TOCCATA CLASSICS

# Nicolas BACRI

## CHAMBER MUSIC, VOLUME ONE
## WORKS FOR FLUTE

DOUZE MONOLOGUES PASCALIENS, OP. 92
TRIO NO. 3, SONATA NOTTURNA, OP. 54
TROIS IMPROMPTUS, OP. 115
SONATA DA CAMERA, OP. 67
SPRING SONATA, OP. 147

Danielle Breisach, flute
Andrew Briggs, cello
Yana Avedyan, piano

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDING

# A SENSE OF INNER NECESSITY

Nicolas Bacri in conversation with Sabine Weyer

*From your early compositional attempts to today, how do you see the evolution of your music, and how do you position it?*

After a brief period dedicated to the life of 'sound material' (timbre, tone-colour) under the influence of Scelsi (but also, of course, that of Ligeti, from whom Scelsi liked to say he received a letter expressing great gratitude), I wanted to break free from the sectarianism of what I had not yet named 'modernist orthodoxy'. To that end, I decided to write a symphony entirely based on the type of melody that was already in germ in the Cello Concerto, Op. 17, and the *Capriccio Notturno*, my first clarinet concerto (Op. 20). The result was the Second Symphony (*Sinfonia dolorosa*), Op. 22 (in memory of Allan Pettersson, the great Swedish symphonist of the second half of the twentieth century), which I subtitled, in its first version (for strings), *Sinfonia Carminum*. This melodic aspect gradually led me to the reconquest of tonal sentiment, especially from my Second Violin Concerto, *Tre Canti e Finale*, Op. 29, and *Folia* for orchestra, Op. 30 (*Folia* ends on the perfect minor chord that concludes the well-known theme of the *Folies d'Espagne*).

Only gradually, from the late 1980s, did I understand that, whereas until 1950 the greatest composers had to measure themselves by what they had *changed*, from 1950 onwards they had to measure themselves by what they had *saved*. This means not only that writing relatively traditional and tonal music after 1950 is a sign of courage (when one is not a composer from the Soviet bloc) but also that even within the Darmstadt avant-garde, saving a certain idea of tradition, as attempted, sometimes successfully, by Boulez, Carter, Donatoni, Kurtág or Ligeti, is preferable to the empty mirrors held by Berio, Cage, Lachenmann, Nono, Stockhausen, Xenakis and many others.

To answer your question more precisely about how I appreciate the evolution of my own music, I would say that what seems essential to me today, after traversing the atonal universe in my first twenty works, is to retain the most beautiful aspects of the tonal system without necessarily preserving its *modus operandi*. In my opinion, what is most beautiful in the tonal system is the ability to create dissonances and to modulate. Dissonance gives meaning to consonance; modulation gives meaning to tonal anchoring. Well, what I seek (since I realised that the radically atonal universe proposed by modernist orthodoxy does not correspond to the philosophical idea I have of music) is to move away from the tonal *system* while preserving the idea of dissonance and modulation.

What irritates me in a significant part of the music written today is the absence of both, which gives me the feeling of listening to 'sick' music. In a score where any tonal anchoring is excluded, where all harmonic hierarchy has disappeared, there is no possibility of dissonance, and, *a fortiori*, no modulation. One could already level this criticism at Schoenberg (from Op. 12). I sometimes hear contemporaries who approach tonal sentiment by using modal scales that distance them just as much from atonality as from the tonal system. Although this approach arises from a good intention, the lack of release of harmonic tension and modulation resulting from this modal usage, in a word, this lack of harmonic savour, condemns these scores to certain oblivion.

*'Writing is a trial, not an addiction.' In a recent interview conducted by Alain Steffen for the magazine* Pizzicato *(January 2021), you uttered this phrase, which might seem peculiar coming from a composer who has written 160 works. In what sense is the act of writing a trial for you?*

The magical component of the act of composition can indeed be enchanting and lead to addiction – although a young composer will naturally feel frustration as he learns his craft. This frustration also exists – to a lesser extent, certainly – for each new work. With each new work, the composer is subjected to the enchantment of what he perceives about what he must write and, at the same time, to the obligation of extending and

improving his technique to allow his ideas to unfold in a new form each time. For me, it is always a terrible ordeal.

*And despite this difficulty, you have subjected yourself 160 times to this exercise....*

Indeed, I have done it many times, and I will do it again; but I will not hide from you that each time, I mean *every* time, I go through a moment that may seem more or less brief or more or less long depending on its severity, of deep discouragement that makes the writing of my work a torment. However, the sense of the inner necessity of the music I write and the extraordinary reward I feel each time I see a performer inspired by my music are essential drivers for the pursuit of my vocation.

