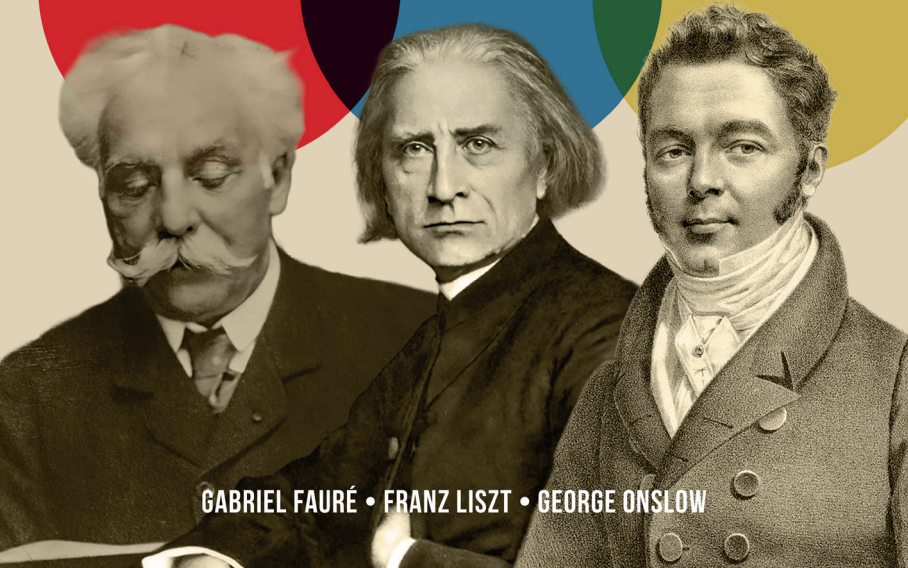




FRANCE REVISITED

VOL. TWO

Piano À Deux



GABRIEL FAURÉ • FRANZ LISZT • GEORGE ONSLOW

France Revisited, Volume Two

Piano À Deux

Gabriel Fauré

Dolly Suite for piano duet (four hands)

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|------|
| 1. | I. Berceuse | 2:38 |
| 2. | II. Mi-a-ou | 1:46 |
| 3. | III. Le jardin de Dolly | 2:42 |
| 4. | IV. Kitty-valse | 2:23 |
| 5. | V. Tendresse | 3:00 |
| 6. | VI. Le pas espagnol | 2:09 |

Franz Liszt

- | | | |
|----|---|-------|
| 7. | Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 | 11:47 |
| | (arr. for four hands by Franz Bendel with cadenzas by Piano À Deux) | |

George Onslow

Sonata No. 2 in F Minor, Op. 22

- | | | |
|-----|---|-------|
| 8. | I. Allegro Moderato e Patetico | 13:16 |
| 9. | II. Minuetto, Moderato | 9:23 |
| 10. | III. Largo - Finale, Allegro espressivo | 12:33 |

Total playing time 61:41

Notes on the Music

Piano duets have a long and distinguished history, whether as piano-four-hands or four-hands-two-pianos. And musicians who dedicate themselves to this branch of the pianist's art have often escaped the confines of the concert hall to become household names: Marjan Rawicz and Walter Landauer, respectively Polish and Austrian pianists, met by chance in 1930 or 1931, forming a piano duo which entertained audiences around the world – on radio, in concert and on record – until Rawicz's death in 1970. Escaping from Nazi Germany, their adopted home of England endeared them to the then Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII); wartime internment as 'enemy aliens' did not deter them from adopting British citizenship, and the hospitality of these isles provided a stable base from which to pursue their joint career. Famed for the precision of their ensemble playing, they could start a piece together while seated in adjacent rooms; the door between them was then closed and reopened towards the end of the piece, to find them still completely synchronised.

While accomplished solo pianists have often teamed up for specialised projects and recordings – André Previn and Vladimir Ashkenazy, Radu Lupu and Murray Perahia, Martha Argerich and Nelson Freire spring to mind – pianists who have made a career specialisation of duo work will bring nods of recognition: Phyllis Sellick and Cyril Smith (an unusual three-hands duo), Bracha Eden and Alexander Tamir, Richard Markham and David Nettle. But in considering the neural pathways of great musicianship, there is an intriguing connection to be made in specialised piano duo work when the performers are siblings: Güher Pekinel and Süher Pekinel (twins), Aloys and Alfons Kontarsky (brothers), Katia and Marielle Labèque (sisters). Or married couples: John Ogdon and Brenda Lucas, and our performers here – Piano À Deux (Robert Stoodley and Linda Ang Stoodley); in duet work, subliminal instinct coupled with intimacy can surely provide a powerful boost to physical co-ordination and musical interpretation.

