

# A Musical Salon



Recital for tenor  
and piano

Benjamin Alunni &  
Fernando Palomeque

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*By Benjamin Alunni & Fernando Palomeque*

It is because of the shock produced by these months of paralysis, of impediments to circulate, to create and to perform on stage, that we have the desire to bring these two nations, the French and the American, closer together through our art: **the music.**

It was no longer possible to travel from one continent to another or to see a clear horizon. Many artists have tried to reinvent themselves through screens to maintain a connection with the public. But technology is not capable of replacing the creative exchanges between artists, nor of replacing the meeting with the public at this very special moment that the concert is.

Keen on exploring the French repertoire inspired by other cultures, we continue our momentum and offer you a story of Franco-American musical friendship during the 20th century until our time. The title of this program is A Musical Salon for which we collaborate with Vincent Giroud, professor of comparative literature and curator of books and manuscripts at the Beinecke Library at Yale University.

We wish to renew the success of the album “Confluences” (2017) which highlights the links between French culture and Jewish culture, or the project “Anochecer en España” about the Hispanism in French music (2019).

The program of A Musical Salon concert dives into the ancient, particular and deepconnivance between these two nations. We wish to offer the public a multi-faceted sample which, through American and French composers, presents well-known and little-known melodies such as the American and French-speaking composer Amy Beach, Lili Boulanger, French with a great role in the United States musical life. Or Samuel Barber and his melodies in French on texts by Rainer Maria Rilke, the fantasy of Poulenc or the melodies of Thomson on texts by Gertrude Stein and many others.

We want to immerse the public in these stories of creations and friendships. Shed light on artistic relationships that were sometimes forged at the darkest moments of the century and which have produced beautiful and varied works, funny and sensitive. A Franco-American tête-à-tête made up of music and poetry. At the same time, we would like to offer two additional events when desired. First of all an introduction (presentation, contextualization, etc.) of the musical program to the public by Vincent Giroud. On the other hand, we would like to organizedmasterclasses on the French repertoire, in particular the French Art Song to students in vocal training.



#### Programme

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*Maurice Ravel* (France, 1875 – 1937) - Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé  
*Amy Beach* (EE. UU, 1867 – 1944) - Mémoires Op.21 N° 2: Extase , Op48 N°4: Canzonetta  
*Reynaldo Hahn* (Venezuela/France, 1874 – 1947) - Love without wings  
*Gabriel Fauré* (France, 1845 – 1924) Barcarolle Op.26\*ww  
*Nadia Boulanger* (France, 1887 - 1979) - Clairières dans le ciel (extracts)  
*Claude Debussy* (France, 1862 – 1918) - Proses Lyriques : De Fleurs

#### Intermission

*Samuel Barber* (EE. UU, 1910 – 1981) - Mémoires passagères op.27  
*Alexandre Tansman* (France, 1897 – 1986) - Sonatine Transatlantique\*  
*Francis Poulenc* (France, 1899 – 1963) - Banalités (extracts)  
*Hôtel et Voyage à Paris*  
*Virgil Thomson* (EE. UU, 1896 – 1989) - Susie Asad  
*Ned Rorem* (EE. UU, 1923 - ) - For Poulenc  
*Darius Milhaud* (France, 1892 – 1974) - Six chansons de théâtre (extracts)  
*Hannah Lash* (EE. UU, 1981 - ) - World premiere (Commision for this project)  
*George Gershwin* (EE.UU, 1898 – 1937) - Three Preludes\*  
*Leonard Bernstein* (EE. UU, 1918 - 1990) - La bonne cuisine

Concert introduced with a presentation by Vincent Giraud

Duration : 1 hour 10'

\* piano solo

## Benjamin Alunni

*Ténor*



While maintaining a major presence in the contemporary music repertoire Benjamin Alunni loves devoting himself to creation. He regularly performs on the stage of several leading opera houses such as le Théâtre de la Monnaie I De Munt, l'Opéra Comique, le Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, le Lincoln Center..

