

emv:



# The Birds Concert



**La Rêveuse** directed by  
**Florence Bolton** and **Benjamin Perrot**

**FRIDAY APRIL 21, 2023 / 7:30 p.m.**

Christ Church Cathedral

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This concert is generously supported by Anthony Morgan



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## THE ARTISTS

### La Rêveuse

Florence Bolton

BASSE DE VIOLE & PARDESSUS DE VIOLE

Sébastien Marq

RECORDERS & FLAGEOLETS

Benjamin Perrot

THEORBO

Jean-Miguel Aristizabal

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Instruments from the EMV collection of historical instruments used in this concert:

French double-manual harpsichord after Taskin by Edward R Turner of Pender Island, restored by Craig Tomlinson of West Vancouver



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## THE BIRDS CONCERT

### PROGRAMME

– THIS CONCERT WILL BE PERFORMED WITHOUT AN INTERVAL –

William Williams (1675-1701) / Robert Orme (?-1711)

**Sonata In Imitation Of Several Birds**

Adagio

Grave

Allegro

Jacob Van Eyck (1590-1657)

**Engels Nachtegaeltje** (*English Nightingale*)

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

**Prelude for The Birds** - from *The Fairy Queen*

Theodor Schwarzkopf (1659-1732)

**Sonata all'imitazione del Rossignolo e del Cucco**

Allegro

Gigue

François Couperin (1668-1733)

**Le Rossignol en amour** - transcribed for recorder & theorbo

**Les Fauvettes plaintives** - transcribed for recorder pardessus de viole & harpsichord

Louis de Caix d'Hervelois (1677-1759)

**La Sauterelle**

**Le Papillon**

François Couperin

**Les Sylvains** - transcribed for theorbo by Robert de Visée (c.1650 - before 1732)

Jean-Baptiste de Bousset (1662-1725)

**Pourquoi doux rossignol** - instrumental version by Michel Blavet (1700-1768)

Michel Corrette (1707-1795)

**Le Coucou**

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) / arr. Vincent Bouchot (b.1966)

**Le Coucou au fond des bois** - from *Carnival of the Animals*

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) / arr. Vincent Bouchot

**Cuckoo** from *Friday afternoons*

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)

**La Poule**

Camille Saint-Saëns / arr. Vincent Bouchot

**Poules et coqs** - from *Carnaval des Animaux*, arr. Vincent Bouchot

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) / arr. Vincent Bouchot

**Laideronnette impératrice des pagodes** - from *Ma Mère L'Oye*

## PROGRAMME NOTES

BY CONNOR PAGE

Musicians – and poets – have often seen birds as kindred spirits. The fascination with birdsong among music-makers and theorists of the European tradition goes back centuries. Intellectuals debated whether birdsong was, properly speaking, music at all – whether it was rational or sensual, the product of conscious artistry or automatic mechanism. Some argued that birdsong reflects the distant origin of human music and even language, which were then refined and systematized over millennia of human civilization. Most, in any case, shared a common delight in imitating Nature with Art. In an age (after about 1600) when virtuosic instrumental music had come into its own, composers demonstrated their ingenuity by incorporating familiar birdcalls into the design of their latest pieces for violin, recorder, or harpsichord. These imitations were partly matters of convention, but also of observation. A keen ornithologist would recognize in such works the iconic two-note descent of the cuckoo, for example. The great Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher exemplified this interest in the real musical properties of birdcalls when he transcribed, in *Musurgia Universalis* (1650), the songs of several notable birds in musical notation.

As might be expected, the taste for bird music transcended boundaries of language and nation. The oldest music in this programme, by the blind Dutch bell expert and recorder master Jacob van Eyck (1590-1657), transports a tune identified as *Engels Nachtegaeltje* (“English Nightingale”) to the streets of Utrecht. Van Eyck published this set of variations as part of a large collection of music for solo recorder called *Der Fluyten Lust-Hof* (“The Flute’s Pleasure Garden”). Many of these pieces were likely heard for the first time in the wooded park around the Janskerk (St. John’s Church) in Utrecht, where van Eyck was commissioned to entertain passers-by “with the sound of his little flute.”

