

TONIGHT'S CONCERT

LA VOIX HUMAINE

Thursday 24 February 2022 7-8.30pm
Barbican

Richard Strauss Metamorphosen

Francis Poulenc La voix humaine

Tragédie lyrique en 1 acte pour Soprano et orchestre

(Ricordi Paris - UMPG); By arrangement with G Ricordi & Co (London) Ltd

Barbara Hannigan conductor & soprano

Barbara Hannigan, Denis Guéguin, Clemens Malinowski direction & video

Denis Guéguin filming & editing of video for Strauss' *Metamorphosen*

Clemens Malinowski live video for Poulenc's *La voix humaine*

Julien Bourdin sound engineer

Michalis Boliakis rehearsal pianist & musical assistant

Generously supported by the **Jeremy and John Sacher Charitable Trust**

Welcome



Kathryn McDowell CBE DL
LSO Managing Director

A warm welcome to this evening's concert, the final of three rewarding performances this February in which Barbara Hannigan has joined us in the role of both singer and conductor. Earlier this week, we were delighted to announce her appointment as LSO Associate Artist for a period of three years, and look forward to exploring more new and exciting repertoire with her in the seasons to come.

Tonight's programme begins with Richard Strauss' *Metamorphosen*, one of the composer's final and most personal works, composed in 1945, followed by Barbara Hannigan's performance as singer and conductor in Francis Poulenc's one-woman, one-act opera, *La voix humaine*, written in 1958 and based on Jean Cocteau's earlier play of the same name.

We are extremely grateful to the Jeremy and John Sacher Charitable Trust for their generous support towards Barbara Hannigan's concerts with the LSO.

I hope you enjoy tonight's concert and that you will be able to join us again soon. On Thursday 3 March we celebrate the 40th anniversary of our Barbican home, with Sir Simon Rattle, LSO Music Director, conducting Haydn's glorious oratorio *The Creation*, joined by the London Symphony Chorus and a group of stand-out soloists.

Coming Up

Thursday 3 March 8pm & Sunday 6 March 7pm
Barbican

HAYDN'S CREATION

Sir Simon Rattle conducts an all-star line-up of vocal soloists and the London Symphony Chorus in Haydn's great oratorio *The Creation*. The concert on 3 March, along with an array of special pre-concert performances, celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Barbican.

Wednesday 9 March 7pm
Barbican

SIBELIUS & BARTÓK

Fabulous colours and untamed emotions. Sir Simon Rattle celebrates the music he loves: there's Berlioz and Bartók, Hannah Kendall, Ravel's *La valse* and Sibelius' Symphony No 7.

Thursday 10 March 7pm
Barbican

DVOŘÁK, WALKER & SCHUMANN

Warm-hearted nostalgia in Dvořák's American Suite, musical love-notes in Robert Schumann's Symphony No 2, and George Walker's ravishing *Lilacs* with soprano Nicole Cabell.

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Please switch off all phones. Photography and audio/video recording are not permitted during the performance.

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Metamorphosen

Richard Strauss



1945



25 minutes

Programme note by
Lindsay Kemp

In the spring of 1945, with World War II approaching its conclusion, the devastation of Germany's cities was almost complete. For the 80-year-old Richard Strauss it was almost too much to bear. The bombing in 1943 of the Munich National Theatre, where several of his operas had been premiered, had hit him as 'the greatest catastrophe which has ever been brought into my life', and since then the destruction of the opera houses in Weimar, Dresden and Vienna had reduced him to even greater depths of depression and despair. To him, it seemed as if German civilisation itself was coming to an end. Not that this gloomy mood stopped him from composing. The previous summer he had begun work on a setting for male-voice choir of a poem by Goethe, 'Niemand wird sich selber kennen'.

'No one can know himself ... yet daily he must put to the test what he can see clearly and objectively ... what he is and what he was, what he can do and what he may. What goes on in the world, no one really understands correctly, and until today no one gladly wishes to understand it.'

