

ECM

Lonquich's *Plainte Calme*

Three generations of French composers are represented in this exceptional recital disc by Alexander Lonquich, which moves from the songful *Impromptus* of Fauré, through Ravel's exuberantly virtuosic *Gaspard de la Nuit*, to Messiaen's *Huit Préludes pour Piano*. Messiaen's *Préludes*, his first published work, already revealed more than hints of the heightened sensitivity to sound-color and the structural originality that were to make the composer one of the principal architects of the new music. *Plainte Calme*, named for one of Messiaen's *Préludes*, pays tribute to the experimental impulse in French music, and the ways in which it has developed alongside intrinsically lyrical characteristics.



Gabriel Fauré wrote his five *impromptus* over a period of more than a quarter-century (between 1882 and 1909) and accordingly Lonquich treats them as autonomous pieces rather than a set, threading them, jewel-like, throughout the recital. As Jessica Duchen points out in the CD booklet, despite his reputation as a choirmaster and church organist, Fauré was at heart a pianist, and an uncommonly gifted one: "He was ambidextrous, and his piano writing filled with subtle tricks of voicing, intertwining polyphonic lines and melodies set in the center of the piano, divided between the hands, often confirms this." While the influence of Chopin and Saint-Saëns is marked in the early *impromptus*, by the third, Fauré's songwriting gifts are in full flower, and the fourth "unfolds with a dizzying range of harmonic and rhythmic intricacies." The fifth *impromptu* is an instance of Fauré's increasingly exploratory late style.

Maurice Ravel was one of Fauré's composition students at the Paris Conservatoire, although his 1908 work *Gaspard de la Nuit* owes its inspirations to other sources. Ravel's goal was to write a pianistic *tour-de-force* that would top Balakirev's then-popular "oriental fantasy" *Islamey*, and to challenge the playing capacities of his good friend Ricardo Viñes, the Spanish pianist who was also an important advocate for Debussy's work.

Messiaen's *Préludes* are in places equally challenging, "Les Sons Impalpable du Rêve" for instance "presents the pianist with no fewer than 56 changes of meter in 74 bars," while the synaesthetic notes in the margin point to the future, with the composer calling for "blue-orange mode with ostinato in chords cascaded on a violet-blue mode treated like a brassy gong." The last of the *Préludes*, "Un Reflet dans le Vent" is "a signpost toward the music Messiaen was to write for Yvonne Loriod, including the *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* and *Vingts*

Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus — among the greatest works for piano composed in the 20th century.”

Plainte Calme is the second ECM New Series recording to feature Alexander Lonquich. The pianist previously contributed to Israeli composer Gideon Lewensohn's highly acclaimed album Odradek in 2001.

Alexander Lonquich was born in Trier, Germany, in 1960, and studied with Astrid Schmid-Neuhaus, Paul Badura-Skoda, Andrei Yasinki and Ilonka Deckers. In 1976, at the age of 16 he won first prize at the Casagrande Competition in Terni, Italy, and has since been much in demand around the world. He has worked closely with Claudio Abbado, Kurt Sanderling, Ton Koopman, Emmanuel Krivine and especially with Sandor Vegh, and with orchestras including the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, the Camerata Academia Salzburg, and the Orchestra da Camera di Mantova. He plays chamber music with Heinz Holliger, Joshua Bell, Tabea Zimmermann, Thomas Demenga, Shlomo Mintz, Steven Isserlis, Miklós Perényi and other distinguished musicians, and has a growing reputation, additionally, as a conductor. Lonquich's previous solo recordings, for EMI, dedicated to music of Mozart, Schubert and Schumann, have received the highest critical acclaim and prizes ranging from the Edison Award to the “Diapason d'Or.”