


2–3 September  
Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House

# RAVEL, NIELSEN & STRAUSS



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COCKTAIL HOUR

Friday 2 September, 6pm  
Saturday 3 September, 6pm  
Utzon Room,  
Sydney Opera House

# RAVEL, NIELSEN & STRAUSS

WOODWIND REFLECTIONS

**GENEVIEVE LANG** presenter

**HARRY BENNETTS** violin

**KEES BOERSMA** double bass

**EMMA SHOLL** flute

**SHEFALI PRYOR** oboe

**FRANCESCO CELATA** clarinet

**TODD GIBSON-CORNISH** bassoon

**EUAN HARVEY** horn

## ESTIMATED DURATIONS

17 minutes, 24 minutes,  
8 minutes

The concert will conclude  
at approximately 7pm.

## COVER IMAGE

Photo by Tom Niall

## MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

arr. Mason Jones

*Le Tombeau de Couperin*

i. *Prélude*

ii. *Fugue*

iii. *Menuet, allegro moderato*

iv. *Rigaudon, assez vif*

## CARL NIELSEN (1865–1931)

Wind Quintet, Op.43

i. *Allegro ben moderato*

ii. *Menuet*

iii. *Praeludium* –

iv. *Tema con variazioni*

## RICHARD STRAUSS (1864–1949)

arr. Franz Hasenöhr (1885–1970)

*Till Eulenspiegel - einmal anders!*

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# WELCOME

As the Orchestra's Premier Partner, we welcome you to tonight's performance of Ravel, Nielsen & Strauss.

Tonight's Cocktail Hour performance features three audience favourites up close and personal in the glittering Utzon Room. Originally written for solo piano, by adding multiple instruments to Ravel's beautiful *Le Tombeau de Couperin* it acquires new depth and colour. Carl Nielsen's Wind Quintet is a celebration of friendship, each of the five parts written to suit the personalities of the musicians who premiered it. And Richard Strauss's cheeky depiction of Till, a prankster from German folklore, is infused with ingenuity and wit.

Chamber music is the ultimate in collaboration and partnership, requiring musicians to be utterly in sync with each other. In the same way, Credit Suisse continues to work in partnership with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, striving to bring music to more than 2,000 young students in deserving schools by supporting emerging young professional musicians.

We are proud to support this world-class Orchestra and wish you a very enjoyable evening.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RG', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the bottom.

**Richard Gibb**

Chief Executive Officer  
Credit Suisse Australia

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

From the late 17th century wind ensembles had provided the backdrop for royal and military ceremonies, and became a favoured entertainment in aristocratic gatherings, especially towards the end of the 18th. Before his escape to Vienna, Mozart had written numerous divertimentos, serenades and cassations for just such events. Such works, following on from the precedent of the Baroque suite as cultivated by Bach and others, tending to consist of a string of dance-forms.

Maurice Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin* was begun in 1914, the year that World War I broke out, as a 'French Suite' for piano – a title that of course recalls Bach's six keyboard works of that name, but which also nailed Ravel's patriotic colours to the mast. However, when it appeared in 1917 its new title proclaimed it as a memorial to the great French Baroque composer François Couperin (1668–1733) who became *organiste du roi* at the court of France's 'Sun King' Louis XIV.

Much of Ravel's music consists of exquisite simulacra of earlier styles and works (he once asked a friend, 'Doesn't it ever occur to people that I can be "artificial" by nature?') and here, unsurprisingly, replicates and elaborates a series of Baroque dances with two more abstract additions, a fugue and a toccata. But during the work's gestation Ravel served as a truck driver near the battlefield at Verdun, and each movement of the final piece is dedicated to a friend who died defending France and its culture.

In certain keyboard works, Couperin indicated how they might be scored up for ensemble; in the same spirit, Ravel orchestrated four of the six movements in an orchestral suite shortly after the first performance in 1919. Mason Jones' 1970 arrangement of four movements for winds is also justly popular.



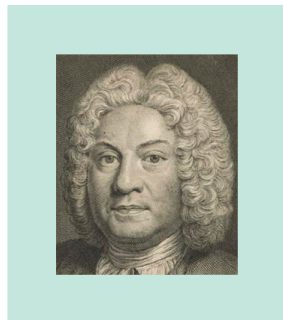
Ravel at the piano

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

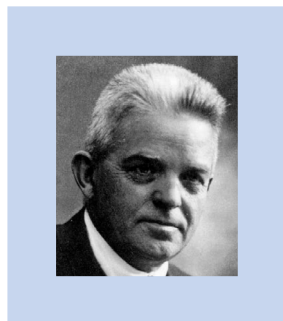
The *Prélude* gives the impression of an improvisatory flourish, which Jones captures by passing the sinuous opening arabesques between oboe and clarinet. The slower-moving chords are given an unusual timbre by placing the horn above the flute. The *Fugue*, which follows, is not often heard in arrangements of the suite. Its theme, made up of terse rhythmically syncopated motifs, offers Ravel an opportunity for the kind of mechanised music that he loved (Stravinsky called him the 'Swiss watchmaker of music'. This tensile material provides contrast with more steady rhythm and limpid modal harmony of the *Menuet*. A contrasting minor key section in that movement is marked *musette*, a dance whose name refers to the small bagpipe that traditionally accompanied it; this translates especially well into wind music. The folksong-influenced *Rigaudon*, in a fast 2/4 time, provides an exciting finish, but not before a digression into some more introspective music.