He began his professional career in Baroque music under the direction of Christophe Rousset, Skip Sempé, Raphaël Pichon... He has been performing regularly with les Arts Florissants and William Christies since the revival of the mythical production of Lully's Atys in a production by Jean-Marie Villégier – Opéra Comique, Opéra de Bordeaux, Brooklyn Academy of Music – New-York

He sang at the Aix-en-Provence festival in 2019 for the world creation of Adam Maor's opera Mille Endormis, which was performed later on at the Lisbon Gulbenkian Foundation and at the Théâtre de la Ville de Luxembourg. He started collaborating with the Aix-en-Provence festival where he was awarded the Prix des Amis du Festival at the Académie within the context of the "Voices and Creation" academy. His love for contemporary music and for crossing genres have led him to work with choreographers such as Thomas Lebrun – Centre Chorégraphie National de Tours in which he performed alongside eight dancers and the Quatuor Voce - created at the Palais de Chaillot- as well as the Lied Ballet which performed at the Cloître des Carmes in 2014 during the Festival d'Avignon and while touring France and China

.Other engagements include Poulenc's Les Mamelles de Tirésias at the Aix-en-Provence Festival and at La Monnaie I De Munt, Der Kaiser von Atlantis de Viktor Ullmann at the Opéra de Dijon where he was also invited to sing in Monteverdi's Orfeo.

He sang Alcindor in Bohème, notre jeunesse, adapted from Puccini's La Bohème for the Opéra Comique and directed by Pauline Bureau. He made his debut in the role of Pelléas by Debussy, directed by Richard Brunel for the Opéra de Lyon in 2021. The production was rescheduled to the following season due to the sanitary crisis.

He also collaborated with composer Hana Ajiashvili in the creation of her new opera, Cut Glass, for the Tel Aviv Felicija Blumenthal Festival.

Alongside Richard Brunel and Youness Anzane, he imagined an opera about homophobia which mostly targeted young people and aimed at introducing them to contemporary opera and music by engaging them: « Zylan ne chantera plus » (Zylan will not sing anymore), a monodrama based on a true story commissioned to the composer Diana Soh and the librettist Yann Verburgh and created in November 2021.

Confluence(s) Benjamin's first solo album – Klarthe records – is dedicated to French melody inspired by Jewish cultures.

## Fernando Palomeque

*Pianiste et chef d'orchestre*



Born in Buenos Aires, in 1990, he is one of the most recognized Argentine musicians of his generation. His extensive repertoire of piano and orchestral conducting includes from Scarlatti's sonatas right up to today's music, for which he devotes much of his work. He continues his studies in piano at the National Conservatory of Music of Paris attending the DAI (Post-Master) and a specialization in conducting contemporary repertoire with Jean-Philippe Wurtz at the Conservatory of Strasbourg. At the same time, he continues his studies on traditional repertoire attending a Master degree in conducting at the Robert Schumann Hochschule in Dusseldorf under the guidance of Rüdiger Bohn.

His engagement with contemporary music, led him to work with some of the most important ensembles in the world such as the Ensemble Intercontemporain, Ensemble Musikfabrik and Ensemble Modern. From 2021 to 2024, he will be part of the Young Promising Conductors project of Ulysses Network. Musical and artistic director of the Ensemble Ecoute in Paris, he has conducted the National Symphony Orchestra (Argentina), the Danubia Orchestra Obuda (Budapest), the Colon Theater Academic Orchestra, Divertimento Ensemble (Italy) the OTM Orchestra in New Jersey and the Filarmonica Dinu Lipati (Romania). In Germany, he has conducted the Ensemble Musikfabrik, Ensemble Modern Dortmund Philharmoniker, Neue Philharmonie Westfalen, Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, Sinfonieorchester Wuppertal Duisburger Philharmoniker, Bergischen Sinfonikern and Anhaltische Philharmonie Dessau. Furthermore, he has been in front of the Ensembles Sargo and Nomads (Switzerland), the Ensemble du DAI Contemporain of Conservatoire de Paris, and the Orchestra Symphony of Bolivar (Colombia)

