Thames Youth Orchestra

Simon Ferris, conductor

Concert

Saturday July 16th 2011
7.30pm

All Saints Kingston

Programme

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) *Suite: Les Biches*

I Rondeau II Adagietto III Rag-Mazurka IV Andantino V Finale

Poulenc was still a young and relatively unknown composer when he was commissioned by Serge Diaghilev to provide a score for the Ballets Russes. The Ballets Russes was itself only fifteen or so years old, having been founded in 1909, but Diaghilev was aware that its reputation rested on its continual self-renewal, and scoffed, by Poulenc's own account, at Poulenc and his contemporaries Milhaud and Auric when they told him they were going to see *Petrushka*: "What? That old thing? Mais quel ennui!"

It has been persuasively argued by Richard Taruskin that the great break with the music of the nineteenth century, which seemed to have been under way since the early exercises of Schoenberg and his pupils in atonality, and the rhythmic barbarity of the *Rite of Spring* (1913), did not in fact occur until the advent of neo-classicism and serialism proper in the 1920s, both of which threw off the last paroxysm of romanticism, understood as music informed by the genius of the artist in the pursuit of their own self-expression. By this reckoning, twentieth century music begins in 1923 with Stravinsky's Octet. The premiere of *Les Biches* dates from early the following year.

The scenario for the ballet was Poulenc's own. Diaghilev had proposed a reworking of *Les Sylphides*, but Poulenc countered with a treatment, inspired by the paintings of Watteau, in which he outlined a superficially formal social interaction concealing an atmosphere of wantonness 'of which an innocent person would not be aware'. The title is derived from *Le Parc aux Biches* of Louis XV – *biches* are does, i.e. female deer, and also in Poulenc's day a term of sexual endearment tendered to a young woman.

This was sufficiently risqué for Diaghilev to give Poulenc his head, and the work was rapidly premiered to choreography by Bronislava Nijinska. There is little in the way of plot. Poulenc described it as a 'modern *fêtes galantes* in a large, all-white country drawing room with a huge sofa in Laurencin blue as the only piece of furniture. Twenty charming and flirtatious women frolicked about there with three handsome, strapping young fellows dressed as oarsmen.' The men and women (the men in particularly tight bathing suits) flirt indiscriminately with one another, and with their more mature hostess, in a variety of couplings.

Neo-classicism is in part characterized by its pastiche of eighteenth century forms and manner, but Poulenc described himself as 'wildly eclectic' and *Les Biches* in fact pastiches not only eighteenth century idioms, but classical ballet of the nineteenth century and jazz and dance-band idioms of the early twentieth, mirroring to an extent the promiscuity of the scenario.

The composer subsequently (in 1939) reworked what Alex Ross calls the 'aggressively antique genre pieces' of the ballet score to a suite of five movements. The first movement, *Rondeau*, is a three part structure, short percussive phrases being handed between instrumental groups. The second movement, *Adagietto*, alternates a languid, unsettled melody with music hall irruptions.

The third movement, *Rag-Mazurka* is more tarantella than either mazurka or rag; the hostess makes her entrance, complete with pearls and cigarette holder, and magnetises two of the young athletes' attention. The fourth movement *Andantino* reprises the theme of the *Rondeau* and balances the *Adagietto*, in both of which a girl in blue dances flirtatiously with Athlete No. 1, and the fifth movement *Finale*, with its allusions to Mozart, confirms what Cocteau said of the suite as a whole: ' I doubt whether this music knows it hurts'.

Eric Satie (1866-1925) *Parade*

I Choral II Prélude du rideau rouge III Prestidigidateur Chinois IV Petite fille américain V Acrobates VI Final VII Suite au 'Prélude du rideau rouge'

Parade was a collaboration between some of the great luminaries of the Parisian wartime avant-garde. It was written to a scenario by Jean Cocteau at the request of Diaghilev ("Étonne-moi", Diaghilev had exhorted him), to be performed at the Ballets Russes. The sets and costumes were by Picasso, and the choreography by Leonide Massine. When Stravinsky turned down the commission to provide the music, Cocteau turned to Satie.