Although the earliest individual examples of keyboard duet music date back to England in the early 17th century, the continuous history of the genre begins at the mid-point of the 18th century. Johann Nepomuk della Croce's famous

portrait of the Mozart family, painted around 1780/81, shows Mozart and his sister Maria Anna (nicknamed 'Nannerl') – herself an outstanding keyboard player – seated at a fortepiano while father Leopold rests his violin on top, with his recently deceased wife Anna Maria looking on in the form of a portrait on the wall; Wolfgang Amadeus and Nannerl gaze out at the onlooker as they play a duet, with Mozart showing cross-hands technique. The young siblings performed duets in London in 1764-5 and Wolfgang Amadeus's Sonata in C major, K. 19d for piano-four-hands was thought to have been written around this time, when the composer was nine. Among other late 18th-century composers of keyboard duets were Johann Christian Bach and Muzio Clementi.

The evolution of the piano in the 19th century, with increasing range, power and sonority, turbo-charged the development of duet repertoire: the impetus for this came with the recognition that the ability of four hands both to generate and navigate rich textures could serve the transcription and arrangement of symphonies: at the turn of the 19th century, Haydn's 'London' symphonies were available and arrangements of Mozart's and Beethoven's symphonies would soon follow. Throughout the 19th century, transcriptions for piano (and also organ) were the main avenue by which musicians and the listening public could become familiar with symphonic repertoire where there was no economic, social or geographical access to concert halls. Franz Liszt was a prolific transcriber of his own orchestral rhapsodies and symphonic poems; such diverse works as Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, Haydn's *Creation*, Verdi's Requiem, Strauss's tone poems and complete operas such as Wagner's 'Ring' cycle and *Tristan* appeared in piano duet versions. In that century, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Brahms, Dvořák, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Balakirev, Bizet, Reger, Debussy, Fauré and Saint-Saëns wrote for the medium. And composing for piano duet was no less attractive to composers in the 20th century, with Samuel Barber, Bartók, Arnold Bax, Luciano Berio, Ferruccio Busoni, Jean Françaix, Paul Hindemith, György Kurtág, György Ligeti, Martinů, Milhaud, Poulenc, Rachmaninov, Ravel, Alfred Schnittke, Stravinsky and Peter Warlock among those adding to the repertoire. The sonic possibilities of piano duets, and the sheer entertainment value of watching skilled, well-matched performers means that writing for this fascinating medium surely has a secure future.

Dolly Suite, Op. 56 (1893-1896)

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

It does no disservice to Fauré's music for listeners of a certain age (including this writer) to recall that one of their earliest introductions to it came in the form of the opening *Berceuse* movement of the Dolly Suite being used as the concluding theme music for the BBC children's radio programme, *Listen with Mother*, broadcast from 1950 to 1982. The programme began with the phrase, 'Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin...' As it finished, the gentle lilt of Fauré's *Berceuse* left young listeners, and their mothers, with an impression of comfort, security and a pleasing nostalgia.

The connection to children is part of the Suite's history – 'Dolly', real name Régina-Hélène, was the young daughter of Fauré's long-term lover, the singer Emma Bardac, who went on to abandon her own marriage and end the union of Rosalie Texier and Claude Debussy, whom she eventually married. The Suite comprises six short pieces sent to mark Dolly's birthdays and other family events.

The first, *Berceuse* [Cradle Song], was originally composed in 1864 for Suzanne Garnier, the daughter of another family friend. In 1893 Fauré changed the title from *La Chanson dans le Jardin*, made some musical amendments and presented this gentle work as *Berceuse* to mark Dolly's first birthday.

Fauré was by inclination averse to naming pieces: according to a recent biography by Jean-Michel Nectoux, Fauré's son Philippe declared that '[his father] would far rather have given his Nocturnes, Impromptus, and even his Barcarolles the simple title "Piano Piece Number so-and-so".' What has come down to us as the name of the second movement, *Mi-a-ou* is most likely the invention of Fauré's publisher, Julien Hamelle. The title of this animated and syncopated *allegro vivo* movement does *not* in fact reference the impetuous movements of a feline, as has been conjectured, but the now two-year-old Dolly's mangling of her brother Raoul's name as she attempted to pronounce it – 'Messieu Aoul'. Before the intervention of Hamelle, Fauré's manuscript shortened the name to 'Miaou' – French for the cat noise – and surely adding to the cat-confusion. Certainly, it's

difficult to banish the image of a kitten playing with a ball of wool or chasing sunbeams in the mercurial, leaping agility of the *primo piano* part.

