

POULENCE • FRANÇAIX
MARTINŮ • DUREY

20th Century Harpsichord Music

Christopher D. Lewis



20th Century Harpsichord Music

Francis Poulenc • Jean Françaix • Bohuslav Martinů • Louis Durey

Francis POULENC (1899-1963):		Bohuslav MARTINŮ	
Suite française	14:47	Sonate pour clavecin	9:14
d'après Claude Gervaise (XVIe siècle)		12 I. Poco allegro	2:40
1 I. Bransle de Bourgogne	1:39	13 II. Poco moderato cantabile	4:15
2 II. Pavane	3:20	14 III. Allegretto	2:19
3 III. Petite marche militaire	1:19	Louis DUREY (1888-1979):	
4 IV. Complainte	2:09	Dix Inventions	
5 V. Bransle de Champagne	2:06	15 No. 1 Très calme	19:20
6 VI. Sicilienne	2:19	16 No. 2 Allegretto	1:52
7 VII. Carillon	1:55	17 No. 3 Très modéré	1:11
Jean FRANÇAIX (1912-1997):		18 No. 4 Lent et grave	2:30
Deux Pièces pour clavecin		19 No. 5 Tranquille	1:38
8 1. Grave	2:28	20 No. 6 Animé et rythmé	1:26
9 2. Vivace	1:26	21 No. 7 Modéré	2:22
Bohuslav MARTINŮ (1890-1959):		22 No. 8 Décidé	1:16
Deux Impromptus		23 No. 9 Modéré (mélancolique)	1:57
10 I. Allegretto	2:36	24 No. 10 Très animé	2:26
11 II.	2:40	Bohuslav MARTINŮ:	
		Deux Pièces pour clavecin (1935)	
		25 I. Lento	7:32
		26 II. Allegro con brio	3:32
			3:59

The harpsichord has a distinguished historical pedigree extending from the renaissance era to the early nineteenth century. Its decline in popularity among composers and the public was due to the appeal of the newly-invented pianoforte. Yet the elegant beauty and characteristic sonorities of the harpsichord and its extensive repertoire were not allowed to expire and from the 1880s there was a revival of the instrument which has grown and flourished ever since.

Modern harpsichords came about primarily owing to the rise in interest in harpsichords and early music at the start of the twentieth century and were created as a modern alternative due to lack of available historic harpsichords. As a consequence an entirely new type of harpsichord was born, the 'revival' harpsichord. Useful modern additions such as pedals were crafted on to them to change what strings were being played and to couple the keyboards. Modern materials were often used in these instruments, usually to try and make them sound louder in larger auditoriums of the day.

One of the pioneers of the twentieth-century resurrection

of interest in the harpsichord was the great virtuoso Wanda Landowska. Between 1905 and 1912 she assisted in the development of a harpsichord built by Pleyel of Paris. This proved to be an entirely new design quite different from traditional constructional methods as it used a heavy case including a cast-iron frame. Pleyel produced a two keyboard instrument, equipped with a deep register called a sixteen-foot, sounding one octave below normal pitch. It also had two eight-foot registers, a coupler, and a lute-stop. The instrument was a curious hybrid between a piano and a harpsichord, in effect, a plucked piano. Some harpsichordists affectionately called it the 'whispering giant'. Landowska first played a Pleyel harpsichord at the Breslau Bach Festival in 1912 and it was on this type that she performed, recorded and taught until her death in 1959.

The harpsichord heard on this recording is a 1930s Pleyel harpsichord, known as the 'Eaton Pleyel' as it was purchased by the Toronto Eaton Auditorium. In 2013 the Eaton Pleyel harpsichord was subjected to an extensive restoration in

Cleveland, Ohio, by Philip M. Cucchiara, shortly before the instrument was set up in its new home in San Francisco. It is on this instrument that Christopher D. Lewis has chosen to play music by twentieth-century composers to demonstrate the range and intensity of the modern repertoire.

Francis Poulenc, born in Paris, was mainly a self-taught composer whose outstanding abilities won him a place in Les Six, a circle of distinguished French composers which also included Auric, Durey, Honegger, Milhaud and Tailleferre. Profoundly influenced by Stravinsky, Poulenc wrote operas, ballets and other incidental music, orchestral and choral works, film scores, many piano and instrumental pieces, and a great quantity of songs.