In 2019, he assisted Sofi Jeannin in a production of "Die Jasager" at Radio France and in 2017, he made his debut as a conductor in the US conducting his first opera with the Opera Theatre of Montclair in New Jersey presenting a full production of La Cenerentola by G. Rossini. In 2021, he was assistant conductor at the Vienna Opera Academy. He has performed as conductor and pianist in the United States, France, Austria, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Hungary, Romania and most of Latin America.

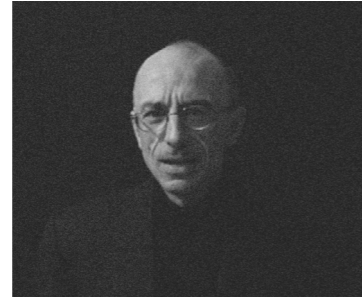
During his studies, he worked with great personalities like Peter Eotvos, L.Fleischer, N. Hodges, Bruno Gelber, Akiko Ebi, Rena Shereshevskaya and Massimiliano Ferrati and participated in academies such as Lucerne Festival Academy, Peter Eotvos Masterclasses, at 57° Weimar Meisterkurse, at the XV Corso di Direzione di Orchestra in Milan, International Keyboard Institute and Festival in New York, Clavicologne Piano Festival 2014 (Germany), among others.

Regularly invited to perform in various cycles and festivals, he has participated at the Messiaen Festival, Festival Musica in Strasbourg, Mozarteum Argentino Midi Concerts, Impuls Festival, Torroela de Montgri Festival, Summer Nights Festival, Bilgi New Music Festival (Turkey), Festival Ginastera 100 ans, Festival de las Artes (Colombia), Festival Integrales at the Colon Theater.

Among the institutions that have supported Fernando during his career, we can mention the International Center Nadia and Lili Boulanger, Mécénat Musical Société Générale, the Mozarteum Argentino, the Ministry of Culture of Italy, Stiftung Kagel-Burghardt, the Meyer Foundation (France)

## Vincent Giroud

*Professor in comparative literature, formerly a curator at Bard College, Yale University*



Vincent Giroud is a professor at the University of Burgundy Franche-Comté. A graduate of the École normale supérieure and Oxford and a PhD in comparative literature, he has taught at Johns Hopkins, Vassar, Bard, and Yale, where he was for many years curator of modern books and manuscripts at the Beinecke Library.

His publications include *French Opera: A Short History* (2010), *Massenet aujourd'hui* (2014, in collaboration with Jean-Christophe Branger), *Graham Greene: un écrivain dans le siècle* (2015), *Nicolas Nabokov: A Life in Freedom and Music* (2015), and *The Real Tales of Hoffmann* (2017, in collaboration with Michael Kaye).

## Hannah Lash

*Composer / Commission for this project*



Hannah Lash was born in New York State in 1981. She obtained a bachelor's degree in composition from the Eastman School of Music, a performance degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music, a PhD from Harvard University and an Artist Diploma from the Yale School of Music in 2012.

Lash's works have been commissioned by many orchestras : Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Alabama Symphony Orchestra, American Composers Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, etc. Hannah Lash is a harpist player. In November 2021, she premiered her double harp concerto "The Peril of Dreams" with Seattle Symphony

Her chamber music has been commissioned and performed by the JACK Quartet, the Da Capo Chamber Players, the Arditti Quartet, the Jupiter Quartet, loadbang, and Hub New Music, among others.

Associate editor of the *Oxford Companion to the Book* (2010), he is a contributor to the *Oxford Handbook of Opera* (2014) and the *Oxford Handbook of Faust in Music* (2017) and has edited, in collaboration with Solveig Serre, *La réglementation de l'Opéra de Paris, 1669-2019* (2019). He lives in New York.