The Suite continues with *Le Jardin de Dolly* [Dolly's garden]. This was a present for New Year's Day, 1895. Containing a quote from Fauré's Violin Sonata No.1, composed 20 years earlier, the movement is said to portray the garden of the Bardac family as seen in the lovely melody, moving harmonies, and limpid, subtle counterpoint, a delightful *mélange* which Nectoux hails as 'perhaps the jewel of the suite'.

Kitty-valse (No.4) has, for anglophones, another misleading title: Fauré wrote 'Ketty-Valse' on the manuscript – the Bardac's dog was called Ketty. In this fast waltz, one can readily imagine the animal jumping and spinning around.

The fifth movement, *Tendresse* [tenderness] pulls the tempo back to *andante*, offering in atmosphere and gentle lyricism a musical counterpart to *Le Jardin de Dolly*. But the notable chromaticism of the writing surely looks forward to the later harmonic developments of Debussy and Ravel.

There is no mistaking the Hispanic exuberance of the sixth, *allegro* movement, flagged in the title: *Le pas espagnole* [Spanish Dance]. Inspired by a bronze equestrian statue that Dolly loved, the music reflects a fascination with Spanish culture among French composers of the period – this is the musical milieu of Bizet's *Carmen* and Chabrier's *España*; we can just imagine the castanets in this fitting, emphatic conclusion to a suite of rare delicacy and charm.

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

(arr. for four hands by Franz Bendel with cadenzas by Piano à Deux)

Franz Liszt has been characterised as being like a 'rock-star' of the 19th century. The Hungarian composer, virtuoso pianist, conductor and teacher was famous for his dazzling piano technique and prolific output of music. A sense of his effect in person, especially on women, might be gauged by remembering the hysterical screaming which used to accompany live appearances by the Beatles.

Certainly, the rock-star lifestyle pertained to Liszt's personal life: an 11-year relationship with the married Countess Marie d'Agoult resulted in a son, Daniel, and a daughter, Cosima, who went on to become the second wife of Richard Wagner. A later affair with the also married Polish Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein lasted for 40 years, and eventually had to be conducted fully in the open following an unsuccessful attempt by Princess Carolyne to have her marriage to the Russian military officer Prince Nicholas von Sayn-Wittgenstein annulled.

Franz Liszt wrote over 700 compositions, including extensive and highly technically demanding works for solo piano, orchestral pieces such as symphonic poems, choral music, and transcriptions of other composers' works. The Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C-sharp minor is the second of a set of 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies published in 1851 and is easily the most famous. Composed in 1847 and dedicated to the writer and statesman Count László Teleki, the piece was an immediate success as a piano original, and was soon orchestrated.

Performed in concert halls and recital rooms the world over, the Rhapsody has also broken out into popular culture with prominent use in cartoons from Tom and Jerry (*The Cat Concerto*) to Bugs Bunny (*Rhapsody Rabbit*) and a famous performance by the pianist-entertainer Victor Borge and Rowlf the piano-playing dog on *The Muppet Show*.

The work begins with a *Lassan* (Hungarian for 'slowly'), the slow section of the csárdás, a Hungarian folk dance, although the theme in this case is of Romanian origin; the *Lassan* generally has a dark, sombre tone or a formal, stately one. Here, there is a teasing overtone, a sense of emotions and movements held in check until the transition into the following *Friska* with its gradual acceleration into a much faster tempo – a display of ever-increasing energy and pianistic bravura. The music builds into a whirlwind of sound before, unusually, Liszt invites the performer(s) to add their own cadenzas. Many choose not to, although Rachmaninov and, in recent times, Marc-André Hamelin have done so; Piano À Deux do not shirk the challenge... The Rhapsody concludes with a torrent of *prestissimo* octaves, ascending and then descending to cover almost the entire range of the keyboard.

