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SCHUMANN FARRENC DUROSOIR

# RESONANCE

*Piatti Quartet*

*Emmanuel Despax*

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## Piatti Quartet Emmanuel Despax

LOUISE FARRENC

*\*Piano Quintet in C minor, Op. 40*

- |   |                       |         |
|---|-----------------------|---------|
| 1 | I. Allegro            | [12.30] |
| 2 | II. Andante Sostenuto | [06.11] |
| 3 | III. Allegro Vivace   | [06.45] |

ROBERT SCHUMANN

*\*\*Piano Quartet In E-Flat Major, Op. 47*

- |   |  |         |
|---|--|---------|
| 4 | I. Sostenuto assai - Allegro ma non troppo | [08.15] |
| 5 | II. Scherzo. Molto vivace                  | [03.45] |
| 6 | III. Andante cantabile                     | [07.07] |
| 7 | IV. Finale. Vivace                         | [07.33] |

LUCIEN DUROSOIR

- |    |  |         |
|----|--|---------|
| 8  | Prière à Marie<br><i>For violin and piano</i>  | [03.38] |
| 9  | Chant élégiaque<br><i>For violin and piano</i> | [05.20] |
| 10 | Berceuse<br><i>For cello and piano</i>         | [03.40] |

Total Timings: [1.05.46]

\*World Premiere Recording

\*\*Zahra Benyounes *viola*

## Foreword

We are very proud to present this album which has been a dream of ours to record for some time. After discovering that Louise Farrenc had arranged her own brilliantly dramatic Wind Sextet and Piano for Piano Quintet, we started to imagine the 'resonance' that would compliment this. As Robert Schumann was an admirer of her work, a composition by him made sense. Interesting to us too, how his music looked to the future while Farrenc looked backwards to Beethoven, even though Schumann's work was composed nearly a decade earlier. Schumann's Piano Quartet, although a step away from the obvious Piano Quintet in this format, appealed to us more with its magnificent andante cantabile at its beating heart while its mysterious opening provided a perfect foil and contrast to the drama of the Farrenc quintet. Lucien Durosoir, a rarely heard composer, has strong connections to us personally in the quartet. He was born only a few years after Farrenc's death in the 1870's and he is a link to the resonance of that century. Had Farrenc lived another 20 years, they could well have met each other in Paris. We ourselves have met his son Luc and Luc's wife Georgie several times, who keenly promote and have rediscovered and distributed Lucien's works. When we played one of his string quartets they got in touch, and since then we have visited Durosoir's house where memories and testament to his incredible performance and compositional career can be found. The quartet sound world would not have been appropriate for this album, however because his timbre is so unique, we chose three of his most touching and beautiful pieces, including one of the last pieces he ever composed. We hope this recording leads to more discovery of his extraordinary works.

Michael Trainor, Piatti Quartet



Schumann's Piano Quartet dates from 1842, his so-called chamber music year, in which he also composed his piano quintet, three string quartets Opus 41 and a set of three Fantasy Pieces for piano trio. What may be described as his rather obsessive tendency is manifested in different ways, one instance being his total concentration on a single genre for a period of time. After composing exclusively for the piano (twenty-six pieces) he turned to orchestral works, then composed nearly 150 songs – the famous so-called year of song. Next, after intense study of string quartets by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, he devoted himself to the chamber music already mentioned. When he was eighteen Schumann had composed a Piano Quartet in C minor, but the E flat Piano Quartet dating from fourteen years later is a thoroughly mature and characteristic work. Though a little overshadowed in popularity by the Piano Quintet, it is an equally fine composition with its own distinct character. Underlining its importance is the fact that the piano quartet medium has not been enriched with many major works. Apart from Schumann's outstanding example, there are two by Mozart, three by Brahms, two by Dvořák and two by Fauré. All of these are either masterpieces or at least highly valued works of what is a meagre repertoire. Other piano quartets by Mendelssohn and Beethoven are early compositions which only rarely appear in concerts.

