

## McGILL-McHALE TRIO

Demarre McGill, flute  
Anthony McGill, clarinet  
Michael McHale, piano

**January 15 through January 17, 2021**

## PROGRAM NOTES

### **Chris Rogerson (b. 1988)**

#### **A Fish Will Rise, from the *River Songs* (2016)**

This work was premiered by Demarre McGill (flute), Anthony McGill (clarinet), and Michael McHale (piano) at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia in December 2017.

#### **Chris Rogerson, composer**

“Growing up, my family visited a place called Stehekin several times, most recently this summer. Stehekin is a tiny community adjacent to the North Cascades National Park in Washington State. It sits at the very end of Lake Chelan and is only accessible by float plane or a long ferry ride. Only around ninety people live in Stehekin year-round, and there is no phone or internet access. [...], we rented fishing poles and tried our luck. It turns out, the most unlikely suspect, my sister, became obsessed with fishing! She was trying morning and night. She was desperate to catch a fish--I had never seen her so determined. Finally, she caught a huge rainbow trout! It was a very exciting moment. I had an idea to write a series of *River Songs*.

The first movement, titled *A Fish Will Rise*, is a reference to a favorite book of mine, Norman Maclean’s *A River Runs Through It*. On the last page, he writes: “[...] all existence fades to a being with my soul and the sounds of the Big Blackfoot River and a four-count rhythm and the hope that a fish will rise.” The second movement re-imagines some material from a previous work, and it’s called *Massing Clouds*. Finally, the third movement is titled *Swan Song*. Here, I imagine Norman Maclean fishing the waters alone among the shadows, as an old man.

This work is dedicated to my sister, Bethany.”

<https://www.chrisrogerson.com/works/a-fish-will-rise-for-flute-clarinet-and-piano>

**Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)**  
**Sonata for flute & piano (1957)**  
**I. Allegretto malincolico**  
**II. Cantilena (Assez lent)**  
**III. Presto giocoso**

This composition has become one of the best-known and most-played works in the flute repertoire. The sonata was commissioned by the American Library of Congress.

To the request by the Library of Congress to write a piece for two pianos or alternatively a chamber piece for up to six instruments, Poulenc eventually answered: "Much more at home with wind instruments than strings," as he had always preferred wind instruments, with their similarities to the human voice, to the strings.

After the first two of the three movements had been completed, Poulenc wrote to his friend Pierre Bernac:

"In working on this Flute Sonata, I have the feeling of going back a long way, but with a more settled technique. It's a sonata of Debussyan dimensions. It's the French sense of balance [*la mesure française*]. Finding the form for your language is the most difficult thing. It's what Webern has in the highest degree ... and what Boulez has not yet found."

With the composer at the piano, the flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal premiered Sonata at the Strasbourg Music Festival in 1957. The work was an instant success. At the time, *Le Figaro* said, "The music burst forth from the heart, without formality, and 'sang,' in every sense".

**Malcolm MacDonald, music critic**

"The work is infused with Poulenc's trademark bittersweet grace, wit, irony and sentiment, which are manifested in different ways in each of its three movements. The first ... makes clear the composer's elegiac intentions; the second is a haunting cantilena for the flute. Very fast and very tricky for the players, the skittish and vivacious ... finale brings the work to a close in cheerful and sardonic style."

**Sources**

Malcolm MacDonald (2013). *Notes* to Opus Arte CD.

Wilfrid Mellers (1995). *Francis Poulenc*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Roger Nichols (2020). *Poulenc*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Joseph Siegel (2000). *Notes* to 4Tay CD.

**Guillaume Connesson (b. 1970)****Techno-Parade, for flute, clarinet, and prepared piano (2002)****Patric Standford, music critic**

“*Techno-Parade* is a breathless series of patterns that adds up to an invigorating sense of happiness.”

“The music is colorful, quirky, exhilarating, very French, and unlike anything much else going on now, although it is easy enough (any fool can do it!) to list the music of which it may perhaps be reminiscent – Stravinsky, Couperin, John Adams. Messiaen, Ravel. But why go in? This is music to be appreciated for what it so cleverly is rather than what its critics may liken it to – that evasive technique of displaying what one knows without betraying a dearth or complete absence of opinion.”

<http://www.mvdaily.com/articles/2006/02/connesson.htm>

**David Rowe, music critic**

“Absolutely riveting chamber music by French composer Guillaume Connesson.”

*Techno-Parade* is a “combination of mesmerizing, irresistible, *danceable* exhilaration, plus a dramatic weight and substance, making it an absolutely riveting experience.”

