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ÉCHAPPSODIE

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Première Rhapsodie 10 mins

GABRIEL FAURÉ

Piano Quintet No. 1 35 mins

ALICE CHANCE

Échappodie 20 mins

MELBOURNE

Tue 13 Feb 2024 — 7:00 PM

Elizabeth Murdoch Hall,
Melbourne Recital Centre

SYDNEY

Sat 17 Feb 2024 — 2:00 PM

Sat 17 Feb 2024 — 7:00 PM

The Neilson, ACO Pier 2/3

MUSICIANS ON STAGE

David Rowden — Clarinet & Artistic Director

Peter Clark — Violin I

Natalia Harvey — Violin II

Neil Thompson — Viola

Paul Stender — Cello

William Hansen — Double Bass

Vatche Jambazian — Piano

DURATION

Approx. 90 minutes without interval

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TAKING PHOTOS

We encourage you to share your concert experience! However, to avoid distractions, the best time to take a photo (without flash) is during applause. Video or audio recording of the performance is not permitted.

COVER PHOTO CREDIT: SASKIA WILSON



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Don't miss a single note



2024 National Concert Season
omegaensemble.com.au

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862 — 1918)

Première Rhapsodie

COMPOSED IN 1910 AND PREMIERED AT CONSERVATOIRE DE PARIS, FRANCE

One of the leading exponents of French musical Impressionism, Claude Debussy was a seminal force of the 20th century, developing a highly original musical language that expressed the many ideals to which artists of his time aspired.

In 1909, Debussy joined the Conservatoire de Paris, appointed by its Director Gabriel Fauré. As part of his duties, Debussy was commissioned to write two *solo de concours* (competition solos) to test the abilities of clarinet students.

Unexcited by the tedious assessment process of hearing a single work performed repeatedly, Debussy embraced the virtuosic brief and submitted his *Première Rhapsodie*, a whirlwind free-form work and nine-minute technical assault

for clarinet and piano.

With tests of endurance and breath control, and extreme contrast of tone, intonation, and nuance, almost immediately the *Rhapsodie* began appearing in public as a concert showpiece.

Described as a “masterpiece in miniature” the *Rhapsodie* is total-Debussy, with an extraordinary palette of colour and innovation. The composer was so pleased with the work's resulting popularity, that less than a year later he adapted his *Rhapsodie* for clarinet and orchestra.

Few composers could paint musical colours like Debussy, and the beauty of his own orchestration reveals the innovative melodic and harmonic source material embedded in the work in its original form, including impressive technicality in the accompanying piano not to be overlooked.

GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845 — 1924)

Piano Quintet No. 1 in D minor, Op. 89

COMPOSED IN 1905 AND PREMIERED IN BRUSSELS, BELGIUM IN 1906. DEDICATED TO EUGÈNE YSAÏE

- I. Molto moderato
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegretto moderato

Student of Camille Saint-Saëns, successor to Jules Massenet at the Paris Conservatoire, and teacher to Maurice Ravel and Nadia Boulanger, Gabriel Fauré's far-reaching influence on French music is undisputed.

Yet Fauré's chamber music is sometimes overshadowed by those works of his that have risen to heights of eternal popularity, such as the dreamy *Pavane*, blissful *Cantique de Jean Racine* and transcendent *Requiem*.

In 1888/89, Fauré gave several successful concerts with leading violinist Eugène YsaÏe, including performances of his two piano quartets. It was following the success of these performances that Fauré began to sketch ideas

for a new piano quintet.

However, dissatisfied with the initial attempt, Fauré set his sketches aside until 1894, and then again until 1903, finally completing the work some eight years after his original attempt.

Such a laboured compositional process is all but invisible in the *Quintet's* wistful and light opening, with liquidity and long lyrical lines in the piano and strings. Fauré himself noted that "the first movement was very hard. But now when I hear it, it has a deceptive air of spontaneity."

Fauré never studied at the Conservatoire de Paris

at which he would later become Director, and this is possibly why he never allowed himself to be distracted by contemporary trends or compelled by the pursuit of a new musical language.

And therein lies Fauré's mastery. Without abandoning a traditional tonal language, he takes musical expression to its extreme limits, with outrageously inventive melodies, while always maintaining simplicity and classical elegance.