Decades later, the Stuttgart-based Theodor Schwartzkopff (1659-1732) and the English composer of *Sonata in Imitation of Several Birds* (attributed to both William Williams and Robert Orme) combined the principle of bird imitation with the conventions of the Italian sonata. Here, the characteristic trills and warbled thirds are set off by imitation between the voices and by tuneful sequences. Another English composer, Henry Purcell (1659-1732), invoked the “songsters of the sky” to create an atmosphere of pastoral contentment; in Purcell’s semi-opera *The Fairy Queen*, a pair of duetting birds suggest the enchanted forest world of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, introducing a moment of rest into the unfolding drama of quarrelling fairies and mismatched lovers.

Like Purcell, Jean-Baptiste de Bousset (1662-1725) associates the thought of birdsong with a repeating ground bass pattern, a kind of timeless cycle underlying variations of melody and mood. In the original text of *Pourquoi doux rossignol*, a forlorn lover asks the nightingale why she has woken him before dawn. Bousset was an eminent composer of courtly song, and his gift for supple melodic lines and expressive text setting is still visible in this transcription for instruments by the fine flautist and composer Michel Blavet.

Beyond song, French music had a rich tradition of instrumental music with descriptive titles. François Couperin (1668-1733), called “le Grand” (“the Great”) to distinguish him from other accomplished musicians of the Couperin family, made a significant contribution to this tradition with his several volumes of *pièces de clavecin* (“pieces for harpsichord”). Couperin drew his subjects from the world around him; some of his pieces represent the personalities of friends and acquaintances, some depict emotions and abstractions, and many evoke features of nature. *Les Sylvains* may recall a royal entertainment in 1702 in which the king’s musicians appeared dressed as “sylvains” – that is, forest creatures, perhaps the goat-legged satyrs of Classical mythology. The transcription



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for theorbo by Robert de Visée indicates the popularity of this majestic rondo. *Le Rossignol en amour* and *Les Fauvettes plaintives* take a more descriptive turn; a tender melody and long trills suggest the voice of the amorous nightingale, and the plaintive warblers are heard in sighing appoggiatura figures.

Louis de Caix d'Herlevois (1677-1759) and Michel Pignolet de Montéclair (1667-1737) were important musicians of Couperin's generation, d'Herlevois an influential composer for viol and Montéclair an admired double bass player. In this case, d'Herlevois is representing not birds but insects; *La Sauterelle* seems unexpectedly dignified for the subject matter – the humble grasshopper – but *Le Papillon* is expectedly light and fluttery. Montéclair's *Les Ramages* ("chirps" or "warbles") gathers a whole aviary of distinctive birdcalls, conveniently labelled in the score – see if you can pick out the sounds of the nightingale, canary, blackbird, hen, parrot, and cuckoo.

Jean-Phillipe Rameau (1683-1764) also had some fun with the published form of *La Poule*, part of his *Nouvelles suites de pieces de clavecin* of 1727 – in the score, the first line of music is "translated" textually into the call of a hen: "co co co co co dai!" Rameau was an innovative composer and thoughtful theorist who approached the imitation of nature very seriously, but his sense of humour is clearly on display in the high drama, dissonant harmony, and grave minor key with which he treats the pecking (repeated note motif) and crowing (rapid arpeggios) of a hen. Michel Corrette (1707-1795), by contrast, integrates the song of the cuckoo – the characteristic descending third that comes out in both the basso continuo and the upper line – into the lighter, more tuneful idiom of the new century in a lively piece that resembles a jig.

Leading figures in French music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) were both inspired by their Baroque forebears. The charming musical portraits that conclude this concert are adapted from Saint-Saëns's *Le carnaval des animaux* – whose elusive cuckoo and bustling chickens are by now familiar characters – and Ravel's *Ma Mère L'Oye*, a collection of fairy tales from "Mother Goose" – the "impératrice," or empress, of the pagodas is something of an ugly duckling, cursed by an angry fairy but destined to live happily in the end. This latter-day bird music often evokes a kind of touching, irresistible naiveté: Ravel conceived of his fairy-tale suite with children in mind, and Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) wrote the lovely *Cuckoo* as part of an early collection intended for pupils at his brother's school; Saint-Saëns, meanwhile, actually prohibited the public performance of *Le carnaval des animaux* during his lifetime to safeguard his reputation as a serious composer. Nevertheless, these have become some of the composers' most well-loved works, carrying forward the musical (and avian) imagination of centuries past. ■

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Dirck Hals: "Merry Company on a Terrace" (1623)

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## THE ARTISTS

### La Rêveuse

Founded by Benjamin Perrot and Florence Bolton, La Rêveuse is an ensemble of solo musicians that works on the heritage of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a period rich in artistic experiments and inventions of all kinds. The ensemble's recordings have all been acclaimed by French and international critics and have received numerous awards.