A commission from the Swiss conductor and patron Paul Sacher, however, caused him to re-divert the material of this setting into a 'study for 23 solo strings', which he completed on 12 April 1945. By this time it had a new title: *Metamorphosen* (Metamorphoses).

The use of the word tells us two things. First of all, this single-movement Adagio, lasting nearly 30 minutes, is one in which the melodic material is subjected to constantly unfolding and intricate development. There are four main themes, of which the drooping, grief-stricken second theme, heard on a pair of violas immediately after the cellos and basses have given out the chordal first one, is the most naggingly obstinate. Its origins lay in a theme Strauss had noted down after the loss of the Munich Opera House; and just before the end of the piece we hear it in its final metamorphosis, transformed by cellos and basses into the theme from the Funeral March of Beethoven's 'Eroica' Symphony. Strauss maintained that the allusion had not been a planned one, but he nevertheless wrote the words 'In Memoriam!' underneath it in the score. The implication seems clear – that *Metamorphosen* is a threnody for German musical life.

But there is another resonance in the work's title, this time to do with the Goethe connection. Strauss had recently embarked on a project to read Goethe's complete works, and would have been fully aware that towards the end of his own life the great poet had used the word 'Metamorphosen' to describe his own mental development, especially when applied to works which had taken form over a number of years. Seen in this light, and bearing in mind both its genesis and the text originally associated with it, Strauss' work clearly embodies a much more personal message about self-knowledge and the passing of time. The result is one of his most searching and emotionally intense utterances.

Richard Strauss In Profile

1864 to 1949 (Germany)

Richard Strauss was born in Munich in 1864, the son of Franz Strauss, a brilliant horn player in the Munich court orchestra; it is therefore perhaps not surprising that some of the composer's most striking writing is for the French horn. Strauss had his first piano lessons when he was four, and produced his first composition two years later. Surprisingly, however, he did not attend a music academy; his formal education ending rather at Munich University where he studied philosophy and aesthetics, continuing with his musical training at the same time.

Following the first public performances of his work, he received a commission from Hans von Bülow in 1882 and two years later was appointed Bülow's Assistant Musical Director at the Meiningen Court Orchestra. This marked the beginning of a career in which Strauss was to conduct many of the world's leading orchestras, in addition to holding positions at opera houses in Munich, Weimar, Berlin and Vienna. While at Munich, he married the singer Pauline de Ahna, for whom he wrote many of his greatest songs.

Strauss is best known for his operas, songs and magnificent symphonic poems. Works such as *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Don Juan* and *Ein Heldenleben* demonstrate his supreme mastery of orchestration. The thoroughly modern operas *Salome* and *Elektra*, with their Freudian themes and near-atonal scoring, are landmarks in the development of 20th-century music, and the neo-Classical *Der Rosenkavalier* has become one of the most popular operas of its century. Later operatic masterpieces by Strauss include the 'chamber opera' *Ariadne auf Naxos*, the fairytale opera *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, the lyrical comedy *Arabella* and the 'conversation piece' *Capriccio*.

Strauss spent much of his last years in self-imposed exile in Switzerland, waiting to be officially cleared of complicity in the Nazi regime. His final works included *Metamorphosen* for string orchestra, the Oboe Concerto and the *Four Last Songs*. He died at Garmisch-Partenkirchen in 1949, shortly after his widely celebrated 85th birthday.



