

# CLOCHES ET CARILLONS

Piano music by  
Blumenfeld  
Debussy  
Enescu  
Liszt  
Messiaen  
Mishory  
Murail  
Ravel  
Saint-Saëns  
Schmitt  
Vierne



Deutschlandfunk Kultur

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDING

Irmela Roelcke

# CLOCHES ET CARILLONS

Jonathan Powell

Irmela Roelcke writes that

the heart of this album is the ‘Choral et Carillon nocturne’ by George Enescu. When I got to know it a few years ago, it fascinated me immediately and formed the starting point of my research into piano music that deals with the theme of bells and carillons. The selection on this recording primarily presents works from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and explores various aspects of the sound of bells: bells from specific cities, but also bells in their various functions – evening bells, bells of farewell and joy, funeral bells and bell sounds that reach beyond the earthly present and touch a spiritual dimension. The aim of the present recording is to illuminate this broad spectrum in a specific section of history.<sup>1</sup>

## CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

(1835–1921)

### *Les Cloches du soir*, Op. 85 (1889)

The vast majority of Saint-Saëns’ piano works are miniatures – études, mazurkas, bagatelles and *romances sans paroles* predominate, taking their cues from Chopin and Mendelssohn in particular. In addition, he wrote a number of descriptive character pieces, such as a *Souvenir d’Italie* (1887) and *Les Cloches du soir* (1889), the latter following an earlier bell piece by only five years – ‘Carillon’ is the second piece in the *Album*, Op. 72, of 1884. *Les Cloches du soir* <sup>[1]</sup> was written during a period of crisis in the composer’s life: in December



<sup>1</sup> E-mail to the author dated 11 May 2022.

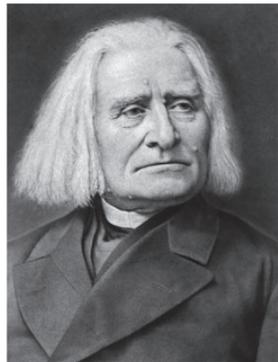
1888 his mother died, and Saint-Saëns was plunged into depression, even contemplating suicide. He spent much of 1889 in Algiers, recuperating. In *Les Cloches du soir*, a tolling figure is linked by a falling arabesque to a chorale-type melody rather redolent of Alkan; this pattern is then repeated with the melody appearing in the tenor.

### FRANZ LISZT

(1811–86)

#### ***Weihnachtsbaum* (1873–76, rev. 1881): No. 9, 'Abendglocken'**

Unlike the majority of Liszt's piano works, *Weihnachtsbaum* does not call for virtuosity and perhaps for this reason this suite of twelve pieces has been rather overlooked by pianists. The suite is dedicated to his grandchild Daniela von Bülow (1860–1940, daughter of Liszt's daughter Cosima and the conductor Hans von Bülow), perhaps in gratitude for her having accompanied the composer to Rome because of his ill health. The first complete performance took place in 1881 in Daniela's hotel room in Rome on Christmas day (which was also Cosima's birthday). Many of the pieces are based on Christmas carols, though Nos. 6 and 9 ('Carillon' and 'Abendglocken') are obvious exceptions. In 'Abendglocken' [2](#), a four-note falling motif is alternated and combined with repetitive tolling of bells, the music gradually receding into silence before the bells reappear multi-layered, with an effect that presages the opening of Busoni's opera *Doktor Faust* from half a century later.



#### ***Années de Pèlerinage I – Suisse* (1837–38, rev. 1848): No. 9, 'Les Cloches de Genève'**

The first two books of the *Années de Pèlerinage* form a type of chronicle of the years Liszt spent with the Comtesse Marie d'Agoult in Switzerland; many pieces in the first book of the *Années* (called *Suisse*) first saw light in the *Album d'un voyageur*, composed in 1835–38 and published in 1842. Liszt later discarded some items from this collection, revised the remaining ones and added new ones to form the new collection. 'Les Cloches

de Genève' [3] was originally dedicated to Liszt's and d'Agoult's first child – Blandine – who was born in the city (no piece in the *Années* bears a dedication) where they had lived for some time. It carries a quotation from Byron's *Childe Harold*: 'I live not in myself, but I become / Portion of that around me'.

