

## ISRAELI CHAMBER PROJECT

**Hila Baggio**, soprano

**Daniel Bard**, violin & viola

**Tibi Cziger**, clarinet

**Guy Eshed**, flute

**Michal Korman**, cello

**Sivan Magen**, harp

**Assaff Weisman**, piano

**Shirit Lee Weiss**, director

**MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)**

**La Valse (arr. Yuval Shapiro)**

(approx. 14 minutes)

**IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882–1971)**

**Petrushka (arr. Yuval Shapiro)**

Shrovetide Fair

Scene and Danse Russe

Petrushka's Room

The Black Moor

Shrovetide Fair

(approx. 25 minutes)

Intermission

## ARNOLD SCHOENBERG (1874–1951)

### Pierrot Lunaire

#### PART 1

1. Mondestrunken
2. Columbine
3. Der Dandy
4. Eine blasse Wäscherin
5. Valse de Chopin
6. Madonna
7. Der kranke Mond

#### PART 2

8. Nacht (Passacaglia)
9. Gebet an Pierrot
10. Raub
11. Rote Messe
12. Galgenlied
13. Enthauptung
14. Die Kreuze

#### PART 3

15. Heimweh
16. Gemeinheit
17. Parodie
18. Der Mondfleck
19. Serenade
20. Heimfahrt (Barcarole)
21. O alter Duft

(approx. 40 minutes)

## Maurice Ravel

### La Valse

Ravel had been planning to write a celebration of the Viennese waltz since 1906, when he began to sketch out a piece he called simply *Wien* (Vienna), a tribute to the city's so-called "waltz king," Johann Strauss II. But it was only under a commission from Sergei Diaghilev, impresario of the famous Ballets Russes dance company, that he was prompted to finish it in 1920. Diaghilev hated the work after hearing it played in Ravel's two-piano version, but undeterred, the composer published it anyway in an orchestral version, and it premiered in 1926.

The work begins with a mysterious rumble deep in the bass register to prepare our ears for the great sonic feast that Ravel has created for us. As he summons up the spirits of Viennese ballrooms past, tantalizing tidbits of waltz rhythm float up like champagne bubbles to the mid-range of the texture



until finally the misty veil of memory is lifted to reveal a glittering dance floor of swirling figures deliriously enthralled by the downbeat hesitation and second-beat uplift of a full-on waltz tune.



The work is structured in a series of waltzes, some coyly coquettish with seductive chromatic lines creeping upwards in the inner voices, others boldly uninhibited and carefree, all leading by the end to a final triumphant explosion of joyous exultation and unbridled elation.



Ravel describes what he called his *poème chorégraphique* as follows:

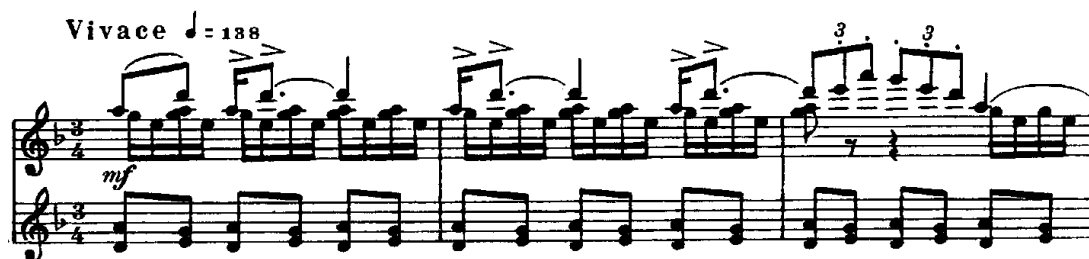
*Swirling clouds afford glimpses, through rifts, of waltzing couples. The clouds scatter little by little; one can distinguish an immense hall with a whirling crowd. The scene grows progressively brighter. The light of the chandeliers bursts forth at the fortissimo. An imperial court, about 1855.*

## Igor Stravinsky

### Petrushka

Stravinsky's ballet *Petrushka* was written for Sergei Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* and premiered in Paris in 1911. It tells the story of a love triangle between three puppets — Petrushka, the Ballerina, and the Blackamoor<sup>1</sup> — who come alive during the Shrovetide (i.e., Mardi Gras) festivities in St. Petersburg in 1830.

