

Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

28 April 2019 – 4pm

Rob Burton

Saxophone

Christine Zerafa - Piano

PROGRAMME NOTES *by John Woollard*

Claude Debussy (1862-1918): Rhapsodie for alto saxophone & piano

Many great composers have accepted commissions for new works, and then never managed to bring them to fruition; Debussy was certainly no exception. A composer who found it exceptionally difficult to write anything to order, Debussy found the composition of his Rhapsodie for alto saxophone and orchestra -- which had been requested in 1903 by Elisa Hall, President of the Boston Orchestral Club -- a particularly disagreeable task.

Hall had taken up the saxophone -- as yet still rather unfashionable prior to the jazz era, when the instrument came into its own -- in the hope that it would improve a respiratory weakness from which she suffered. With little regard for the cost, she set about commissioning a substantial array of new works for the instrument, which

then had a very small repertory, and approached several prominent French composers, including Debussy. Debussy, who cared little for the instrument and knew almost nothing of its technical capabilities, would not fulfill the commission for the Rhapsodie for several years; indeed, when he did submit his score, it was incomplete and unorchestrated.

Jean Roger-Ducasse undertook the task of completing the work after the composer's death, in a manner which showed how well he understood Debussy's musical language. The Rhapsodie was premiered in its completed form on May 11, 1919, conducted by André Caplet and featuring saxophonist Yves Mayeur as soloist.

Paul Creston (1906-1985): Sonata for Saxophone & Piano, Op. 19

Paul Creston's Sonata for saxophone and piano, Op. 19, is an early work, composed in 1939, just a half dozen or so years after Creston really committed himself to a career writing music. (Recognition came speedily to Creston: he earned himself a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1938!) The work is written for E flat saxophone and has three movements, the headings of which are in common-sense English, as espoused by a handful of American composers in the 1930s and '40s, rather than the traditional Italian. Movement 1 is marked "With vigor" and is appropriately

filled with vivacious rhythms; short, pointed gestures are balanced against long legato lines, both types of material having been built using Creston's usual richly chromatic, thickly harmonized tonal idiom. "With tranquility," the second movement, is a lovely A major instrumental song in 5/4 time, while "With gaiety," the D major finale, is crisp and decisive, but not necessarily loud. In the finale, a wonderfully greasy central melodic episode (marked "smooth") slows things down for a while.

Gabriel Grovlez (1879-1944): Sarabande et Allegro

Born in Lille, Grovlez studied with Gabriel Fauré, Louis Diémer, and André Gedalge at the Conservatoire de Paris. At the Schola Cantorum, Charles Bordes introduced him to Gregorian Chant and the music of the Renaissance. As a solo pianist and accompanist Grovlez toured through Europe. He was professor of piano at the Schola Cantorum from 1899 to 1909, choir director and deputy conductor of the Opéra Comique (1905–1908), and musical director at the Théâtre des Arts (1911–1913) where he was responsible for the first performances of Albert Roussel's *Le Festin de l'araignée*, Maurice Ravel's *Ma mère l'oye*, and a number of baroque operas.

From 1914, he was for twenty years the director of the Opéra de Paris, where, among other productions, he also conducted a season of Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*. As a guest conductor he worked at opera houses in Monte Carlo, Cairo, Lisbon, New York, and Chicago.

As a composer, his compositions were mainly for voice and for the stage, including ballets. Much of his work shows strong neo-classical influences. He also wrote reviews for Paris music journals including *Excelsior* (1916–17) and *L'Art musical* (1937–39). Grovlez died aged 65 in Paris.

Jules Demersseman (1833-1866): Fantaisie sur un theme original

Fantaisie sur un Thème Original, written by Jules Demersseman in 1860, was composed in the early days of the saxophone's history, when the instrument was relatively unknown. The high technical facility called for in