### ***Ave Maria – Die Glocken von Rom* (1862)**

Liszt wrote several piano compositions with the title *Ave Maria*, and this one [4] was composed in 1862 at the request of Drs Siegmund Lebert and Ludwig Stark (founders of the Stuttgart Conservatoire) for the fourth part of their *Grosse theoretisch-praktische Klavierschule*,<sup>2</sup> which they compiled especially for the Conservatoire students. According to the pianist and Liszt scholar Leslie Howard, the subtitle *Die Glocken von Rom* may not be Liszt's,<sup>3</sup> but it is certainly useful in distinguishing this piece from others by Liszt with the same title. There is no specific connection to any vocal work in particular, but the opening melody (heard after the five-note introduction in the left hand) clearly correlates with the rhythm of the Latin prayer. It is at the restatement of this theme that distinct bell-like sonorities are heard in the left hand; and the effect is amplified when the music modulates from E major to E flat major in the central section, the bells this time high in the register. After a section marked *più adagio* (and one can imagine *quasi organo* would also be appropriate), the opening motif is taken through a kaleidoscope of harmonies, with bells in all registers gradually enveloping the melodies. The coda provides a suitably solemn amen.

### **FLORENT SCHMITT**

(1879–1958)

### ***Musiques intimes*, Op. 29 (1904): No. 6, 'Glas'**

The two books of *Musiques intimes* – Opp. 16 and 29 – are largely typical of the several collections of piano miniatures Schmitt wrote during his early years. They display the influence of his teachers Massenet and Fauré and possess little of the complexity of the

<sup>2</sup> Verlag der J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, Stuttgart, 1872.

<sup>3</sup> Booklet text for Liszt, *The Complete Music for Solo Piano*, Vol. 7: *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, Hyperion CDA66421/2 (1990).

brooding and virtuosic *Ombres* and *Mirages* he would write a decade or so later. However, the difference between the two books of *Musiques intimes* is remarkable enough to give a clear indication of the aesthetic direction in which the composer was travelling: the first is essentially domestic in *ambiance*, whereas the second already inhabits the concert-hall. The six pieces that comprise the second book were written between 1898 and 1904 in various locations: Montreux, Berlin, Munich, Paris and, finally, Rome, where Schmitt resided in the Villa Medici as a recipient of the prestigious Prix de Rome. ‘Glas’ [5] opens with distant tolling within which a theme – *d’une sonorité sourde* – is presented first alone, and then given canonic treatment. It is then heard in the middle of the piano register, played *forte*, while imitation partials are played *pppp* (*à peine entendu*) two octaves higher, foreshadowing a crucial technical aspect of replication of bell sounds in the Enescu and Murail pieces in this recording. A recitative (perhaps a funeral oration) follows, after which the theme is given quite different treatment, though the tolling is still present. After the opening material is revisited, the recitative makes a final appearance, underpinned by more bells.



### **LOUIS VIERNE**

(1870–1937)

#### ***Poèmes des cloches funèbres*, Op. 39 (1916): No. 2, ‘Le Glas’**

In 1916 Vierne went to Switzerland to be treated for glaucoma (he had had very poor eyesight all his life) and expected to be away from Paris for a short period; in the event, he was gone for four years, with Marcel Dupré, his assistant organist at Notre-Dame, stepping into his shoes for the duration. It was in Lausanne that Vierne embarked on an intended four-movement work called *Poèmes des cloches funèbres*; movements three and four may well not have been started, and the first part – ‘Cloches et le cauchemar’ – is presumed lost. Only ‘Le Glas’ [6] remains, dated Christmas Day, 1916. It is dedicated

to the memory of his close friend Alphonse Franc. The manuscript of this piece was not discovered until late in the twentieth century.

In a manner comparable to Ravel's 'Le Gibet' (which naturally also concerns death), the second movement of *Gaspard de la nuit*, a single note – G sharp in this case – tolls throughout the whole piece, mostly in combination but not always with another, D sharp (as heard at the very beginning). This constant sonority is then combined with various elements: melodies which increasingly become filled out into chords; a secondary tolling the shape of which mimics the melodies but at half speed; and, finally, sonorous octaves occupying the lower half of the instrument. This latter ingredient is gradually placed more and more at odds with the overriding tonality, thus increasing the tension until a triple *forte* restatement of the melody. As the dynamic and texture recedes, the bare tolling heard at the outset is left. Vierne then introduces a quasi-choral 'Kyrie eleison, dona eis requiem' in chords in the major key, under which a slow chromatic descent in the depths of the piano brings the work to its close.