SONATA NO. 2 in F Minor, Op. 22

Georges Onslow (1784-1853)

André Georges Louis Onslow was a French composer of English descent. He was the son of Edward Onslow MP who was himself the younger son of the first Earl of Onslow – a prominent politician with close professional ties to the Crown. Edward's French sojourn came in the wake of a scandal when he was accused of making homosexual advances to an individual during an encounter at the Royal Academy Exhibition. 'Ned', as he was known, and his family chose self-imposed exile to avoid the consequences of the alleged crime, settling in Clermont-Ferrand in the Auvergne. He married the noted beauty Marie-Rosalie de Bordeilles de Couzances, in the process collecting a dowry of £20,000 for the purchase in 1789 of property in France, namely the Château Le Chalandrat. Except for a further, brief exile during the French Revolution, Edward remained in France for the rest of his life, taking an active part in Auvergne society and raising several children. Of these, it was the eldest, Georges, who would forge a path as a composer, eventually earning the sobriquet – at least in the eyes of his commercially-astute publisher Camille Pleyel – 'notre Beethoven français' [our French Beethoven].

As a composer whose music and reputation went into steep decline after his death, only to begin to achieve recognition once again some 150 years later, it is worth spending some time exploring the ups and downs of his life and musical development. Onslow grew up in a life of financial privilege – not always the ideal preparation for the hard graft of composing in a society where travel, horsemanship and hunting were competing, higher-value attractions. Indeed, in his brief autobiography he noted that music studies formed but a secondary part of his education; but clearly there was a talent sufficient to impress Jan Ladislav Dussek and J B Cramer, noted composer-pianists of the period who became Onslow's teachers. Financial security meant that Onslow could develop his interests at his own pace; an early interest in chamber music led to his first steps in composition, in the shape of string quartets and quintets. He learned the cello, and with amateur groups played through the chamber music of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. Realising that there was a skill gap to be filled, in 1808 he went

to study in Paris with the noted Czech-born, later naturalised French composer Anton Reicha.

Frequent visits to the French capital allowed his growing output of music to be heard, not least his first two operas which were premiered at the Opéra Comique; and Paris afforded opportunities to meet fellow musicians such as Mendelssohn – Onslow was an early champion of the music of Berlioz.

Exotic unions seemingly running in the family, Onslow married Charlotte Françoise Delphine de Fontanges, heiress to a rich Aurillac landowner, and fathered three children with her. The perils of maintaining an interest in hunting and shooting came home to him when he took a stray bullet in a boar hunt and was rendered partly deaf in one ear.

After some initial financial struggles in the marriage, a fortunate inheritance from his father-in-law made Onslow independently wealthy. And of course, a personal fortune and the luxury of being able to write for oneself, as opposed to for commissioners and impresarios can provoke a toxic mixture of envy and disdain among fellow composers and writers – Onslow was not immune from such criticism. Nonetheless, significant honours did come his way: he was the second Honorary Fellow of the Philharmonic Society of London (Mendelssohn was the first) and in France he received the prodigious honour of succeeding Luigi Cherubini as a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, beating off Auber and Berlioz for this significant bauble; he was also made a Knight of the Légion d'honneur. An engraving of 1844 entitled *Galerie des compositeurs dramatiques modernes* by Nicolas-Eustache Maurin shows Onslow in the exalted company of Berlioz, Donizetti, Auber, Mendelssohn, Henri-Montan Berton, Fromental Halévy, Meyerbeer, Spontini, and Rossini.

Notwithstanding his admission to the pantheon of *compositeurs dramatiques* for his small handful of operas, Onslow's list of opus numbers – mainly chamber music – runs to 83, plus some 24 unnumbered compositions. Of the former, the vast majority are quartets, quintets and pieces for other small instrumental groupings. Onslow wrote comparatively little for solo piano, and in this context, the Sonata for Piano Four Hands, Op. 7 of 1811 (recorded by Piano À Deux,

Divine Art dda 251320) and its sibling, Op. 22 of 1823, stand out not just for their scarcity value, but also for the scale and ambition of their musical content.

Op. 22 enjoyed heavyweight support: no lesser figures than Frédéric Chopin and Franz Liszt performed it at their debut joint performance in Paris in 1834. Putting the duets into the context of Onslow's wider output, the musicologist Benedict Sarnaker points out that the vocal writing in the operas, lacking individuality, resulted in weak characterisation; Onslow's symphonies suffered from repetitive patterning. But the larger works for piano are superior... 'and show a performer's idiomatic ease. At their best, e.g. the piano duo Op. 22, they display fresh ideas that are well developed and a form which is a consequence and fulfilment of the thematic material.' US composer, pianist and writer Jed Distler concurs: 'If you love the piano duet literature and don't know George Onslow's two serious, substantial minor-key sonatas, a major discovery awaits you. They're packed with wonderful tunes, imaginative harmonic ideas, and a style of piano writing that anticipates Chopin's innovations.' It's no exaggeration to say that, particularly in the 'Grand' duet Op. 22, one can find ample justification to hail Onslow, indeed, as 'notre Beethoven français'.

