

The logo for Brilliant Classics, featuring a stylized globe icon above the text "BRILLIANT CLASSICS".

BRILLIANT
CLASSICS

The title "Poulenc" is written in a light blue, cursive script. Below it, "CONCERTO FOR 2 PIANOS" is written in a white, serif, all-caps font.

Poulenc
CONCERTO FOR 2 PIANOS

The title "Britten" is written in a light blue, cursive script. Below it, "SCOTTISH BALLAD" is written in a white, serif, all-caps font.

Britten
SCOTTISH BALLAD

The title "Debussy" is written in a light blue, cursive script. Below it, "SUITE" is written in a white, serif, all-caps font.

Debussy
SUITE

Leonora Armellini
Mattia Ometto *pianos*

Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto
Luigi Piovano *conductor*

Music for 2 Pianos and Orchestra and Piano 4-hands

Francis Poulenc 1899-1963

Concerto in D minor FP61

for two Pianos and Orchestra

1. I. Allegro ma non troppo
- Très calme 8'29
2. II. Larghetto - Beaucoup plus
allant - Tempo I 6'01
3. III. Allegro molto - Agité - Plus
calme - Tempo I subito 6'21

Benjamin Britten 1913-1976

4. Scottish Ballad Op.26

for two Pianos and Orchestra 15'09

Claude Debussy 1861-1918

Première Suite d'Orchestre

for Piano four hands

5. I. Fête (Allegro vivace) 5'59
6. II. Ballet
(Andantino con moto) 4'13
7. III. Rêve (Andante) 7'18
8. IV. Cortège et Bacchanale
(Moderato mais très ferme
- Allegro con fuoco) 8'27

Duo Pianistico di Padova

Leonora Armellini and Mattia Ometto *pianos*

Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto · Luigi Piovano *conductor*

From Debussy to Britten: the birth of the 20th century

Composed in the summer of 1932 for the Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Venice (effectively the second edition of the Biennale Musica), the *Concerto for two pianos and orchestra* is one of the best-known works by **Francis Poulenc** (1899-1963). A true compendium of the composer's style, from the first movement it plays with form, loosening the traditional sonata structure and embracing the kaleidoscopic vision that was Poulenc's stylistic hallmark. From the Javanese gamelan to echoes of Mozart, from children's nursery rhymes to passionate outbursts, from primitive percussion to the *café chantant*, this Concerto embraces everything, all of it brilliantly interconnected in a constant centrifugal movement full of references and citations. The second movement is a perfect case in point. By means of references to his beloved Mozart, in particular to the *Concertos* KV 466 and 467, it features a *Larghetto* that comprises some of the most touching music Poulenc ever wrote. Yet the outcome has nothing to do with mere imitation. Instead Poulenc lovingly melds the themes and stylemes he chooses with his own perceptions and sensitivity, permeated with the nostalgia and yearning typical of the early 20th century. In actual fact the *Concerto* reveals various different influences, as Poulenc himself readily admitted: apart from Mozart, there is also an evident allusion to Ravel, in particular to the *Concertos*, which were also published and performed in 1932. Another less familiar citation regards the *Partita for piano and small orchestra* by the conductor and composer Igor Markevitch. Constructed along the lines of a piece by the same name composed by Alfredo Casella for the same instrumental ensemble, the *Partita* itself is also interwoven with stylistic references, especially in the opening *Overture* and the final *Rondo*, which comprise various elements that herald rhythmic and thematic ideas found in Poulenc's work. The *Concerto* ends with a *Finale: Allegro molto* in which the entire musical roundabout is unified by means of the rhythm, like a heady gallop through the landscape of the composer's passions that ends with a return to the gamelan of the first movement. The originality of the

Concerto should not be underestimated: as is often the case with early 20th century composers, Poulenc leaves his lasting mark in the density of his musical citations and references, all of them revealing astounding skill in the scoring. This is not only true as regards the two solo parts with their rapid, lively exchanges, but also the orchestra, with the clarity of the wind instruments and the range and timbre of the percussion. It is thus not surprising that the *Concerto for two pianos and orchestra* rapidly became a true cornerstone of the two-piano repertoire right from its premiere performance featuring Désiré Defauw conducting La Scala orchestra, with Poulenc himself and Jacques Février at the pianos. The composition met with such success that it was rapidly included in concert programmes further afield, to the extent that over ten years after the premiere, in 1945, Poulenc found himself playing it with Benjamin Britten in London. It was Britten's first encounter with the esteemed French musician who was fourteen years his senior.