### **FELIX BLUMENFELD**

(1863–1931)

#### ***Cloches: Suite pour Piano, Op. 40 (1909)***

Blumenfeld spent his childhood in Elisavetgrad (later called Kirovohrad, now Kropyvnytskyi in south-central Ukraine) and began his musical education there with Gustav Neuhaus (father of Heinrich), who had married Blumenfeld's elder sister. Felix's paternal grandfather's wife was Maria Szymanowska (the daughter of a Polish landowner), who was the sister of the grandfather of the composer Karol Szymanowski. Blumenfeld became a virtuoso pianist who gave premieres of works by Tchaikovsky, Glazunov, Lyadov and others, and later a teacher who counted Simon Barer, Maria Grinberg and Vladimir Horowitz among his students. He was also a conductor who

gave world premieres of major works by his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov and friend Skryabin; the Russian premieres of some Wagner operas were given under his baton, and he even impressed Toscanini. But he was a composer, too, and 50 out of 54 of his works were published by Belyayev, to whom he was introduced by Rimsky-Korsakov.

The suite *Zvonï* (or *Cloches*: Belaïeff published pieces with both Russian and French titles) is an elaboration of the bell sounds familiar in much Russian music. It is worth noting that Blumenfeld had performed Rachmaninov's *Fantaisie-tableaux* (or First Suite, Op. 5) with the composer at a Belyayev soirée in late 1893, and Rachmaninov's debt (according to his biographer Barrie Martyn) in the last movement, 'Easter', to the bells in *Sadko* and *Boris Godunov*, 'could not have escaped the notice of Rimsky and Lyadov',<sup>4</sup> who were presumably present at this performance. Although in some senses a throwback to the previous century, Blumenfeld's suite is awash with the complex chromatic harmony that characterises the composer's later pieces and which demonstrates the growing distance between him and the Belyayev traditions. The first movement, 'Cloches et clochettes' [7], in E major and marked *Moderato*, plays on the contrast between the lighter sound of the 'clochettes' in the treble and the heavier resonances of the 'cloches' in the bass. The central panel, 'Glas funèbre' ('Funeral Knell'), a C minor *Adagio* [8], opens with rolling arpeggios (misspelled *sempre arpeggiato* in the score), which leads to a Chopinesque central section; the opening chords then return, rather more emphatically, dying away as the piece closes. The finale, 'Cloches triomphales' [9], an *Andante* in D flat major, presents the overlaying patterns of chiming bells characteristic of the Russian Orthodox Church – and familiar to non-Russians from some of the classics of Russian art-music, the opening of the Coronation Scene in Musorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov* being an obvious example.



<sup>4</sup> Barrie Martin, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor*, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon, 1990, p. 75.

## MAURICE RAVEL

(1875–1937)

### ***Miroirs* (1904–5): No. 5, ‘La Vallée des cloches’**

One of Ravel’s few remarks on his collection of five pieces collectively entitled *Miroirs* was that they ‘mark a change in my harmonic development pronounced enough to have upset those musicians who, until then, had had the least trouble appreciating my style.’<sup>5</sup> The whole set was complete by late autumn 1905, and Ricardo Viñes gave the first performance in the Salle Érard on 6 January 1906. ‘La Vallée des cloches’ [10] is dedicated to Ravel’s friend and pupil, the composer Maurice Delage. Robert Casadesus later recalled that Ravel told him that the work was inspired by the midday bells of Paris.<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that the composition of this piece immediately precedes Ravel’s embarkation in 1906 on a project for an opera – *La Cloche engloutie* – which he subsequently abandoned. It pre-dates Debussy’s first unmistakable attempt to evoke the sound of bells on the piano – in ‘Cloches à travers les feuilles’, in Book II of *Images* – by two years.



## CLAUDE DEBUSSY

(1862–1918)

### ***Images, Livre II* (1907): No. 1, ‘Cloches à travers les feuilles’**

Unlike Ravel’s evocation of urban bells, Debussy’s ‘Cloches à travers les feuilles’ [11] was inspired by the bells of the village of Rahon, in the Jura, home of the sinologist Louis Laloy, his friend and first biographer. The piece is an essay not only in bells (presumably heard from a distance, and through some rustling leaves) but in layered *pianissimo ostinati*: the dynamics never rise above *piano* except for two *forte* chords in

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Roger Nicholls in his Preface to the Peters edition of *Miroirs*, London, 2001, p. vi.

<sup>6</sup> Marcel Marnat, *Maurice Ravel*, Fayard, Paris, 1986, p. 184.

the middle of the piece, and yet the pianist must endeavour to produce subtly differentiated timbres and dynamic levels for each layer. There is also a hint of the Gamelan – beloved by Debussy and featuring prominently in his ‘Pagodes’ written not so long before (it was the first of his *Estampes* of 1903) – in the repeated patterns simultaneously using short and longer durations, as well as the unresolved harmonies. The three *Images* that comprise the second book of the series were also first performed by Viñes in 1907.