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Composers active in Paris in 1844 (1880 postcard after the 1844 original), by unknown



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Maria Anna "Nannerl" Mozart, and their father Leopold Mozart. Attributed to Johann Nepomuk della Croce (1736-1819)

Piano À Deux The Story So Far

Surprisingly, Robert & Linda met on a dating website and not through music. They married in 2008 and “Piano À Deux” was formed in 2010.

Though their repertoire includes the familiar, their research has led to their discovery of neglected composers such as George Onslow, whose two duet sonatas they found in a dusty library drawer and which they have since recorded over two albums.

To date they have recorded four albums. ‘France Revisited’, on the Divine Art label, includes Onslow’s Op. 7 Duo Sonata, his six solo pieces, Debussy’s Petite Suite & songs by Poulenc (arranged by Linda).

Critics said that their playing on France Revisited was “piano four hands ...at its very best...” Their Petite Suite (Debussy) won high praise and they have been hailed as being worthy of taking on the mantle of Goldstone and Clemmow, a duo whose career was aborted by the untimely death of Anthony Goldstone.

Their third album Porgy, Preludes & Paris, with their arrangements of music by Gershwin, has also had glowing reviews.

The duo’s début album Strictly Not Bach (2011) was highly praised. Through this, £2,000 was raised for various charities including WorldVision.

Novel programming with titles like ‘From Mistresses to Manhattan’ presented with charm, humour and drama, combined with their original musical arrangements has won them a worldwide following. Their work on cruise ships has turned them into intrepid globetrotters.

On land, they have performed in the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Finland, and Singapore, and were live on Radio 3’s ‘In Tune’ in 2015 with the prize-winning violinist Erzhan Kulibaev.

Covid Lockdown 2020 provided a springboard for inspirational online group activities. These began with “Brush Up Your Shakespeare” where participants explored sixteen sonnets, and continued with ACE - “Amazing

Culture Enthusiast” a journey of discovery about Music, Literature and Art, all laced with humour.

Their online “2-minute Tips on Composers” spawned during Covid was also warmly received.

The duo’s repertoire also includes music for two pianos, and their latest project “From Rachs to Riches”, a concert including Rachmaninoff’s Two Piano Suite Op. 17 and their own “Scenes From Porgy & Bess” all played from memory, has met with high praise.

Two concerts in Finland in the Summer of 2024 was met with the same unqualified enthusiasm and, at the second concert, the entire audience gave them a standing ovation.



Robert Stoodley

Robert studied with Dorothea Law: student of Paul Baumgartner and Alfred Brendel (Vienna). He has performing and teaching diplomas from the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music (London).

Robert, a linguist, studied Hindi, not knowing that he would one day marry a Mandarin speaker. Combining linguistics and musical studies, he gained the Premier Prix (Conservatoire de Lyon, France), has broadcast on BBC Radio 4, given recitals and played concertos throughout the UK.

Some of Robert's songs have been published and are sung throughout the world. Some have been recorded, the most recent being "St. Michael-le-Belfrey": the Vinyl Years".



Linda Ang Stoodley

Singapore-born pianist Linda read a B.Mus. (Edinburgh) and obtained several diplomas before relocating to London's Guildhall School of Music. Whilst there, she won the Royal Overseas League Accompanist's Prize and was harpsichordist of the Guildhall String Ensemble when they won the Internationales Jeunesses Musicales Competition in Belgrade. Their subsequent European tour ended in Spain where Linda performed Bach's 5th Brandenburg Concerto with renowned flautist Jean-Pierre Rampal.

Linda has since focused on the piano and performed extensively in the UK, Europe, Mauritius and Singapore; on Dutch and Mauritius TV, Radio Scotland, Radio Oxford, Radio 3; and live on Classic FM and Premier Radio. She has recorded with several artistes and has released seven albums of her own.

Linda was featured in the Singapore "Straits Times", the Singapore Airlines In-flight Magazine, and as cover photo for "Woman Alive" magazine.

In 2002, soprano Janet Fairlie and Linda created "Diva, Diva" delighting cruise line passengers on Crystal, Cunard, Holland America and Regent Sevenseas. Then, in 2005, each Diva stepped out, Janet into London's West End, and Linda to touring with her solo shows which have met with critical acclaim on land as well as on luxury cruise lines like Silversea and Seabourn, before meeting Robert in 2007, an event which changed her life forever.





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Piano À Deux
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Piano À Deux
Divine Art: DDA 25183

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