

Li Shan Tan
harp

Recital in partial fulfillment of the
Doctor of Musical Arts degree, 2024
Student of Jessica Zhou

Sunday, October 30, 2022
8:00 p.m.
Brown Hall

PROGRAM

François-Adrien Boieldieu
(1775–1834)

Sonata No. 2 in G Major, op. 8 no. 2 (c. 1795)
Allegro moderato
Rondo: Allegro vivace

Gabriel Fauré
(1845–1924)

Impromptu, op. 86 (1904)

Marcel Tournier
(1879–1951)

Sonatine, op. 30 (1924)
Allègrement
Calme et expressif
Fiévreusement

Caroline Lizotte
(b. 1969)

Suite Galactique, op. 39 (2000)
Exosphère
Hymne au Bon Combat
Scherzo del Pueblo

*There are too many people in my life whom I cannot thank enough,
as you have all shaped me into the way I am today.*

*My biggest warmest thank you goes to Jessica - thank you for being the most wonderful
mentor I could ask for, and for always supporting me in every endeavor <3*

*Thank you to my family for constantly cheering me on all the way home in Singapore,
and allowing me to pursue this life.*

*Finally, to my dear friends who are always there for me. Thank you for all our coffee runs,
brunch times, banana bread madness, fridates, random walks in the park and for hearing me
runthrough for the umpteenth time. I am grateful, always.*

Boieldieu Sonata No. 2 in G Major, op. 8 no. 2

Despite being celebrated as the “French Mozart” of his time, it is a pity that the name François-Adrien Boieldieu is not more widely known in this day and age. Boieldieu was one of the leading opera composers of 19th century France, as well as the professor of piano in 1798 and professor of composition from 1820-1829 at the Paris Conservatoire. He wrote over 30 operas and his contemporaries Auber, Cherubini and Berlioz have all praised his music for its elegance and freshness.

Born in Rouen, a city in northern France, Boieldieu's first opera *La fille coupable* was met with great success at only 18 years of age. His subsequent comic operas were equally successful and cemented his reputation as the leading opera composer. It is no wonder, then, that Boieldieu's music features graceful lines with melodic ease. He was reputed to have composed his melodies simply by singing, resulting in a fluid and improvisatory quality to them. Berlioz described his music to be ‘without difficulties and requiring no special attention, simple both for performers and listeners – a pleasant and elegant art, never dreaming and passionate, but fresh and lively’.

Although primarily an opera composer, Boieldieu also wrote other works, such as the Harp Concerto in C, which has been an important staple in the harp repertoire. His Sonata II in G Major however, is much less known; this sonata was once believed to be lost, but now found and housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. In two movements, this sonata embodies Boieldieu's style of writing through flowing melodies and scalic runs. However, this sonata does pose a conundrum for the harpist. On one hand, it is not technically complex, but awkward groupings and figurations lying in the lower registers are not ideal. This was perhaps in part due to a younger and less experienced Boieldieu writing this Op. 8, and in part due to the type of harp it was composed for - smaller range, sound and lighter tension. Despite this, the harp repertoire has been enriched with this piece and is all in all a great addition to the works from the classical era that are available for this instrument.

Fauré Impromptu, op. 86 (1904)

Gabriel Fauré's academic contributions and works such as *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Après un rêve* and *Sicilienne* are widely known, but he remains a composer often overshadowed by his French contemporaries. Fauré's achievements were immense, from winning the Prix de Rome to becoming chief organist at the Madeleine, professor of composition and later in 1905, director of the Paris Conservatoire.

Written in 1904, Impromptu op. 86 must have been a huge undertaking for Fauré considering his already limited time. The commission resulted from the harp *concours* of the Paris Conservatoire where all harp students had to prepare two pieces to play - a piece from the standard repertoire and a newly written work announced exactly a month before the *concours*. Fauré was so late in completing the work that there was no time to print it, and all the students had to copy the entire manuscript by hand. What remains in question however, is the authorship of the work.

Many harpists have noted the distinct change in character, writing style and idiomatlicity of Impromptu mid-way through the work. Some have attributed the

latter half of the work to Fauré's close friend Alphonse Hasselman, who was the professor of harp at the conservatoire. It has been rumored that Fauré approached Hasselman to complete the second half of the work due to his numerous commitments and lack of time. This has not been proven however, but the stark difference in styles is certainly arguable.