Working together at the Conservatoire de Paris, the younger Debussy would later describe Fauré as "the master of gracefulness."

ALICE CHANCE (1994 —)

Échappodie

WORLD PREMIERE. IN A NEW CHAMBER VERSION
COMMISSIONED BY OMEGA ENSEMBLE WITH THE
GENEROUS SUPPORT OF PETER HOWARD AND MODEST
EXPECTATIONS FOUNDATION.

- I. Rubato, shy and curious
- II. Stillness
- III. Charged with energy

A rising star in both her native Australia and current home in Paris, Alice Chance has been commissioned by many of Australia's leading ensembles and orchestras, including the Australian String Quartet, Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Song Company, Gondwana Choirs and Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and is a three-time finalist in the APRA AMCOS Art Music Awards.

Chance's music often has a twist of playfulness, and it's very important to her that listeners and performers feel welcome within her work. You can often find Alice's music inviting audiences to contribute with their voices or imaginations, or

even with their phones.

This preoccupation with audience experience and engagement has led Chance to collaborate across many disciplines and musical forms, such as choral music, film and musical theatre, and notably as vocal arranger and music director of the award-winning Australian musical *FANGIRLS*.

Originally written as an orchestral work for clarinetist Oliver Shermacher and premiered by the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra (2022), *Échappodie* is at first a comparatively traditional work in its structure and presentation.

However, armed with Debussy's *Première Rhapsodie* as its vibrant source material and influenced by Chance's own whimsical wanderings through the streets of Paris (for which she has a sizable social media following), the work is a captivating exploration of virtuosity, beauty and colour that draws the listener into a world of curious impossibilities and climactic delight.



From the composer:

If Debussy's *Première Rhapsodie* is a wise and well-spoken grandfather, *Échappodie* could be described as its cheekiest granddaughter.

Debussy's work is known for its long, delicate passages, ducking and swooping technical gestures, and free form. My original idea was to create a response to this well-loved work, taking key motifs and musical language, recontextualising them with new harmonic and timbral language, and fleshing it all out into a veritable clarinet concerto that would be sooner heard in an interplanetary circus than the exam halls for which the *Première Rhapsodie* was first written.

I began working on the piece about the same time I began learning French, and it accompanied me all the way to fluency and moving to Paris where I am now based. The work is thus infused with a French language spirit, that constantly taunts you

with exceptions and abnormalities, whilst simultaneously charming and intoxicating you. At least I hope so.

In this reimagining for chamber ensemble, I have taken things a step further and made the work into a conversational group concerto, in which the clarinet must accept that it is no longer the star, but does not go down without a fight.

I would like to thank Omega Ensemble for believing in this work, and its potential for another life in a chamber context. It's a great joy for me to see this version of the work in such expert hands.

The Ensemble

Hailed as ‘the best chamber music outfit in town’ (Sydney Morning Herald) and ‘Australia’s most exciting and forward-thinking ensemble’ (Limelight), Omega Ensemble is one of Australia’s most dynamic chamber music ensembles.

With a mission to champion extraordinary Australian musical talent through high-energy and impactful performance, the Ensemble tour their National Concert Season to metropolitan and regional audiences across Australia, as well as frequent appearances in national music and cultural festivals.

At the heart of the Ensemble’s success is the talent it supports, including some of Australia’s most accomplished classical musicians and artistic collaborators. With a commitment to preserve and cherish foundational repertoire, the Ensemble also proudly stands at the forefront of new musical expression, with frequent commissions and premieres from leading Australian and international composers.

Profiling Australian musical voices also forms the foundation of the Ensemble’s education and professional development programs, including through the CoLAB: Composer Accelerator Program, Young Ensemble in Residence program and in-school workshops.

The Ensemble was winner of Performance of the Year at the 2023 APRA/AMCOS Art Music Awards, and has previously received multiple nominations for Best Performance and Best New Work. In 2023, the Ensemble was also a finalist in the Limelight Artist of the Year Awards.

PRINCIPAL ENSEMBLE

David Rowden — Clarinet & Artistic Director

Peter Clark — Violin I

Natalia Harvey — Violin II

Neil Thompson — Viola

Paul Stender — Cello

Vatche Jambazian — Piano

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