*But how is it that you hear in your head, before writing it, music that seems wonderful to you and yet, even so, you are temporarily discouraged each time?*

It is precisely because I have a very clear perception of what I want to write that I put immense pressure on myself to live up to this preconceived imagination. And the more wonderful what I hear seems to me, the more I scrutinise and doubt the technical means at my disposal to transcribe it through musical notation. It seems to me that this work of prior musical imagination is also valid for performers and makes all the difference between an execution that may seem technically perfect but does not achieve the expected 'shift' in a concert, and an interpretation that sublimates the text.

*It seems to me that in your music melody plays an essential role. I have the impression that in your work the beauty of harmony comes from a quite remarkable superimposition of melodic lines, each extremely interesting in itself. I have rarely heard music, written in recent years, as subtly and richly contrapuntal and harmonic as yours. Can you tell me more about the creative process that leads, in your case, to this happy meeting of lines, generating captivating harmonies?*

It seems to me that what we call harmony encompasses an analytical rather than a creative process. The teaching of Nadia Boulanger, who was a student of Fauré – who

was, wrongly, in my opinion, made out to be the archetype of the harmonist *par excellence* when he was, in fact, an outstanding contrapuntist (although I wouldn't want to appear to oppose them in a simplistic way) – rested on a doctrine as simple as it was effective. It consisted of asking the student not to think in terms of chord-progressions and degrees but only to think about the superimposition of lines and their harmonic interaction. If this learning process succeeds, it will inevitably result in the emergence of a personal harmonic feeling among the most gifted students. This leads me to conclude that a composer is a musician recognisable by his harmonic personality and, paradoxically, that this harmonic personality can be achieved only through counterpoint.

As far as counterpoint is concerned, I often say that it represents the matrix of western music. But what gives counterpoint its artistic scope is its expressiveness. It's the expressiveness that the greatest composers drew from counterpoint that gave this form of thought a seminal power, giving rise to successive harmonic languages that are milestones in the history of music. This vision is the very foundation of my composition teaching, and it seems to me that, regardless of the aesthetic choices my students make later on, they will have acquired, thanks to it, a skill that will significantly underpin their artistic integrity.

*You were born French. Do you think of yourself as a typically French composer? What are the profoundly French elements in your music?*

From my childhood, I had massive access, through cinema, to American culture, and from adolescence onwards, I was able to come into contact with the music of Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, William Schuman, Samuel Barber, Charles Ives, Carl Ruggles.... When I completed my Op. 1 at the age of eighteen, it seemed natural to send the score and recording to Elliott Carter, telling him that repeated hearings of his Second String Quartet had deeply marked me. Imagine that, in the 1960s and 1970s, it was easier for a French person to buy records of these composers than French (apart from Messiaen), English, German, Spanish or Italian composers of the same generation. 'Imports USA' were not abundant, of course; you had to go to certain specialised shops,

but at least these shops existed. On the other hand, when you tried to get to know the music of William Alwyn, Alan Rawsthorne, Edmund Rubbra, Michael Tippett (and even Britten and Walton, who, however, enjoyed international success), you had to cross the Channel. I had to take advantage of my first language stay in England at the age of fifteen to discover the composers I just mentioned.

It must be said that the same problem also concerned French music, since until the mid-1980s, when the major companies lost their monopoly on record production, French music was limited to the well-known names. Very few works by Koechlin, Pierné, Roussel, Schmitt were recorded. As for the music of Bréville, Gouvy, Huré, d'Indy, Le Flem, Magnard, Ropartz, Samazeuilh, all that was not Vierne's organ music (which remains the best part of his work) remained unrecorded and therefore unavailable except in some archive concert broadcasts on France-Musique.

The fact is that I have never identified nationally with the music I was listening to, regardless of the nationality of the composer. I believe that I belong to the first generation of composers who were able, thanks to the advent of mass media and stereo, to benefit from the beginning of a very wide choice of musical works from around the world (despite the difficulties I mentioned), and this necessarily had a neutralising impact on my sense of belonging to a particular school.

That being said, the older I get, the more I realise that I am getting closer to my atavism. For the past twenty years, I have occasionally surprised myself by writing certain melodic or harmonic turns close to Fauré or Ravel. But what seems to be the most revealing of my French identity is probably found more in the care I take with a certain conciseness, the clarity of thematic ideas, and formal structures.