Poulenc met Wanda Landowska at the Princess Edmond de Polignac's salon and commented: *'My encounter with Landowska was a capital event in my career. I have for her as much artistic respect as human tenderness. I am proud of her friendship, and I shall never be able to express how much I owe her. It was she who gave me the key to the harpsichord works of Bach. It was she who taught me all I know about our French harpsichordists. What is so prodigious about Landowska is that she makes the music of the past actual and alive.'* For Landowska, Poulenc composed his *Concert Champêtre* for harpsichord and large orchestra, of which she gave the première on 3rd May, 1929, in Paris with Pierre Monteux conducting.

Poulenc's *Suite Française* was not intended for solo harpsichord, but the instrument has played a colourful part in the history of the piece. Originally scored for wind band, percussion and harpsichord, the suite offers antique dances in the moods and textures of the twentieth century.

The *bransle* was a French rustic dance dating from the sixteenth century, one form of which was associated with the Bourgogne area of France (known in English as Burgundy), an east-central region of France rich in wine and history. The *pavane*, a stately dance of the sixteenth century, was particularly popular in England, France, and Spain. The *marche militaire* has a long history in instrumental pieces imitating military music since at least the sixteenth century. *Complainte*, the French form of *planctus*, is a song of lamentation dating back to the ninth century, often associated with dirges or plaintive music based on biblical texts. *Bransle de Champagne* refers to the famous wine-growing area in north-east France.

Sicilienne (the French name for the Italian *Siciliana*), is an aria type and instrumental movement popular in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, found at its finest in the music of J. S. Bach. Finally *Carillon*, imitative of the pealing of bells, takes the structure of a rondo, repetitions of the main theme being interspersed with contrasting episodes.

Jean Françaix began writing music at the age of six and also developed his talents as a very accomplished concert pianist. He studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. Firmly within the neoclassical tradition, he was a truly prolific composer of some two hundred works including operas, dramatic works, orchestral pieces, chamber and solo instrumental music, as well as choral and solo vocal compositions.

Two Pieces for Harpsichord have not been recorded previously. *Grave* is a funereal progression of sonorities unusual in that it concentrates by and large on the lower sonorities of the harpsichord's range with a definite atmosphere of the baroque conceived in twentieth-century colours. *Vivace* has been described as sounding like 'demonic circus music', combining humour and a touch of the sinister.

Bohuslav Martinů lived for most of his life away from his home country of Czechoslovakia but despite this is still regarded as the greatest Czech composer of the twentieth century after Janáček. As a boy he studied violin and eventually studied at the Prague Conservatoire. He began to compose in 1910 though earning his living at this time mainly as a violinist and teacher. In 1923 Martinů went to Paris to study with Roussel. After the Nazi invasion of France, he moved to the United States in 1941 but returned to spend his final years in France and Switzerland.

Martinů's immense creative output includes operas, ballets, film and incidental music, many orchestral works as well as choral pieces, songs, chamber music for many combinations of instruments, and keyboard compositions.

Deux Impromptus and *Sonata* were written for Antoinette Vischer (1909-1973), the Swiss harpsichordist. A strong advocate of contemporary music, she commissioned works by Luciano Berio, Earle Brown, and John Cage, as well as Martinů. *Deux Pièces* was composed for Marcelle de Lacour (1896-1997), French harpsichordist, harpist and teacher and a pupil of Wanda Landowska. She was professor of harpsichord at the Paris Conservatoire between 1955 and 1967.

The first of the *Deux Impromptus* is a work of baroque embellishments, strong rhythms and organ-like sonorities, taking us back to J. S. Bach and Scarlatti in its grandeur. The second *Impromptu*, more finely tuned to twentieth-century sensibility, is an ebullient dance movement.

Martinů's *Harpichord Sonata* opens lyrically, imparting to the instrument's sonorities a neoromantic aura. But as the movement develops many of the traditional harpsichord effects are utilised with staccato chords, brisk contrapuntal episodes and echoes of Rameau. In contrast, the second movement, *poco moderato cantabile*, is gracefully Scarlattiian in its opening phrases. Rather than an archetypal slow movement, this is a *cantabile* exploration of the harpsichord's intimately expressive qualities. The *Allegretto*, with its staccato accents and sudden silences, is a dramatic finale full of intensity and fire. Its intrinsic virtuosity is rounded off with a slower episode in a plaintive coda.

The first of *Two Pieces for Harpsichord*, marked *lento*, opens with dramatic hammer blows and powerful chord progressions, and through the rest of the composition the harmonic and melodic possibilities of these opening sonorities are explored and probed. The *Allegro con brio* is an elegant manifestation of refined vitality. Martinů's harmonic style is well represented here with patterns of chordal progressions in the mood of a dance. Excitement mounts

throughout the piece as the cumulative percussive energy increases.

