

Charles Owen

Wednesday 5th November 7.30pm,
Firth Hall

PERFORMANCE
VENUES
CONCERTS

Ravel - Valses Nobles et Sentimentales

Chaminade - Sérénade Espagnole, Op. 150

Chaminade - Guitare, Op. 32

Ravel - Le Tombeau de Couperin

INTERVAL

Emma-Ruth Richards - Étude No 1: Escape

Cheryl Frances Hoad - Stones of the Sky

Schubert - Wanderer Fantasie

Charles Owen

Charles Owen is an internationally renowned pianist and professor of piano at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. His repertoire encompasses an extensive range of piano solos, duos and chamber works by a multitude of classical and romantic composers, ranging from J S Bach and Beethoven to Rachmaninoff and Poulenc.

He has collaborated with performers such as Alina Ibragimova, Johan Dalene and Imogen Cooper, as well as the Carducci, Heath, Sacconi and Takács String quartets. He regularly works alongside pianist Katya Apekisheva as Co-Artistic Director of the London Piano Festival, commissioning works for piano duo by leading composers such as Sally Beamish, Nico Muhly and Elena Langer. He has also performed concertos alongside award-winning ensembles including the Philharmonia, Hallé, Aurora and London Philharmonic Orchestras.

Owen regularly appears at major UK venues and festivals, such as the Bridgewater Hall, The Sage and Aldeburgh and Ryedale festivals. International performances range from the Lincoln Centre and Carnegie Hall in New York, to the Melbourne Recital Centre and Australian festival of Chamber Music.

Ravel - Valses Nobles et Sentimentales

I - *Modéré- Très Franc*

II - *Assez Lent- avec une expression intense*

III - *Modéré*

IV - *Assez animé*

V - *Presque Lent- dans un sentiment intime*

VI - *Vif*

VII - *Moins Vif*

VIII - *Épilogue- Lent*

Born in 1875, Maurice Ravel was a French composer, pianist and conductor widely regarded as one of the most significant and influential composers of the early 20th century. Famed for his rich tone colours and subtle harmonic shifts, his work greatly contributed to the impressionist movement at the time.

Ravel's *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* is a series of 8 dances in triple metre, originally composed for piano in 1911. Ravel cited both the *Valses Nobles* and *Valses Sentimentales* collections of dances by Franz Schubert, published in 1823, as the inspiration behind this work. He described it as a “markedly clearer kind of writing which crystallises the harmony and sharpens the profile of the music” (**Nashville Symphony**), further suggesting Schubert's influence within the piece. The work was later scored for orchestra as part of the ballet *Adélaïde, ou le langage des fleurs* (*Adélaïde, or the Language of Flowers*).

Chaminade - Sérénade Espagnole, Op. 150

Cécile Chaminade was a French composer and pianist born in 1857. Showing promise from a young age, family friend Georges Bizet advised her parents to enroll her into music school, however she ended up studying privately with the professors of the Paris conservatoire, after her father opposed the idea of her studying full-time. Chaminade went on to become a prolific composer for piano, writing over 200 piano miniatures throughout her lifetime. She also wrote a comic opera, a ballet and a choral symphony, amongst many other works for piano and voice (**Music by Women**).

Originally published in 1895 as a song entitled *Chanson Espagnole*, Chaminade arranged *Sérénade Espagnole* for solo piano in 1926 after fans began to create their own arrangements. Its popularity is likely owed to the “Spanish rhythms” and haunting melody heard within the piece (**Hyperion Records**).

Chaminade - Guitare, Op. 32

One of Chaminade's lesser-known pieces, *Guitare* is a caprice written for solo piano in 1885, its spread chords featured at the beginning evocative of the strumming of a guitar.

Ravel - Le Tombeau de Couperin

I - *Prélude*

II - *Fugue*

III - *Forlane*

IV - *Rigaudon*

V - *Menuet*

VI - *Toccata*

Ravel worked on the score of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (*The Tomb of Couperin*) from 1914-1917, whilst waiting to be drafted for the First World War. His wartime experiences led him to dedicate each of the 6 baroque-inspired movements to friends who had been killed on the frontline (**Royal Northern College of Music**).

