

BARBER | BORODIN | DEBUSSY | RAVEL

SAMUEL BARBER (1910 - 1981)

Souvenirs, Op. 28

01. Waltz	03:48
02. Scottische	02:17
03. Pas de deux	03:27
04. Two-Step	01:38
05. Hesitation-Tango	03:40
06. Galop	02:17

ALEXANDER BORODIN (1833 - 1887)

Polovtsian Dances

07. Andantino	02:20
08. Allegro vivo	01:14
09. Allegro	02:10
10. Presto	05:50

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862 - 1918)

11. <i>Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune</i>	10:19
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MAURICE RAVEL (1875 - 1937)

12. <i>Boléro</i>	15:32
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Michela Chiara Borghese & Sabrina De Carlo

Total Time: 54:32



Recording by **Simone Sciumbata** in Abbey Rocchi Studios, Rome January 2021 | Piano Technician **Massimiliano Pinazzo**

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SAMUEL BARBER (1910 - 1981): *Souvenirs*, Op. 28 (1951)

(Orchestrated in 1952. Ballet première: New York, New York City Ballet, choreography Todd Bolender, 11/15/1955)

The Lobby - Waltz

Third Floor Hallway - Scottische

A Corner Of The Ballroom - Pas de Deux

Tea In The Palm Court - Two Step

A Bedroom Affair - Hesitation Tango

The Next Afternoon - Galop: Coda

ALEXANDER BORODIN (1833 - 1887): *Polovtsian Dances* (1879)

(Transcribed for piano four hands by Nikolai Sokolov. Ballet première: Paris, Ballets Russes, choreography Michael Fokine, 05/18/1909)

Andantino

Allegro vivo

Allegro

Presto

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862 - 1918): *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1892-1894)

(Transcribed for piano four hands by Maurice Ravel. Première: Paris, 12/22/1894; ballet *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, première: Paris, Ballets Russes, choreography Vaslav Nijinsky, 05/29/1912)

MAURICE RAVEL (1875 - 1937): *Boléro* (1928)

(Transcribed for piano four hands by the author. Première: Paris, Ida Rubinstein Ballets, choreography Bronislava Nijinska; 11/22/1928)



Photo Valerio Carosi

DuoKeira Piano Duo, *Michela Chiara Borghese & Sabrina De Carlo*

Inspired by the Greek word for “hand”, the name *DuoKeira* also echoes that of Chiron, the mythical centaur whose learning embraced both arts and sciences, reason and intuition. Michela Chiara Borghese and Sabrina De Carlo offer performances which joyously fuse strict discipline and openness to the synesthetic potential of music. Both passionate about chamber music, the two pianists are very different in temperament and by training. Michela brings to the partnership absolute precision, strong sound, unfailing stamina and rhythmic drive. Complementary to these are Sabrina’s melodic elegance, sense of timing and imaginative spacing, her unceasing quest for true quality of sound, and for deep bonds with their chosen composers. In more than ten years of activity, *DuoKeira* has performed in prestigious concert halls as well as in intimate locations in three different continents. In choosing and interpreting their repertoire, the duo has striven to renew the performance canons of chamber music while respecting the demands of the classical tradition. This comes out clearly in their albums. *Giochi di piano a quattro mani* (RES 2009) features compositions from different periods linked by the common theme of game-playing, while their most recent cd, dedicated to Mendelssohn’s four-hands versions of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Fair Melusine* (Brilliant Classics 2020), has been hailed by Quirino Principe as “a supernatural fairy tale, re-invented by *DuoKeira* with rare charm”. Earlier recognition came during the 2010 IBLA Grand Prize World Music Competition, when *DuoKeira* was awarded the Most Distinguished Performance prize and special commendation for its execution of works by Samuel Barber and Darius Milhaud. In 2016 the duo was invited to take part in the UNESCO “Nuit de la philosophie” in Paris, and the following year was among the recipients of the Global Music Awards, for their execution of Barber’s *Souvenirs*. Michela and Sabrina enjoy bringing music into creative dialogue with other artistic and cultural forms. In this vein, in 2015 and again in 2016 they organized at the Villa Torlonia Theatre in Rome a festival dedicated to the repertoire for piano duos involving poets, actors, dancers, video-makers, even astronomers. During the second edition *DuoKeira* staged ‘Dream for two’, a performance of Mendelssohn’s music for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the version for piano four hands, with scenes from Shakespeare’s comedy and readings from correspondence between the composer and his sister Fanny.

