

Celebration

Sunday, April 24, 2022 • 7:30 p.m.
Benaroya Hall

Harmonia Orchestra & Chorus
William White, conductor



LILI BOULANGER (1893–1918)
D'un matin de printemps

WILLIAM C. WHITE (*1983)
The Muses, Op. 54 — WORLD PREMIERE

Introduction: The Muses — Cleio, the Muse of History — Euterpe, the Muse of Music —
Thalia, the Muse of Comedy — Melpomene, the Muse of Tragedy — Terpsichore, the Muse of Dance —
Erato, the Muse of Love Poetry — Polymnia, The Muse of Sacred Poetry —
Urania, the Muse of Astronomy — Calliope, the Muse of Epic Poetry — Coda

— **intermission** —

MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)
Daphnis et Chloé (Choreographic symphony in three parts)

Introduction (*Lent — Tres modéré*)
Religious Dance (*Modéré — Un peu plus lent — Mouvement du début — Vif*)
General Dance (*Beaucoup moins vif — Vif — Moins vif — Plus modéré*)
Dorcon's Grotesque Dance (*Très modéré — Plus animé — Plus modéré*)
Daphnis' Light and Graceful Dance (*Assez lent — Plus animé — Animé — Vif — Lent — Moins lent —
Très libre — Très modéré — Modérément animé — Tres animé — Lent — Tres agité — Modéré — Plus lent*)

Même mouvement
War Dance (*Animé et très rude — Très rude*)
Chloé's Dance of Supplication (*Modéré — Animé — Assez lent — Animé — Lent — Assez animé — Lent —
Modéré — Plus animé*)

Dawn (*Lent — Très lent — Un peu plus animé — Vif — Très lent — Lent — Animé — Lent — Animé*)
General Dance (Dance of Daphnis and Chloé — Dance of Dorcon — Final Dance: Bacchanal)

Please silence cell phones and other electronics, and refrain from the use of cameras and recording devices during the performance.
Harmonia would like to thank Zart Eby, Michael Moore and the Seattle Symphony for the loan of instruments used at this concert.
Special thanks to Ron Haight, Marc McCartney and Dianne Carlisle for their continuing support at our rehearsal venues this season.

Harmonia Orchestra and Chorus

William White, music director • George Shangrow, founder
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Maestro's Prelude

Dear Listeners,

I don't think I've ever been quite as excited for a concert program as I am for the one we're presenting tonight.

We begin with the work of Lili Boulanger. Some of you may recall that during my first season as Harmonia's music director (2018–2019) we featured one of her works on each of our (non-Messiah) concerts, including this piece, *D'un matin de printemps*. I remain as committed to Boulanger's music today as I was then, and I am so glad to give this work a repeat hearing. It is a paean to springtime and the bubbly, chirping sounds that come to life at this time of year.

The centerpiece of tonight's program is Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*, a sort of choral ballet-symphony, which may well be my favorite piece of music of all time. (At the very least it's in my top five.) It is Ravel's magnum opus, and probably the single most expertly orchestrated work ever created by anyone. It is so colorful, so vivacious and so perfectly constructed that I can do little more than stand in awe of its magnificence. (Hopefully I'll find a way to move my arms as I'm standing there.)

We're also presenting a world premiere tonight, a brand new work of my own composition. I've known that I would write something significant for Harmonia since I accepted the job as the organization's music director back in 2018. But just what to write? With a group like this, the possibilities are endless, given the myriad combinations of voices and instruments available.

Naturally, for our performance at Benaroya Hall, I wanted to compose something in which everyone could participate. I don't remember exactly how I struck upon the idea to write a piece about the muses of Ancient Greek mythology — perhaps Euterpe herself put the idea into my head — but when I got a hold of the concept, it seemed like the perfect notion for a big choral-orchestral work.

I had a lot of fun writing *The Muses* and I hope you'll have a grand time listening to it. This piece is dedicated to the musicians of Harmonia as a token of my appreciation for their support over the past four years. These singers and instrumentalists are my muses all, and I am overwhelmingly grateful for their talents and their loyalty during these most challenging times.