IN BRIEF

Born 1864, Munich

Died 1949, Garmisch-Partenkirchen

Musical training
Private study with Friedrich Wilhelm Meyer

Famous acquaintances
Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Stefan Zweig, Hans von Bülow, Gustav Mahler

Best known for
Tone poems including *Don Juan* and *Ein Heldenleben*; operas including *Salome*, *Elektra* and *Der Rosenkavalier*; songs including *Four Last Songs*; Oboe Concerto

Composer profile by
Andrew Stewart



2022

JANUARY TO JULY

STILL TO COME THIS YEAR

Haydn's *Creation* with **Lucy Crowe,**
Andrew Staples, Roderick Williams
& the **London Symphony Chorus**
3 & 6 March

Sir Simon Rattle conducts
Sibelius, Dvořák, Bartók, Gershwin & Brahms
9 & 10 March; 12 & 16 June

World and UK premieres from **Helen Grime,**
Francisco Coll & Joel Järventausta
with **Håkan Hardenberger**
& **Patricia Kopatchinskaja**
3 April

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Weill's *The Seven Deadly Sins*
27 & 28 April

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La voix humaine (The Human Voice)

Francis Poulenc



1958



50 minutes

Sung in French

English surtitles by

Jonathan Burton

Operated by **Michalis Boliakis**

Programme note by

Jessica Duchon

*Born in Paris in 1921, **Denise Duval** trained as a soprano at the Conservatoire de Bordeaux. She had starring roles at the Grand Theatre de Bordeaux. In 1947 she was discovered by Poulenc, and worked closely with him through the rest of her international career. She passed away in 2016.*

Francis Poulenc's one-act opera for a lone soprano is among the crowning glories of his career, its title paying tribute – perhaps by coincidence – to the inspiration behind his best music: the human voice. It dates from 1958, following hot on the heels of the magnificent reception accorded to his opera *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

The musicologist Henri Hell suggested that Poulenc had been considering setting Jean Cocteau's 1928 monologue *La voix humaine* for a long time, but had waited years, feeling he needed a great deal of experience in order to construct it perfectly. The monologue itself had first been presented in 1930 at the Comédie-Française, performed by the actress Berthe Bovy. The project reunited Poulenc with Cocteau nearly four decades after their first acquaintance in the years following World War I and the composer took great care with the text, omitting only passages he felt would hold up its emotional tension when rendered in music.

Another spur for the piece may have been an incident at La Scala, Milan, when, at a performance with some friends in January 1956, Poulenc watched Maria Callas taking a curtain call. He recalled:

'As the last notes faded beneath thunderous applause ... Callas violently pushed the splendid Mario [del Monaco] into the corner

of the wings and advanced by herself into the middle of the stage ... At which point one of my dear friends, my publisher [Henri Dugardin], who was sitting next to me, said: 'You should write an opera just for her ... that way, she wouldn't be such a nuisance''

It was nevertheless for – and with – the soprano Denise Duval that Poulenc created the opera *La voix humaine*. He had first come across her in 1947; hearing her rehearsing Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly*, he had chosen her at once for the lead role of his own opera *Les mamelles de Tirésias*. The two enjoyed a close collaboration thereafter, undertaking concert tours of the US and Europe together. (Poulenc was a magnificent pianist, particularly when working with singers, and was celebrated also for his partnership with the baritone Pierre Bernac.) Duval sang the role of Blanche in the first French performance of *Dialogues des Carmélites* and later, in 1960 and 1961, Poulenc wrote the song cycle *La courte paille* and another Cocteau monologue, *La dame de Monte Carlo*, for her.

She played a key role in the creative process for *La voix humaine*, along with her teacher, Janine Reiss. The latter recalled in her memoirs that she and Duval had advised the composer on numerous details; for instance, when Poulenc found one phrase sounding too harsh, they identified that this was

because it was too high; the composer duly put it down a third in response. He regarded Duval therefore as virtually a 'co-composer'.

Poulenc finished sketching the score in March 1958 in Cannes. The first draft was completed in early June, the orchestration in August, and Duval gave the world premiere at the Opéra-Comique on 6 February 1959, conducted by Georges Prêtre. Cocteau himself took charge of the design and staging.

The story is brief and devastating. An unnamed woman known only as Elle ('She') is speaking on the telephone to her former lover, the day before his marriage to someone else. Abandoned and distraught, she blames herself for everything that has gone wrong. She reveals that after he left her, she tried to take her own life.