*Your musical language is often compared to that of Britten or Shostakovich, but shouldn't it also be compared to Barber's, who, even more than Carter (who mainly influenced your early works), seems to have influenced you with his lyricism?*

It all depends on what is meant by 'having been influenced'. For me, to be influenced is to have assimilated a style or an aesthetic to the point of making it one of the foundations

of one's own language. If we talk about the foundations of my music, that is, the styles assimilated at the time when I started writing music seriously (since 1978), then neither Barber, nor Britten, nor Shostakovich influenced me simply because I did not know them at that time. And those two years before my Op. 1 (1980) were very important for the constitution of my definitive style, the one that would take shape from 1987.

You know, it's very difficult for a composer to talk about his own influences. A composer is someone who is more inclined to talk about what makes his style unique rather than communicate about what influenced him. Nevertheless, when asked who had influenced him, Ravel replied: 'Everyone'. It is indeed courageous, and I would tend to say the same. All composers work in the same way. They absorb what they like, transform it and recreate it more or less convincingly. When they do it unconsciously, it is an influence; when they do it consciously, it is a reference. But most refuse to talk about it. This is not my case. For example, if you ask me about the influences I perceive in my own music, I would like to tell you: Mahler, probably the most decisive influence for me, Debussy, Sibelius, Nielsen, Roussel, Zemlinsky, Vaughan Williams, Ravel, Ruggles, Bridge, Bartók, Stravinsky, Varèse, Frank Martin, Prokofiev, Honegger, Hindemith, Henry Barraud, Copland, Gerald Finzi, Jolivet, Tippett, Carter, Messiaen, William Schuman, Dutilleux and the Viennese school, because it seems that they and only they shaped my musical language by decisively imprinting my harmonic ear as a child and adolescent (from 1969 to 1980). 'Decisive' means that I felt other influences until 1987 (mostly the Darmstadt School and rather Boulez than Stockhausen) but they disappeared quite quickly.

I specify that trying to name one's own influences is trying to make the unconscious conscious. It is a psychoanalytic approach. One must be very humble when declaring to be influenced by a particular composer. Not only because of the comparison it implies with its model, conscious or unconscious, but simply because it is possible to be mistaken in identifying that model. But let's assume that the list of influences I just named is correct. You have to start from something….

I got to know the music of Shostakovich, Barber and Britten far too late to be influenced by them in the sense I defined earlier. On the other hand, I can affirm that

these three composers (and many others) have been, since the 1990s, essential references for me when, having returned to tonal feeling, I decided to deepen the traditional (classicising, if you will) dimension of my music. So they are composers to whom I willingly refer, rather than influences. For most musicologists, the distinction between what I consider an influence and what I consider a reference may seem specious, I realise that very well. It's not a very serious matter anyway.[1]

*Sabine Weyer was described by Colin Clarke, writing in* International Piano*, as being 'among the most important young pianists of today'. Following her initial training at the Conservatoire of Esch-Alzette in Luxembourg, she studied in different pianistic schools in France, Belgium and the United Kingdom. The deep curiosity for the less-well-known jewels of the repertoire that informs her unusually interesting recital programmes recently resulted in recordings of piano music by two namesakes: Nikolai Myaskovsky and Nicolas Bacri. Since 2015 she has been professor of piano at the Conservatoire de la Ville de Luxembourg.*

[1] This conversation is excerpted from the unpublished English translation of Nicolas Bacri and Sabine Weyer, *Éclairages: catalogue raisonné et commenté des œuvres de Nicolas Bacri*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2022.

# MY CHAMBER MUSIC FOR FLUTE
by Nicolas Bacri

For me, the flute is the instrument of dreams; indeed, the American flautist James Thompson entitled his doctoral dissertation on my flute music 'L'Instrument du rêve' ('The Instrument of Dreams').[1] I was delighted that he perceived my dreamlike conception for this instrument as self-evident.

***Sonata da camera*, Op. 67 (1977/97–2000)**
Like a number of my chamber works, my *Sonata da camera* can be performed in a number of instrumental permutations, being scored for viola (or violin, cello, flute, clarinet or alto saxophone) and piano. It was commissioned by the Musée Claude Debussy in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, just to the west of Paris, and the first performance was given in the Musée on 23 September 2000 by the violist Vinciane Béranger and pianist Nicolas Bringuier. The premiere of the version for flute and piano was given in the Salle Varèse, Conservatoire National Supérieur Musique et Danse de Lyon, on 11 June 2002 by students from the class of Philippe Bernold.