P.S. If you'd like another chance to celebrate all the wonderful things that Harmonia does, consider attending our annual gala concert and fundraiser on Saturday, May 7. Members of our orchestra will be joined by soprano Ellaina Lewis for an evening of songs, arias and spirituals. It's a further chance to revel in the tremendous past, present and future of this marvelous organization. It's been over a decade since this group last performed in Benaroya Hall. If you think we should return next season, this is your chance to fund such a possibility.

Program Notes

Lili Boulanger

D'un matin de printemps

Marie-Juliette Olga ("Lili") Boulanger was born August 21, 1893, in Paris, and died at Mézy-sur-Seine on March 15, 1918. She began this work in 1917, completing the orchestral version in January 1918. The score requires triple woodwinds (with piccolo, English horn, bass clarinet and contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, percussion, harp, celesta and strings.

At age 24, Lili Boulanger was nearing the end of her tragically brief life while composing her final two orchestral works and the last music written in her own hand: *D'un soir triste* ("Of a sad evening") and *D'un matin de printemps* ("Of a spring morning"). Boulanger conceived three versions of each work, with *D'un matin* being scored for violin (or flute) and piano, piano trio, and full orchestra.

"Her manuscripts for these works betray the increasing effects of her illness," writes biographer Léonie Rosenstiel. "The notes are minuscule. What reveal most the composer's steadily worsening condition are the alternative versions within a single score, the insertion of ideas between staves." *D'un matin*, which Rosenstiel calls "by turns mordant, animated, agitated and slightly ironic," exhibits the influence of Claude Debussy, who would die a mere 10 days after Lili.

William C. White

The Muses, Op. 54

White was born August 16, 1983, in Fairfax, Virginia. He composed this work between January 1 and March 17, 2022, especially for this occasion, and it receives its first performance this evening. In addition to SSATBB chorus (some of whom double on kazoo), the score calls for triple woodwinds (including piccolo, English horn, bass clarinet and contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

William White is of course familiar to Harmonia audiences as the ensemble's music director (see the program cover for additional biographical details). His *Psalm 46* was featured on this season's opening concert and his *Recollected Dances* for string orchestra on our February program, but this is the first work he has composed especially for the group, dedicating it to the board and membership of Harmonia "in deepest gratitude for their unwavering support through the quiet times."

Early during his first season as music director of Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers (now known as Harmonia), White had the idea of writing a piece called *The Muses* for the ensemble. "In fact," he says, "when we were working on a new name for the group, I thought 'The Muses' might fit the bill, and that writing a piece to accompany its unveiling would be a perfect way to celebrate the occasion. We ended up going with a different (and much better) Greek-mythology-inspired name but the idea of a choral-orchestral piece on the subject of the muses stuck with me.

"A huge bit of the inspiration for this piece comes from a number in a very obscure musical by Stephen Sondheim

called *The Frogs*, written for the student theater at Yale. Based on the Ancient Greek comedy by Aristophanes, it features an *a cappella* choral number, 'Invocation to the Muses,' in which each muse is named and given a short title. In essence, *The Muses* is a spinning-out of this piece."

Sondheim is certainly among the musical influences, but so are "Ravel, Holst, Orff and, to a lesser extent, Herbert Howells and Björk. I had intended this to be the final composition of my very fertile lockdown period, which I had thought was going to last a bit longer than it did. But then the Hot Vax Summer of 2021 arrived, and suddenly everything became possible again. Although I had done a fair amount of the groundwork and text research during the non-existent 2020–2021 season, the composition proper had to wait until January 2022."

At first, White thought the piece would "be like the Sondheim 'Invocation' meets Ravel's *Daphnis*—each muse's name would be invoked, then the choir would blend into the orchestral fabric." The text (excerpted from *Library of History* by first-century B.C.E. Greco-Italian historian Diodorus Siculus) "describes each of the muses and explains the linguistic derivation of their name. This gave me the one consistent compositional element that appears in each of the sections: I use a harmonic 'spotlight' on each of the root words that give the muses their names."