La Rêveuse is frequently invited to appear in prestigious venues in France (Auditorium de Radio France, La Folle Journée de Nantes, Les Concerts Parisiens, Fontevraud Abbey, Théâtre de l'Athénée, the Chambord and Radio-France Montpellier festivals, the Scènes Nationales of Orléans, Blois, and Quimper, the TNP de Villeurbanne, etc.) and abroad, notably in the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, Russia, Japan, the United States and Canada.

Wishing to forge links between the different artistic disciplines, the ensemble often collaborates with the world of the theatre and literature in order to give a new slant to classic texts. Among the notable productions it has premiered are *L'Autre Monde ou les États et Empires de la Lune* by Cyrano de Bergerac and *Les Caractères de La Bruyère* with the actor and director Benjamin Lazar, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* by Molière/Lully with Catherine Hiegel and François Morel, Molière's *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* with Théâtre de l'Éventail (Raphaël de Angelis) and *L'Heure verte*, a show focusing on the poets of the Cabaret du Chat Noir, with the composer Vincent Bouchot.

Alongside this, the ensemble has developed over the past few years a series of concert-lectures, aimed at museums and media libraries, which bring out parallels between music and painting of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The ensemble has also invested in knowledge transfer through Les Ateliers de Musique Ancienne (Early Music Workshops), which aim to introduce the music and arts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to a wide audience through a range of activities, including chamber music courses at the Conservatoire d'Orléans, lectures and 'discovery concerts'.

In 2017 La Rêveuse was awarded the Gold Medal of the Académie Arts-Sciences-Lettres for its overall achievement.



Photo credit: Jean Dubrana

### Florence Bolton and Benjamin Perrot directors

Florence Bolton began musical studies at the age of seven, with the harpsichord and the recorder. Attracted to bowed instruments, she finally devoted herself to the viola da gamba. After obtaining a first prize for a viola da gamba and a first chamber music prize at the Saint-Cloud Conservatory (Sylvia Abramovicz's class), she joined the early music department of the CNSM in Lyon where she studied with Marianne Muller. She obtained a first prize in 2001. She also holds a master's degree in Japanese from the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO). Florence Bolton teaches viola and chamber music in Orleans and various baroque music courses.

With Benjamin Perrot she founded and shares direction of the ensemble La Rêveuse. With La Rêveuse, she has created several shows including *The Other World or the States and Empires of the Moon* by Cyrano de Bergerac (2004) and *Les Caractères de La Bruyère* (2006), with the comedian and director Benjamin Lazar; *The Thousand and One Nights* (2011) with actress and director Louise Moaty; *Concerto Luminoso* (2012) – a magic lantern show and old music – with the visual artist Vincent Vergone; *L'Heure Verte* (2017) with the composer Vincent Bouchot, a cabaret show about the resonances of the circle of libertines of Gaston d'Orléans and the poets of the Chat Noir.

Benjamin Perrot studied lute, theorbo and baroque guitar with Eric Bellocq and Claire Antonini at the Conservatoire National Régional (CNR) in Paris, where he graduated in 1997 with the Diplôme Supérieur de Musique Ancienne. He then went on to advanced study with Pascal Monteilhet. In 1996-97 he was also trainee accompanist at the Studio Baroque de Versailles (Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles).

He is co-founder of the ensemble La Rêveuse with Florence Bolton. He also created the production *L'Autre Monde ou les États et Empires de la Lune* with the actor and director Benjamin Lazar.

He teaches lute and theorbo at the Conservatoire of Versailles and is a *répétiteur* at the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles. He also teaches on several early music training courses. ■





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