Since Jean-Marc Bardot's commentary on the work for a 2006 recording of the viola version[2] begins by quoting me, I shall begin by quoting him, adapting his text so that it applies to this new recording for flute and piano:

> 'In 1997, I came across one of my old manuscripts from 1977. It revealed the desperate efforts of a fifteen-year-old musician trying his hand at composition with a lot of awkwardness, but also the presence of a fairly well structured theme to which I wanted to give a chance', comments Nicolas Bacri. This theme (*Moderato*), intoned right from the beginning of the first movement in unison [1], extends in perfect harmonic complementarity between the two instruments until the arrival of the second theme (*Sognando/L'istesso tempo*), from

[1] Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, May 2019.
[2] Arnaud Thorette (viola), Johan Fargeot (piano), *Tenebrae*, Accord-Musidisk EAN13 (Universal Music), 2006.

which it seems to originate. The latter, played by the flute, progresses in imitative complicity with the piano, at the border of the tonal world. Then the discourse comes to life in a brief development of the first theme (*Vigoroso/Più mosso*), while the piano unfolds a long monodic string of very rapid notes. Finally, a recapitulation of the themes brings symmetry to the movement, inherent in the sonata form used here, before fading away in a calming coda (*Tragico/Molto sostenuto* until *Lento*).

The second movement [2] is a scherzo (*Presto misterioso*) with astonishing rhythmic dynamism. Referring once again to the traditional form (scherzo–trio–scherzo), it develops an irresistible melodic-rhythmic interplay between the two instruments, interrupted only by the Trio, initiated by the flute in the manner of a concerto cadenza (*Appassionato*). The second theme of the first movement, subtly appearing in the Scherzo, is barely perceptible. It will take the second part of the Trio (*Largo*) to hear its incipit in the flute, in a nebulous piano accompaniment in long values.

The third movement [*Pezzo elegiaco* [3]] recalls, in a melancholic character (*Adagio mesto*), and in long rhythmic values, the main theme of the work. Introduced by the piano alone (right hand) with an indescribable gentleness on an F minor chord (left hand), it slowly unfolds its song, alternately relying on tonal and atonal harmonies. Then, a new theme (*Sognando/L'istesso tempo*) is proposed by the flute, which the piano delicately supports. The texture then unfolds in three voices, blending contrapuntal writing (flute/pianist's right hand) and harmonic (left hand). Like the other movements, a recapitulation of the main theme concludes this 'elegiac piece' in infinite gentleness.

A fluid theme (*Comodo*) followed by eleven variations make up the fourth and final movement of the Sonata [4]. But if, as in the previous movements, the structure of a referenced form is again chosen, it is perceived more as a theme developed at will. The movement unfolds without interruption, within a unitary architecture. The eleventh variation (*Sereno/L'istesso tempo*) superimposes on its theme and, as in a final memory, the initial theme of the sonata, then fades away, reassured, in a welcoming E major chord (*Dolcissimo/Lentissimo*).

As Bardot points out, my *Sonata da Camera* is written on a 'juvenile' theme that runs throughout the work, and is built on a kind of perpetual variation of this theme, filtered through the 'classic' forms of the two-theme sonata and scherzo. Even the 'new' theme that is the subject of variations in the last movement ultimately reveals its kinship with the main theme by superimposing itself on it during the last variation. The sweetness,

almost naivety, of this theme also made me think of the spirit of Schubert and, without claiming to compare my work to his, to that grand simplicity that characterises the Arpeggione Sonata. However, the existence of the arpeggione was very ephemeral, and Schubert's score was published, well after his death, only in the form of a duo for violin/piano or cello/piano before experiencing the success it now has in its versions for viola or cello and piano. That gave me the idea of writing this sonata, thinking of it from the start for different instruments such as the viola, violin, cello, but also flute and clarinet, which is why the title of *Sonata da camera* is both very precise in spirit and totally elliptical in terms of instrumentation. However, I chose to have the viola appear on the piano score, and it was only natural that this instrument would reveal the work to the public for the first time. Furthermore, I consider my *Sonata da camera*, Op. 67, as my first sonata for flute and piano. I am grateful to Philippe Bernold for assisting me in writing the flute version, for having premiered it and for programming it for the CNSM de Lyon certificate competition. On this occasion, I heard four wonderful young flautists giving excellent interpretations.