The ballet is structured in four *tableaux*, the first of which, *Shrovetide Fair*, establishes the setting as a fairground packed with revellers. In the sprightly fanfares of the flute, we hear the bustle of the crowds and the cries of hawkers offering their wares.



Unique features of Stravinsky's compositional style soon become obvious, such as his use of parallel chords in his harmonic structures.



His motivic building blocks tend to be repetitive and confined within a small melodic range, with frequently changing time signatures that keep one's ear ever alert, listening for where the downbeat is.

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<sup>1</sup> "Blackamoor" is an archaic term used to describe a dark-skinned person from Africa, or any swarthy-toned individual.

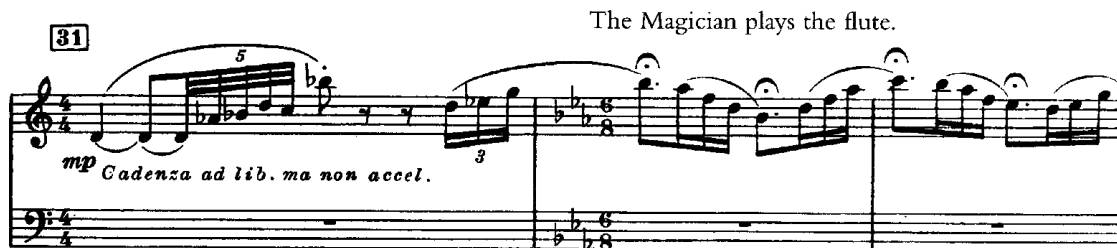


Which is not to say that clear, tuneful and predictable melodies never occur. Traditional folksongs, music hall tunes and popular songs are also heard, depicting the “common folk” milling about at the fair and singing little ditties like this:



In the following *Scene and Dance russe* a Magician puppet master appears and draws a curtain back to reveal his puppet theatre to the crowd.

Then by improvising a sinuous melody on the flute, he brings the three puppet protagonists of this ballet miraculously to life.



The Magician plays the flute.

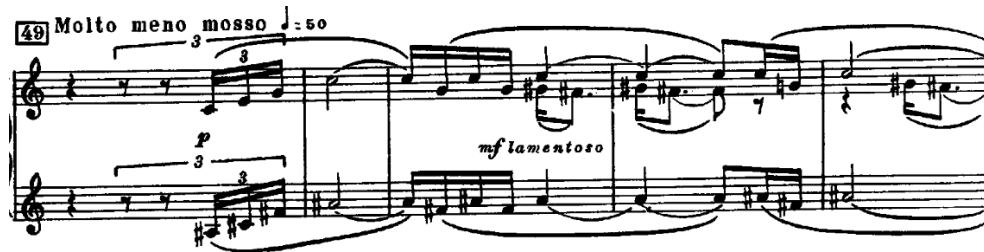
And feeling new strength in their limbs, the first thing they do to express their newfound freedom, of course, is to launch into a joyous and vigorous Russian Dance.



But unfortunately for our poor Petrushka, no matter how many toothy grins, sly winks and fervent gestures of eyebrow theatre he directs at the Ballerina, she still seems to prefer the Blackamoor.

\* \* \*

The second tableau takes us to *Petrushka's Room* where we hear for the first time the celebrated “Petrushka chord” for which this ballet is famous.



This bitonal chord is formed from a combination of C major and F# major broken chords played together to generate a composite arpeggio of colourful dissonances. And this will be Petrushka’s “sonic signature” representing him throughout the ballet.

In this tableau we hear Petrushka’s side of the story, his anger towards the Magician, his frantic attempts to impress the Ballerina when she wanders into the room and his despair at his own inability to impress her.

\* \* \*

The third tableau takes us to the *Blackamoor's Room*, where an entirely different scene is unfolding. The Blackamoor is luxuriating in his own contours on a chaise-longue, amusing himself attempting to apply his razor-sharp scimitar to a recently-acquired coconut.

The Blackamoor’s music up to this point is mysterious and more than a little threatening, due in large part to the scimitar that he brandishes with gusto. The Ballerina then arrives, obviously fresh from band practice, because she just can’t restrain herself from playing a merry little tune on her cornet.



But the Blackamoor has other things on his mind, and a seductive waltz, full of whimsy, soon ensues between the two of them.

