



MY PARIS

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* after Borne, Horowitz, Hubay, Sarasate, Waxman. With gratitude to the Waxman family and Fidelio Music Publishing Co.

Total playing time: 88. 35

Ana de la Vega, flute
Paul Rivinius, piano



With no lodgings, no teacher, no friends and no plan, I flew from Sydney to Paris on a one-way ticket. I had little idea what I was doing other than that the indescribably beautiful tone of Jean-Pierre Rampal was something I needed to get close to. I longed to walk the streets of the city where the famed French school of flute playing held its throne. One cannot learn such magic from books sitting on a beach in the South Pacific... It is in the drinking water.

The airport train passed through Jardin de Luxembourg. Perfect. I'd seen it in a movie. With my belongings on my back and my flute around my neck, I emerged out of the Métro (a feat in itself... I'd never been on an underground before), booked a room in the nearest hotel for two weeks, and felt extremely pleased with myself. Paris, here we go!

Not so fast girl... I had incorrectly calculated the exchange rate — the

Australian dollar was not, as I had thought, three times the euro, it was in fact three times less! I blew all my money in 4 days and was kicked out of the hotel. But this misfortune turned into one of the greatest gifts. I was introduced to a wonderful 90-year old French woman, I moved into her apartment, and there began one of the most important relationships of my life.

Madame Mouscadet, who passed away in 2020 at the age of 104, became my best friend, confident, language teacher, and shoulder to cry on. She had been in Paris during the German occupation, had seen Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, heard Rampal in concert, and bought paintings from Matisse himself. My stars aligned the day we met. She became my guardian angel, my rock and a first-hand window into the French Belle Époque; she was an entrada into a bygone period and if you hear old-school magic in this album it is largely due to the looking glass she led me

through. She sat listening to me day and night as I prepared my audition for the great *Conservatoire Supérieur de Paris*, and squeezed my hand as I headed off across Paris on audition day.

For the next 6 years I lived, breathed, learnt, loved and suffered in Paris. All things flute, but more so, all things life. Ah Paris... Writers, poets and painters have been trying to define her in words and brush strokes for centuries. But she is ever illusive. She defies being pinned down by the limitations of language and the visual.

But with music we have a chance at capturing that which does not wish to be captured. The fleeting, the ethereal, 'the too beautiful for words'. Because in its very nature, music, the most abstract of the arts; and hearing, the most abstract and fleeting of the senses, leaves room for the worlds that live within us but resist taking concrete form... those images and

sensations we will never fully share with another because the spoken and written language is too limited.

With music the listener can complete the story, create one's own pictures, choose one's own colours, feel one's own heart, ride one's own emotions, dream one's own dreams, and write one's own ardent love letter. Triggered, inspired, provoked by something we don't fully understand: music. So if Proust and Baudelaire struggled to capture the city's alluring essence in words, I certainly cannot. I can only describe and conjure up 'My Paris' with the music on this album.

The big boys of the French musical 'institution' (Debussy, Ravel, Saint-Saëns, Poulenc, Bizet) are, of course, here. But so are the ladies. There are three female composers on this album — Cécile Chaminade, Lili Boulanger and Maria von Paradis — and *My Paris* would not be 'my' Paris without them. Powerful yet feminine,

strong yet delicate, cheeky yet coy, French women are as alluring and mysterious as their capital and I pay tribute to the countless French women who have inspired and influenced me. France's history boasts Jeanne D'Arc, Colette, Camille Claudel, Coco Chanel, Simone de Beauvoir, Brigitte Bardot and Marie Curie, among many others, and while the composers on this album have not been recognised with the same fame, I proudly share their artistry, courage and beauty.

Smokey, sexy, nostalgic, luminous, intense, unapologetic, mysterious, arrogant and magical, Paris is incomparable. As T.S. Elliot rightly said, "the chief danger about Paris is that it is such a strong stimulant." I hope that with the pieces on this album, which I believe to be the most enchanting of French music possible for my instrument, you will not only be lured through her fragrant streets, into her bars and her cafés, but led also into the depths of your own imagination.

No other city has been so important to the development and history of a single instrument as Paris has been to the flute. Paris is flute. Flute is Paris. And as Audrey Hepburn said... 'Paris is always a good idea'.



Paris and the flute

Reflections on a long-standing love affair

As Ana de la Vega puts it, “no other city has been so important to the development and history of a single instrument as Paris has been to the flute.” This recording is not only an anthology of some of the greatest music inspired by this metropolis, but also a trip down memory lane for de la Vega, who arrived in Paris straight from an Australian farm, and eventually found her way into centuries-old French flute-teaching traditions to which she still feels deeply connected and absorbed. In that respect, *My Paris* is a very personal album, a declaration of love to a city that continues to draw and dazzle visitors from all over the world with its unparalleled beauty, mystery and charm.