Louis Durey did not decide to become a composer until 1907 and wrote his first work in 1914. During the Second World War he was an active member of the resistance during the German occupation. In all he wrote 116 works including dramatic pieces, many songs, orchestral and chamber music, film scores, and piano works.

About *Dix Inventions, Op. 41*, Durey commented: '*These are some transcriptions for piano of short pieces written from 1924 to 1927 for various instruments (Op. 35); 1, 6, 7, 8, and 10 were originally for two clarinets; 2 and 5 for two violins; 3 was for oboe and cello.*'

The pieces are generally reminiscent of J. S. Bach's *Two-Part Inventions* (Durey's main inspiration for the suite), but with twentieth-century atmosphere. The tension between homage to the baroque and the modern voice provides the piquancy of the work. No. 4, *Lent et grave*, written for the piano, for example, is rooted in twentieth-century dissonance, beginning with bass chromatic chords against an anguished melodic line. As the suite proceeds the composer's individuality is subtly revealed. Yet Bach's presence hovers round the work like a benevolent master admiring the tribute implicit in the concept.

Graham Wade



Christopher D. Lewis

Known as 'the Welsh Contemporary Harpsichordist', Christopher D. Lewis is currently based in San Francisco, California. Born in Rhiwbina, in Wales, he moved to North America in 2005 to study harpsichord with Luc Beauséjour and Hank Knox at McGill University, Montreal. In 2010 he moved to California and completed a Master's degree at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music with Corey Jamason, specialising in contemporary music. In his 2010 début as a recording artist he released *The New Fangled Clavier* through the New Mix Music label, featuring old and new music and works commissioned especially for this CD. In late summer 2012 he completed his first orchestral album and joined the Naxos label in 2013. Currently he is a Ph.D student at the University of Southampton in England, undertaking research into the history of the modern harpsichord.

Photo: Drew Kelly

Many thanks to Philip M. Cucchiara, Corey Jamason, Robert Tiffit and Frank Venema for their invaluable help and advice.

One of the pioneers of the 20th-century resurrection of interest in the harpsichord was the great virtuoso Wanda Landowska who assisted in the development of a harpsichord built by Pleyel of Paris. Performing on a 1930s Pleyel harpsichord, Christopher Lewis has chosen a programme of 20th-century works by French or French-based composers. Poulenc's colourful *Suite française* is followed by Françaix's exciting and previously unrecorded *Deux Pièces*. Martinů's lyricism and intensity of expression can be heard in the *Sonata* and other pieces while Louis Durey's piquant *Dix Inventions* is both a homage to Bach's *Two-Part Inventions* and a work whose compositional technique is firmly rooted in the modern era.

20th Century Harpsichord Music

- | | | |
|--------------|---|--------------|
| | Francis POULENC (1899–1963) | |
| 1–7 | Suite française (1935) | 14:47 |
| | Jean FRANÇAIX (1912–1997) | |
| 8–9 | Deux Pièces pour clavecin (1977) * | 3:54 |
| | Bohuslav MARTINŮ (1890–1959) | |
| 10–11 | Deux Impromptus (1959) | 5:16 |
| 12–14 | Sonate pour clavecin (1958) | 9:14 |
| | Louis DUREY (1888–1979) | |
| 15–24 | Dix Inventions (1924–1927) * | 19:20 |
| | Bohuslav MARTINŮ | |
| 25–26 | Deux Pièces pour clavecin (1935) | 7:32 |

Full track details will be found in the booklet

* WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING

Christopher D. Lewis, Harpsichord

Recorded at the residence of Tom Perkins, Belvedere, California, USA, 7–11 March 2014
Producers: Norbert Kraft & Bonnie Silver • Session Producer, Engineer & Editor: Norbert Kraft
Publishers: Editions Durand (tracks 1–7); Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG (8–9); Editions Max Eschig (12–14);
Editions Musicales Transatlantiques (15–24); Universal Edition (25–26) • Booklet notes: Graham Wade
Harpsichord: 'Eaton Pleyel', c. 1930 • Technician/tuner: Kevin Fryer • Temperament: Bach/Lehman, A=440
This recording was made possible by a grant from the Thomas J. and Gerd Perkins Foundation
Cover photograph by Drew Kelly of the instrument used in this recording



8.573364

DDD

Playing Time
60:05



© & © 2015
Naxos Rights US, Inc.
Booklet notes in English
Made in Germany
www.naxos.com