SAN FRANCISCO
PERFORMANCES

presents...

Shenson Piano Series

DANNY DRIVER | Piano

Tuesday, November 8, 2022 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

FAURÉ	**Prelude in D-flat Major, Opus 103, No. 1**
	Barcarolle No. 4 in A-flat Major, Opus 44
	Theme and Variations in C-sharp Minor, Opus 73
	Barcarolle No. 5 in F-sharp Minor, Opus 66
FRANCK	**Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue**

INTERMISSION

L. BOULANGER	**D'un vieux jardin**
	D'un jardin clair
RAVEL	**Un barque sur l'ocean**

SCHUMANN **Symphonic Etudes, Opus 13**

Thema: Andante
Etude I (Variation 1): Un poco più vivo
Etude II (Variation 2): Espressivo
Etude III: Vivace
Etude IV (Variation 3)
Etude V (Variation 4): Vivacissimo
Etude VI (Variation 5): Agitato
Etude VII (Variation 6): Allegro molto
Etude VIII (Variation 7): Andante
Etude IX: Presto possibile
Etude X (Variation 8): Allegro
Etude XI (Variation 9): Con espressione
Etude XII: Finale: Allegro brillante

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Danny Driver dannydriver.com

Hamburg Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco

ARTIST PROFILE

Tonight is the San Francisco Performances recital debut of Danny Driver.

One of Britain's most respected pianists, **Danny Driver** is recognized internationally for his sophistication, insight and musical depth. His studies at Cambridge University and the Royal College of Music inspired his holistic approach to performance, from which he derives a vibrant brand of programming that he brings to concert halls and music festivals across the UK, Europe, Asia and North America. His breadth of repertoire and musical curiosity are reflected in recordings of music from the baroque period through to the present day.

Driver's solo recital career to date has included numerous performances at London's celebrated Wigmore Hall, artist residencies at the Lichfield and Lammermuir Festivals (UK), as well as the Southbank International Piano Series, Music Toronto, Montreal's Salle Bourgie, and Paris' Musée de l'Orangerie. Driver's passion for chamber music has generated invitations to esteemed festivals such as O/Modernt, Eilat, Bard, Gothenburg, and the Australian Chamber Music Festival, and has found expression in longstanding musical partnerships with violinists Chloë Hanslip and Jack Liebeck, baritone Christian Immler, and cellist Oliver Coates, as well as collaborations with the JACK, Parker, Carducci, and Brodsky String Quartets.

Approaching concerto performance as a form of large-scale chamber music, Driver has worked with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Minnesota Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, American Symphony Orchestra, RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Hong Kong Pro Arte, Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Uppsala Chamber Orchestra, and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. He has performed twice as soloist at the BBC Proms.

Driver's long relationship with Hyperion Records has spawned a varied discography of works by composers including CPE Bach, Handel, Balakirev, and Schumann, winning accolades such as *Limelight Magazine's* Instrumental Recording of the Year 2014 and inclusion in the *New York Times'* list of 2017's Best Classical Recordings (Piano Concertos by Amy Beach, Dorothy Howell and Cecile Chaminade). His most recent release, György Ligeti's Études for Piano, has met with particular international acclaim.

Danny Driver lives in London with his family. Besides his performance schedule, he teaches a small class of advanced pianists at the Royal College of Music.

PROGRAM NOTES

Prelude in D-flat Major, Opus 103, No. 1

GABRIEL FAURÉ
(1845–1924)

Gabriel Fauré wrote for the piano across the span of his life, but he was not attracted to structured forms such as the concerto and sonata. Instead, he preferred shorter and freer forms: he wrote 13 barcarolles, 13 nocturnes, six impromptus, and a number of preludes. Late in life (1909–10), Fauré composed a set of nine preludes. The *Prelude in D-flat Major* has been described as a nocturne. Fauré marks it *Andante molto moderato* and stresses that the beginning should be both *cantabile* and *dolce*. The beginning is so gentle that one is hardly aware of all the "wrong" notes that should not be a part of D-flat major—here their soft sting gives this music its expressive power. The middle section, somewhat more animated, moves to C-sharp minor, again with much harmonic freedom within that key. Fauré makes a very subtle return to the opening material, and a five-measure coda leads to a most subdued conclusion.

Barcarolle No. 4 in A-flat Major, Opus 44

The term *barcarolle* ("boat-song") comes from the Italian *barcarole*, the songs of the Venetian gondoliers. The barcarolle traditionally has some of the relaxed ease of those songs, in which a melody is sung over a rocking accompaniment in a slow 6/8 meter that echoes the motion of the boat across the waves. Fauré's *Barcarolle No. 4 in A-flat Major*, composed in 1886, glows with the sunny spirit of the barcarolle form. Marked *Allegretto*, the music moves gently along the expected 6/8 meter. It opens with the principal melody in the right hand while the left provides a rocking accompaniment that seems to soothe even as it helps push the music forward. The second subject reverses these roles: now the melody is deep in the pianist's left hand, while the right hand provides a rippling accompaniment high above. After all this energy, the barcarolle glides to a subdued conclusion on a series of delicately arpeggiated chords.