## OLIVIER MESSIAEN

(1908–92)

### *Préludes pour piano* (1928–29): No. 6, ‘Cloches d’angoisse et larmes d’adieu’



Messiaen was still a pupil of Paul Dukas when he wrote his ten *Préludes*, and they are the work which the composer always considered his opus one. It is indeed remarkable that these pieces demonstrate the formation of a unique voice before his studies were even finished. They were also the first pieces of the young composer to attract critical attention, and the first performance of most of the pieces – by Henriette Roget on 1 March 1930 – was soon followed by their publication by Durand (in June of the same year). Messiaen later explained that the *Préludes* ‘don’t form a suite in the usual sense of the word, but are essentially a collection of successive states of the soul and of personal feelings.’<sup>7</sup> In their monograph on

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone, *Messiaen*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2005, p. 28.

the composer, Nigel Simeone and Peter Hill remark that ‘Cloches d’angoisse et larmes d’adieu’ [12] stands out from the cycle for its

Apocalyptic vision [which] makes it the piece most prophetic of later Messiaen. The stillness that Messiaen achieves in its immense coda – the ‘farewell’ of the title – is a hallmark of all his great slow movements, and the final page is superbly imagined: silence creeps in and the music distils into fragments.<sup>8</sup>

## TRISTAN MURAIL

(b. 1947)

### *Cloches d’adieu, et un sourire* (1992)

Tristan Murail, a Messiaen student who went on to become one of the leading members of the ‘spectral’ school of composition, has supplied the following programme note on his *Cloches d’adieu, et un sourire* [13]:

This unpretentious little piece was written at the request of German Radio, Deutschlandfunk, in memory of Olivier Messiaen. It borrows several aspects (the conducting of the discourse, and the three final notes – the ‘adieu’) of one of Messiaen’s earliest works, the prelude *Cloches d’angoisse et larmes d’adieu* (1929). I tried to mix in, amongst other allusions, a few echoes of bells which feature in many of my own works. These are answered by luminous echoes and clusters of chords in cheerful keys, as the ‘smile’ of Messiaen’s last works managed to triumph for good over the ‘anguish’ and ‘tears’ of the past – for there is no final farewell.



<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

## GILEAD MISHORY

(b. 1960)

### *Cloches de joie et larmes de rire* (2006)

The Jerusalem-born pianist and composer Gilead Mishory studied at the Rubin Academy in his native city and then with Gerhard Oppitz in Munich and Hans Leygraf at the Salzburg Mozarteum. He has himself been on the professorial staff of the Freiburg Hochschule für Musik since 2000. He, too, has written a programme note on his ‘bell’ piece:

*Cloches de joie et larmes de rire* (‘Bells of Joy and Tears of Laughter’) [14] was commissioned for the second Lephthien Piano Competition, held in Freiburg in 2007. It is a third, joyous transformation of the bell motif in Messiaen’s *Cloches d’angoisse et larmes d’adieu* (the second being Murail’s *Cloches d’adieu, et un sourire*). What is the central element in the piece? Is it perhaps the rhythmic element, or rather the tension between the sound mix and the motif clarity? Is it the wild, unyielding laughter or even the warmth of the tears and the calming elements which evoke familiar feelings? The answers to these questions remain up to the interpreter and the listeners.



## GEORGE ENESCU

(1881–1955)

### *Piano Suite No. 3, Pièces impromptues, Op. 18* (1913–16):

#### VI. ‘Choral’; VII. ‘Carillon nocturne’

Enescu’s Third Suite stands at a watershed in his *œuvre*: written between the vast Second and Third Symphonies, it is one of the first works in which one can detect elements of his later style (that of the music he wrote from the 1920s and beyond), and yet some of the pieces in it still retain elements of his earlier work; it is also his last piano composition

before the later – and quite different – sonatas and the occasional *Pièce sur le nom de Fauré*. The last two movements – ‘Choral’ [15] and ‘Carillon nocturne’ [16] – can really be considered a single piece since they are to be played without a break. Whereas the ‘Choral’ initially evokes a church choir (gradually expanding into a decidedly pianistic texture by its conclusion), the ‘Carillon nocturne’ is an essay on the sonorities of monastery bells tolling in the dark of Sinaia, a village where Enescu wrote much of his music, situated on the lower slopes of the Carpathians, north of Bucharest. In his monograph on the composer, Noel Malcolm writes how the ‘sonority of the bells is captured in an extraordinary way: above the main ringing notes, the impure harmonics are conjured up with clusters (spread over two octaves) of simultaneous fifths, sixths and sevenths, *pianissimo*’<sup>9</sup>