Schumann was very conscious of the two sides to his creative personality. Florestan was the more active, even extrovert aspect, while Eusebius was the more passive. He sometimes referred to "Florestan the wild and Eusebius the mild". Schumann explained the origin of these invented names thus: "a society that was more than a secret society, that is, which existed only in the mind of its creator – the Davidsbündler." The two names are probably more relevant to Schumann's prolific activity as a music critic, used as two voices to express different opinions on the music he was discussing. However, his music – in particular piano works such as Carnival and Davidbündlertanze – often reflects his dual nature in a similar way, though we must be wary of over-simplifying. To compare the Piano Quintet and Piano Quartet, one clearly recognises – in general – that the Quintet is the more extrovert,

Florestan-style piece, whereas the Quartet is largely a Eusebius work. Schumann composed both Quintet and Quartet with his wife Clara in mind, but it was a cellist, Matvei Wielhorski, who urged him to write the Piano Quartet. Of Polish parentage, Wielhorski, who was also a concert impresario based in St Petersburg, entertained Schumann and Clara on their visit to the city in 1844.

Unlike Schumann's Piano Quintet, his Piano Quartet opens with an introduction, marked *Sostenuto assai*. Here, with simple means, Schumann creates a strong sense of expectancy. The following *Allegro ma non troppo* begins with the notes G-F-G-A flat – a 4-note motif originally heard in the slow introduction (bars 2-3) but now played in a faster tempo and leading to an expressive answering phrase in legato quavers on the piano. Beginning with a cello melody (– another transformation of that 4-note motif), a wealth and diversity of other melodic material unfolds, but this includes, surprisingly, a return to the slow introduction. Here, at the close of the exposition, this recall is the first of two with which Schumann suspends the movement's progress. After an increasingly intense and strenuous development, Schumann begins his recapitulation fortissimo in the grand manner with multiple-stopping for violin and viola. The second reprise of the slow introduction comes at another structural landmark – just before the coda.

The scherzo (*Molto vivace*) begins as a *moto perpetuo* in resolute quavers. Of course Mendelssohn's elfin scherzos have left their mark, but the character here is pure Schumann. Beethoven was fond of bringing back his trio section twice (as in some of his symphonies), but occasionally Schumann preferred to compose two different contrasting trios, alternating with reprises of the scherzo section. Thus we glide smoothly into a rather melancholy first trio, although the piano twice attempts to reinstate the scherzo material. The return of the scherzo leads to a brief second trio which, as so often in Schumann's music, consists entirely of syncopation (marked *dolce*). Once again the piano intrudes with the scherzo music, here humorously punctuated by forceful pizzicato notes, before the gentle syncopation returns. A final

brief reference to the first trio leads to the understated conclusion.

The Andante cantabile is one of the most wonderfully lyrical movements in Schumann's output, virtually a song without words. The principal melody, introduced by the cello after the briefest of preparations, is characterised by its expressive intervals of a seventh – both ascending and falling. In the middle section Schumann once more writes a whole passage of syncopation, in this instance for the piano right hand. Breathless in effect, this is difficult to play, as its off-the-beat rhythm gently conflicts with the other instrumental parts, while subtly enhancing the deeply expressive mood. A subsequent chorale-like passage in G flat major leads to the first of three further statements of the original songful melody, now on the viola and accompanied by elegant figuration in the violin. Near the end Schumann introduces a 3-note figure, F - B flat - G, which quietly anticipates the opening theme of the finale. (At the end of the slow movement of his First Symphony the trombones similarly prepare the beginning of the Scherzo.)

This athletic finale theme is treated fugally before the cello introduces a lyrical melody, but it is the opening theme – often intensified by overlapping entries – which dominates much of the movement. There are also references to music from the scherzo and, very briefly, the subtle, breathless syncopation of the slow movement. In this exuberant finale Schumann brilliantly combines masterful counterpoint and lyricism.

Lucien Durosoir was among the most celebrated violinists of the fin-de-siècle period. Having studied with Joseph Joachim, he gave the French premiere of Brahms's Violin Concerto. In 1921, when he was about to accept the position of concert-master of the Boston Symphony, a disabling accident suffered by his mother forced him to abandon his performing career. During military service in World War I – fifteen months in the trenches, then as a stretcher-bearer – he had formed a chamber group with André Caplet playing viola and Maurice Maréchal on cello. The ensemble was the creation

of a Colonel Valzi although a General Charles Mangin commandeered the group to enjoyed the prestige. The trench-warfare was a uniquely profound bonding experience for the men but also, in a completely different way, was the music-making. Having studied composition and counterpoint with Charles Tournemire and Eugène Cools, Durosoir had previously felt a desire to be a composer. Caplet, both friend of, and assistant to Debussy, had given him tuition while in the trenches, but it was only on his return from the war that Durosoir felt strongly motivated towards composing. On 12th September 1916 he had written to his mother “I will begin writing music and thus grow accustomed to handling freer forms, and I will, I am convinced, bear ripe fruit.”