Her chamber music has been commissioned and performed by the JACK Quartet, the Da Capo Chamber Players, the Arditti Quartet, the Jupiter Quartet, loadbang, and Hub New Music, among others. Her music has been presented in such venues as Carnegie Hall, the Walt Disney Concert Hall, Aspen Music Festival and School, the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, New York City Opera's VOX, and the Art Institute of Chicago..

Paul Appleby and Natalia Katyukova gave the world premiere of "Songs of Imagined Love", a song cycle commissioned by Carnegie Hall. Lash's chamber opera, "Desire", premiered at Columbia's Miller Theatre in October, 2019.

Lash was appointed to the composition faculty of the Yale School of Music. Her works are edited by Schott edition.

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Entre culture française et culture juive

## A cross-national itinerary, *by Vincent Giroud*

The program offered here invites us to explore various aspects of the musical dialogue between France and the United States throughout the twentieth century: American musicians living in France, French musicians popular with American audiences and hosted by the United States, cross-linguistic exchanges, musical influences. If one emblematic figure in this dialogue needs to be singled out, the name of Nadia Boulanger is inescapable: composer, organist, conductor, teacher, co-founder (in 1921) then director (from 1948 to her death) of the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau, she welcomed and trained there the flower of several generations of composers from the US, from Aaron Copland to Leonard Bernstein and from Elliott Carter to Philip Glass. Like Darius Milhaud, who fled the Nazi Occupation and taught at Mills College, near San Francisco, and was regularly invited to visit the United States in the next three decades, Boulanger spent the war years in America and paid numerous visits to the country. That her legend is still alive is evidenced by the 2021 Bard Festival entirely devoted to her. She is represented in this program with excerpts from *Clairières dans le ciel*, a song cycle based on poems by Francis Jammes she wrote in 1913–

As for Milhaud, his Six chansons de théâtre, three of which are heard here, are connected to three 1936 stage projects he was involved in at the Théâtre des Mathurins run by Georges and Ludmilla Pitoëff: the first, “*La bohémienne la main m’a pris*,” on a text by Pitoëff himself, for *Tu ne m’échapperas jamais*, French version of *Escape Me Never*, the play by the British novelist Margaret Kennedy; the fifth, “*Mes amis les cygnes*,” for Henri-René Lenormand’s fairy-tale play *La Folle du ciel*; and the fourth, “*Chacun son tour, les animaux*,” for the oneact farce *La Première Famille* by Jules Supervielle. One may recall that Milhaud and his wife Madeleine, during their war years in Oakland, later adapted as an opera Supervielle’s play *Bolivar*, which the Comédie-Française premiered on 1 March 1936, with incidental music by Milhaud.

Among the American composers who, on the other hand, were longtime French residents, pride of place goes to Virgil Thomson. Born in Missouri, he was trained at Harvard by the Francophile composer Edward Burlingame Hill, a student of Widor and friend of Ravel. Thomson came to Paris in 1921–22 to study counterpoint and the organ with Boulanger and moved there from 1925 to 1940. He befriended Gertrude Stein, another famous expatriate, and collaborated with her on the operas *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934) – staged in Paris in 1952 with the young Leontyne Price – and *The Mother of Us All* (1947). Written shortly after their first meeting in 1926, the song *Susie Asado* was composed on a 1913 “portrait,” published in 1922 in the collection *Geography and Plays*. Typical of Stein’s minimalist writing, its subject is a Spanish flamenco dancer.

