

Total performance time: approximately 60', with no interval

## Raymond Brien & Rob Hao

**Raymond Brien** clarinet

**Rob Hao** piano

### **Lili Boulanger** (1893–1918)

Three songs from *Clairières dans le ciel* (1914), arr. Brien

- i. Elle était descendue au bas  
de la prairie* 2'
- ii. Elle est gravement gaie* 2'
- iii. Parfois, je suis triste* 4'

### **Herbert Howells** (1892–1983)

Clarinet Sonata (1946) 21'

- i. Con moto dolce e con tenerezza*
- ii. Allegro ritmico con brio*

**Robert Schumann** (1810–1856), arr. Brien  
Drei Romanzen, Op.94 (1849) 12'

- i. Nicht schnell*
- ii. Einfach, innig*
- iii. Nicht schnell*

**Claude Debussy** (1862–1918)  
Première rhapsodie (1909–10) 9'

**Raymond Brien** and **Rob Hao** are Britten Pears Young Artists for 2022–23.

Last year they both participated in a masterclass with Nicholas Daniel as part of the 2022 Aldeburgh Festival, and in the Composition and Performance course at Snape Maltings in November.

The Brien–Hao clarinet and piano duo was formed at the beginning of 2022. Both performers are award-winning soloists and came together originally as Britten Pears Young Artists. The duo continually pushes for developing new and varied programmes that include new music, standard repertoire and re-imaginings of art song. Praised for their stimulating duoship, Raymond and Rob perform recitals regularly throughout the UK and are due to release their first disk in 2024. Raymond and Rob are also composers.

### **Boulanger: Songs from *Clairières dans le ciel***

Lili Boulanger was born into an unusually musical family. Her father taught composition at the Paris Conservatoire and her mother, a Russian princess, was one of his students. Their elder daughter, Nadia, became one of the 20th-century's most influential teachers but it was Lili who was the more talented composer. She was just two when Fauré discovered she had perfect pitch: at five, she was observing classes at the Conservatoire and in 1913, still in her teens, she became the first female winner of the prestigious Prix de Rome. Her song-cycle *Clairières dans le Ciel* ('clearings in the heavens') appeared the following year, to verses by her contemporary, Francis Jammes. They feature a young girl – tall, beautiful but with an underlying sadness – who has mysteriously vanished from the poet's life. In the first one, she appears in a low-lying meadow, laughing among the flowers. Next, the poet contemplates her gentle solemnity and in the third song comes sorrowful acceptance: she has disappeared for ever, leaving only fleeting memories.

### **Howells: Sonata**

Howells's career encompassed two world wars. He produced his first mature work as a student in 1916 but this sonata appeared 30 years later, in the aftermath of World War II. It was a brave move for Howells: four years earlier, his oboe sonata had been firmly rejected by its dedicatee, Leon Goossens, who had reservations both about its structure and about Howells's knowledge of the instrument's capabilities. Obliging, the composer promised to 'have another go at it': in the event, he never actually rewrote the piece but he did take note of the player's concerns. It seems the clarinet sonata was at least partly the result of his attempts to revise the previous work, a shorter first movement creating a more balanced structure and the clarinet able more fully to exploit the flowing melodic lines. It was to be Howells's last major chamber composition and by the end of his life he had forgotten it completely. Nowadays, however, it is considered one of the finest clarinet sonatas since those published by Brahms not long before he died.

Although the sonata was first published in a version for B flat clarinet, it was originally written for the more mellow and sonorous tone of the A clarinet, which is how we hear it played today.

### **Schumann: *Drei Romanzen***

The Romantic 'character piece' was a genre in which Schumann felt thoroughly at home. His many colourful miniatures conjure up a vast range of moods and settings, many of them abstract but nonetheless vivid – the product

of a highly-developed imagination. He disliked using descriptive titles for fear of influencing a performer's interpretation but the term 'Romance' was sufficiently vague to provide the ideal solution. The Op.94 set appeared in 1849, one of the most productive years of Schumann's career, during which he worked at astonishing speed while producing music of consistently high quality. He wrote all three within five days during early December and presented them to his wife, Clara, for Christmas.

It was a violinist who gave their first performance, with Clara at the piano, but the Romances were originally scored for oboe. In them, Schumann put his mastery of song-writing to good use, with wonderfully expressive melodic lines in the wind part and the piano weaving in and out of the texture to become an almost equal partner.

### **Debussy: *Première rhapsodie***

Another nebulous title, the term rhapsody indicating nothing more specific than a lack of formal structure and an expression of powerful emotion. Debussy was nearing the end of his life when his *Première rhapsodie* appeared in 1910, commissioned by Fauré who – as director of the Paris Conservatoire – needed something for the end-of-year exams. The result was a piece that sets the player real technical and artistic challenges, demanding a highly-accomplished technique as well as providing serious tests of breath control, intonation and subtleties of tone.

Debussy dedicated the work to the Conservatoire's professor of clarinet but it soon found its way out of the exam room and into the concert hall, where the same professor gave the premiere the following year. It was an immediate success and Debussy himself was so pleased with it that a few months later he produced a second version, rearranging the piano part for orchestra. Its title, incidentally, suggests that he had plans to produce a successor but – in the event – a *Deuxième rhapsodie* never appeared.

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