The post-war years were the period which he devoted to composition, but his totally secluded life-style in a village in the south-west of France meant that his works remained unpublished and in complete obscurity. This decision to separate himself from the thriving musical world of Paris and the prevailing trends accounts for the individuality of his musical language and his originality. (Similarly, Joseph Haydn, at Esterházy in the Hungarian countryside, capitalised on isolation – “I was forced to become original.”) André Caplet was full of admiration for Durosoir's first string quartet, but the effects of wartime gas weakened his lungs and he died prematurely from pleurisy in 1925. Therefore Durosoir was deprived of his most ardent champion.

Extending to about forty works and including three string quartets and a violin sonata, his composition list is dominated by chamber and orchestral music. Durosoir composed *Chant élégiaque* in 1950, dedicating the piece to the memory of Ginette Neveu, who had died aged thirty in a plane crash the previous year. This elegiac tribute, the most extended of the three pieces recorded here, conveys a spirit of gentle meditative mourning. The simple and typically unidiomatic piano part is like a restless undercurrent, while the expressive trills – in the violin then piano – are characteristic of Durosoir's personal, unclassifiable sound-world. Durosoir commented: “I took the melodic line from my *Berceuse funèbre* [an adjective he subsequently used because he had written the piece on the day before his mother's death] ... and completely



rewrote ... all the lines of accompaniment. This piece is undoubtedly much better than the first.”

Prière à Marie (1949) is dedicated to the composer's children. When in his seventies and in poor health, he anticipated that he would not see his adolescent children reach adulthood. “That is why”, he wrote, “through my Prière à Marie, I ask God to let me live a little longer.”

Louise Farrenc was born in Paris in 1804. Having studied the piano with Hummel and Moscheles, the fifteen-year-old Louise began private composition lessons with Reicha. Like her two piano teachers, she would become an outstanding virtuoso. From 1842 until her retirement in 1873 she held the position of Professor of Piano at the Paris Conservatoire, being only the second female professor in the establishment's history. However, women were still not allowed to teach composition there. With her husband, Aristide, she established what would become one of the leading publishing houses in the city. Just as Schumann initially concentrated on the solo keyboard genre (1830-39), so too Ms Farrenc composed exclusively for the piano over a ten-year period (1820-30). Subsequently she went on to compose three symphonies and two overtures, but through the 1840's and 50's she was largely preoccupied with chamber works, including a nonet for combined strings and wind, two piano trios, a violin sonata, a cello sonata, two piano quintets and a sextet for piano and wind instruments. Ms Farrenc's partiality for the piano quintet medium (as in her two examples Opus 30 and Opus 31) is emphasised by her own piano quintet arrangement of the Sextet Opus 40 for piano and wind (1851-2). Whereas she had included a double-bass in the two piano quintets, she reverted to the traditional scoring in her arrangement of Opus 40. At a time when the Parisian public was besotted with opera, Ms Farrenc showed her individuality in preferring the tradition of German composers' adherence to classical instrumental forms. Her special admiration of Beethoven is reflected in her choice of C minor, a key in which Beethoven composed several of his most arresting works, for her Sextet.

The very substantial Allegro of this sextet/quintet has a dramatic opening paragraph, dominated by a theme characterised by dotted rhythm. This gives way to legato and lyrical phrases above a grumbling piano part until the dotted rhythm returns. The second subject in the relative major key of E flat, introduced by the piano and marked dolce, brings further lyrical contrast. Following an animated development section, culminating in an extended dominant pedal, we arrive at the recapitulation, in which the second subject is recalled in C major. As in Mendelssohn's chamber music with piano, much of the momentum is generated by the buoyant, bubbling keyboard writing. It is quite obvious that Ms Farrenc was a virtuoso pianist, but here the demand on the player's stamina is equally marked. Schumann, a discerning but generous music critic, wrote admiringly of Farrenc's music, while Mendelssohn himself would have been proud of its fluency, vivacity and easy memorability. Hummel and Weber readily come to mind as equally fluent composers of brilliant music – Hummel for piano, Weber for clarinet – but Ms Farrenc avoids the garrulousness and vacuity of Hummel in his less inspired vein. Beginning without piano, the central Andante sostenuto in E flat major exudes calm and serenity. The piano's entry continues the lyrical mood before assuming a graceful accompanying role. Just as this Andante brings relaxation after the larger scale of the first movement, so the finale introduces a restlessness which increases during the development section. In contrast with the opening theme of this Allegro vivace, which is a faster variant of the second subject from the opening Allegro, the second subject is light and buoyant, but the sternness of C minor returns to conclude this engaging work.