A whole generation younger than Thomson, Ned Rorem, once briefly his copyist, is now, at 98, the dean of American composers. A student of Honegger at the *École normale de musique* and the recipient of the 1950 Lily Boulanger Prize, Rorem lived nearly continuously in Paris from 1949 till 1958. A “literary” composer in the noblest acceptation (his journals have made him one of the great diarists of his time), he is reputed above all as a song composer: his catalogue includes more than five hundred. Published in 1968 in his *Four Songs, For Poulenc* is based on an elegy by Frank O’Hara, himself one of the finest poets of his generation, who died at 40 as a result of an accident in 1966. It is thus doubly a homage, both to a poet and friend and to a composer Rorem knew well and cherishes as much as any. Arguably, the fact that Poulenc is now held, correctly, as one of the great

musicians of his century can be credited, without exaggeration, to his American popularity. While, unlike his friend Milhaud, he never lived there, he did visit the country several times on tour, the first in the fall of 1948, performing with much success as soloist or to accompany Pierre Bernac and, on his last visit in 1960, Denise Duval.

His death, in 1963, was marked by musical tributes seldom awarded to French composers. He is, naturally, present on this program with two excerpts from one of his most famous song cycles, *Banalités*, on poems by Apollinaire, published in 1941; Americans had the opportunity to hear him perform it with Bernac on their second tour in January 1950. They were so successful, at New York's Town Hall, that *Voyage à Paris* had to be encored.

On their third visit to New York, in February 1952, Poulenc and Bernac gave the first hearing of Samuel Barber's *Mélodies passagères*, which are dedicated to them. These unquestionably deserve to be hailed as the most cosmopolitan work on the program, having been composed by the Pennsylvania-born musician (nephew of the fabled contralto Louise Homer and himself trained as a baritone) on texts written in French by Rilke around 1924 and published two years later at the time of the death of the Austrian poet. The first two were first premiered by the American soprano Eileen Farrell in Washington, D.C., in 1951, with Barber at the piano. As the composer Russell Platt has noted, these songs – the only ones Barber ever set to non-English words – were also the first in which he paid homage to the French song tradition, in terms both of the sober treatment of the text and harmonic subtlety.

With their love of France and the French cultural heritage, Thomson and Rorem meant to counterbalance the predominance, at times overbearing, of the German tradition, so perceptible to this very day in American music schools and music departments. Even though he originated in part from this tradition, Antonín Dvořák, in a famous article published in 1895 while he was still the head of the New York Conservatory, had, however, urged American composers to draw their inspiration, rather, from American popular music, and especially the music of African Americans.

Among American composers on the program, Amy Beach, whose creative period extended from the 1880s to the Second World War, not only enjoyed a highly successful career in a field largely closed to women but is also representative of this gradual emancipation of American music from Germanic models; her friend Charles Loeffler, like her an adoptive Bostonian, is another example. It can thus be noted that Beach's catalogue includes a *Suite française* for piano dating from 1907. Very early, in fact, Boston did welcome French music and musicians, among whom André Caplet, Henri Rabaud, and Pierre Monteux, and, later, the flutist Marcel Moyse and Charles Münch. Among the many songs to which Amy Beach owed her fame, there is thus, unsurprisingly, a whole series on French texts, such as her opus 21, published in 1893 in a bilingual edition: beside *Extase*, on a poem by Victor Hugo drawn from *Les Orientales*, it includes *Chanson d'amour*, also on a poem by Hugo, and *Elle et moi*, by the Neuchâtel poet Félix Bovet. The second example heard here is *Canzonetta*, fourth of the *Four Songs* opus 48 (1902) and the only one on a French text in this collection, in this case a 1891 poem by Armand Silvestre, well known for his collaborations with Fauré, Massenet, and Saint-Saëns. In both cases, the idiomatic prosody reveals Beach's familiarity with this repertory, while the rich, expressive accompaniment in *Extase* may recall Duparc.

