

CONCERT 3

FRIDAY 28 NOVEMBER, 3PM

POÈME

Ernest CHAUSSON (1855-1899) *Poème*, op. 25 (1896)

16'

Adam Chalabi (ANAM Resident Faculty, Head of Violin) violin soloist
Miriam Niessl (QLD) violin
Noah Coyne (VIC) violin
Mattea Osenk (SA) viola
Howard Penny (ANAM Resident Faculty, Head of Strings and Cello) cello
Paavali Jumppanen (ANAM Artistic Director) piano

CHAUSSON Concert, op. 21 (1889)

42'

i. *Décidé - Animé*
ii. *Sicilienne. Pas vite*
iii. *Grave*
iv. *Très animé*

Theonie Wang (QLD) violin soloist
Miriam Niessl (QLD) violin
Noah Coyne (VIC) violin
Mattea Osenk (SA) viola
Howard Penny (ANAM Resident Faculty, Head of Strings and Cello) cello
Paavali Jumppanen (ANAM Artistic Director) piano

Approximate duration: 1 hour

Adam Chalabi's position is supported by the Patricia H Reid Endowment.

Howard Penny's position is supported by the Johnson Family Foundation & Anonymous (2).

The position of ANAM Artistic Director is supported by Janet Holmes à Court AC and Rosemary & the late John Macleod.

Miriam is supported by ANAM Syndicate donors Lyndsey Hawkins, Michael Schwarz and David Clouston, Michael Tyazhky and Mila Tyazhka, Julie Wehbe.

Noah is supported by ANAM Syndicate donor Faye Goldsmith. He currently plays a Karel van der Meer Violin Bow on loan to ANAM from Emily Boutard.

Mattea is supported by ANAM Syndicate donors Mary-Anne Carmody, Jerry Koliha and Marlene Krelle, Mick and Margaret Toller, Dianne Vale, Anonymous (1). She plays a Douglas Coghill viola, purchased with the assistance of the Lesley McMullin Viola Fund.

Theonie is supported by ANAM Syndicate donors Maureen and Alan Cant, Dorothy and Hans Carlborg, Lyndsey Hawkins, Michael Kent and Cristina Capp Legora, Michael Schwartz and David Clouston.

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THE TRUE SPIRIT OF FRENCH MUSIC?

Our third concert is the nexus of our festival, the halfway point for our tireless musicians, and an apt moment to explore an unlikely composer who captured the many strands of French music at the dusk of the long nineteenth century. The past, present and future all collide in the music of **Ernest Chausson**.

Chausson died at the age of 44 in a shock bicycle accident, cutting short the life of a composer still approaching his prime. Though the first concert of this series proposes Lili Boulanger as a major voice in twentieth century France had her own life not been cut short at the age of 24 –it is more likely Chausson who would have had the more transformational impact. The earlier time, his significant means, and (pragmatically) his gender, in combination with a gift for composition, set him up perfectly to drive the development of French music.

Even Chausson's origins have a deeply Romantic character to them, with personal tragedy and isolation against a backdrop of financial security and relative comfort. The youngest child of a government contractor, Chausson's bourgeois family lived a comfortable life, and Chausson himself received excellent tutelage in fine arts, thought and philosophy. His idyllic childhood was overshadowed by the deaths of his two older brothers, and most biographies address the very protective role his parents took over their only remaining son. Growing up sheltered in the company of the artists and composers, but with no contact with peers of his own age, the young Chausson was cultured beyond his years with a sincere, unpretentious and melancholic artistic air.

Psychoanalysis of those in the past is always a finicky affair, but it's a safe call to assume these childhood experiences influenced a perfectionistic personality who laboured through the taxing act of creation and struggled with melancholy and his mental health. Wishing to please his parents, he initially studied and was certified to practice law, but never worked a day in a court — he instead enrolled in the Conservatoire de Paris to study with Jules Massenet and Cesar Franck. Immediately, both recognised his natural artistic sense and deep sensitivity. Massenet overeagerly entered Chausson into the Prix de Rome, after which Chausson withdrew from Massenet's tuition, continuing instead with Franck's classes. Franck moreso than Massenet influence Chausson's grounding in the past in a rigorous training in French style, evident in the lyricism of his early works, reminiscent of Massenet's operatic output, and Franckian structures of obscured exposition of thematic ideas and their gradual development.

Of course, like Debussy after him, Chausson was swept up in the Wagner-mania that influenced so many creatives during the second half of the nineteenth century. His wife must have been delighted to see *Parsifal* for their honeymoon. Chausson's harmonic language and orchestration of the early 1880's are clearly influenced by Wagner's hyper-expressionism, evident in his early tone poem *Viviane* (1882, op. 5) and orchestral song cycle *Poème de l'amour et de la mer* (1882-90, op. 19). This Germanic edge remain in his later works despite Chausson himself acknowledging in an 1888 letter that "de-Wagnerisation is necessary."

Pre-empting those that inadvertently followed in his footsteps, Chausson's 'de-Wagnerisation' saw him turn to French sources, looking at Gallic folk legends and the music of Couperin, Lully and Rameau. This development came years before Debussy's own revelations about French composition, and Jean Cocteau's *Les Six* that followed. Cocteau wrote of the need to re-imagine French music through the lens of the past in his manifesto *Le coq et l'arlequin*, yet Chausson found his own way to this revelation nearly 30 years prior.

The *Concert* is one such work coming out of Chausson's examination of French music history. The instrumentation recalls Rameau's chamber works, not quite a violin concerto not quite a sextet, each instrument in own right its soloist. Whilst the harmony and rhapsodic nature of the development gives it an immediately Romantic character, the construction of the themes and their Franck-inspired development hark back to an earlier time.

The *Poème*, written just seven years later, is rightfully a gem of the concerto repertoire for violin, rarely played in this chamber version rediscovered in the early 2000's. The work was requested by star violinist Eugène Ysaÿe, a daunting task for the self-doubting Chausson. It was only after the rapturous applause at the first Paris performance of the *Poème* that Chausson realised he had far exceeded his task. Claude Debussy himself praised the work two decades after the premiere, saying:

"The freedom of its form never goes against its harmonious proportion. The sense of dreamy gentleness is at its most touching at the end when, leaving aside all trace of description and anecdote, the music becomes that very feeling which inspires its emotion. Such moments in the work of an artist are very rare."

Chausson truly captures this fertile turning point of French music, where those who came before and those who come after are all visible in his musical output. He is all at once the epitome of Romantic exuberance, tinged with the Germanic obsessions of his peers, looking back to the classical forms of Baroque France, and looking forward to their revival and its coming transformations in the hands of the mystics, logicians and technologists. Is it of course impossible to know what would have happened had Chausson had the time to develop further – perhaps those who followed him would have advanced further for the breadth of foundational work Chausson had laid would have become deeper, or perhaps Chausson would never move beyond his theories and remain a fringe name, easily enjoyable and endlessly mystifying, so much a Romantic figure as if to be drawn right from Goethe's texts.

Words by Alex Owens, Music Librarian, Robert Salzer Music Foundation.