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DARIUS MILHAUD
CHAMBERWORKS

ENSEMBLE POLYTONAAL



DARIUS MILHAUD (1892-1974)

ENSEMBLE POLYTONAAL

Rien de Reede *flute* Jan Spronk *oboe* Els Vreugdenhil *clarinet* Josef Malkin *violin*
Esther van Stralen *viola* Eduard-van Regteren Altena *cello* Marcel Worms *piano*

SUITE FOR VIOLIN, CLARINET AND PIANO (1936)

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|------|
| 1 | Ouverture | 1.30 |
| 2 | Divertissement | 3.23 |
| 3 | Jeu | 1.35 |
| 4 | Introduction et Final | 5.25 |

SECOND SONATA FOR VIOLA AND PIANO (1944)

- | | | |
|---|------------|------|
| 5 | Champêtre | 4.01 |
| 6 | Dramatique | 5.30 |
| 7 | Rude | 2.35 |

SONATA FOR FLUTE, OBOE, CLARINET AND PIANO (1918)

- | | | |
|----|------------|------|
| 8 | Tranquille | 6.41 |
| 9 | Joyeux | 3.18 |
| 10 | Emporté | 1.50 |
| 11 | Douloureux | 5.29 |

SECOND SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO (1917)

- | | | |
|----|----------|------|
| 12 | Pastoral | 6.24 |
| 13 | Vif | 3.05 |
| 14 | Lent | 3.49 |
| 15 | Très vif | 4.07 |

QUARTET FOR VIOLIN, VIOLA, CELLO AND PIANO, OP. 417 (1966)

- | | | |
|----|------------------|------|
| 16 | Modérément animé | 4.33 |
| 17 | Lent | 5.27 |
| 18 | Vif | 4.27 |

Total time: 73.19



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The French composer **Darius Milhaud** was born in a Provençal/Jewish milieu, where his musical abilities were quickly recognized and encouraged. His parents hoped for a violinist's career for him, and thus in 1909, Milhaud entered the Conservatory of Paris. However, he soon discovered that his ambitions lay in the field of composition. He received a comprehensive education, during which he already composed a considerable amount of music, influenced primarily by Debussy. His literary interests brought him into contact with the author Paul Claudel, who took Milhaud with him as his secretary when he was appointed French Ambassador to Brazil. Milhaud's Brazilian sojourn (1917-18) introduced the composer to South American folk music. He developed a polytonal writing style, simultaneously employing several keys and later adding elements of jazz to the mixture. Upon returning to Europe he became a member of the famous 'Groupe des Six': Milhaud fought against the Wagnerian influence in French music (both in music and literature) and admired the ascetic style of Erik Satie. His compositions from this period (including 'Le boeuf sur le toit') are refreshing, original, and uncompromising. Therefore, many of the premieres ended in disorder, and sometimes even violent reactions among the audiences.

In 1940, Milhaud and his wife Madeleine fled from the Nazis and took refuge in America, where Milhaud was appointed professor of composition at Mills College of Oakland, California in 1947. He later combined this position with a similar one at the Paris Conservatory.

Milhaud's oeuvre is of enormous dimensions, including every imaginable genre and musical form. His creative powers seemed virtually inexhaustible, and the fact that he sometimes produced works of lesser quality can hardly be considered a valid criticism. Milhaud's stylistic traits include the intensive use of counterpoint (polyphony) and great melodic inventiveness. In addition, he always remained a warm-blooded Mediterranean, wary of any sort of pathos or false sentimentality; perhaps he can best be described as a humanistic composer.

Suite for violin, clarinet and piano (1936)

Milhaud's oeuvre includes a considerable quantity of film and stage music. In this vein, he composed incidental music for Jean Anouilh's 'le Voyageur sans bagage'. From this score, Milhaud extracted a Suite for violin, clarinet and piano. The titles and tempo indications for the movements already indicate the cheerful and unpretentious character of this work: 'Jeu' (game), 'Vif' (lively), 'Animé' (energetic)....the swinging rhythms of the last movement evoke the atmosphere of Milhaud's famous 'Scaramouche'.

Second sonata for viola and piano (1944)

Milhaud wrote this sonata during his stay in the United States. The first part is entitled 'Champêtre', a popular indication in the music of the 'Groupe des Six' for whom the rural surroundings of Paris often served as a model. This is followed by a fairly slow and dramatic movement. Even today, the stormy Finale ('Rude') makes it clear to the listener why Milhaud's compositions sometimes stirred up strong feelings in his audiences. A significant fact in this context is Milhaud's custom of leaving the windows of his workroom, in the middle of Paris, wide open while he was composing: the city, with its array of violent sounds, functioned as source of inspiration.

Sonata for flute, oboe, clarinet and piano (1918)

This sonata was also composed during Milhaud's stay in Brazil. It contains all the characteristic traits for this period: exotic tone colors, polytonality, syncopated rhythms, and South American folk elements. The four movements represent four different moods, as witnessed by the indications at the beginning of each movement: 'Tranquille', 'Joyeux', 'Emporté', and 'Dououreux'. The best part of the third movement ('Emporté') is an unbridled cacophony, of a sort that Milhaud probably heard in the great city of Rio de Janeiro. The last movement is a funeral march, which has a purifying effect after the preceding movement. Characteristically for Milhaud's style and the spirit of the period during which the work was composed, the moods here are portrayed in a warm and lyrical manner, which at the same time is anti-Romantic and unsentimental, maintaining a certain degree of objectivity.

Second Sonata for violin and piano (1917)

Milhaud composed this sonata during his stay in Brazil, and the premiere, as a result, took place in Rio de Janeiro. In this work, Milhaud made extensive use of the polytonal technique which he had developed: the simultaneous use of two or more keys. This, for him, was the solution to the dilemma of, on one hand, a purely tonal style, whose possibilities seemed exhausted at the time, and on the other the atonal style, in which he did not feel comfortable.

The piece begins with a pastorale movement. In the fiery Scherzo, the world of Klezmer (Jewish music from eastern Europe) can be heard. The slow movement is an intimate nocturne. The finale, with its toccata-like piano part, radiates a swinging vitality.

Quartet for piano, violin, viola, and cello (1966)

It is probably a unique fact in the history of music that two string quartets by a given composer can be performed either separately or together, i.e. as an octet. Milhaud offers us this possibility with his fourteenth and fifteenth string quartets. This says much for the independence of the voices in his strongly contrapuntal style. In the piano quartet of 1966, the independence of the voices is also remarkable. At first hearing, it even seems as though each voice is telling its own story without any direct interest in the progress of the other musical lines. However, once one becomes familiar with Milhaud's specific musical language, it can be seen that the members of the conversation are indeed sharply aware of each other. The tender and tentative lyricism of the middle movement is in sharp contrast to the stormy energy of the outer movements, which are full of dissonant explosions. In his seventies, Milhaud has apparently lost none of his musical vitality.

The **Ensemble Polytonaal** was founded in 1992, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Darius Milhaud's birth. Its name refers both to the polytonal character of Milhaud's music and to the numerous sound combinations which can be achieved with winds, strings, and piano. During the 'Centenaire Milhaud', the ensemble gave many concerts in the Netherlands and France, with Milhaud's music taking center stage. In addition the world premiere was given of Jean Françaix's trio for clarinet, viola, and piano.

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