FOUR HANDS DANCING ON A KEYBOARD

This album celebrates a double achievement. With the exception of the Barber piece, originally written for the piano and subsequently adapted for orchestra, it is a virtuoso exercise in transcribing orchestral scores for a single instrument. It also takes on the formidable challenge of emulating choreographed drama. The works performed here by DuoKeira share a number of links to the Ballets Russes, which premièred both Borodin’s *Polovstian Dances* and Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*. It was also the company in which Ida Rubinstein, who later commissioned Ravel’s *Boléro* for her own company, found fame as a dancer, and its ballet master, George Balanchine, was in the thirties to emigrate to the United States and there found the New York City Ballet, the company that premièred Barber’s *Souvenirs*.

SOUVENIRS, BARBER Samuel Barber composed *Excursions*, a dance suite rooted in rural American folklore, in 1942. Almost ten years later, he produced *Souvenirs*, another dance suite but this time distinctly urban in character - not to say posh. He described the piece as «a *divertissement* in a setting of the Palm Court of the Hotel Plaza in New York, the year about 1914, epoch of the first tangos; *souvenirs* remembered with affection, not in irony or with tongue in cheek, but in amused tenderness». Although his all-time famous *Adagio for Strings* features in various movie soundtracks, Barber never composed for the silver screen directly, but it is probably *Souvenirs* that most closely approximates to a film score, as is underlined by the precise settings indicated for each movement (see tracklist). Behind Barber’s playful, nostalgic music loom suggestions of sentimental drama with an uncertain ending, as if the lost world of the Palm Court were the setting for one of those silent narratives hinted at in an Edward Hopper painting.

POLOVTSIAN DANCES, BORODIN Alexander Borodin never finished his most famous work, the opera *Prince Igor*, which was to be completed after his death by Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov, and which premièred in 1890. But he was at least able to witness, in 1879, the première of its most famous orchestral page, the *Polovstian Dances*. This choreographic interlude occurs at the end of Act II, and consists of four successive, then intertwined, dances performed by a 12th Century nomadic tribe on the shores of the Black Sea. The ballet imagined by Michel Fokine for the first Parisian season of the Ballets Russes in 1909 had no leading dancer, only groups (Maidens, Men, Boys) whose rhythmic signatures ranged from *gliding* to *wild*, and culminated in a frenzy of orchestral colours (*General Dance*). At its première the audience welcomed the work with shouts of enthusiasm; four years later, with Stravinsky's 'scandalous' *Rite of Spring*, the Ballets Russes was to cause another kind of tremor.

PRÉLUDE À L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE, DEBUSSY The title and inspiration for this work, composed when Debussy was 30, come from a sensuous, symbolist poem by Stéphane Mallarmé, the 110 verses of which find their equivalent in the 110 bars of the score. The composer himself described the piece, «is a succession of scenes through which pass the desires and dreams of the faun in the heat of the afternoon». Written for a relatively small ensemble, more in tune with the intimate enigma of Mallarmé's poem than the large orchestras favoured in France at the time, this gem of impressionistic music, with its delicate harmonies and its elusive pulsation, was so highly acclaimed during its première that it was encored, and Maurice Ravel declared that «My most ardent desire would be to die, softly lulled by the suave and tender intricacy of this unique miracle of music».

BOLÉRO, RAVEL A masterclass in crescendo: this could sum up one of the most famous and most frequently performed pieces of classical music of all time. Composed in 1928 for the dancer Ida Rubinstein, the *Boléro* pays tribute to Ravel's love for Spain and Spanish culture. Sustained by a hypnotic rhythmic motif (snare drum) repeated 169 times, two sinuous melodies are repeated under various orchestral guises, each reiteration featuring a new solo instrument. From *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, the music builds up toward a climax which takes all the mastery of Ravel to make it sound as impressive in its four-hands piano transcription as in its a fully-fledged orchestral version. The composer himself, who described his music as at once experimental and extremely simple, was surprised by its popular success. But when, at the première, he heard a lady saying «This music is pure madness», he exclaimed: «You've hit the nail on the head?».

Pierre Brévignon