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-Élysées, 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 five 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.