White eventually decided to set the Diodorus text in Ancient Greek rather than in English translation. "I know precisely zero about the language," he admits, "but I thought that it would be a good way to distinguish the piece. (There are thousands of pieces written in Classical Latin, so why not one in Ancient Greek?) While Diodorus lived in the age of Classical (Koiné) Greek, the *Library of History* was purposefully written in a learned, archaic style that is very much Ancient Greek in its particulars (or so I am led to believe by my advisors, Ellen Kaisse and Marcello Cormio.)"

The Muses consists of nine sections (one for each muse) surrounded by an introduction and coda. "The opening represents the light bulb of a creative idea—the very moment that is supposedly most connected to the muses themselves. Each section involves some combination of the muse's subject area (comedy, tragedy, dance, etc.), the description given by Diodorus (Kleio comes from 'mega kleos,' the great glory of heroic men written about by the historians), and any folk traditions that have associated a muse with a particular instrument (Kleio's cornetto, Euterpe's panpipes)."

Each muse receives its own character piece: Cleio gets a Turkish march (with reeds, muted trumpets and kazoos evoking her cornetto), replete with a "Turkish crescent" in the percussion section; Euterpe, the muse of music, interestingly has the shortest time in the spotlight (a mere seven bars); Thalia's romp has a definite "Comedy Tonight" vibe; Melpomene's music is appropriately somber and reflective; Terpsichore gets a pop ballad befitting a Disney princess; Erato's material builds to a grand climax; Polymnia's music is more pensive; Urania, the muse of astronomy, calls to mind Holst's *The Planets*; and Calliope's segment has a sense of the epic, leading to a quiet coda.

Maurice Ravel *Daphnis et Chloé*

Joseph-Maurice Ravel was born in Ciboure, France, on March 7, 1875, and died in Paris on December 28, 1937. He began work on the ballet *Daphnis et Chloé* in 1909, completing the score in 1912. The first performance took place in Paris on June 8 of that year. In addition to wordless chorus, the score calls for 3 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), alto flute, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, Eb clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, a very large percussion battery (including a wind machine), celesta, 2 harps and strings.

The ballet impresario Sergei Diaghilev is responsible for a number of works that today greet audiences far more often in the concert hall than in staged performances. Among these, of course, are the three great ballets of Igor Stravinsky—*The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913)—as well as the remarkable ballet that premiered between those last two, Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*. Stravinsky himself called *Daphnis* "not only Ravel's best work, but also one of the most beautiful products of all French music."

Daphnis underwent a longer-than-intended gestation, in part due to the personalities and high standards of Ravel's collaborators, who included choreographer Michel Fokine, designer Léon Bakst, dancers Vaslav Nijinsky and Tamara Karsavina, and conductor Pierre Monteux. In a 1909 letter, Ravel wrote: "I've had a really insane week: preparation of a ballet libretto for the next Russian season. Almost every night, work until 3 a.m. What particularly complicates matters is that Fokine doesn't know a word of French, and I only know how to swear in Russian. Even with interpreters around you can imagine how chaotic our meetings are."

Fokine had for some time been keen to choreograph the tale of *Daphnis and Chloé*, adapted from a story attributed to the Greek author Longus (who lived around the second-century C.E.) via a 1559 French translation by poet Jacques Amyot, welcoming Ravel's involvement: "I was delighted that a musician of such talent was going to write music for my *Daphnis* ballet, and I felt that the music would be unusual, colorful and, most important, what I sincerely wished—totally unlike any other ballet music."

Ravel initially envisioned a "great choreographic symphony in three parts... a vast musical fresco," completing a piano score by May 1910. But significant revisions followed, particularly to the General Dance that ends the ballet, forcing the premiere to be twice postponed. When Ravel delivered the final version of this scene, the *corps de ballet* objected to the irregular $\frac{5}{4}$ meter, prompting Ravel to suggest they chant "Ser-gei-Dia-ghi-lev" to keep track of the pulse.