© Philip Borg-Wheeler

## *Piatti Quartet*

Michael Trainor | violin

Emily Holland | violin

Miguel Sobrinho | viola

Jessie Ann Richardson | cello

\*\*Zahra Benyounes | viola (for Schumann)

The Piatti Quartet are Michael Trainor (violin), Emily Holland (violin), Miguel Sobrinho (viola) and Jessie Ann Richardson (cello). Resident Quartet at Kings Place, London, the distinguished Piatti Quartet are widely renowned for their ‘profound music making’ (The Strad) and their ‘lyrical warmth’ (BBC Music Magazine). Since their prizewinning performances at the 2015 Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition, they have performed all over the world and made international broadcasts from many countries.

The Piattis are famed for their diverse programming and for passionate interpretations across the spectrum of quartet writing. Their wide ranging discography and repertoire is thanks to their enthusiasm and curiosity in collaborating with a broad range of artists. Recent accolades for recordings include a Presto Music Award as one of the ‘Top 10 Recordings of the Year 2023’, a Gramophone’s ‘Editor’s Choice for the Month’, and a five star review from BBC Music Magazine.

Contemporary music has been ever present in their repertoire and leaving a legacy to the quartet genre through commissions is one of the quartet’s central tenets. Major commissions and dedications have stemmed from Mark-Anthony Turnage, Emily Howard, Charlotte Harding, and Joseph Phibbs whilst they have premiered a huge number of new works over the years beginning with Anna Meredith back in 2009. The Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Flagey Radio Hall Brussels, Wigmore Hall London, and the Aldeburgh Festival are some of the high profile occasions where new music has been presented.

The quartet’s name is dedicated to Alfredo Piatti, a 19th Century virtuoso cellist who was a professor at the Royal Academy of Music (the alma mater of the founder’s of the quartet) and also a major exponent of chamber music and contemporary music of his time.

Durosoir’s works, Chant élégiaque and Prière à Marie are performed by Michael Trainor (violin) and Emmanuel Despax (piano), while Berceuse is performed by Jessie Ann Richardson (cello) and Emmanuel Despax. Longtime musical collaborator and friend Zahra Benyounes is the viola performer on the Schumann Piano Quartet, Op.47.





## *Emmanuel Despax*

Emmanuel Despax has gained international recognition as an artist whose interpretations bring a rare sincerity and imagination to the music.

A remarkable performer of romantic and post-romantic music, he has been invited to give recital performances in the UK (Wigmore Hall, Cadogan Hall, Chipping Campden and Petworth Festivals, and the Royal Concert Hall in Nottingham, where he was appointed artistic director in 2020 of a complete Beethoven piano sonata cycle); in France (Louvre Auditorium, Salle Cortot, Salle Gaveau, International Festival Les Nuits Pianistiques in Aix-en-Provence, L'été Musical au Pajoula, and Les Nuits du Château de la Moutte in Saint-Tropez); Benelux (Amsterdam, The Hague and the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels); Cyprus (Pharos Arts Foundation); Italy (Fazioli auditorium); and in South America.

Past engagements include two tours of New Zealand, hailed by critics for his recitals in the prestigious Fazioli International Piano Series in Auckland and concerto performances with the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra. In the UK, Emmanuel Despax has played with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Symphony and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestras, among others. He is also regularly broadcast on Medici TV, France Musique, BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM. His work as a talented broadcaster has included presenting a probing and approachable edition of BBC Radio 3's Inside Music, and he is already amassing an impressive, critically acclaimed discography.

Previous albums on Signum Classics include 'Liszt Piano Works' (SIGCD798, released June 2024), 'Après un rêve: Belle Époque: Nights at the piano' (SIGCD747, released June 2023) and 'Chopin: Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2 (String Quintet Versions)' (SIGCD700, released April 2022).





We would like to extend our warmest gratitude to Luc and Georgie Durosoir who have helped us discover the extraordinary legacy of Lucien Durosoir. Huge thanks to Emmanuel Despax for collaborating with us on this album, to Steve Long for supporting this album, Kim Bourlet and the Signum team for pulling this all together, Zahra Benyounes for all our collaborations over the years and to Raphaël Mouterde, our producer, for beautifully capturing our sounds.

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