With the notable exception of Saint-Saëns, who made the trip to New York in 1906 and to California in 1915 (the year of his eightieth birthday), few French composers visited America before the First World War. While Debussy signed a contract with the Metropolitan Opera for two short operas after Edgar Allan Poe, *The Devil in the Belfry* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, left incomplete at his death, he never crossed the Atlantic, leaving his disciple Caplet in charge of the Boston premiere of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1912, four years after the New York premiere under the auspices of Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House. Served by musicians of the caliber of Caplet and Monteux – to say nothing of the Scottish-American Mary Garden, the original *Mélisande* – his music nevertheless gained acceptance in both the concert hall and the theater. As for Debussy himself, he was evidently not insensitive to American popular music, as can be heard in the joyful *Golliwog's Cakewalk*.

from the Children's Corner suite and Minstrels, in the second book of Preludes. The third of the Proses lyriques, *De fleurs*, composed on a text by Debussy himself, dates from 1893 and is thus contemporary with Amy Beach's *Extase*. Debussy had just embarked on the composition of *Pelléas*, the manuscript of which, long held by the New England Conservatory in Boston, is now at Yale.

The cosmopolitan Reynaldo Hahn, born in Caracas to a father of Hamburger roots and a Spanish mother, never visited America either, despite an invitation to give a series of lectures in New York in 1907. A fluent English speaker, he set to music *Love Without Wings*, a poem by Mary Robinson, the late eighteenth-century British actor and writer who had an affair with the Prince of Wales, the future George IV. Published by Heugel in 1904 along with a French version, the song is occasionally referred to with its incipit, "Oh! for the wings of a dove!"

Maurice Ravel already enjoyed a considerable American reputation when he was invited to the United States and Canada for a four-month tour in the spring of 1928. About this triumphant tour that took him to Toronto, Vancouver, San Francisco, Chicago, and Kansas City, in addition to New York, it can be said that it definitively consecrated his high reputation worldwide. In America, Ravel had the opportunity to indulge in his passion for jazz, already evidenced in his 1927 Sonata for violin and piano, since its slow movement is entitled *Blues*; other traces can be found in the 1929–31 Concerto in G and the 1930 Concerto for the Left Hand. In New York, Ravel met George Gershwin, who admired him deeply; they saw each other again in Paris during the visit that inspired Gershwin's tone poem *An American in Paris*. According to the testimony of the Canadian singer Eva Gauthier, Gershwin, in New York, is said to have asked Ravel to give him lessons in composition. Ravel declined the request, explained to Gershwin he had everything to gain by preserving his natural gifts and continuing to write good Gershwin rather than trying to produce bad Ravel. Dating from much earlier, the *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* are famous for drawing Ravel and Debussy into simultaneous competition in 1913, since

only the third poem is different in their respective sets. Yet it should be made that the initiative had been Ravel's, since he had direct access to Edmond Bonniot, Mallarmé's son-in-law and literary executor, through his friends the Godebskis, the poet's neighbors in Valvins, and had first solicited from him permission to set the three poems to music.

While, of the American composers on the program, Leonard Bernstein is the one least in need of an introduction, his mini-cycle *La Bonne Cuisine* will no doubt surprise anyone not already familiar with it: the composer, at that time music director of the New York City Symphony Orchestra, set to music four recipes extracted from one of his cookbooks (mile Dumont's *La Bonne Cuisine française*). A musical joke in the tradition of Milhaud's *op. 10* *rasminute* and Satie's piano pieces, it was first performed in October 1948 by the mezzosoprano Marion Bell, revealed the year before in *Brigadoon*, the musical by Frederick Loewe and Alan Jay Lerner, whose second wife (out of a total of eight) she became. Edwin MacArthur was her accompanist. If one must select an emblematic work to conclude this overview, let it be the *Sonatine transatlantique* by Alexandre Tansman, born in the Polish city of Lodz when it was part of the Russian Empire, then a Parisian between the wars, exiled in Los Angeles from 1940 to 1946, and a Parisian again until his death. The opening *Fox-Trot* of his 1930 *Sonatine de 1930* sounds like a tribute to Gershwin, whom Tansman met during his 1927 American tour at the invitation of Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra; yet it also features a ragtime in the manner of Scott Joplin, as if to remind us, both retrospectively and prophetically, as first stated by Dvořák, of the fundamental, irreplaceable contribution of African Americans to the culture of their country.

(Translated by the author)





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