The attraction of Paris as a cultural centre where artistic dreams come true and

foreign musicians can gain a reputation goes at least as far back as the days of the Italian immigrant composer Lully (1632-1687), who introduced the flute as an orchestral instrument in 1681 in his ballet *Le Triomphe de l'Amour*, and used it in several of his operas. Roughly a century later, in 1778, a 22-year old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) went to Paris, accompanied by his mother, in search of a lucrative position. The journey turned into a tragedy, as Mozart couldn't secure any court engagement, but particularly because his mother died during their Paris sojourn. In his grief, Mozart composed his sombre **Violin Sonata in E Minor, K. 304/300c**, one of his few minor-key sonatas, clearly influenced by his Parisian tragedy. Performed here in a version for flute and piano, it underlines the link between Paris and Mozart, who wrote prolifically for the flute, establishing a link between *My Paris* and de la Vega's acclaimed interpretation of Mozart's flute concertos. Hearing the

legendary French flautist Jean-Pierre Rampal perform Mozart gave de la Vega her artistic calling, and without it, she would have never gone to Paris. In her own words, “without Mozart, there would be no Ana and flute, and hence no Paris.”

Another piece for violin and piano that is presented here in a version for flute is Maria Theresa von Paradis's **Sicilienne**. Von Paradis (1759-1824) was a star pianist associated to the Viennese court, who performed an incredibly wide-ranging repertoire despite having turned blind at the age of five. She travelled to Paris for a concert tour in 1784, and was admired by Mozart, who appears to have written a Piano Concerto for her, possibly the 18th in B-flat Major, K. 456. Characterized by the typical dotted Siciliano rhythm in 6/8 metre, this rendition for flute shows a striking similarity in tone to the famous *Sicilienne* from Gabriel Fauré's *Pelléas et Mélisande* suite (1893). These similarities may well, however, have been caused by

the fact that the *Sicilienne* likely wasn't composed by von Paradis, but actually by violinist Samuel Dushkin, who published it in 1924, misattributing the music to her.

The first half of the nineteenth century is often considered a sort of Dark Ages in the history of the flute. While domestic flute playing still flourished, and a Parisian guild of flute composers such as Jean-Louis Tulou, Louis Drouet, Joseph-Henri Altès and Jules Demersseman still composed for the instrument, the flute no longer occupied a central place in the activity of renowned composers. Romanticism seemed uncongenial to the flute, while the demands of virtuosity and loudness in concerto writing could be achieved more easily on the piano and violin. The limited interest that German Romantic composers had showed in the flute made the instrument an all the more interesting vehicle for a French musical renaissance following the country's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871).

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) played a central role in this movement as one of the driving forces behind the foundation of a *Société nationale de musique*, established to protect French music against foreign domination. His **Romance for Flute and Piano** sounds idyllic and innocent, but Saint-Saëns composed it in exile in London, having fled Paris. The lyrical flute line has the artlessness of a sung *mélodie*, although the rising gestures of the Romance's contrasting middle part call for a virtuosic control of the instrument. Saint-Saëns premiered the *Romance* together with flautist Paul Taffanel, one of the most legendary teachers of the French school of flute playing.

Saint-Saëns also contributed to the French musical renaissance as a teacher, and Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) was among his most successful students. One of Fauré's most famous melodies is the song **Après un rêve** (1878), based on a

poem about an elusive, ecstatic love that withers in the light of day. In a version for flute and piano, the former instrument fully conveys the sensuous, mysterious atmosphere of the subject, and the triplet embellishments that dominate the melodic line sound much more oriental than in its sung original. Fauré wrote the **Morceau de concours** in 1898 as an exam piece for the Paris conservatoire. Unlike most exam pieces, it places musical expression and style above virtuosity, and the melody gracefully arabesques through several registers of the flute.

France's relationship with foreign peoples played a huge role in Parisian turn-of-the-century arts, and musical exoticism proved a very effective means for French composers to diverge from German musical norms, while simultaneously catering to the thirst for exotic artifacts of those days. Georges Bizet (1838-1875) went south with his opera *Carmen*, and wrote a score full of Southern-Spanish



Paul Rivinius
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folk idioms, of which Daniel Röhn has selected some of the most appealing melodies for his **Carmen Suite**, premiered on this album. Jules Massenet's (1842-1912) opera **Thaïs** (1894) takes place in Egypt, and the famous **Méditation** is an instrumental interlude during which the Egyptian courtesan Thaïs decides to denounce sexual love and to convert to Christian faith. Originally scored for solo violin and orchestra, it has become one of the evergreens of the violin repertoire. Played on flute and piano, the oriental, French lure of the piece arguably becomes even greater.

