

## Sunday Recital with Mark Gasser

St Matthews Church Albury, 2:00pm August 17, 2008

### Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937) - La Valse

This piece took Ravel fourteen years to formulate and crystallize, having begun as a "symphonic poem" *Wien* and ended as a "choreographic poem" *La Valse*. Meant to represent an "apotheosis of the Viennese waltz", it follows the customary form of a series of enchainé waltzes that can be divided into two sections, the second of which is a free recapitulation.

The work was composed in 1919-20 and premiered in the same year by the Lamoureux Orchestra. Versions for piano solo and for two pianos appeared in print in 1920, before the orchestral version of 1921. Its first ballet presentation by Ida Rubinstein's troupe took place at the Paris Opéra in 1929.

A two piano performance was given by Alfredo Casella and Ravel in October 1920 at Arnold Schönberg's Society for Private Musical Performances in Vienna. Here is how Ravel described the music:

*Clouds whirl about. Occasionally they part to allow a glimpse of waltzing couples. As they gradually evaporate one can discern a gigantic hall, filled by a crowd of dancers in motion. The stage gradually brightens. The glow of the chandeliers breaks out fortissimo. An Imperial Court about 1855.*

### W.A. Mozart (1756 – 1791) - Sonata in C major, K.545

*Allegro - Andante - Allegretto grazioso*

The charming simplicity of the first movement's opening theme has made it a household tune the world over. Qualities of simplicity and charm characterize the whole sonata, despite the stormy episode that dominates the Allegro's development section.

The simple song of the Andante achieves a finely wrought beauty that is all the more remarkable because the right hand melody is accompanied throughout by an unrelenting Alberti bass, illustrating how a commonplace musical device that might serve as a sheet anchor to lesser talents can be used to greater effect by a composer of Mozart's genius.

The work concludes with a brief Rondo that, in the space of one and a half minutes, presents features that adorn its simple content with much rhythmic vitality and not a little humour.

### Maurice Ravel - Gaspard de la nuit (Devil of the night)

In the early 1800s Aloysius Bertrand wrote a book of dark poetry dealing with the language of horror. Inspired, Ravel chose three poems in 1908 and set them to musical imagery, producing music that is programmatic and often nightmarish in nature. Ravel didn't set the individual words to music, but created musical impressions of the poems. The three movements depict: the seductive spell of a water spirit; the grotesque world surrounding a hanging corpse; and the terror induced by a malevolent gnome.

Today **Kerryn Beatty** will read the poems that introduce each piece: *Ondine*, *Le Gibet* and *Scarbo*.

### Schubert (1797 – 1828) - Fantasy in F Minor, D 940 for Piano Duet (with Sarah Regan)

This music presents the composer as a full-fledged Romantic. Its four contrasting sections combine the emotional intensity that defined 19th century music. The piece is framed by the recurrence of a lilting theme, alternately appearing in major and minor keys. A double fugue brings the Fantasy to a dramatic climax.

The Fantasy, one of the great jewels of the four-hand repertoire, is among the composer's final works, written in 1828, the year of his death. Thought to have been composed for Countess Caroline Esterhazy, this duet was not intended for a concert hall performance. Rather, like other works for multiple pianists, it was to be performed in the more intimate setting of a salon or a private drawing room.

## **Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886) - Isolde's Liebestod from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde***

Franz Liszt, a virtuoso pianist and a prolific composer, brought many innovations to romantic piano music. His introduction of solo recitals provided more independence to musicians and raised the artistic level of concert performances. Liszt brought even more freedom to pianists by creating a completely new piano technique.

Transcriptions and paraphrases played a special role. He transcribed the work of others to promote their music and enrich the piano literature. At the same time he challenged himself as composer and dazzling performer.

Today's work is a transcription of the final scene of the opera. A brief summary of the plot may help understand the context of this music, and explain its highly charged emotions and passionately extravagant writing.

Tristan's ship is carrying Isolde, daughter of the Irish king, to Cornwall so that she can be married to King Marke. She is brooding and on edge. Tristan stays at his post, not speaking unless necessary. She tells Brangaene of her past history with Tristan. He came to her in disguise to be healed from wounds he received in combat with the Irish champion, Morold, her betrothed.

As she cured his wound she realized who he really was and tried to strike him with a sword. When she looked into his eyes she was unable to kill him. Now he has come back to escort her to Cornwall to marry his uncle, the king. She hates Tristan and her situation and decides the only way out is to kill both herself and Tristan with a poison draught. She tells her maid Brangaene to prepare the potion and summon Tristan. When he arrives they are both tense but still feel a mutual attraction.

Brangaene cannot bring herself to prepare the death potion and substitutes a love potion instead. The two drink the potion and fall into each other's arms, finally declaring the love they have always felt for each other but were unable to express. The ship docks and King Marke arrives. Tristan and Isolde fulfill their roles but are dazed and mechanical.

They meet whenever they can find time to be alone but eventually they are caught together by the king and his courtiers. Tristan does not try to defend himself when challenged and is mortally wounded. His companion Kurwenal spirits him away to his childhood home in Brittany, where he lays dying of his wounds. Isolde follows him by ship.

Soon after she arrives he dies in her arms. She bends over him and retreats to another world where she desires only to follow Tristan in death. King Marke, who has followed Isolde on another ship, arrives to tell the lovers he has learned the truth from Brangaene and forgives them. It is too late, but it does not matter to the lovers. They are blissfully joined in the death that was their destiny.

## **Mark Gasser**

He is a Fellow of both the Birmingham Conservatoire and Royal Academy of Music. He studied under John Humphreys, Frank Wibaut, Alfred Brendel and Peter Donohoe. Mark plays both large scale and standard piano literature as well as broadcasting and recording on five continents. He is recognized as having a dramatic affinity for the Viennese Classics (Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert in particular) as well as Ferruccio Busoni & Rachmaninoff and the French Impressionists Debussy and Ravel. His repertoire is vast, ranging from the *Goldberg Variations* of Johann Sebastian Bach to the extraordinary *Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus* of Olivier Messiaen that he will perform at tonight's concert.

His concerto repertoire alone includes over 70 different works from Bach to the present day. Mark is also closely associated with many contemporary composers, and has premiered or recorded many compositions by living and 20th century composers. Shortly after the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 he performed a charity concert at Carnegie Hall in New York.

Mark has performed in many of the world's leading concert halls, music festivals and has been a soloist with the leading Symphony Orchestras worldwide. He was Bösendorfer Artist of the Year In 2002 and has, in recent years, performed a great deal on the Australian made *Stuart and Sons* pianos. He is currently on the staff at Central Queensland University in Mackay.