The wind ensembles for which Mozart wrote fell out of favour at the turn of the 19th century as the string quartet became the preferred chamber line-up. The now familiar wind quintet really only established itself after 1810, largely thanks to the work of Bohemian composer Anton Reicha, but has been much cultivated since, and especially in the 20th century.

Denmark's greatest composer, Carl Nielsen was born on the island of Funen in 1865. Nielsen's family was extremely poor, but his mother introduced him to folk-song which she sang 'as if she were longing for something far away beyond the farthest trees of the land'. His father played violin and cornet in a local amateur band. Carl soon joined the band, initially as a violinist. Soon after, he joined a military band in Odense, playing signal horn and trombone, where he came to the notice of local authorities who arranged for him to study at the Copenhagen Conservatorium.



François Couperin



Carl Nielsen

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

Nielsen was not a brilliant or disciplined student but did become interested in philosophy, art and language – all elements which had a profound influence on his music.

Three years after graduating he joined the Royal Chapel, the orchestra of the Royal Theatre, as a second violinist. He held this post for many years, but during that time was also awarded a scholarship which enabled him to travel to a number of European cities. His reputation as a composer grew steadily during the 1890s, so that in 1901 he was granted a government annuity to supplement his income as an orchestral player, and by 1903 he also received a retainer from his publisher.

Nielsen's Wind Quintet was composed in 1922 for the Copenhagen Wind Quintet (Nielsen, incidentally, planned concertos for each of the Copenhagen players, but only lived to complete the Flute and Clarinet Concertos.)

The piece, throughout its first two movements, is simply and delightfully an object lesson in how to write for an ensemble of five highly individual musical characters. In the first movement he gives each instrument its due prominence in a fleeting series of solos and duets, finding ways to blend the very different instrumental colours. The Menuet, with its initial stepwise motif and grace-notes, bears a passing resemblance to the theme of Ravel's in *Le Tombeau de Couperin*.

The third movement begins in a much less genial fashion, with a Praeludium that features much more dissonant harmony and darker textures, as well as florid solo cadenzas. Without a break, the ensemble announces a hymnal theme in 3/4 upon which Nielsen constructs 11 frequently amusing variations, character pieces that often strip the ensemble down to its constituent parts, before a coda marked *Andantino festivo* – the hymnal theme now in 4/4.



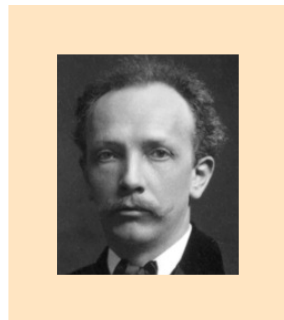
# ABOUT THE MUSIC

Richard Strauss's 15-minute tone-poem, *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, Op.28, appeared in 1895. It was based on the exploits of Till Eulenspiegel, a (probably) legendary practical joker of the 14th century, whose surname can be translated 'owl mirror' (or 'Owlglass') or, in less high German, something rather more scatological. Strauss had planned to write an opera on the subject of Till's adventures, but had had a disappointment with his early opera *Guntram*; moreover the episodes of Till's life proved difficult to discipline into a scenario, so instead used the stories the basis for his symphonic poem.

Strauss provided some indications of events in the orchestral score: Till has two themes stated at the outset, and the intervening episodes suggest moments like his causing chaos on horseback; disguising himself as a priest; getting the better of supposedly learned scholars; falling in love; and finally being hanged (that was Strauss's decision – Till is generally thought to have died in his bed.)

Till's adventures as apprentice, joker or wit, and his constant defiance of death, provide a reservoir of moods on which Strauss draws, or as he put it, an 'expansion of rondo form through poetic content'. Debussy hated it, or affected to, calling the piece a 'parade of clowns' and an 'extravagant orgy', but in fact, despite its huge orchestra (the woodwind section alone requires four of each instrument!) and sometimes overwhelming effects, it is a finely crafted piece. For that reason its translation by Franz Hasenöhl into a (shorter) chamber work in 1954 is remarkably successful, conveying the madcap spirit of Strauss's work. The five instruments – Till's signature horn, clarinet, bassoon, violin and double bass – are skilfully blended: horn and bassoon suggests a pair of horns, clarinet and horn a pair of clarinets and so on. There is a constantly fascinating variety of colours and textures that keep the musicians, and audience, on their toes.

Gordon Kerry (c) 2022



Richard Strauss



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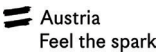
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