Whether Fauréan or Hasselmanian, Impromptu is a magnificent work in the harp oeuvre. Opening with luscious chords which spin out into never-ending melodies, the theme is further developed through a series of virtuosic variations. These variations feature the diverse timbres of harmonics, glissandi and arpeggios while showcasing the harpist's technical prowess. Impromptu would surely have been both a great challenge and a grand showcase for the harpists of the 1904 *concours*.

Tournier Sonatine, op. 30 (1924)

First a harp student then the professor of harp at the Paris Conservatoire, Marcel Tournier taught many harpists between 1912-1948. As a teacher, his student Gerard Devos recalls that "with his students at the conservatoire he was rather icy. No one spoke in class..." As a composer, Devos also notes that many of Tournier's works were not commissioned, but a completely spontaneous process. Tournier not only held the Deuxième Prix of the highly coveted Prix de Rome for his cantata *La Roussalka*, he additionally wrote a large body of solo harp works and transcriptions which expanded the technical possibilities of the instrument. On par with the other harp names of Salzedo, Grandjany and Renié, Tournier's contributions to the harp repertoire solidified the harp's status as a solo instrument. Without a doubt, Marcel Tournier contributed greatly to the harp world as a harpist, composer and pedagogue.

Sonatine, op. 30 highlights the coloristic capabilities and sensual sonorities of the harp. "Allègrement" opens with a charm juxtaposed against a forward drive and complex harmonies, while "Calme et expressif" adorns its melody with ephemeral embellishments. The final movement, "Fiévreusement", culminates in a bold and almost audacious conclusion. A *tour de force* movement on its own, the harpist also needs to be bold to lead this movement into a thrilling finish. Despite often being compared to Ravel's work of the same name, Tournier's Sonatine is a highly idiomatic work for harp and unquestionably holds its own.

Lizotte Suite Galactique, op. 39 (2000)

French-Canadian harpist and composer Caroline Lizotte has been making waves in the harp world. Her contributions to the 20th and 21st century harp repertoire have been performed around the world and often selected as required pieces for international harp competitions. As a performer, Lizotte has been an avid soloist, chamber and orchestral musician, most notably as second harp with the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal for 23 years. She is currently the professor of harp at the Université de Montréal.

Suite Galactique is an exploration of imagery, sounds and techniques in three movements. Lizotte creates untraditional timbres and a new universe of sound through pitch bends, glissandi between tuning pegs and discs, pedal slides, singing, and rattling papers against strings. Each movement presents a story and paints vivid imagery through the use of sounds.

“Exosphère” is galactical, creating an atmosphere where molecules rise up into space. As the movement progresses, one ascends higher and higher until one experiences the weightlessness of zero gravity. The second movement, “Hymne au Bon Combat”, depicts a warrior in the bitter cold; his chattering teeth represented by the rattling of papers against the harp strings. The warrior sits in front of a fire with his friends as they sing and recount their stories of combat; one can hear this song as the harpist will sing while she plays. The final movement, “Scherzo del Pueblo”, contrasts this with a short energetic scherzo featuring pitch bends, quick strums and a dance-like quality while the people celebrate.

Below are the composer’s notes on the individual movements:

Exosphère

Atmospheric layer approximately 1000 km deep, where the lightest molecules escape the effect of gravity and reach the interplanetary space. The substance is built in the low register of the harp - in the earth - as if we had taken a clod of mud and extracted the water from it, and followed its molecular cycle through several transformations it experiences in the atmosphere. Musically, an ascending feeling – free of gravitational forces - is clearly presented.

Hymne au Bon Combat

The warrior sits down around a fire with his companions. They each relate their conquests, and the strangers are welcomed into the circle, because everyone is proud of his life and proud to lead the Good Combat. (Manuel do Guerreiro da Luz/Paulo Coelho) The chattering effect appearing from the very first bars suggests to us that the warrior is exhausted and cold after a hard struggle. Close to the fire, he will warm himself and sing with his friends. ‘Organic and interactive’ movement for the performer because he or she must feel cold and sing like the warrior. However, avoid lighting a fire ...

Scherzo del Pueblo

Translation of ‘Scherzo of the People’ in Spanish. To my friend living in Spain: ‘I am composing the 3rd movement of my *Galactical Suite* for harp. Funny, it tends to be developing into a very ‘agricultural’ ternary: thumbs on thorns, hands in hay! Thinking of a possible title: Scherzo for Common People. The music is turning in my mind as inside a meat-grinder ...’ And my friend answered: ‘Just for fun, say it with pronunciation accents: Scherzo del Pueblo; better than Scherzo Popular.’

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