**Trio No. 3, *Sonata Notturna*, Op. 54 (1996, rev. 1997)**

My *Sonata Notturna*, for violin (or flute), cello (or viola) and piano was commissioned by Bernard and Doris Millet, and is dedicated to them and their children, Florence, Carole and Gilles, who are all successful musicians. It was composed in 1996 and, as is usually my practice, revised in 1997. The first performance of the original version was given on 9 July 1997 during the Festival Juventus (7th European Encounter of Young Musicians) at the Villa Louvigny in Luxembourg; the musicians were the Romanian-French violinist Radu Blidar, the Belgian cellist Marie Hallynck and the Serbian pianist Aleksandar Madžar. The revised version was heard very soon after that, at the 4th Festival 'Musique en écrins' in the Église de Vallouise, in the Hautes-Alpes of south-eastern France, on 22 August 1997; the performers on this occasion were all French: the violinist François Payet-Labonne, cellist Christophe Beau and pianist Florence Millet, one of the dedicatees.

In his commentary on the work for the 2005 recording of the work by the Ensemble Capriccioso,[3] Gérard Condé wrote:

> In general, this score is placed under the sign of economy. The thematic material of the three movements stems from the initial motif (C sharp, D, F, E), which is none other than Shostakovich's favourite motif (D, E flat, C, B) played backwards and transposed a whole tone higher. The kinship stops there, as that of Bartók's nocturnal music could also be evoked.
>
> In the first movement, 'Enigma' [5], the initial motif returns as a reminder amidst the painful imitations of the strings and the false parallelisms of the piano. The roles are exchanged halfway, and then redistributed in a varied re-exposition. The second movement, 'Notturno' [6], follows a progressive evolution, from melancholy to the expression of a sensual desire […], whose bites (on the piano) form the starting point for a pursuit, if not a nocturnal chase, the climax of which will be a frenzied waltz. Once the tension is relieved, the end returns to the initial melancholy.
>
> 'Serenata ostinata' [7] has the appearance of a rondo. But the refrain (on the initial motif) is so omnipresent that the verses are hardly distinguishable. What is more striking is the return of elements already heard, especially in the previous movements. In this sense, this finale can be placed under the sign of development, that is, thematic work and confrontations. But all this in an atmosphere of lightness that avoids the usual emphasis of recapitulations and confirms the nocturnal atmosphere of the score.

This work can be considered a thematic amplification of the Second Sonata for solo violin, Op. 53 (1996). They are, in fact, twin works, though not identical, illustrating the potential diversity of the development of the same material. Gérard Condé's remarkable analysis emphasises the focus on the nocturnal atmosphere. Night is one of my favourite themes; countless works in my catalogue reference it. Night, for me, is the metaphor for passage and transformation, two themes that I consider both musical and existential. Indeed, for a composer as attached as I am to large forms, the variation and metamorphosis of ideas are intimately linked to the idea so well formulated by

[3] Triton TRI 331141.

Hans Keller in two aphorisms: 'the large-scale integration of contrasts'[4] to describe in a few words the essence of sonata form, but also of variation, and 'the meaningful contradiction of expectation'[5] to summarise the *essence* of the genius of western music.

Believe it or not, it became apparent to me only during the writing that the four-note motif on which this trio is based is the retrograde of the famous DSCH motif.

**_Douze Monologues Pascaliens_, Op. 92 (2004)**

After responding to Olivier Cohen's request to write some musical interludes for a record featuring the actress Anouk Grimberg in *Alice in Wonderland* of which he was the producer and director, I suggested to him, when he mentioned his plan to record a selection of Blaise Pascal's Thoughts with Michel Duchaussoy,[6] that I write short interludes for solo flute. This is how these *Douze monologues pascaliens* 11–22 were born, which, despite their apparent simplicity, present numerous technical and musical challenges to the performer. The work can also be played on the oboe, as indicated by the double dedication, to a flautist (Philippe Bernold) and an oboist (François Leleux).

**_Trois Impromptus_, Op. 115 (2005/9)**

This collection of three short pieces was written in two stages. In 2005, I visited my friend Philippe Morant in Chambéry, where he had invited me to talk about my music to his middle-school students. Among his students was a brilliantly talented flautist who seemed poised for a successful career. With three hours of free time in my schedule, I responded to Philippe's request to compose a short piece for him to play with his student. He was absolutely right to ask me – because that flautist turned out to be none other than Mathilde Caldérini![7] It is to her and Philippe that the piece 8 is dedicated.

[4] 'The State of the Symphony: not only Maxwell Davies's', *Tempo*, No. 125, June 1978, reprinted in *Hans Keller: Essays on Music*, ed. Christopher Wintle, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p.108.

[5] Keller used this phrase throughout his writings – as, for example, in 'The Keller Column', *Music & Musicians*, January 1985, p. 13: 'The central truth about all creativity is indeed the meaningful contradiction of the recipient's expectations, which the creator arouses before he contradicts them'.