*Jonathan Powell is a pianist, composer and writer on music. He was awarded a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge for his thesis After Scriabin: Six Composers and the Development of Russian Music. He continues to write about music, usually for his own recordings. His concert engagements have taken him around the globe. His recording of Sorabji's Sequentia cyclica was awarded the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritiken in 2020; Igor Levit invited him to perform the work in the 2021 edition of the Heidelberger Frühling. His recent orchestral recordings include the First Concertos of Hans Winterberg (in its first recording), with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra under Johannes Kalitzke, and of Xaver Scharwenka, with the Poznań Philharmonic under Łukasz Borowicz, for Capriccio and CPO respectively.*

<sup>9</sup> George Enescu: *His Life and Music*, Toccata Press, London, 1991, p. 131.

One important strand of **Irmela Roelcke's** work concerns the rediscovery and performance of rarely played or forgotten piano works and chamber music with piano: for example, she released the first recording of Artur Schnabel's monumental Piano Quintet on the CPO label. She is also committed to contemporary music and has been involved in performing works for multiple pianos. Notable examples are John McGuire's *Frieze*, Clarence Barlow's *Çoğluotobüsüşletmesi* and Stefan Wolpe's *Enactments*. She was part of the ensemble that gave the first performance of *Farben der Frühe* for seven pianos by Mathias Spahlinger.

She also specialises in historic keyboard instruments: fortepiano, harpsichord and clavichord. She has played original works and arrangements in unusual line-ups, alongside such instruments as arpeggione, cimbalom and psaltery.

Her collaboration with the author and film-maker Alexander Kluge has provided her with a close knowledge of the use and purpose of music in interdisciplinary contexts. She has devised and implemented a wide range of projects with Ensemble Modern, Ensemble Musikfabrik, Ensemble Surplus, Staatskapelle Berlin, Filmorchester Babelsberg and the Anhaltische Philharmonie Dessau, as well as the GrauSchumacher Piano Duo, her piano-duet partner Axel Gremmelspacher, the cellist and arpeggione player Gerhart Darmstadt and the Pellegrini and Bennewitz String Quartets. A large number of albums and broadcasts testify to her work.

She has a private piano-teaching practice in Berlin and works with the pre-university course at Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf Music School. She is often invited to lecture at the Hanns Eisler conservatoire in Berlin, as well as those in Frankfurt am Main, Hanover, Lucerne and Saarbrücken, and at the Berlin University of the Arts.





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# CLOCHES ET CARILLONS

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CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

[1] *Les Cloches du soir*, Op. 85 (1889)

FRANZ LISZT

*Weihnachtsbaum* (1873–76, rev. 1881)

[2] No. 9 Abendglocken

*Années de Pèlerinage I – Suisse*

(1837–38, rev. 1848)

[3] No. 9 Les Cloches de Genève

[4] *Ave Maria – Die Glocken von Rom* (1862)

FLORENT SCHMITT

*Musiques intimes*, Op. 29 (1904)

[5] No. 6 Glas

LOUIS VIERNE

*Poèmes des cloches funèbres*, Op. 39 (1916)

[6] No. 2 Le Glas

FELIX BLUMENFELD

*Cloches: Suite pour Piano*, Op. 40 (1909)

[7] I Cloches et clochettes

[8] II Glas funèbre

[9] III Cloches triomphales

MAURICE RAVEL

*Miroirs* (1904–5)

[10] No. 5 La Vallée des cloches

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

*Images*, Livre II (1907)

[11] No. 1 Cloches à travers les feuilles

OLIVIER MESSIAEN

*Préludes pour piano* (1928–29)

[12] No. 6 Cloches d'angoisse et larmes d'adieu 8:07

TRISTAN MURAIL

[13] *Cloches d'adieu, et un sourire* (1992)

GILEAD MISHORY

[14] *Cloches de joie et larmes de rire* (2006)\* 4:17

GEORGE ENESCU

*Piano Suite No. 3, Pièces impromptues*, Op. 18  
(1913–16)

[15] VI Choral

[16] VII Carillon nocturne

6:35

6:41

Irmela Roelcke, piano

TT 83:33

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