Nocturne, et lumineux

Eline Hensels & Daniël Kramer

Nocturne, et lumineux

Eline Hensels cello
Daniël Kramer piano

Charles Koechlin

Cello Sonata, Op. 66

1	Très modéré, et d'allure bien tranquille	3:58
2	Andante quasi adagio / Très calme	3:39
3	Final. Allegro non troppo	6:15

Nadia Boulanger

Trois pièces

4	Modéré	2:53
5	Sans vitesse et à l'aise	1:46
6	Vite et nerveusement rythmé	2:37

Leoš Janáček

Pohádka

7	Con moto	5:08
8	Con moto	4:18
9	Allegro	2:46

Henriëtte Bosmans

10	**Nuit calme**	6:50

Francis Poulenc

Cello Sonata, FP 143

11	Allegro – Tempo di Marcia	5:53
12	Cavatine	6:30
13	Ballabile	3:35
14	Finale	6:44

Charles Koechlin (1867 - 1950)

Although Charles Koechlin led an — one could state — almost 'conventional' life as a composer, studying at the Paris Conservatoire with Massenet and Fauré and subsequently earning his money as a teacher and composer, his interests stretched long ways beyond just composing. He had a wide range of interests, which can also be assumed to have affected his compositional style. These interests, for instance, included French folksong, Bach chorales, the "Jungle Book", photography, and most noticeably, astronomy, with the young Koechlin having had aspirations of becoming an astrologist.

In his enormous output of orchestral works, chamber music, and vocal music, this analytical approach is very often present, which leads to a highly personal and immediately recognisable musical style. In the *Cello Sonata*, which was written in 1917 and premiered in 1924, we can almost imagine ourselves under a heaven of stars, with melodies that effortlessly seem to flow in and out of the musical landscape present, and underlying patterns sometimes being very hard to decipher, if at all present. In all of this, rhythm and time signature seem to be floating freely in time and space, especially in the first two movements, of which the first movement is somewhat brighter in tone than the second movement, the latter featuring some rather dark colours, aided by the performance indication "*en somme*" (sleeping). In the third movement, some more agitation seems to occur, which however seems to come along with a slightly brighter the mood, especially considering the movement preceding it. After a number of climaxes that however never get overwhelming or emotionally intense, the movement, and with it the sonata, ends in a calm and soothing manner.

Nadia Boulanger (1887 - 1979)

Nadia Boulanger was born into a musical family: both her father Ernest as well as her younger sister Lili were composers, although the latter unfortunately merely

lived up to an age of 24. Although one could state that the compositional output of Nadia Boulanger is not extremely large (partially due to her strong doubts about her abilities as a composer), she has played a pivotal role in the 20th century music history, becoming one of the most renowned composition teachers of her time, with composers such as Copland, Piazzolla, Glass, Milhaud, and Bacewicz studying with her. However, especially from her earlier years, a handful of compositions exists, of which the *Trois pièces* feature on this album. These comprise three short pieces which originally were written for organ in 1911, but transcribed for cello and piano in 1914.

The first movement starts with a delicate accompaniment in the piano, with a soaring and seemingly endless melody in the cello. In the middle section, the accompaniment grows more massive and the mood becomes more stormy, after which the beginning returns and the movement ends in a gentle and calm way. The short second movement uses a rather simple and short melody, which is repeated canonically in the piano (if you listen closely to the cello melody, you will hear it just a beat later in the upper voice of the piano!) throughout the movement. The third movement is much more capricious in character than the preceding two, featuring a vigorous melody and suitably bearing the performance indication *Vite et nerveusement* (quick and nervous). The middle section is slightly calmer with elegantly arpeggiated chords in the piano and a lingering melody in the cello, after which the mood from the beginning returns, closing off the set of three pieces in an energic way.

Leoš Janáček (1854 - 1928)

If you listen to Janáček's music, it could occasionally come across as being a bit restless or fragmentary. Perhaps listening to it from a speech perspective might make a difference: Janáček was a master at 'capturing' features of the Czech language in music, such as rhythm and pitch. This can be assumed to have helped him greatly in writing his operas (such as *Jenůfa*, in which this style is clearly

noticeable for the first time), all of which are written in Czech, but this way of writing also stands out in his orchestral and chamber music works. And just as some composers jot down melodies in their notebooks when away from home, Janáček regularly wrote down snippets of speech that inspired him.

His main activities during his lifetime did however not only include speech notation or composition: he was the founder and (first) director of the Organ School (Varhanická škola) in Brno, which continued as a conservatory Czechoslovak independence in 1919, and still exists today. His students described him as very strict, stubborn, mistrustful, and with a noticably restless 'staccato'-like speech, yet very affectionate towards the ones close to his heart.

Janáček had a lifelong fascination with Russian culture, which made him visit Russia as often as he could, found a 'Russian Circle' in Brno and read a lot of Russian literature (in the original language). This interest was reflected in a large number of works, such as his first string quartet based on a book by Tolstoy, his last opera loosely based on Dostoyevsky, and the cello and piano work Pohádka, which is loosely based on the epic work *The Tale of Tsar Berendyey*, by the Russian author Vasily Zhukovsky.