72 Allegretto  $\text{♩} = 60$

*mf grazioso e poco grottesco*

The fourth tableau sees the arrival of evening back at the *Shrovetide Fair* with Stravinsky's sugary texture of parallel chords

setting the tone once again for a bustling scene of dancers, musicians and other entertainers performing before an audience of the common folk.

First, up are the Wet-Nurses, dancing to a gloriously hummable tune, a paraphrase of the well-known folk song *Down the Petersky Road* (Вдоль по Питерской):

8

93

After a bit of commotion, the gypsy women take to the stage to do their merry dance.

$\text{♩} = 126$  Più mosso

106

Then comes the confident striding pace of the Coachmen and Grooms, high-stepping it across the stage, soon joined by the Wet Nurses.



Not to be outdone, a group of Mummers<sup>2</sup> take their turn and enjoin the crowd to join them.

The rest of the crowd joins in the Mummers' dance.



And with this, the Israeli Chamber Project ends their rendition of excerpts from Stravinsky's ballet on a merry note of dancing and general revelry.

\* \* \*

But what happens to the puppet Petrushka in the end? Does he win the girl? Or does the Blackamoor give him a good drubbing and win her himself?

You'll have to go see the full ballet to find out.

But here's a hint: Admiralty Square in St. Petersburg, where the ballet is set, is an "open carry" jurisdiction, so I would watch out for that scimitar...

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<sup>2</sup> Mummers were masked mimes that traditionally performed in country villages on holidays and religious feast days.





The effect is unsettling, like someone whispering conspiratorially in your ear one moment and then raving at the sky the next. At every dynamic level it bespeaks raw unfiltered emotion —and madness.

The work is divided into three sections of seven poems each. The first section depicts the elation and rapturous intoxication produced by love and religious devotion. The second deals with the darker impulses of the human heart. The third sees Pierrot travelling home to Bergamo, reflecting on his past.

### PART ONE

In *Moondrunk* we are introduced to Pierrot as he “drinks in” the “wine” of a moonlit evening, musing over the intoxicating power of the Moon to fuel poetic inspiration.

We are also introduced to a textural characteristic of Schoenberg’s score that accounts for much of its “strangeness.” We hear an eerie disconnect between the unpredictably wandering vocal line and the finely wrought, meticulously ordered patterning of the instrumental accompaniment, as represented in this first piece by the seven-note tumbling arabesque figure in the piano.

This ordered patterning features intricate points of imitation between the instruments and displays of learned counterpoint that only get more dazzlingly complex as the work proceeds, leading the listener to wonder: who is crazier, the raving singer or the obsessive-compulsive accompaniment?

\* \* \*

In the second piece, Pierrot’s thoughts turn to his love for *Columbine* as he fantasizes giving her “roses” of pale moonbeams.

Columbine is the mistress of his arch-rival Harlequin, and Pierrot's love is unrequited. The cadenza-like acrobatics of the violin convey the fanciful nature of his love aspirations.

\* \* \*

In the nineteenth century, Pierrot became a pantomime figure in a white, flouncy costume and a white-painted face. In *The Dandy* we encounter him at his make-up table whimsically musing over his choice of colours as a shrieking bright beam of moonlight strikes the flasks of his face-paint.



Which colour will he choose? White, of course, the pale colour of moonbeams.

\* \* \*

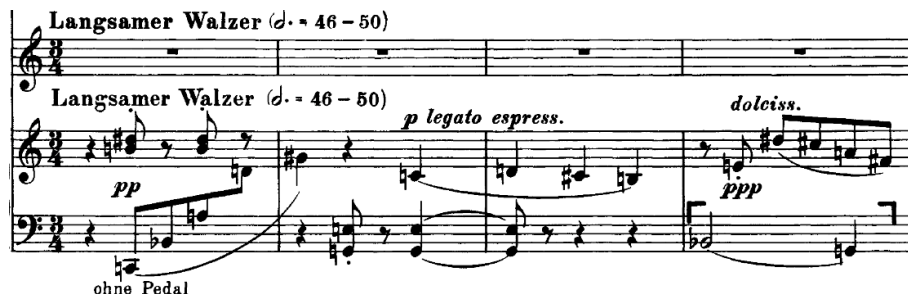
In the fourth piece Pierrot imagines the Moon as *A Pallid Laundrymaid*, a ghostly presence in the sky, washing “faded linen” with her “silver-white arms.”



The instrumental accompaniment is as pale and expressionless as the face of the Moon.