Satie, unlike his collaborators, was not young. He had been associated both with the impressionists of the fin de siècle (he was a close friend and occasional collaborator of Debussy), and with the music hall and cabaret of the 1890s. He had always struggled for acceptance, however, and beat a much embittered retreat from Montmartre to the Parisian suburb of Arcueil, whence he would troop into town each day with a notebook and a pencil, stopping at cafes to compose and drink; arrived in Paris, he would play in the music halls and cabaret to make his living, and return by the last train. He had a reputation as an eccentric, a sardonic bohemian, and was not an obvious choice, but Cocteau, interviewed later in life, explained that Satie's music was 'linear, without sauce, without veils', and therefore perfectly adapted for this new thing they were creating.

Such, in fact, was the plainness of the music that the orchestra at its first rehearsals were resistant to it, taking it for ballroom music (one flautist, according to Cocteau, stood up and said to the composer 'Mr Satie, you think I'm stupid! To which Satie replied 'No I don't. But I could be wrong.') Cocteau felt obliged to bring in Ravel to chastise the orchestra and inform the players that this was a masterpiece.

Its first audiences, too, were violently divided between its admirers and its detractors (as with *The Rite of Spring*, there was a riot at the first performance), in part because this was, in common with much avant-garde art of the war years in Paris, a work of what musicologist Claude Samuel calls 'derision' (and what David Albright calls 'cultivated apathy'), and in part because in its directness, its bald functionality, it is a precursor to that final and fundamental break with the music of the nineteenth century (and what Stravinsky, the great absentee in *Parade*, called the Art-Religion of Wagnerism): neo-classicism.

George Auric, writing the programme note for the first performance, described the score as background to the percussion, and to the onstage noises. The score, in other words, means

nothing by itself, but must be understood as part of a performance – it is not an ingredient, but a fragment of collage. And what is happening onstage is similarly a deliberately meaningless act: the scenario is an advertisement for a music hall: a sideshow of circus performers – acrobats, a Young American Girl (who pantomimes a silent movie), a Chinese Magician - are hired by the circus manager to attempt to attract the attentions of the passing public before the performance, but they are so entertaining in themselves that the public refuses to go inside. The circus is of course the most paradigmatically meaningless (and also collaborative) form of entertainment. Satie, in his music hall and cabaret background, was an ideal exponent of functional, rather than beautiful, or significant, music. And so in a sense the collaborators, Cocteau and Picasso and Massine and Diaghilev and Satie were advertising themselves as circus performers, jugglers, high-wire artistes, vagabonds, outsiders.

In spite of Cocteau's comments about the music being linear, there is in fact, typically for Satie, no motivic direction, nor any harmonic movement towards a point in the music at all. It is, rather, typified by gestures of one sort or another – half melodies that fail to take off, allusive fragments (in one case to the Irving Berlin tune *That Mysterious Rag*), bits of broken down chorale and fugue. Perhaps Cocteau's term was derived from a more general sense of the rhetorical directness of the music, a directness he compounded by introducing (somewhat to Satie's dismay) a number of 'noise making' instruments, among them a typewriter, a steamboat whistle, a pistol, a siren, and a 'bouteillophone' (a row of drink bottles played like a xylophone).

The poet Guillaume Apollinaire published a piece in advance of the first performance (subsequently included in the programme) in which he lauded in Satie's music 'a clarity and simplicity in which you can see the wonderfully lucid mind of France itself', and in which he celebrated the mix of media (some of Picasso's costumes, in particular for the impresario character, were so cumbersome they allowed for little movement on the part of the dancers, and were described as living cubism) and the 'cinematic' realism, and concluded that Cocteau had been wrong to describe this as a 'realist ballet'. A new word was needed to capture the peculiarities of the form, and that word was *sur-réalisme*.

