

Sonatine en Trio for Flute, Cello, and Harp by Maurice Ravel (1875-1937).
arr. Carlos Salzedo (1905)

Ravel composed the *Sonatine* for solo piano while he was still a student at the Paris Conservatoire. The work has a strange history: Ravel composed the first movement for a contest for a one-movement work of no more than 75 measures, which was sponsored by an arts magazine. The contest was then canceled because Ravel was the only participant and the magazine was on the verge of bankruptcy. Moreover, Ravel did not adhere to the 75-measure limitation and would have been disqualified from the contest on those grounds.

Ravel added two short movements to the original work, which are marked by an austerity of textures and clarity of musical lines. The original movement, *Modéré*, is in sonata form with two contrasting themes, the first presented against a murmuring accompaniment, and the second darker and structured on static chords. The movement is dominated by the interval of a descending fourth, which appears subsequently in the latter two movements, (*Mouvement de Menuet* and *Animé*).

Ever searching to expand his repertoire, harpist Carlos Salzedo arranged Ravel's already virtuosic piano *Sonatine* for flute, cello and harp. Fiendishly chromatic, it requires 458 pedal changes. Salzedo, a flutist and cellist played his transcription for Ravel, and apparently Ravel asked, "Now, why didn't I think of that?"

Glimpses for Cello and Harp by Christopher Culpo (b 1960.)

While I have composed often for the cello in solo, chamber, and orchestral contexts, I have never written for harp in a chamber setting. The harp is such an iconic instrument, with which the public so readily makes extra-musical associations, that I am enjoying the challenge of working on a set of short pieces for these two instruments.

- C. Culpo

Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp (1915) by Claude Debussy (1862-1918).

In 1914, with the encouragement of his music publisher Jacques Durand, Claude Debussy set out to compose a cycle of *Six Sonatas for Various Instruments*. The project was undertaken at a time when Europe was ravaged by the First World War and Debussy was suffering from terminal cancer. Only three Sonatas had been completed at the time of Debussy's death on March 25, 1918.

The *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp* floats into a magical dreamscape that feels emotionally detached and ambiguous. Simultaneously melancholic and joyful, it seems to exist in a world beyond emotion. The music just *is*. In attempting to describe the piece in a letter, Debussy wrote, “I can’t say whether one should laugh or cry. Perhaps both at the same time?”

The first movement (*Pastorale: Lento, dolce rubato*) develops out of a series of five ethereal motivic fragments, which return at the end of the movement in a different order. Listen to the way these three instrumental voices, each with its own distinct persona, come alive in a vibrant musical conversation. In the opening bars, each voice magically emerges from another, beginning with the harp, moving through the flute line, and passing off to the viola. The final moments drift off into hazy, pan diatonic hues.

The second movement’s title (*Interlude: Tempo di minuetto*) recalls the elegant minuet dance form from the French Baroque period. Interestingly, similar ghosts from the distant past emerge in Ravel’s *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, written at the same time. At two amazing points in this movement, the normal soundscape fades away and we find ourselves, suddenly, in a bright, shimmering world of new colors (the flute combines with the viola’s harmonics) and Eastern harmony.

The third movement (*Finale: Allegro moderato ma risoluto*) brings the Sonata to a dramatic and exhilarating conclusion with raspy, close-to-the-bridge sul ponticello and snapping pizzicato in the viola and fiery arpeggios in the flute. In the final moments, there is a joyfully exuberant reprise of the falling four-note motive from the first movement, followed by a teasing final resolution.

Introduction et Allegro in G-Flat Major for Harp, Flute, Clarinet, and String Quartet (1906)
by Maurice Ravel (1875-1937).

This exquisite work, in effect a miniature harp concerto replete with mini-cadenzas, was commissioned in 1905 by the Parisian publisher and instrument maker *Maison Erard* to promote its new model of pedal-harp.

Erard, which early in the 19th century had patented a forerunner of the chromatic harp (favored by Rossini and Donizetti in their operas), was responding to the challenge of its crosstown piano-making rival, Pleyel et Cie., which had recently branched out and introduced its own harp, without pedal, and had commissioned Claude Debussy, to create for it a musical promotion, known as his *Danses sacrée et profane*.

The *Introduction et Allegro* made its official debut in February of 1907, when it was presented by Le Cercle Musical, an exclusive chamber society in the salle of the French

Photographic Society. The program also included Ravel's String Quartet and his recently completed song cycle *Histoires naturelles*. In its rhythmic subtleties and languid sensuality, the *Introduction et Allegro* strongly recalls the *Shéhérazade* songs of 1903, the composer's greatest success up to that time.

The entire piece is built on the theme in thirds stated at the outset by flute and clarinet, followed quickly by two additional themes, the second also announced by the winds and a third, by the cello. The harp embellishes each briefly before taking centerstage in the *Allegro*, commencing a series of brief, harmonically dazzling exchanges with the other ensemble members. —Herbert Glass