"The work is constructed symphonically," Ravel explained, "out of a small number of themes, the development of which ensures the work's homogeneity." As the ballet opens, orphans *Daphnis* and *Chloé* fall in love; in a central episode, pirates abduct *Chloé*, and the god *Pan* rescues her; the final scene reunites the young lovers and ends in celebration.

The premiere took place at the end of the 1911–1912 Ballet Russes season, allowing for only two performances, on a program that included Rimsky Korsakov's *Scheherazade* on the first half. (Diaghilev would reprise the work during the next two Paris seasons, as well as in London.) Critical reaction to the production as a whole was mixed, but *Le Figaro* considered it "the most accomplished and the most poetic work which we owe to M. Diaghilev's artistic enterprise."

Ravel's music quickly found its way into the concert hall. In fact, a suite (comprising the bulk of the second scene) had been performed and published a year before the premiere of the ballet, and a second suite (essentially consisting of the third scene) followed, the latter becoming an orchestral staple. Performances of the complete ballet—Ravel's longest work, on the grandest of scales, and the closest he would ever come to writing a symphony—is heard much less often in live performance, and even more rarely with the wordless chorus that the composer Ravel employs throughout the ballet as yet another evocative timbre in his seemingly inexhaustible instrumental palette.

Although he prepared orchestral cues to replace the choral passages when absolutely necessary in smaller theaters, Ravel considered the chorus indispensable. When Diaghilev mounted the London production *sans* chorus, the composer wrote a scathing letter to *The Times*, calling the omission of the choral parts "disrespectful towards the London public as well as the composer."

The ballet opens in a "meadow at the edge of a sacred wood" on "a bright spring afternoon." Ravel quickly introduces several musical motives that will recur frequently. Youths enter, carrying gifts for three nymphs depicted on an altar. They engage in a religious dance; meanwhile, Daphnis and Chloé, orphans and childhood friends, arrive on the scene. Young girls swirl around Daphnis in a lively $\frac{7}{4}$ dance, causing Chloé to experience jealousy for the first time.

A cowherd, Dorcon, expresses interest in Chloé. Someone proposes a dance-off between Daphnis and Dorcon,

with a kiss from Chloé being the prize. Dorcon performs grotesquely, the crowd imitating him mockingly; Daphnis dances gracefully, emerging victorious and claiming his kiss. Chloé and the worshipers recede, leaving Daphnis to become entranced by a shepherdess, Lyceion, who dances seductively. Pirates arrive on the scene and kidnap Chloé. In an extended *a cappella* interlude, the three nymphs come alive and invoke the god Pan.

The second scene unfolds at the pirates' camp, where the ruffians scurry about, unloading their plunder and dancing violently. The chief pirate forces Chloé to perform a dance of supplication. She attempts to escape (more than once) but is rebuffed each time. Satyrs surround the camp and Pan appears, causing the pirates to flee.

The third section opens with perhaps the most brilliant musical evocation of a sunrise in the orchestral literature. The scene is that of the opening of the ballet. "No sound but the murmur of rivulets of dew trickling from the rocks," Ravel summarized. "Little by little, day breaks. Bird songs are heard. Herdsmen arrive searching for Daphnis and Chloé. They find Daphnis and awaken him. In anguish, he looks around for Chloé, who at last appears. . . . They throw themselves into each other's arms."

An elderly shepherd explains that Pan saved Chloé because of his love of the nymph Syrinx. Daphnis and Chloé proceed to mime the story Pan and Syrinx. "Chloé impersonates the young nymph wandering in the meadow. Daphnis appears as Pan and declares his love. The nymph repulses him. He grows more insistent. She disappears among the reeds. In despair, he plucks some reeds and shapes them into a flute and plays a melancholy tune. Chloé returns and dances to the melody of the flute. The dance grows more and more animated and, in a mad whirl, Chloé falls into Daphnis' arms. . . . A group of young girls . . . enters. Daphnis and Chloé embrace tenderly. A group of young men invade the stage. Joyous tumult. General Dance."

— Jeff Eldridge

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