[6] *Les Pensées de Pascal, lu par Michel Duchaussoy*, Frémeaux & Associés FA8061, 2005.

[7] Solo flautist with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France since 2020.

Four years later, I decided to give this *Impromptu* two companions. I chose to dedicate the first [9] to Frédéric Chatoux as a token of appreciation for his beautiful recording (with Bertrand Giraud) of my *Sonata da camera*, Op. 67.[8] No. 3 [10] was dedicated to Berten d'Hollander, who wanted to perform a piece of mine in a concert where he had Éliane Reyes (my wife at this time) as his partner. Thus, on 24 September 2009, in the Église Saint Antoine in Edegem, south of Antwerp, he and Éliane gave the first performance of these three brief pieces, which have no other ambition than to let the flute resonate in line with a French tradition inherited from the early style of Dutilleux.

## ***Spring Sonata*, Op. 147 (2018)**

Since my departure from the modernist orthodoxy that marked my early works, two trends have emerged in my music. The first, predominant, one is based on expanded tonality up to its temporary negation through more or less radical chromaticism. The second, less common, is also based on expanded tonality but, contrary to the first, goes as far as affirming a tonal orientation, without hesitating to embrace diatonicism. This second trend primarily concerns my vocal music (cantatas, cycles of melodies, and some choral works), as well as music written for an audience of children and works intended for pedagogy. It also encompasses some purely instrumental works, each time with my programme notes expressing the desire to justify, if not excuse, this language by emphasising the context that makes tonality necessary.

With my *Spring Sonata*, Op. 147, for flute and piano[9] and my *Sonata in Anlehnung an Brahms*, Op. 148, for violin and piano, both written in 2018, the time may have come to assert that this second trend could justify itself and that it is, fundamentally, the other side of the same coin, the existence of which has been made necessary by my desire to explore the multiple possibilities that the emergence of modernity in tradition (and vice versa) makes possible.

However, in the titles of these works, either a programme (the blossoming of spring) or an extremely significant dedication (Brahms) persists, tending once again to provide

[8] Anima ANM081200001, 2012.

[9] The *Spring Sonata* exists also in a version for flute and strings, Op. 147b.

an 'excuse' for me to be what I am. Yet that is precisely what happened to me when writing these two works: to accept consciously being the composer I have become over the years.

The *Spring Sonata* was written in the spring of 2018 at the request of Danielle Breisach, who, along with her partner Yana Avedyan, had recorded several of my flute works years earlier as part of her doctoral work. However, neither the period when the work was written, spring, nor the precise name of the location where it would be premiered, Spring Green in Wisconsin (I learned that only after completing the score), were decisive factors in the choice of title. Only the desired effect of attempting to make the phenomenon of the unfolding of a bud, its transformation into a flower, perceptible through sounds prompted me to call this work *Spring Sonata*.

It is very likely that my immersion in the world of seasons (with nine works referring to it in my catalogue up till then, including my *Four Seasons*, Op. 80, Nos. 1–4 (2000–11), for soloists and chamber orchestra, my Fourth Violin Concerto, *Winter's Night*, Op. 116 (2008–9), and my Four Intermezzi for piano entitled *Saisons*, Op. 123 (2009–11)), has something to do with it. Nevertheless, the tonal affirmation of C major that occurs at the beginning of the central movement ('Reverie') well illustrates this blossoming after a first, atonalising and passionate movement, in sonata form, which, in retrospect, can only correspond to the vicissitudes of winter.

The *Spring Sonata* begins [23] with a dark and slow ten-bar introduction with a phrase based on a sinuous motif of alternating fourths and half-tones. It precedes a sonata-form exposition with a very voluble first theme of eighteen bars. A bridge passage, gradually calming the atmosphere, appears at bar 30 and leads to the second theme, marked *Più espressivo e poco meno mosso*. After the complete repeat of the exposition, the development of the first theme occurs at bar 56, and that of the second, at bar 73, quickly taking on the character of a flute cadenza. The cadenza concludes with a false re-entry of the first theme in the tempo of the re-exposition, which will only truly begin at bar 101 after the rocket-like entry of the piano. The re-exposition presents the first theme without modification, and then, from the bridge onward, a transposition occurs for the second theme.