\* \* \*

A rather grotesque image is summoned up in *Valse de Chopin*. Pierrot is moved by a drop of blood on his white costume to think of the waltzes of Chopin — who died, after all, spitting blood from tuberculosis.



*Madonna* is a kind of musical Pietà, featuring Mary, the “mother of all sorrows,” imagined by Pierrot as holding her crucified son in her arms.

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Madonna'. It consists of two staves. The top staff is a bass line starting with a 'pizz.' (pizzicato) marking and a 'p' (piano) dynamic. The bottom staff is a vocal line starting with a 'p' dynamic and the instruction 'Mäßig langsam (♩ = ca 50) p sehr innig'. The lyrics are: 'Steig, — o Mut-ter al-ler Schmerzen, auf den Al-tar mei-ner'.

To complete the blasphemous overtones of this piece, it features a pizzicato walking bass line, as if it were from a Bach cantata.

\* \* \*

*The Sick Moon* reveals how Pierrot has gone from manic elation to isolation and despair in his “lunar madness.” The Moon, like his soul, is now “sick.”

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'The Sick Moon'. It consists of two staves. The top staff is a vocal line starting with a 'p' dynamic and the instruction 'Sehr langsame ♩. (♩ = 96-100)'. The bottom staff is an instrumental accompaniment starting with a 'p' dynamic. The lyrics are: 'Du näch-tig to-deskranker Mond dort — auf des Himmels schwarzem'.

Pierrot’s loneliness is conveyed by the instrumental accompaniment of a lone flute, playing in its lowest register, as if heaving its last breaths.

## PART TWO

By the end of the nineteenth century Pierrot had also become associated in art with the dark side of the Moon, as a figure capable of embodying the worst moral excesses of *fin de siècle* European society. This dark side of his personality pervades the second part of *Pierrot Lunaire*.

Thus darkness pervades *Night*, with its images of “dark black butterflies” blocking out the sun.

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Night'. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line starting with a 'p' dynamic and the instruction 'Gehende ♩ (ca 80)'. The middle staff is a vocal line starting with a 'p' dynamic and the instruction 'Gehende ♩ (ca 80)'. The bottom staff is an instrumental accompaniment starting with a 'pp' (pianissimo) dynamic. The lyrics are: 'Finstre, schwarze Rie-senfal-ter tö-tetender'.



The “grisly Eucharist” he offers up is his own heart, ripped from his breast!

The last three songs of Part Two describe the death of Pierrot in three different types of execution: hanging, beheading and crucifixion.

First he is hanged in *Gallows Song*, the shortest of the pieces in this work. The executioner is his “last mistress,” a prostitute who ties the noose around his neck.



The image shows a musical score for the piece "Gallows Song". It consists of three staves. The top two staves are for piano accompaniment, with dynamics markings of *pp*. The bottom staff is for the vocal line, starting with the tempo marking "Sehr rasch (♩ = ca 120)". The lyrics are: "Die dür - re Dir - ne mit lan - - gem Hal - se wird sei - ne letz - te Ge -".

The whiplash phrase of the piccolo at the end is him dropping to his death.

\* \* \*

Next it is the turn of the Moon itself, which he previously worshipped, to come down on his neck like a shining scimitar in *Beheading*.



The image shows a musical score for the piece "Beheading". It features three staves. The top staff is for guitar, labeled "C-Saite", with dynamics markings of *ff* and *legato*. The middle staff is for piano accompaniment, with dynamics markings of *ff* and *gestoßen*. The bottom staff is for piano accompaniment, with dynamics markings of *ff* and *hervortretend*. The tempo marking is "Ziemlich bewegte (ca 126)".

Brusque chopping motions in the instruments as the piece opens foretell the kind of execution being described.

\* \* \*

Finally, in *The Crosses*, Pierrot identifies self-pityingly with all the poets whose verses are the agents of their own crucifixion, while the clamouring mob stands by and gawks.



Langsame  $\text{♩}$  (ca 56)  
(ernst) *f*

Heil - ge Kreu - ze sind die Ver - se, drandie Dichter stumm ver.

Langsame  $\text{♩}$  (ca 56)  
*ff* *legato*

*r. H.*  
*L.H.* *ff*

### PART THREE

With his symbolic death enacted in these ways, Pierrot is overwhelmed with a sense of homesickness and a longing for home.