It may well be that **Benjamin Britten** (1913-1976) had Poulenc's *Concerto* in mind when he was composing his *Scottish Ballad for two pianos and orchestra Op.26* in 1941. Yet despite this the two works develop in distinctly different directions, though they are both rhapsodic in mood. Composed for the pianists Ethel Bartlett and John Rae Robertson during his American years, the *Scottish Ballad* belongs to Britten's exploration of folk music, an interest that culminated in the *Suite on English Folk Tunes* that he finished two years before his death. The idea for using Scottish folk tunes certainly had something to do with the fact that Robertson had Scottish roots, but it also speaks for the composer's strong desire to return to the United Kingdom, not least on account of the lukewarm reception he met with in the USA. A sense of nostalgia and narration underlies the whole of the *Scottish Ballad*, where the plasticity of themes and rhythms is so different from the frenzy of Poulenc's *Concerto*. This is clear from the outset of the *Ballad*, which opens with the solemn majesty of archaic chords in the piano and an orchestral response that heralds the sparkling sea

of sound we associate with Britten. The initial sense of disorientation that follows the stately incipit gives way to a long, structured funeral march, the heart of the entire *Ballad*, in which the sounds and harmonies of the 1900s meld with a taste for earlier times reminiscent of the novels of Walter Scott. The feeling of loss and suspension ultimately leads to the transition towards the final section, which is much freer and more lively. The vibrant passage in the pianos and the way they dialogue with the orchestra is like a breath of fresh air suggesting the sweep of the Scottish moorlands. The *Scottish Ballad* ends in a triumphal cavalcade, with hints of Poulenc and Prokofiev in the piano parts preceding a brief return to the funeral march that is then drowned in the frenzy of the finale.

In many respects **Claude Debussy** (1862-1918) was the true forerunner of the experiments in style and sound carried out by Britten and Poulenc. He was certainly part of the climate of rediscovery of pre-romantic music and the styles of folk and exotic music. The recently rediscovered *Première Suite d'orchestre* was probably written between 1882 and 1884, and exists in two versions: one for orchestra, which is lacking the third movement; and another for piano four-hands, which is complete. The influence of French romanticism, in particular that of Saint-Saëns, Lalo, Chabrier and Massenet, is clearly recognizable in a work that was written when the composer was still in his early twenties, yet the stylistic features typical of his later music are already there in embryonic form. For instance, the brilliant colours and the sudden lyrical vein of *Fête*, the first movement, heralds the sense of celebration later found in the *Nocturnes* and *Iberia*. The somewhat eastern sensuality of the second movement, *Ballet*, does not have much in common with the exuberant *Ballet* of the *Petite suite* for piano four-hands of 1889 or with the brilliant second movement of Massenet's orchestral suite *Scènes de Féerie* of 1881, but it does share something of the orientalism fashionable in *fin de siècle* Paris. Next comes *Rêve*, where Debussy already reveals a fondness for pure, suspended sound, along with the cradling theme

that seems to be the archetype for many later themes, typically constructed in the central register and surrounded by airy accompaniments, but with a lyrical effusion that became increasingly rare in Debussy's works after the *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune*. The *Première Suite* ends with a double movement: *Cortège* and *Bacchanale*. In this case the gaudy colours of *Cortège* are distinctly reminiscent of Massenet's *Scènes de Féerie*, heralding the *Cortèges* from the cantata *L'enfant prodigue* and the *Petite Suite*, but with more marked brilliance. Lastly, an *accelerando* introduces the *Bacchanale* with its echoes of Massenet and the famous episode in *Samson et Dalila* by Saint-Saëns. A return to *Tempo I* reintroduces the grandeur of the opening procession combined with the rhythmical parenthesis of the *Bacchanale*, before the composition ends in the frenzy of the *Vivo*.

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Translation by Kate Singleton



Winner of the Janina Nawrocka Prize for “extraordinary musicality and the beauty of sound” at the F. Chopin International Piano Competition in Warsaw (2010), pianist **Leonora Armellini** (b.1992) is considered one of the most brilliant Italian musicians of recent years. She performs as a soloist, chamber musician and with numerous orchestras in prestigious halls all over the world (Carnegie Hall in New York, Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg, Salle Cortot in Paris, Philharmonic in Warsaw, Teatro la Fenice in Venice, Tongyeong Concert Hall in South Korea, Musashino Concert Hall in Tokyo, Millennium Monument Theatre in Beijing, ...). For Da Vinci Classics Leonora in duo with Mattia Ometto has recorded the complete Brahms two-pianos works, and her DVD “Piano Recital” was released recently by Continuo Records. With Matteo Rampin she authored the book “Mozart was cool, Bach even more”, published by SALANI (2014), now in its eighth edition and translated into Spanish.

She studied piano for four years with Laura Palmieri, graduating with full marks, honours and a special mention at the age of twelve. In 2005 she won the Premio Venezia, thereafter continuing her studies under Sergio Perticaroli at the Academy of

S. Cecilia in Rome, where she graduated with honours in 2009, the youngest graduate of the institution. After specializing at the Hochschule in Hamburg with Lilya Zilberstein, she studied with Boris Petrushansky at the Imola Academy.