Theme and Variations in C-sharp Minor, Opus 73

Fauré composed his *Theme and Variations in C-sharp Minor* during the summer of 1895, a few months after his fiftieth birthday. It cost him a great deal of work, and in September of that year he wrote to a friend: "I'm at grips with the final variation, the conclusion of a "thème varié" for piano. I don't know if the piece is good, but I'm sure I'm not surprising you by saying it's very difficult!"

The form of the work is straightforward: a theme and 11 variations; the work is compact, spanning only 16 minutes. The theme itself is remarkable: it extends over two minutes by itself, and this imposing music manages to be both noble and subdued at

the same time. The variations that follow are often quite short, and they are set in different tempos, meters, and keys. Fauré's writing for piano can be quite difficult—several of the variations are so complex that they might almost be written more easily across three staves than two.

The ending is remarkable. The tenth variation, marked *Allegro vivo*, dances agilely along its 3/8 meter—that fast 3/8 pulse can be heard in virtually every measure of this variation. This is virtuoso music, and it drives to a powerful concluding chord. This seems a perfect ending, well calculated to make an audience burst into applause. But it is *not* the ending. Fauré pushes beyond this virtuosity to conclude with a long and expressive eleventh variation that he marks *dolce* and sets in the extremely rare key of C-sharp major. This final variation rises to a measured climax, then falls away to conclude on a quietly arpeggiated chord.

Fauré was a great admirer of the piano music of Schumann, and in particular he admired Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes*, which Mr. Driver will perform as the final work on this concert. Listeners may find it interesting to compare both composers' approach to variation form.

Barcarolle No. 5 in F-sharp Minor, Opus 66

Fauré completed the fifth of his series of barcarolles on September 18, 1894. No one coming to this music without knowing its title would guess that it is a barcarolle. Rather than exuding a relaxed ease, this is complex music. Fauré sets it in 9/8 rather than the expected 6/8, but will then write passages in 6/8, and at one point he sets the right hand in 2/4 and the left in 6/8. This is also quite energetic music. Fauré may mark the beginning *dolce*, but within just a few measures the music has grown to *sempre fortissimo*, and it spills over with energy throughout—it can be rippling and sparkling one moment, turbulent and dissonant the next, and dissonances will sting from out of these washes of sound. After all this energy, the music grows quiet and vanishes on a gentle chord in F-sharp major.

Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue

CÉSAR FRANCK
(1822–1890)

In 1884 César Franck set out to compose a piano work inspired by Bach. Specifically, Franck chose Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* as his model and planned at first to compose a *Prelude and Fugue*. But as he worked, Franck came to feel that the music needed a transition between these two parts, and eventually this "transition" turned into a movement of its own, the *Chorale*. Franck's former pupil Camille Saint-Saëns gave the first performance at a concert of the Société Nationale in Paris on January 24, 1885.

The Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue is based on a thematic technique Franck had learned from Liszt, who in turn had adapted it from Schubert: the work is in a cyclic form in which certain germinal themes will reappear in modified form throughout. Here the method is particularly ingenious because the themes of the *Prelude and Chorale* begin to evolve as soon as they are stated, and—at the climax of the *Fugue*—Franck recalls and weaves together all his themes in some impressive contrapuntal writing.

The *Prelude* has an improvisatory air: the opening measures give way to a falling figure Franck marks *a capriccio*, and he will alternate and extend both these elements across the span of this opening section. The pace slows slightly at the *Chorale*, where Franck does not present his principal theme immediately: a rather free introduction (marked *molto cantabile, non troppo dolce*) leads to the chorale melody, presented in richly-arpeggiated chords that roll upward across four octaves. The structure is once again episodic, as Franck alternates the free beginning with the solemn chorale tune. As the movement proceeds, we begin to hear a foreshadowing of the fugue subject, and suddenly the music rushes into the *Fugue*. This is the longest section, and Franck puts his fugue subject through complex treatment. When Saint-Saëns complained that this was not really a fugue, he was referring to the fact that some of the interludes here are not contrapuntal at all—they consist of a main line and its accompaniment. But in fact Franck's fugue is quite complex, treating the subject in inversion and in various rhythmic displacements. Near the end comes the high point of all this contrapuntal complexity: Franck recalls elements of the *Prelude* and then—through shimmering textures—combines the *Chorale and Fugue* themes and presents them simultaneously.