In *Nostalgia* we hear the call of his homeland in Italy, beckoning him to return, in the lyrical outpouring of the violin and mischievous scamper of the clarinet.

In abwechslungsreicher Bewegung ( $\text{♩}$  = 56 - 70)  
frei etwas rasch  
*pizz.* *arco* *stacc.* *zögernd*  
*f* *p* *pp*

He hears the call of the “old Italian comedy” (i.e., *commedia dell’arte*) in which he was born.

\* \* \*

Returning to the rough humour of early *commedia dell’arte*, in *Mean Trick* Pierrot drills through the head of Cassander, a critic who has presumably tortured him in a similar fashion.

Ziemlich rasch ( $\text{♩}$  ca 126)  
In den blanken Kopf Cas - san - ders, dessen Schrei die Luft durchze - tert,  
Ziemlich rasch ( $\text{♩}$  ca 126)  
*ff*

Putting tobacco in the cavity, he smokes his nemesis’ head like a pipe.

\* \* \*

Schoenberg waxes cleverer and cleverer in his use of musical materials in the pieces that follow. *Parody* tells the tale of a grey-haired old Duenna (a type of

chaperone in Spanish society) who sits waiting with her knitting needles for the arrival of Pierrot, her much younger lover.

(♩ = ca 132)

Klarinette imitiert genau den Vortrag der Bratsche.

mit Dämpfer

grazioso *p* *f* *p* stacc. spicc. springender Bogen

The instrumental texture is rife with canons and other points of imitation, but the way the following voice is inverted (as in the opening) mocks the old woman's claim to have a young paramour at her beck and call.

At the height of his powers, Schoenberg creates canons, inversions of canons and an outright fugue in the instrumental accompaniment to *The Moon Fleck*.

Sehr rasche ♩ (ca 144)

Sehr rasche ♩ (ca 144)

Einen wei - ßen Fleck des hel - len Mon - des auf dem Rük - ken

The premise is that Pierrot finds a small fleck (i.e., beam) of moonlight on the back of his costume, and it drives him crazy trying to get rid of it. The virtuoso display of contrapuntal skill in the instrumental texture symbolizes the futility of his efforts.

\* \* \*

The *Serenade* is stuffed with musical in-jokes.

The scene is Pierrot playing a waltzing serenade on the viola, but Schoenberg scores it for cello.

rit.

rit.

rit.

knipster trüb ein Piz - zi - ca - to.

immer *p*



And when the text says that Pierrot plays *pizzicato* the cello blithely goes on playing *arco*.

Pierrot, with his “giant bow,” gets to engage in another Punch-and-Judy whack at the critic Cassander, who comes to complain about the noise but ends up getting “played” like an instrument by Pierrot.

\* \* \*

In the last two pieces Pierrot’s thoughts are fully back in his Italian homeland, daydreaming of the sensations and even the smells of home.

*Journey Homeward* is a barcarolle, its rocking rhythm conveyed by up-and-down phrases from the cello and violin while the clarinet sings out a wave-inspired melody.

Leicht bewegt (♩ = 42 – 46)

sehr zart und leicht

pizz. p ppp

Returning to previous kinds of imagery, “The moonbeam is the rudder, the white lily is the boat.”

\* \* \*

In the last piece Pierrot is back where he belongs, in Bergamo, comforted and restored to health by the very smells of his hometown.

Bewegt (♩ = ca 60)

O al - ter Duft aus Mar - chenzeit, be - rau - schest wieder meine

Bewegt (♩ = ca. 60)

p pp

In celebration of this homecoming, Schoenberg almost — almost! — gives us hints of good old-fashioned tonality, with the piano accompanying the voice more reverently and with the sound of the entire ensemble more traditionally orchestral and less aurally complicated.

\* \* \*

But what is Schoenberg’s achievement in this work? Its emotional tenor is confoundingly elusive, often sitting on a knife-edge between sarcasm and pathos. Irony is certainly omni-present, starting with the “Marlene Dietrich” cabaret gesture of having a male character acted out by a female performer.

Are the nightmarish elements to be taken seriously, or as grotesque satire? Should we pity Pierrot, or just laugh at his mawkish sentimentality? Just how much are we to remain detached from the words and the text?

It is questions like this — questions that continue to be asked — that have branded this work a masterpiece of early twentieth-century artistic expression.

Donald G. Gíslason 2024