A pupil of Aldo Ciccolini in Paris and Earl Wild in Palm Springs, **Mattia Ometto** graduated with full honours under Anna Barutti at the “B. Marcello” Conservatory in Venice, then specializing with Giorgio Lovato, Riccardo Zadra, Riccardo Risaliti, Gustavo Romero and Daniel Rivera. Since a young age he has performed in the concert seasons of the main Italian cities, including Venice (Teatro la Fenice),

Milan (Società dei Concerti), Rome, Naples, Turin, Trieste, Udine, Bologna, Treviso, Padua (Amici della Musica, Auditorium Pollini), Vicenza (Società del Quartetto).

In 2008 he made his debut at the Carnegie Hall in New York and at the Théâtre du Rond Point des Champs Elysées in Paris. Since then he has performed regularly in Europe and the United States (New York, Boston, Des Moines, Redlands, Berlin...).

He has played as a soloist with the Lyric Symphony Orchestra of Los Angeles, the Academic Baskent Orkestra of Ankara, the Vidin State Philharmonic Orchestra (Bulgaria) and the Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto alongside conductors such as Dini Ciacci, Gheorghe, Gambetta, Korkmaz and Piovano.

His recordings include the complete *Mélodies* by César Franck and Henri Duparc (Brilliant Classics) and the works for two pianos by Brahms with Leonora Armellini (Da Vinci). In duo with Leslie Howard, Mattia Ometto recorded the complete piano duos of Reynaldo Hahn (Melba Recordings) and Franz Liszt’s music for two pianos (Brilliant Classics).

Mattia Ometto is Professor of piano at the “A. Buzzolla” Conservatory in Adria (Italy).

Principal solo cello of the Accademia di S. Cecilia Orchestra, **Luigi Piovano** graduated at the age of 17 with full marks and honours under the guidance of Radu Aldulescu, with whom he later also graduated in Paris in cello and chamber music.

In 1999 he was chosen by Maurizio Pollini to participate in the Pollini Project at the Salzburg Festival, and also at the Carnegie Hall, in Tokyo and in Rome.

He has held chamber music concerts with artists such as Sawallisch, Chung, Lonquich, Sitkovetsky and Kavakos. Since 2007 he has been part of a duo with Antonio Pappano.

He has performed as a soloist with eminent orchestras, including the Tokyo Philharmonic, New Japan Philharmonic, Accademia di Santa Cecilia, Seoul Philharmonic, Symphonique de Montréal - under the baton of conductors such as Chung, Nagano, Pletnev, Menuhin and Bellugi.

His recordings include the Six Cello Suites by Bach, the complete works for cello by Saint-Saëns and the Bach Goldberg Variations together with Dmitry Sitkovetsky.

He plays a 1710 Alessandro Gagliano cello.

As a conductor he has recorded for Naxos, Eloquencia, Arcana and Sony. In 2012 the album in which he conducted Mahler’s *Kindertotenlieder* and *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* with Sara Mingardo was judged the best Lieder album of the year in France.

Since 2012 he has been musical director of the ICO Orchestra of Magna Grecia.

Since 2013 he has headed the String ensemble of the Santa Cecilia Orchestra with which he has recorded several albums, the last of which was first released by the magazine “Amadeus” and then published by Arcana.

His schedule for 2020 includes *Tosca* at the Teatro Bellini in Catania.





Founded in October 1966, the **Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto** has established itself as one of the foremost Italian orchestras. It takes part in around 120 concerts and operas every year, with its own season in Padua, concerts in the region, and performances for eminent concert organizations and festivals in Italy and abroad.

From its foundation to 1983, the Orchestra's musical and artistic director was Claudio Scimone, followed by Peter Maag (main director, 1983-2001), Bruno Giuranna, Guido Turchi, Mario Brunello (musical director, 2002-2003), Filippo Juvarra. In September 2015 Marco Angius took over as musical and artistic director.

The OPV has worked with outstanding international musicians, including M. Argerich, V. Ashkenazy, I. Bostridge, R. Chailly, R. Goebel, P. Herreweghe, S. Isserlis, L. Kavakos, T. Koopman, R. Lupu, M. Maisky, Sir N. Marriner, V. Mullova, O. Mustonen, AS Mutter, M. Perahia, I. Perlman, S. Richter, M. Rostropovich and K. Zimerman.

With the arrival of Marco Angius in 2015, the OPV hosted Salvatore Sciarrino as a composer in residence, creating the first cycle of sound lessons, an experience that was then renewed in the following seasons with Ivan Fedele, Giorgio Battistelli, Nicola Sani and Michele dall'Ongaro.

The Orchestra has featured in many television broadcasts for Rai5 as well taking part in over 60 recordings for the most important labels.

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