Poulenc rounds out the drama in a way that only opera can. In Cocteau's play the audience hears only one side of this increasingly fraught conversation; but Poulenc seems to bring us something of the other side too, via the orchestra. Instead of imagining the ex-lover's emollient phrases to Elle, his accusations or his indifference, the audience can experience those responses through the supporting instrumental textures.

The music flexes between the conversation's fragments with biting astringency and heart-twisting, sinuous strands of melody. Poulenc's sensitivity allows him to burrow into the subtle ways that the script's intense emotions are manipulated: sometimes concealed behind the heroine's dissembling or complicated by the telephone's technological failures, with crossed lines and some inadvertent disconnections. His setting follows and enhances the swift, clipped style of the words, the lyrical flowerings becoming all the more striking through the contrast.

'If you did not love me and were not so awkward, this telephone could easily become a terrible weapon', Elle notes. 'A weapon that would leave no marks, nor make a noise ...' In the end she wraps the telephone cord around her neck as if to strangle herself and sinks into her bed, still uttering the words 'Je t'aime, je t'aime ...'.

Francis Poulenc In Profile

1899 to 1963 (France)



IN BRIEF

Born 1899, Paris

Died 1963, Paris

Musical training

Private study with Ricardo Viñes (piano) and Charles Koechlin (composition)

Musical acquaintances

Maurice Ravel, Erik Satie, Nadia Boulanger, fellow-members of 'Les Six', Benjamin Britten

Best known for

Operas including *Dialogues des Carmélites*, numerous songs and piano pieces, concertos including one for two pianos, *Gloria* for soprano, choir and orchestra

Composer profile by
Jessica Duchon

Francis Poulenc was born in Paris in 1899, into a family wealthy and famous through its part in founding the pharmaceutical giant Rhône-Poulenc. Devoid of financial worries, the budding composer could devote himself wholly to music, after side-stepping his father's objections.

After serving in World War I, he returned to the French capital, where he surfed the tide of new musical fashions. In particular, a new generation of composers was taking on the influence of the author and artist Jean Cocteau, who wrote in 1919: 'Enough of clouds, of waves, of aquariums, of water-nymphs, of nocturnal perfumes, we need an earthbound music, AN EVERYDAY MUSIC ...'. Mingling further influences from Erik Satie's quirky genius, Igor Stravinsky's neo-Classicism, and from his friends in the group known – despite plentiful differences – as 'Les Six' (the others were Georges Auric, Germaine Tailleferre, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud and Louis Durey), Poulenc became a crucial figure in creating that new approach for the Roaring Twenties.

The witty, extrovert 'Poulet' (Chicken), as he sometimes signed his letters, was also sensitive and insecure, suffering intense crises over his homosexuality and his religious faith. This ferment of paradoxes – liveliness and introspection, spirituality and earthiness, joy and sorrow – contributes much to his distinctive sound.

After serving briefly in an anti-aircraft unit in 1940, Poulenc spent World War II chiefly in Paris, horrified by the Nazi occupation. Though in danger as a homosexual, he still set the work of Resistance poets to music.

In the 1950s he became increasingly celebrated, producing some of his greatest works, including the operas *Dialogues des Carmélites* and *La voix humaine*; soon afterwards came *Gloria* for soprano, large orchestra and chorus, the world premiere of which he attended at Carnegie Hall, New York, in 1961. He died in 1963 at his home in Paris.

Barbara Hannigan

LSO Associate Artist



Soprano and conductor Barbara Hannigan is an artist at the forefront of creation. Her artistic colleagues include Sir Simon Rattle, Sasha Waltz, Kent Nagano, Vladimir Jurowski, John Zorn, Andreas Kriegenburg, Andris Nelsons, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Christoph Marthaler, Sir Antonio Pappano, Katie Mitchell, Kirill Petrenko and Krzysztof Warlikowski. The late conductor and pianist Reinbert de Leeuw has been an extraordinary influence and inspiration on her development as a musician.

