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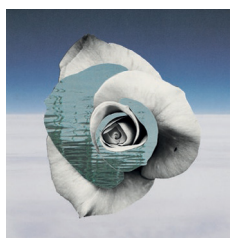
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CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

ARR. OGUEY

Rhapsodie

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

ARR. OGUEY & CONSTABLE

Concerto in D major, BWV 1053R

i. *Allegro*

ii. *Siciliano*

iii. *Allegro*

STEVE REICH (born 1936)

Mallet Quartet

ESTIMATED DURATION

Debussy - 10 minutes

Bach - 20 minutes

Reich - 15 minutes

The concert will run for
approximately 45 minutes

COVER IMAGE

By Rebecca Shaw

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Photo by Pierre Toussaint

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ABOUT THE MUSIC

Arrangement is having a moment just now as creative arranging extends the range and life of many pieces. Some musical works resist it, being too intimately conceived with specific instrumental sound in mind, while in other cases, such as chamber versions of Mahler symphonies made by the likes of Arnold Schoenberg, enhance details that might be lost in the surf of a full orchestral performance. And the 19th century, of course, saw many orchestral works presented, in the absence of recording and broadcasts, in versions for piano.

Some composers effectively finalized certain pieces by arranging and rearranging – Brahms' Piano Quintet, Op.34, began life as a string quintet, and was then revised as a piano duo before Brahms hit on the right sound. And in the Baroque period, composers such as JS Bach freely arranged and rearranged their own (and often other people's) music, to suit circumstances and available performers.

We hear two arrangements tonight, beginning with Debussy's Rhapsodie originally for saxophone and orchestra, which as David Garrett explains, certainly did not emerge fully-formed from the composer's head, and so might be considered fair game for an arranger of Alexandre Oguey's skill.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)

ARR. OGUEY

Rhapsodie

In its final form, Debussy's *Rhapsodie* is one of the few masterpieces for saxophone and orchestra. It is important to say this, since almost everything said about it by the composer is prejudicial to the piece, while being too amusing not to be repeated. The commission came to Debussy from a French-born American lady, Mrs. Elise (or Eliza) Hall, wife of a Boston surgeon, and president of the Boston Orchestral Club. She had been advised to take up a musical instrument to help with an asthmatic complaint, and for some reason her choice fell on the alto saxophone. Debussy took the money, spent it, then dithered, for years. On June 8, 1903, Debussy wrote to his friend André Messager:

The Americans are proverbially tenacious. The saxophone lady landed in Paris... and is inquiring about her piece. Of course I assured her that, with the exception of Rameses II, it is the only subject that occupies my thoughts. All the same, I have to set to work on it. So here I am, searching desperately for novel combinations calculated to show off this aquatic instrument.

After seeing Mrs. Hall in 1904 play some of the new repertoire she had commissioned, Debussy thought it ridiculous to see a lady in a pink frock playing on such an ungainly instrument. He admitted to being not very well acquainted with the saxophone, and wondered 'whether it indulges in romantic tendencies like the clarinet?'

In 1911 Debussy set to work on the instrumentation, which he only got to the stage of a rough draft. When the draft was presented to Mrs. Hall, it was found that her asthma prevented her from sustaining the long phrases, and Debussy had to redistribute the saxophone's music, putting chunks of it into the piano (or orchestra) part.



Debussy in the early 1900s

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Debussy never finished the job, and after his death the composer Jean Roger-Ducasse filled in some bridge passages and completed the orchestration, for a first performance with orchestra by the saxophonist Louis Adolphe Mayeur, and publication in 1919.

Uncertainty over the title gives clues to the character of the music. Originally it was to have been 'Rhapsodie Orientale', later 'Rhapsodie Mauresque' (Moorish Rhapsody). The rhythms, such as that of the habanera, indicate that Debussy was thinking of the Moorish aspects of Spanish culture (between 1905 and 1912 he was also composing *Ibéria*). The *Rhapsodie* begins in a languid nocturnal atmosphere, and the soloist begins to rhapsodise. A Spanish-oriental dance begins, but the sultry opening mood returns, until the music stirs by gradual degrees into more sustained dance measures, the solo instrument outlining a series of different melodic ideas, developed and amplified by the orchestra. Finally a degree of energetic forward motion is achieved, but many of the main phrases remain arabesques, many of them presumably originally intended for the soloist, who reappears in a brief, effective concluding flourish.

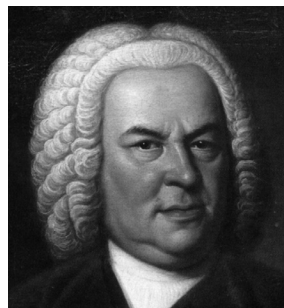
ABOUT THE MUSIC

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750) **ARR. OGUEY & CONSTABLE** **Concerto in D major, BWV 1053R**

Alexandre Oguey and Timothy Constable teamed up to make this arrangement of Bach's Concerto, BWV 1053, where the cor anglais take the lead, occasionally in partnership with the vibraphone, which also enhances the 'orchestral' parts and sometimes takes on a continuo role. As Justine Bashford explains, this piece has already had a couple of incarnations:

Johann Sebastian Bach moved to Leipzig in 1723, to take on the important role of Kantor at the prestigious Thomasschule, where one of his principal duties was the musical training of the students. He was responsible also for the music of the town's four main churches. For the first few years there, Bach concentrated on the composition of religious music, producing almost a cantata a week. These would be performed in the Sunday church services, by the boys he was teaching at the school.