Massenet's operas were tremendously successful, and his fluid, elegant melodies had a profound influence on a generation of younger composers, including Claude Debussy (1862-1918). Massenet certainly served as an important model for Debussy's **L'enfant prodigue**, a cantata on the Biblical subject of the prodigal son that was awarded with the prestigious

Prix de Rome in 1884. The **Prélude** revolves around an orientally-sounding arabesque that is sequenced and varied. Even if the sound world may still be far removed from Debussy's mature style, his creative employment of a small motivic cell adumbrates his compositional mastery. **Clair de lune** (Moonlight) is also an early work by Debussy, composed in 1890, and published as part of his **Suite Bergamasque** in 1905. The piece was initially called *Promenade sentimentale* — after a poem by Verlaine — but received its definitive title, also referring to a text by the same poet, shortly before being published. It is one of Debussy's most famous melodies. While the opening bars feel suspended in time, the 9/8 time signature eventually becomes perceivable, giving the music an elegant flow. Debussy wrote his **Petite suite** for piano four hands in 1889, in a deliberately simple and straightforward style full of allusions to ancient dances. The stately **Minuet** performed here demonstrates

his neoclassical approach. Compared to the other Debussy pieces featured on this album, **La fille aux cheveux de lin** (The girl with the flaxen hair) was composed relatively late in his career, as part of the **First Book of Préludes** for piano, published in 1910. Amidst all the harmonic and chromatic audacities of the other *Préludes*, *La fille* is relatively diatonic and restrained, characterized by an oscillating melody in thirds that stands out all the more in this arrangement for flute and piano.

Debussy is virtually always mentioned in the same breath as Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), that other champion of musical Impressionism, even if they were both not fully happy with that label. *My Paris* features Ravel's **Pièce en forme de Habanera** (1907), inspired by the sultry Habanera dance from Cuba that had been imported to Spain during the nineteenth century, and achieved world fame thanks to Bizet's *Carmen*.

The *Habanera* is characterized by an accented upbeat in the middle of the bar, used as a bass ostinato, while Ravel's melody sounds as exotic and sensuous as Bizet's title heroine. Initially conceived as a vocalise for bass voice and piano, Ravel later transcribed it for cello and piano, and it has appeared in all thinkable instrumental combinations since, including the enchanting version for flute and piano presented here.

Erik Satie (1866-1925) was a contemporary of Debussy and Ravel, but his sparse, neoclassical style is often seen as a response to musical Impressionism, and the absurd titles he gave to some of his works, such as *Three Pieces in the Form of a Pear*, seem to mock the poetic pretensions of his Impressionist colleagues. Satie composed the **Gymnopédie No. 1**, inspired by a gymnastics rite from Ancient Greece, in 1888. Thanks to its minimalist melody, pendulating harmony and overall

repetitive nature, the *Gymnopédie* is often seen as the birth of ambient music.

Female composers also defined turn-of-the-century Paris, and for Ana de la Vega, "My Paris wouldn't be 'My Paris without them.'" Two of them are featured on this album. Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944) wrote the **Concertino in D Major** for the Paris Conservatoire as an exam piece, which shows from its virtuosic character and the high demands placed on the player. Rumour has it that the difficulty of the piece can also be seen as an act of revenge. A flute-playing lover had allegedly left Chaminade to marry someone else, and this piece may have served to demonstrate his shortcomings. Societal expectations restricted Chaminade's compositional activities to less prestigious genres such as character pieces and *mélodies*, but she was commercially very successful with them, and the *Concertino* is still a popular piece beyond the flute world. Whereas

the invitation to write an exam piece for the Paris Conservatoire was quite a step for a female composer, Chaminade's younger colleague Lili Boulanger (1893-1918) surpassed her by being the first female winner of the Prix de Rome in 1913. Her musical future seemed bright, hadn't her poor health taken its toll. She died, aged 24, as one of the biggest unfulfilled promises of her time. Her atmospheric **Nocturne** shows her command of Impressionist harmony and ability to make an impact with limited melodic means.

Francis Poulenc's (1899-1963) **Sonata for Flute and Piano** (1957) is one of the most important and most-performed twentieth-century contributions to the flute literature. Poulenc premiered it himself, together with renowned flautist Jean-Pierre Rampal. The music combines an advanced, twentieth-century harmonic palette with neo-classical inspirations, and takes various stylistic and harmonic

turns. Melancholia constantly looms over this minor-keys-dominated piece, but the exuberant final movement gives the sonata a happy ending after all.

Kasper van Kooten

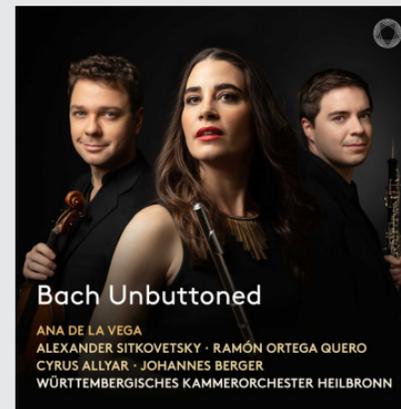
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