At bar 146, a few transitional bars announce the 'Reverie' (played without interruption) [24], which constitutes the second movement of the Sonata. Based on two main motifs, the second appearing at bar 163 after the five bars presenting the first motif (a C major corresponding to my desire to evoke the blossoming of a flower in spring), it allows for a significant emotional contrast after the dynamism and relative aggressiveness of the first movement. After various tonal wanderings (in the literal sense of the word: displacement, total or partial, permanent or temporary, of the bed of a watercourse) and a *Doloroso* passage introduced by the piano alone (bar 180), the first motif returns to the flute, with the piano in canon, leading to new harmonic variations.

The third and final movement (Epilogue) [25], also connected to the previous one, is in itself a large terminal development of the themes heard earlier. It comes after a brief cadential passage for the flute based on the second motif of the 'Reverie'. It is based on the recall of the introduction of the work and gradually introduces phrases reminiscent of other significant motifs from the themes of previous movements. Of a meditative nature, it reminds the listener, through its thematic organisation, that all seasons are connected and form an evolutionary circle similar to musical motifs that dialogue, contrast or merge.

These analogies between nature and artistic creation have always fascinated me, and I have always tried, within the thematic organisation of my music, to embrace their logic. Germination and cell proliferation are the origins of all life. Spring provides the most dazzling spectacle of this process. That is the lesson I have learned from existence, and this work is my attempt to convey it in terms of musical construction and emotion.

# NICOLAS BACRI'S CAPTIVATING MUSIC FOR THE FLUTE

by Danielle Breisach

It was nearly a decade ago (c. 2014) that I took a deep dive into the music of Nicolas Bacri, along with music by Philippe Hersant and Betsy Jolas, as my chosen doctoral topic. I have always been intrigued by and drawn to French music, as I find its emotional capacity to be endlessly expansive. The twists and turns from light to dark, sentimental to fiery, extroverted to introverted have always felt easy and satisfying to convey – this is where I've always felt most at home in music.

Nicolas' music spoke my musical language. There is very clear emotion embedded into his compositional style that waits to be drawn out by the performer. The flexibility required of the performer to execute his music is of particular note. Alongside more chromatic passages, which create a sense of turbulence, he writes large leaps which require a nimbleness and sensitivity in the flautist's embouchure and air.

It was in October 2015 that Yana Avedyan and I travelled to Rochester, NY, to meet Nicolas when he was at Eastman School of Music to work with the viola students on his music. He generously made time for us and coached us on his music – I believe it was his *Sonata da camera,* Op. 67 [1]–[4], that we performed for him. Strangely, one of the things from that coaching that still sticks out to me today was his insistence on his chosen tempos. He wanted the Scherzo fast! He wanted us to allow the tempo to convey the franticness of the music – for two musicians who liked to be in control, this was a challenging task. We had many wonderful conversations over meals about other composers' music. I especially remember our discussing Henri Dutilleux and his rejection of his own *Sonatina for Flute and Piano* as his compositional style evolved.

Fast forward a decade later, and I am very pleased to finally be putting these recordings out into the world. It is a good thing that I waited some of this time,

because the *Spring Sonata*, Op. 147 [23]–[25], wasn't in existence when I recorded the other pieces. In the years since, Nicolas continues to write captivating music for the flute.

**Danielle Breisach** is a dynamic performer, educator and conductor known for her ability to effortlessly connect with a wide range of audiences and groups. Having performed across North America, in Europe and in Asia, she is equally at home on stage as a soloist or member of an ensemble. She is Principal Flute with the Central Wisconsin Symphony Orchestra and piccolo-player with the La Crosse Symphony Orchestra. She has performed Lowell Lieberman's Concerto for Flute and Orchestra, Op. 39, as a concerto soloist with the Western Michigan University Symphony Orchestra and Michael Daugherty's *Trail of Tears* with the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Symphony Orchestra. In addition to solo and orchestral work, she is a member of the Madison New Music Ensemble, which uses the same instrumentation as Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*. She is a prize-winner in the Alto Flute Competition of the Low Flute Society and an invited performer for the National Flute Association, Low Flute Society, International Double Reed Society and National Association of College Wind and Percussion Instructors.

She currently serves on the faculty at UW-Stevens Point (between Minneapolis and Lake Michigan) as Lecturer of Flute and Graduate Program Manager, where she mentors undergraduate and graduate flautists, teaches pedagogy, conducts the UWSP Flute Choir and administrates the Master of Music Education programme. She has given guest-artist classes and performances and adjudicated competitions, throughout the United States.

She is passionate about creating growth opportunities for musicians, educators and community through her work with the Madison Flute Club, commissioning projects, and UW-Stevens Point Master of Music programme. Under her leadership, the Wisconsin Flute Festival has become a nationally recognised festival offering performance, educational, networking and resumé-building opportunities for flautists of all ages and abilities. As Co-Artistic Director of

the Madison Flute Club, she has been the driving force behind creating unique opportunities for all flautists to connect, perform and provide community education and outreach.