Interval (20 minutes)

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936) La Boutique Fantasque

Overture; Allegretto; Tarantella; Mazurka; Lento; Danse Cosaque; Waltz; Can-Can; Andantino mosso; Valse lente; Allegretto moderato; Nocturne; Galop; Allegro brillante

The Ballets Russes did not merely exist to promote musical modernism – the company was a shrewd commercial venture for which a reputation as a vehicle for scandal (*Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Parade*, etc.) was a marketable commodity, but only up to a point (after it moved its centre of operations to Monte Carlo in 1922 Milhaud was asked to tone down the polytonal harmonies of his score for *Le Train Bleu* so as not to offend the Ballet's high-society

backers). And so Respighi's arrangement of tunes by Rossini, dating from 1919 and premiered in London, is nearer what might be called the *Scheherazade* end of the Ballets Russes brand spectrum, which specialized in richly exotic orchestral and visual colour.

Diaghilev after the war was in fact short of money, and rather than commission wholly new works he was scavenging for material to arrange, and so Respighi's version of Rossini would be followed the next year by Stravinsky's arrangements of music from the commedia dell'arte, *Pulcinella.* Stravinsky however was accorded almost total musical freedom by Diaghilev whereas Respighi, in spite of his new popularity following the *Fontane di Roma* (1915-16) and the first suite of *Antique Airs and Dances* (1917), and his reputation as an orchestrator second in brilliance only to Ravel (he had achieved this mastery, according to his own account, by studying the scores of Richard Strauss and taking lessons, partly in person and partly by correspondence, with Rimsky Korsakov) was kept on a very tight leash. It was Diaghilev who selected the numbers to be arranged from Rossini's manuscripts, decided on their order, and even made suggestions regarding tempo and harmony.

The music for the ballet was derived from the 180 or so pieces for piano which Giacomo Rossini composed in the last 11 years of his life but refused to publish (having retired from his career as an opera composer some twenty years previously at the age of 37). He referred to the pieces as *"Péchés de ma vieillesse"* (sins of my old age). They are mostly humorous and ironic, and were collected after his death into 13 manuscript volumes, which were then kept in his native Pesaro.

The ballet is set in a toy shop where the dolls dance for the satisfaction of prospective customers. Two rival customers, an American and a Russian family, are shown various dolls, each of which performs a characteristic dance (tarantella, mazurka, Cossack dance, waltz, galop, etc.), and are both taken with the pair of dolls which perform the Can-Can. It is agreed that the pair will be split between them. They agree to return the following morning to collect their purchase, but overnight the other dolls, saddened at the imminent separation of the Can-Canning dolls who have fallen in love, hide them away. The customers, outraged on their return the following morning at the disappearance, start tearing up the shop, but the dolls come to life and chase them away, to the jubilation of the shopkeeper.

The ballet was choreographed by the young dancer Leonid Massine, who had previously worked on *Parade.* Here he also danced the role of the Can-Can doll, opposite Lydia Lopovka, to the vociferous approval of the London audiences. No first night riot here. *The Times* reported the audience as having been 'off its head with delight'.

TYO Staff

Musical Director – Simon Ferris
Executive Director – Rebecca Lacey
First Violins Coach – Adrian Charlesworth
Second Violins Coach – Dominika Rosiek
Violas Coach – Pippa Hyde
Cellos Coach – Sarah Hedley-Miller
Bass Coach – Alice Kent
Brass Coach – David Whitson
Wind Coach – Andrew Watson
Percussion Coach – Ben Porter
Treasurer – Lisa Hawkins
Administrator – Hugo Fagandini
TYO intern – Georgina Feary
Friends Coordinator – Louise Carpenter

TYO is indebted to Hani Madanat of Coombe Residential for his extremely generous continuing support.

Simon Ferris, conductor

Simon Ferris, founder director of the Thames Youth Orchestra, read music and was organ scholar at King's College London. As an undergraduate he pursued additional instrumental and musicianship studies with Bernard Oram at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and, after graduation, received composition tuition and encouragement from the composer and John Ireland pupil, Geoffrey Bush.

A skilled and experienced jazz pianist, Simon's wide-ranging professional career now embraces an array of genres and disciplines, as performer, composer (published by ABRSM), arranger, writer (with programme note credits for, among others the Maggini Quartet and the Hanover Band), conductor and teacher, with duties including preparing children's choirs for the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Simon is currently Musician in Residence at Tiffin School, and Musician in Residence at Tiffin Girls' School, Kingston upon Thames, where in addition to his composing and performing duties he also teaches harmony.