this work is thus all the more surprising. Demersseman had an outstanding reputation as a flute virtuoso; as a composer, he was known for his flute and saxophone fantasies.

~~~~~ Interval ~~~~~

For more information on the artists and on future concerts, please visit [www.wethersfieldchamberconcerts.org.uk](http://www.wethersfieldchamberconcerts.org.uk)

# Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

## Alessandro Marcello (1673-1747): Oboe Concerto in D minor, arr. for soprano saxophone and piano

Born in Venice, Marcello was the son of a senator. As such, he enjoyed a comfortable life that gave him the scope to pursue his interest in music. He was a contemporary of Tomaso Albinoni. He held concerts in his hometown and also composed and published several sets of concertos, including six concertos under the title of La Cetra (The

Lyre), as well as cantatas, arias, canzonets, and violin sonatas. Marcello, being a slightly older contemporary of Antonio Vivaldi, often composed under the pseudonym Eterio Stinfalico, his name as a member of the celebrated Arcadian Academy (Pontificia Accademia degli Arcadi). He died in Padua in 1747.

## Robert Muczynski (1929-2010): Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano, Op. 29

Robert Muczynski's Opus 29, the Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano, has become a standard work in the saxophone repertoire. Written in 1970 for Trent Kynaston,

this eight-minute piece is filled with all of the excitement, passion, and drama of many works twice its length.

## Robert Planel (1908-1994): Prelude et Saltarelle

French composer, Robert Planel (1908-1994) was the son of composer and founder of the Music School of Montelimar, Alphonse Planel. Robert Planel was an exceptionally accomplished musician, reflected in his composition Prelude and Saltarelle for Alto Saxophone and Piano. It is hard to fathom why Prelude and Saltarelle has somewhat disappeared from the repertoire. With a typical

performance lasting about seven minutes, Planel's piece is made up of two movements. The Prelude begins calm and, while tonality is exploited and significantly complex flourishes are heard, the relationship between the Saxophone and Piano remains exquisite. The movement then climaxes into the 6/8 Saltarello.

## Pedro Iturralde (1929-): Pequena Czarda

The Spanish composer Pedro Iturralde has to be considered both as pioneer and nestor of Spanish jazz music. 'Pequeña Czarda' (little dance) is a virtuoso little solo piece for saxophone and piano in classic style. Roger Niese did make a transcription for alto saxophone and symphonic band. The "czarda" is a popular Hungarian

dance in binary form, often characterized by a variation in tempo - it starts out slowly and ends in a very fast tempo. It is danced by a male and female, with the female wearing a traditional wide skirt which takes on a distinctive shape as it twirls. One notable example of a czarda can be found in Strauss's Die Fledermaus, sung by Rosalinde.

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Hailing from a farming family in Cambridgeshire, saxophonist **Rob Burton** won the Woodwind Category Final of BBC Young Musician 2018 at the age of eighteen. He went on to secure a place in the Grand Final at Birmingham's Symphony Hall, where he performed with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra conducted by Mark Wigglesworth, broadcast live on BBC 4 and BBC Radio 3.

Recent highlights include performing the Glazunov Saxophone Concerto after winning the Silk Street Sinfonia Young Artists Concerto Competition, and recitals at the Cheltenham Festival and the Charles Wood Festival in Armagh.

Rob studies Classical Saxophone at the Royal Academy of Music with Simon Haram and Huw Wiggin. He was a pupil at Hinchbrook School in Huntingdon alongside studies with Paul Stevens (saxophone) and Derek Hannigan (clarinet) at Junior Guildhall, where he was a Sax.co.uk Scholarship holder. Rob has also achieved Grade 8 Distinction in Saxophone, Clarinet, Piano and Recorder.

Rob was a finalist in Junior Guildhall's 'Lutine Prize' competition for three consecutive years. He has won titles of Wellingborough Young Musician of the Year and Oundle Young Musician of the Year. He was also a National Finalist in Rotary Young Musician of the Year 2016 and highly commended in the Clarinet and Saxophone Society of Great Britain's composition prize.

A keen chamber musician, Rob also enjoys playing with his saxophone quartet 'Kumori Quartet' and his reed quintet. He was Principal Saxophone with the National Youth Wind Orchestra of Great Britain, and has played with the Junior Guildhall Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Academy Symphony Orchestra. Rob is grateful for the support of YCAT in their aftercare scheme for finalists of BBC Young Musician.

London-based Maltese pianist **Christine Zerafa** has appeared as a soloist and chamber musician in various venues and festivals in Malta, the United States and across the United Kingdom. She has frequently appeared at major London venues including Wigmore Hall, Royal Festival Hall, the Elgar Room at the Royal Albert Hall, Cadogan Hall, St John Smith Square, St Martin in the Fields, and she has performed live on BBC Radio 3. Christine has been recipient of various awards including the Bice Mizzi National Competition, RNCM Clifton Helliwell Prize, the RAM Scott Huxley prize for piano accompaniment, Schumann Lieder accompanist prize, the Eric Brough Prize and the John B McEwen Prize. She is a Park Lane Group Artist and a Tunnell Trust Artist. Christine is currently reading for a PhD in performance at the Royal Academy of Music, where she is focusing on her role as a collaborative pianist through a series of live performances and recording projects.

**We hope that you will join us for our concerts next year - on 5 & 19 April; 10 May 2020**