Danielle Breisach has been an invited guest conductor at international festivals and directed flute ensembles for the West Michigan Flute Association, Madison Flute Club, Western Michigan University Flute Studio, UW-Stevens Point Flute Studio and Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestras. She mentors assistant and student conductors as part of her activities with the Madison Flute Club and UW-Stevens Point Flute Studio.

She is an accomplished performer on flute, piccolo, alto flute and bass flute, and enjoys playing Irish and Swedish folk-music on simple-system flutes.

She received her B.M. in Instrumental Music Education and M.M. in Flute Performance from Western Michigan University, and her D.M.A. in Flute Performance with additional studies on Baroque flute from UW-Madison.
*www.daniellebreisach.com*

The pianist **Yana Avedyan** is originally from Kharkiv, in Ukraine, where she attended Music School No. 9 and studied with Glazirina Tatiana, majoring in piano performance. She began her studies with Karen Becker at the State University New York Plattsburgh in 2007 and participated in master-classes with Evgenia Tzarov and Helen Huang. In the spring of 2011, she made her debut as soloist with the Manhattan Chamber Orchestra, playing Mozart's A major Piano Concerto, K488. She completed her bachelor's degree with a double major in music and accounting in May 2012, graduating *summa cum laude*.

During her subsequent studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, she participated in master-classes with Peter Minamoto and Joel Hastings. In 2013 she and Danielle Breisach were the winners of the annual Shain Woodwind-Piano Duo Competition, and in 2014 she was one of the winners of the annual Beethoven Competition. In 2016, she was one of the finalists of the UW-Madison Concerto

Competition and performed Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto with a UW student orchestra in 2017.

She has attended festivals such as the Brevard Music Festival in North Carolina as a solo pianist and the Bay View Music Festival in Petoskey, Michigan, as a collaborative piano fellow. In 2018, she participated in the inaugural concert series of the LunART festival in Madison.

In 2018, she completed her doctoral degree in piano performance at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she was a student of Christopher Taylor, a medal-winner of the Van Cliburn Piano Competition. Her dissertation project was focused on the solo piano works of the Ukrainian composer Myroslav Skoryk.

Yana Avedyan currently lives in Munich, where she teaches piano and English.

Hailed as 'an artist with an already growing reputation and a promising future' (*The Well-Tempered Ear*), the cellist **Andrew Briggs** performs internationally. He recently performed solo and in chamber music at the Bridging Arts Music Festival in Nuremberg, and the Fontainebleau Festival, Terres Vibrantes Music Festival and the Radio France Festival in Montpellier, all in France.

Indeed, he has now made his home in Paris, where he is in high demand as a solo cellist and collaborator. He first settled there as a recipient of the Harriet Hale Woolley Fellowship of the United States Foundation, studying and performing works by Debussy, by the eighteenth-century cellist-composer Jean-Louis Duport and by Poulenc; he then spent two years at the Cité Internationale des Arts working on projects highlighting Beethoven's cello works and world music with the Kimya Ensemble. He was a founding member of the Imago ensemble in residence at the USA Foundation, creating musical performances featuring interdisciplinary artistic collaborations. He often performs in sections of the Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra and the Orchestre National de l'Île de France.

Highlights from last season include a performance of Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras* No. 5 at the Festival Radio France in Montpellier; solo and chamber-music concerts at the Fontainebleau Festival; chamber-music concerts with the Ensemble Calliopé, also in France; performances of the Dvořák Cello Concerto with the Middleton Community, Longmont and University of Colorado orchestras; playing as principal cello of the Orchestre Symphonique de Bretagne and the Juilliard Chamber Orchestra; concerts at Carnegie Hall with the New York String Orchestra Seminar; and chamber-music concerts with the principal cello of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Gregor Horsch.

He graduated from The Juilliard School in New York and completed his doctorate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a project entitled 'Piatti and the Body: An Integrative Approach to Learning the 12 Caprices, Op. 25', which can be found on YouTube. He has benefited from private studies and master-classes with Richard Aaron, Lluis Claret, Xavier Gagnepain, Ophélie Gaillard, Judith Glyde, Frans Helmerson, Gary Hoffman, Gregor Horsch, Steven Isserlis, Ralph Kirshbaum, Paul Katz, Diana Ligeti, Philippe Muller, Michel Strauss and Uri Vardi.
*www.andrewbriggscello.com*

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