Friends of TYO

The purpose of the Friends' Association is to provide financial support to the orchestra to help offset the significant expenses of running a full-scale symphonic ensemble. These costs include music, venue and instrument hire, staffing, performing rights, publicity, transport, maintaining a web presence, catering – the list goes on.

The cost of membership of the friends' scheme is £15 per annum for an individual subscription, £25 for family membership and £40 for corporate members. The benefits are as follows:

- Reduced ticket prices for concerts and events
- Members' names listed in concert programmes
- Receipt of a regular email newsletter

Current Members

Peggy Linton
Peter Jagger
Karen Megranahan
Catriona Rogers
Mary Reid
Miranda Fagandini
Penny & Steve D'Souza
Brigid Whitman
Irene & Howard Mallinson
Sally Wood and Rupert Bruce
Rachael & Peter Nichols
Mike & Sarah Bruce
Paul & Ruth Martin
Simon & Helen Hancock
Martin & Carolyn Parker
Mr & Mrs Christopher Johnson
Julia & John Dilworth
Carlos Duque
Carolyn & Reino Liefkes
Melanie & Dave Price
Pauline & Stephen Cox
Anne & Stephen Wilcox
Hugh & Doris Longworth
Ela & Richard Kaczmarski
Carol Igoe
Louise & David Piachaud
Frank Schubert & Suzanne Dietrich
Ms Rosie Timpson
Cristina Montanari & Seamus Milne
Mrs Margaret Grover
Mr John & Dr Petra Mitchinson
Dr Julia & Mr Philip Whiteman
Jackie & David Jillings
Mr & Mrs J M Rice
Helen Lowis
Karen Lodge
Catherine Schofield

For further details, or to apply for membership, please contact Friends Coordinator, Louise Carpenter: friends@thamesyouthorchestra.co.uk

Thames Youth Orchestra

First Violins
Anna Selig*
(Leader's chair endowed by Peter & Angela Toyne)
James Walsh
James Scollick
Adisha Kapila
David Kola
Sung-Hyo Lee
Toby Piachaud
Louis Watkins
Hana Wilford

Second Violins
Rosie Parker*
Hermione Kellow
Steffi Schofield
Kath Roberts
William Brunt
Nina Lim
Miriam Wilford
Bela Pereira

Violas
Grace Moon*
(Principal Viola chair endowed by Michael Schofield)
Tom Pollard
Heppy Longworth
Natasha Park
Georgina Feary

Cellos
Eunyoung Lee*
(Principal Cello chair endowed by Carlos Duque)
Miles Dilworth
Sarah Ebsworth

Bass
tbc

Flutes
Louis Tam*
Minyoung Seo
Ellie Barlow
Hannah Paul-Bhuvanenthiran
Beckie Sturge
Julia Clarke

Oboes
Catherine Hancock*
Diya Kapila
Jesus Duque
Mark Mitchinson
Sam Mitchell

Clarinets
Tom Nichols
(Principal Clarinet chair endowed by Simon & Susan Feary)
Ellie Pryde
Clare McEvoy
Peter Lidbetter
Grace McKellar

Bassoons
Josh Stevens

Horns
William Whiting
Chris Born
David Liu
Peter Le Tissier
Alexei Watkins

*principal

Trumpets
Imogen Hancock*
Nicolaj Schubert
(Principal & 2nd Trumpet chairs endowed by David Berliand & Miranda Fagandini)
Robert Hawkins
Joe Burley

Trombones
Edmund Jillings*
Ross Moore
Matilda Ashe-Belton

Tuba
Michael Cunningham

Timpani
Patrick Milne
(Timpani chair endowed by Mary Fagandini)

Percussion
(Orchestral Percussion chair endowed in memory of Remy and Sally Adès)
Daehyun Lee
Hugo Fagandini
Ben Porter
Nicholas Wong

Harp
Isobel White

Celeste
Simon Toyne