Although Janáček left little clues as to which parts of the story are exactly depicted in music, a popular interpretation is that it depicts the part of the Zhukovsky poem describing the budding love between Prince Ivan, who promised his soul to King Kashchei of the Underworld, and Princess Maria, who is the daughter of the latter. Following this interpretation, the cello would represent Ivan and the piano Maria. The first movement depicts their first meeting on the shores of an enchanted lake at which they immediately fall in love, although they do have to flee for Maria's father Kashchei discovering their forbidden love. In the subsequent movement, both Ivan and Maria get enchanted to respectively forget about Maria's existence, and to turn into a blue flower. After a good magician frees them of both of their spells, they happily reunite and live happily ever after, which we hear depicted in the third movement.

Henriëtte Bosmans (1895 - 1952)

Born the daughter of the principal cellist of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and a piano teacher, Henriëtte Bosmans rapidly took over the enthusiasm for music that must have pervaded in her house, with her first performance as a pianist in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam taking place at the age of 17.

From around this age, she also started composing, in a rather impressionistic style that owes a great deal to Debussy. She however enrichened it with a very original and distinct harmonic idiom, in which some more modernistic influences such as polytonality would be woven later on in her life.

In 1926, she composed the 'Impressions' for cello and piano, possibly to play together with the cellist Frieda Belinfante, who was her partner at that time and with whom she also lived together. Its second movement, featured on this album, is called *Nuit calme* (Calm night). The piece is in ternary form, with long stretched cello lines under twinkling and sometimes bell-like sounds in the piano, in which with some phantasy we can indeed feel a sense of calm and timelessness, under the night sky. In the middle section, some more agitated music comes into play, with restless syncopated rhythms in the piano, but eventually the calm beginning is reinstated, leading to an ending that is equally peaceful to the beginning.

Francis Poulenc (1899 - 1963)

In 1950, music critic Claude Rostand described the French composer Francis Poulenc as "moitié moine, moitié voyou" ("half monk, half guttersnipe"). And indeed, if we listen to Poulenc's music, it often seems to be a mixture of light-hearted music with occasionally some rather cheeky elements, juxtaposed with more serious, possibly even religious, contemplations. Sometimes, these two seem to stand in shear contrast with each other, and at other moments, they are intertwined in such a masterful way that one could easily be put on the 'wrong' emotional track. The musical style is — in a way that could bring composers such as Mozart or Rossini

to mind — always crystal clear and easy to understand at a first listen, with crisp melodies, subtle harmonies that always firmly keep a strong tonal base, and it reveals a thorough understanding of tension and relief.

The *Cello Sonata* was started by Poulenc in 1940. However, due to World War Two constraints, it was only completed in 1948. The sonata was dedicated to the cellist Pierre Fournier, who also played in the premiere performance of the piece, with Poulenc on piano.

The sonata is generally characterised by an upbeat tone, also bringing to mind the neoclassicism that was regularly used by Poulenc's fellow Les Six composers, such as Darius Milhaud. Generally, the mood is light-hearted, for instance in the march-like first movement, in which short phrases seem to be effortlessly bounced back and forth between cello and piano, in a light and playful manner. The modulations between different keys seem to take place almost equally effortlessly.

A stark contrast to this bright mood, however, is provided in the second movement, '*Cavatine*', which starts off with a chorale-like melody in the piano. This melody returns in various shapes throughout the movement, which possesses a profound religious and almost elegiac character, with the cello sometimes embellishing the chorale melody and sometimes continuing the train of thoughts started by the piano. After this movement, as if gone by unnoticed, a light-hearted mood that is somewhat similar in nature to the first movement pervades in the third movement, *Ballabile* (which could be translated as 'Danceable'), in which again numerous cheerful melodies pass by. All sorrowful feelings released in the second movement seem far away again.

The fourth movement starts off with a very grand and massive statement. This comes rather as a surprise, especially given the rather transparent nature of the writing in the preceding movements. There however also seems to be a somewhat dark undertone to this beginning. This beginning is quickly followed by a new whirlwind of enthusiasm, in which the new ideas almost recklessly seem to follow each other, some of which even bear resemblances to music styles like French

vaudeville music. At the very end of the movement, the grand gesture from the beginning is stated again, and before we know it, the movement is over, and with it the sonata.

The direct juxtaposition of these dark and sorrowful as well as cheerful but somewhat careless elements does leave us with some questions about Poulenc's intentions. Were the cheerful elements meant cynically and is the message of the sonata hidden in the sorrowful pages? Or the other way around? And could the influences of World War II, perhaps unnoticeably, have seeped through the notes? Listen carefully to the sonata, and decide for yourself...

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Brendon Heinst

founder & senior recording and mastering engineer

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Microphone preamplifiers
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