Hannigan has shown a profound commitment to the music of our time and has given world premiere performances of over 85 new creations. She has collaborated extensively with composers including Pierre Boulez, John Zorn, Henri Dutilleux, György Ligeti, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Salvatore Sciarrino, John Barry, Pascal Dusapin, Brett Dean, George Benjamin and Hans Abrahamsen.

The 2020/21 season presented both challenges and opportunities, and true to form, Hannigan continued at her own speed of light, premiering a new live video production of *La voix humaine* in which she sings and conducts, created in collaboration with video artist Denis Guéguin as part of her residency with l'Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. She performed across Europe with colleagues including Sir Simon Rattle and the London Symphony Orchestra, Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Gothenburg Symphony and Munich Philharmonic, and at festivals in Ludwigsburg and Aix-en-Provence, and celebrated her 50th birthday at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, conducting the Ludwig Orchestra in works by Haydn, Copland and Barry, and two Kurt Weill songs arranged for her by Bill Elliott.

The 2021/22 season brings her return to La Monnaie as Berg's Lulu in the much-awaited remount of her first *Lulu* production with Warlikowski from 2012. Her production of Poulenc's *La voix humaine* takes her to the LSO and the Munich Philharmonic, and she returns to the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra. She also works with younger colleagues at The Juilliard School, sings in the world premiere of a work by Zosha di Castri (with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra) and presents several concerts with vocal works by John Zorn in Antwerp, Hamburg and Modena.

Hannigan's album as both singer and conductor, *Crazy Girl Crazy* (2017), won the 2018 Grammy Award for Best Classical Solo Vocal album, and other awards including an Edison and a Juno. Other recent albums include *Vienna: fin de siècle* and Satie's *Socrate*, both with Reinbert de Leeuw. In spring 2020 she released an album of works by Nono, Haydn and Grisey (*La Passione*) with Alpha Classics. Recording plans include the release of three new CDs for the Alpha label.

Hannigan's commitment to the younger generation of musicians led her to create the mentoring initiative Equilibrium Young Artists in 2017. In 2020 she created Momentum: our Future Now, an initiative which encourages artists and organisations to mentor young professional musicians. Her recent awards including the Dresdener Musikfestspiele Glasshütte Award and Denmark's Léonie Sonning Music Prize. The financial component of both awards was donated to young artist initiatives.

Originally from Nova Scotia, Hannigan resides in Finistère, in north-west France.

London Symphony Orchestra

On Stage

Guest Leader

Natalia Lomeiko

First Violins

Ginette Decuyper

Laura Dixon

Maxine Kwok

William Melvin

Claire Parfitt

Laurent Quénelle

Harriet Rayfield

Sylvain Vasseur

Caroline Frenkel

Second Violins

David Alberman

Sarah Quinn

Miya Väisänen

David Ballesteros

Matthew Gardner

Naoko Keatley

Alix Lagasse

Csilla Pogany

Belinda McFarlane

Iwona Muszynska

Andrew Pollock

Paul Robson

Violas

Jane Atkins

Gillianne Haddow

Malcolm Johnston

Germán Clavijo

Sofia Silva Sousa

May Dolan

Claire Maynard

Alistair Scahill

Cellos

Rebecca Gilliver

Alastair Blayden

Jennifer Brown

Noël Bradshaw

Dan Gardner

Amanda Truelove

Double Basses

David Stark

Patrick Laurence

Thomas Goodman

Simo Väisänen

Flute

Gareth Davies

Piccolo

Jack Welch

Oboe

Juliana Koch

Cor Anglais

Christine Pendrill

Clarinets

John Bradbury

Chi-Yu Mo

Bass Clarinet

Laurent Ben Slimane

Bassoons

Rachel Gough

Dominic Tyler

Horns

Timothy Jones

Angela Barnes

Trumpets

James Fountain

Aaron Akugbo

Trombone

Peter Moore

Tuba

Ben Thomson

Timpani

Nigel Thomas

Harp

Bryn Lewis