In 1729, Bach was appointed director of Leipzig's Collegium Musicum. This organisation had been founded by his friend and contemporary Telemann in 1702, and was a voluntary association of professional musicians and university students who met in a coffeehouse on at least a weekly basis to give public concerts. It is unknown whether Bach received extra income from this new position, which must have stretched him on top of all his other duties, but he certainly gained some artistic freedom, and the opportunity to work with fine musicians – and to exercise his skills on secular music for a change. Apart from the regular concerts, the group gave *extraordinaire* concerts on special occasions, engaging visiting artists for such occasions and charging admission. Not all the music performed was Bach's – other Baroque composers such as Handel, Vivaldi, Telemann and Albinoni certainly featured.



JS Bach, portrait by Hausmann, 1748 version

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Unfortunately, much of the orchestral music that Bach wrote for the collegium in Leipzig is lost. Certainly, the Oboe Concerto in F, BWV1053 has not survived in the form in which Bach wrote it. Instead, it has come to us as a harpsichord concerto, dating from around 1738-39. Bach was well known for recycling his own material, and indeed, reworking the music of other composers. This oboe concerto has been reconstructed from the later version, and probably closely resembles the oboe concerto which would have been played in Gottfried Zimmermann's coffeehouse. It seems likely that there was at least one excellent oboe player in Leipzig working with Bach, for he wrote fine obbligato parts for the instrument in his sacred music, and undoubtedly there were other concertos.

The concerto begins with a joyous *Allegro* movement in ternary form, opened by the strings. The soloist enters in clear command, but duets with the violins throughout. Though the central section becomes more hesitant and contemplative, the music returns to its cheerful beginning, the soloist running through scale passages in happy conversation with the violins.

The violins again begin the lilting, pensive *Siciliano*. Like Vivaldi and Telemann, Bach was a master of the slow movement. Tragedy was never far away. Half of his children died in infancy. The joy followed by sorrow of Bach's music echoes his life, and the composer knew how to make full use of the instrument's ability to express pathos.

In true Baroque style, though, the concerto finishes on a positive note – another *Allegro* filled with glorious scale passages as the soloist sails over the strings and basso continuo through some passages of pure virtuosity towards the end, though this time the violins have the final say.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

STEVE REICH (born 1936)

Mallet Quartet

Reich once referred to the training he received at the Juilliard School in New York, and at Mills College in Oakland, California, as 'totalitarian' and experienced dissident feelings aroused, in part, by jazz.

Reich also developed an interest in African drumming in the early 1960s, and experienced Terry Riley's epoch-making work of 1964, *In C*. These three influences provided an antidote, in Reich's mind, to the orthodoxy of serialism and the European avant-garde.

In 1965 he produced a breakthrough piece, *It's Gonna Rain* by recording a sidewalk preacher, Brother Walter, whose 'it's gonna rain!' was a warning of the coming End Times. By making a pair of tape loops out of that phrase and playing them on two machines Reich created a piece that established two hallmarks of his subsequent work: the use of short, repeated motifs to create a kind of active stasis, and the use of 'phasing' – the less predictable effect when the two tapes inevitably got 'out of time' with each other.

In works such as *Clapping Music*, *Vermont Counterpoint* and the 2009 Mallet Quartet that we hear this evening, Reich creates a rich polyphony out of restricted timbral possibilities, partly through the 'substitution of notes for rests'. As strongly profiled rhythmic patterns are 'filled in', melodic motifs emerge that form the basis for canonic treatment.



Steve Reich performing
Clapping Music.
Photo by Ian Oliver

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The composer writes:

Mallet Quartet (2009) is scored for two vibraphones and two five octave marimbas. I had never written for five octave marimbas extending down to cello C. On the one hand I was delighted to have the possibility of a low bass and on the other hand apprehensive since just slightly too hard a mallet that low can produce noise instead of pitch. Eventually, after a bit of experimentation, this was well worked out.

The piece is in three movements, fast, slow, fast. In the two outer fast movements the marimbas set the harmonic background which remains rather static compared to recent pieces of mine like Double Sextet (2007). The marimbas interlock in canon, also a procedure I have used in many other works. The vibes present the melodic material first solo and then in canon. However, in the central slow movement the texture changes into a thinner more transparent one with very spare use of notes, particularly in the marimbas. I was originally concerned this movement might just be 'too thin', but I think it ends up being the most striking, and certainly the least expected, of the piece.

Mallet Quartet is about 15 minutes in duration. It was co-commissioned by the Amadinda Quartet in Budapest, on the occasion of its 25th Anniversary, Nexus in Toronto, So Percussion in New York, Synergy Percussion in Australia, and Soundstreams in Canada. The world premiere was given by the Amadinda Quartet in Béla Bartók National Concert Hall on 6 December 2009. The American premiere was given by So Percussion at Stanford University Lively Arts in California on 9 January 2010.

Notes © Gordon Kerry, David Garrett, Justine Bashford, Steve Reich.



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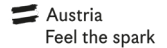
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