Emma-Ruth Richards - Étude No 1: Escape

Emma-Ruth Richards (b. 1985) is an internationally renowned British composer whose deeply expressive work has been described as “simply beautiful” (**Opera North, Bachtrack**) and “lucid, impassioned and compelling” (**Musical Opinion**). After studying for degree in Music at Cardiff University, she went on to complete a PhD at the Royal Northern College of Music, and has been mentored by composers such as Alexander Goehr, Oliver Knussen, Judith Weir, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, and Colin Matthews (**Emma-Ruth Richards | Biography**).

Escape is a piano étude written in 2021 inspired by the work of Spanish photographer Xavi Bou, who captured the movement of flocks of birds by layering images to represent flight patterns. The piece is “an unbridled, often hushed, and muted, impression of flight patterns created by a flock of starlings. Particular appeal came from studying different Murmurations, 'flash expansions' - where the flock separates into sub-flocks to reduce cohesion, 'wave' patterns, and 'blackening' events - when the starlings compact together to appear more intimidating to a predator” (**Emma-Ruth Richards**).

Cheryl Frances-Hoad - Stones of the Sky

Cheryl Frances-Hoad is an award-winning composer born in Essex in 1980. Winning the BBC Lloyds Bank Composer of the Year award at just 15, she has gone on to win the RPS Composition Prize, the Mendelssohn scholarship and three Ivor Novello British Composer Awards for her pieces *Psalm 1*, *Stolen Rhythm* and *Scenes from the Wild*. She has held the positions of composer-in-residence and visiting research fellow at a number of organisations, ranging from the University of Cambridge to Opera North and Rambert Dance Company (**Cheryl Frances-Hoad**).

Stones of the Sky is a piece for solo piano commissioned by the Three Choirs Festival, which premiered at the London Piano Festival in October 2025.

Schubert - “Wanderer” Fantasie

I - *Allegro con fuoco ma non troppo*

II - *Adagio*

III - *Scherzo Presto*

IV - *Allegro*

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) was an Austrian composer who composed over 600 *lieder* and 9 symphonies over the course of his lifespan, despite only living to 31. Widely regarded as one of the most prolific composers of the time, Schubert's work inspired a new generation of Romantic composers and still remains popular amongst modern-day audiences.

The "Wanderer" Fantasie was written in 1822 and published in 1823. It is based on Schubert's earlier *lied* "Der Wanderer", set to Georg Lubeck's poem of the same name, describing the feeling of homesickness that comes with being a foreigner in a strange land. Each movement of the Wanderer Fantasie takes material derived from the original song. It is said to be one of Schubert's most technically challenging pieces which, along with its structure, intrigued Romantics, most notably Liszt, long after Schubert's death (**Guarneri Hall**).

Coming Soon:

Laura Jurd Quintet

Thursday 13th November - 7.30pm

£0-£18

Firth Hall

"Jurd seems unconcerned by transient fashions or enrolment in any kind of scene, and pursues a private muse that draws on jazz, folk traditions from Europe and the Middle East... her work is always spiritedly accessible, and often suggests wordless songs" – John Fordham, The Guardian

One of the most distinctive voices in jazz and improvised music, Laura Jurd presents music from her forthcoming new album, 'Rites & Revelations'. Laura's approach to the trumpet and her love of folk traditions can be heard in her music, alongside a background in classical composition. Her love of traditional music has deepened having played alongside Ultan O'Brien and Martin Green, who appear on the album. Propelled by this world-class rhythm section, the music takes the listener on a journey of ritual and catharsis to a melodic world full of compelling twists and turns, whilst retaining a grounded sense of familiarity.

Gould Piano Trio

Wednesday 26th November - 7.30pm

£10-£17

Firth Hall

"It would be hard to improve upon the Gould Piano Trio's irresistibly stylish and fervent advocacy" Gramophone Magazine

The Gould Piano Trio has been compared in the Washington Post to the great Beaux Arts Trio for their "musical fire" and "dedication to the genre" and has remained at the forefront of the international chamber music scene for over a quarter of a century.

Launched by winning first prize at the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition, they were European Concert Halls Organisation "Rising Stars", making a highly successful debut at New York's Weill Recital Hall, described by Strad Magazine as "Pure Gould". Their many appearances at London's Wigmore Hall have included the complete piano trios of Dvořák, Mendelssohn, Schubert and Beethoven.