<https://www.davidsclassicalcds.com/blog/absolutely-riveting-chamber-music-by-french-composer-guillaume-connesson>

**Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)****Slavonic Dance in G minor, Op. 46 No. 8 (Furiant) (1878)**

Dvořák composed two series of *Slavonic Dances*, a set of eight pieces in 1878 (Op. 46) and another one in 1886 (Op. 72). Written for piano four hands, the *Slavonic Dances* were inspired by Johannes Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*. Prior to the publication of the first set of *Slavonic Dances*, Dvořák was a relatively unknown composer. Publication of both piano and orchestral versions within a year established his international reputation in 1878.

In *Slavonic Dances*, Dvořák doesn't quote folk tunes. Instead, with his own melodies, he follows the models of the traditional dances by focusing on rhythmic patterns and forms characteristic for Bohemian folk music.

The enormous success of the Op. 46 dances led Dvořák's publisher to request another set of *Slavonic Dances*. In 1886, the Op. 72 pieces received a similar reception.

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The Bohemian folk dances that Dvořák took as stylistic sources of inspiration for his work were furiant, dumka, polka, sousedská, skočná, mazurka, odzemek, špacírka, kolo, and polonaise.

**Furiant** is a fast dance in alternating 2/4 and 3/4 time, with frequently shifting accents.

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## Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

### **Jardins sous la pluie, from *Estampes* (1903)**

*Jardins sous la pluie* depicts a garden during a rainstorm, using sonic allusions to the sounds of blowing wind, raindrops, and eruptions of thunderstorm. French folk tunes *Nous n'irons plus aux bois* and *Dodo, l'enfant do* appear in this composition, along with several types of scales (chromatic, whole tone, major and minor scales).

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## Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

### **Sonata for clarinet and piano (1962)**

- I. **Allegro tristamente (Allegretto - Très calme - Tempo allegretto)**
- II. **Romanza (Très calme)**
- III. **Allegro con fuoco (Très animé)**

The Clarinet Sonata is one of the last pieces Poulenc completed. The work is dedicated to the memory of Arthur Honegger; both Poulenc and Honegger belonged to the *Les Six*, a group of French composers active from around 1917 through the mid-1950s.

American clarinetist Benny Goodman commissioned the piece and planned to premiere it with the composer at the piano. However, before the Sonata was published, Poulenc suddenly died of a heart attack. The premiere was given by Benny Goodman and Leonard Bernstein at Carnegie Hall in New York City in 1963.

**Harold Schonberg, music critic**

"Poulenc was not a 'big' composer, for his emotional range was too restricted. But what he did, he did perfectly, and his music shows remarkable finish, style and refinement [...]. The sonata [...] is typical Poulenc. In the first movement, skittish thematic elements are broken up by a broadly melodic middle section. The slow movement is one of those melting, long-phrased and unabashed sentimental affairs that nobody but Poulenc could carry off. Weakest of the three movements is the finale, which races along but has little immediacy. Here Poulenc's inspiration seems to have run out."

(Notes from the review on the premiere of the Sonata; the review was published in *The New York Times* on April 11, 1963.)

Contrary to this opinion, some critics praised the Sonata's final movement for its rhapsodic character that manifested in such distinctive properties of French music as elegant instrumental writing and clear execution of compositional intentions through simple structural design.

**Sources**

- Keith Daniel (1982). *Francis Poulenc, His Artistic Development and Musical Style*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press.  
J. Tyrrell & Stanley Sadie (2001). *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. New York: Grove's Dictionaries.  
Carl B. Schmidt (1995). *The Music of Francis Poulenc (1899-1963): A Catalogue*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.



## **Paul Schoenfield (b. 1947)**

### **Sonatina for flute, clarinet, and piano**

- I. Charleston**
- II. Hunter Rag**
- III. Jig**

Paul Schoenfield was commissioned to write this work by the Minnesota Commissioning Club in 1994. Each movement features a different American Dance style, Charleston, Hunter Rag, and Jig.

**Joel Sachs, the Juilliard School Faculty and founder and Director of the** New Juilliard Ensemble Schoenfield is “among those all-too-rare composers whose work combines exuberance and seriousness, familiarity and originality, lightness and depth. His work is inspired by the whole range of musical experience, popular styles both American and foreign, vernacular and folk traditions, and the ‘normal’ historical traditions of cultivated music making, often treated with sly twists. Above all, he has achieved the rare fusion of an extremely complex and rigorous compositional mind with an instinct for accessibility and a reveling in sound that sometimes borders on the manic.”

<https://www.juilliard.edu/music/faculty/sachs-joel>

## **Zello Ahni**

“Reclusive and a wanderer by nature (having rarely lived in any one place for more than five years), Schoenfeld is presently on the composition faculty at the University of Michigan. Additionally, he is an avid student of mathematics and the Talmud.”

<https://smt.d.umich.edu/about/faculty-profiles/paul-schoenfeld/>