D'un vieux jardin D'un jardin clair

LILI BOULANGER
(1893–1918)

The younger sister of the great teacher Nadia Boulanger, Lili Boulanger was a musician of extraordinary talent. A student of Fauré, Lili was the first woman ever to win the Prix de Rome, but that promise was cut short by perpetually poor health and by an early death: she was only 24 when she died, ten days before the death of Debussy. So short a life inevitably means that one's output is small, and today is Lili is remembered for her vocal settings and a small amount of instrumental music.

In 1914, while living at the Villa Medicis as part of her Prix de Rome residency, Boulanger composed two brief works for piano, both inspired by gardens. Boulanger composed with unusual harmonic freedom, and *D'un vieux jardin* ("Of an Old Garden") is remarkable for its harmonies. The piece may nominally be in C-sharp minor, but any sense of a settled harmonic home is violated by the great number of what seem "wrong" notes. Boulanger marks the beginning *Expressif*, and her vision of an old garden gradually accelerates, then falls back to the opening tempo and slips into silence on chords marked *grave e doux*. We are left wondering how music so full of "wrong" notes can sound so right.

By contrast, *D'un jardin clair* ("Of a Clear Garden") is sunny and bright. The opening tempo marking is *Assez vite* ("Very fast"), and much of this piece is set high in the piano's register (both hands are in treble clef for extended periods). Boulanger spreads the music out over three staves, and her vision of a clear garden fades away on chords spaced across the entire range of the keyboard.

Une barque sur l'océan

MAURICE RAVEL
(1875–1937)

Ravel wrote the five-movement set of piano pieces entitled *Miroirs* in the years 1904–5, when he was 30 years old. The title *Miroirs* suggests that Ravel's attempt here is to reflect an image, and each of the pieces suggests a "sound-picture" of its title. The third piece, *Une barque sur l'ocean* ("A Barque on the Ocean"), may be familiar to audiences in another form, for Ravel

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orchestrated it shortly after publishing *Miroirs*. Here is one of Ravel's most successful efforts at tone-painting: waves shimmer and fall, the wind whistles, and the boat glides and surges across the water.

Symphonic Etudes, Opus 13

ROBERT SCHUMANN
(1810–1856)

The piano teacher Friedrich Wieck sometimes took promising students to live in his own home. Robert Schumann was one of these, and in April 1834 Wieck brought the 17-year-old Ernestine von Fricken into the household. She herself would prove only a mediocre pianist, but her effect on Schumann—and his music—was profound. He promptly fell in love with her, and the two became secretly engaged—to the quiet fury of Clara, who even at age 15 could see what was going on, even if her father could not. At this point, her father, Baron von Fricken, got wind of matters and carried her off, and that was that.

Before this rupture, however, Schumann had begun to compose a set of piano variations on a theme in C-sharp minor written by the Baron himself for flute and titled *Thema quasi marcia funebre*. The end of the romance probably put an end to Schumann's enthusiasm for the piece, and he set it aside, where it lay for two years. But in September 1836 Chopin made a visit to Leipzig, and Schumann was so dazzled by his playing that he pulled out the manuscript and set to work, exclaiming that he was writing "etudes with great gusto and excitement."

Schumann had heard Chopin play his *Etudes* and was inspired to write something similar. His *Symphonic Etudes* were intended at first simply as a set of etudes, but he soon realized that almost all of these were variations on von Fricken's flute theme, so the set is a collection—simultaneously—of etudes and variations. It was originally published in 1837 under the title *Etudes in Orchestral Character for Piano from Florestan and Eusebius*, but for the second edition in 1852, Schumann revised the music, dropped several etudes, and renamed it *Etudes in the Form of Variations*. The generally-accepted title today for the set is *Symphonic Etudes*, though this music has nothing to do with the orchestra: it is simply brilliant music for the piano.

In their complete form, the *Symphonic Etudes*—the theme, the variation/etudes, and a finale—make up a substantial piece of music lasting over half an hour. The Baron's cool, poised theme gives shape to most of the variations, but listeners often feel that in the excitement of Schumann's writing it vanishes altogether—and they may be right. Schumann treats the theme in a variety of ways, ranging from the brilliant and technically difficult to the gentle and evocative. The theme sometimes appears as a subordinate voice, sometimes as a polyphonic subject, and sometimes simply as the melody.

Schumann concludes with a huge finale based on a quotation from Heinrich Marschner's opera *Der Templer und die Jüdin*, and the Baron's original theme appears in the course of this. During the month when he composed this finale, Schumann was being visited by a good friend, the young English composer William Sterndale Bennett. In Marschner's opera this theme, a leaping chordal melody, accompanies the words "England, rejoice," and Schumann includes it here as a welcoming tribute to his English friend.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger