

The Sacred Heart Church, Wadhurst  
Saturday November 29<sup>th</sup> 7.30pm

**GERSHWIN -  
*CONCERTO IN F***

100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 1925 - 2025



Plus music by Debussy and Faure

Steve Law, piano

*Collection in aid of The Sacred Heart Church*

# *Programme*

**Claude Debussy**      *Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum (1908)*

from *Children's Corner*

*Images Oubliées No.1 (1894)*

- *Lent (Melancolique et doux)*

*Clair de lune (1890 revised 1905)*

from *Suite Bergamasque*

**Gabriele Faure**      *Nocturne No.6 Op.63 (1895)*

**George Gershwin**      *Concerto in F (1925)*

1. *Allegro*

2. *Adagio – Andante con moto*

3. *Allegro agitato*

(with recorded orchestral accompaniment arranged by Steve Law)

**Steve Law**      *Forgiveness (2011)*

Steve Law (piano)

*All contributions for The Sacred Heart Church are gratefully appreciated.*

This year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> year since the first performance of George Gershwin's wonderful and ever popular *Concerto in F*. To celebrate I have been performing the concerto with a special orchestral part I made from real recordings and my own recordings of Gershwin's orchestration made on my Yamaha workstation.

*Concerto in F* will always hold a special place in my heart. When I discovered Gershwin's music around the age of 14 I saw the BBC tribute *The Gershwin Years* which included Peter Donohoe performing the last movement of *Concerto in F*. I was completely bowled over!

My sister had an LP of the magical 1971 Gershwin recordings by Andre Previn with the London Symphony Orchestra. I instantly loved the *Rhapsody* but found *Concerto in F* to be something far greater and deeper. I had loved John Williams' orchestral film scores for *Superman* and *Star Wars* from a young age but it was Gershwin who inspired my exploration of piano concertos and classical music. I am sure Gershwin has inspired millions of others. His blend of popular music and jazz influences with classical forms was unique but came naturally to a man of the people like Gershwin; he was just as sincere writing hit songs for Broadway as he was writing symphonic works for the concert hall or opera.

I studied my father's score of the solo version of the concerto and within a year I had learned *Rhapsody in Blue* and the *Concerto* before having a piano lesson. I had already taught myself to read music by studying scores by Scott Joplin and composing piano rags but suddenly I wanted to write a piano concerto! (I made several attempts in my mid-teens.)

Gershwin's *Concerto* is a one-off inspiration. It seems to conjure up every possible image and feeling of America. Besides from its youthful energy and love of life there is an underlying melancholy. There are also some of Gershwin's most memorable and beautiful melodies.

The first movement presents a series of jazz inspired portraits. There is the use of the Charleston rhythm and pentatonic scale in sections of great rhythmic energy. The recurring main theme is slower and uses repeating notes with a shifting chord accompaniment. There is another gorgeous slower paced theme in E major.

The bluesy *Adagio* has a haunting melancholic atmosphere.

The magnificent finale features Gershwin's love of fast repeated notes and a brilliantly innovative form – bringing in reminiscences from the first two movements.

*Concerto in F* was composed and orchestrated in just 6 months between May and November 1925. It was the first work Gershwin orchestrated himself (with some help, perhaps) but it demonstrates an incredible advance in expression and form so soon after the *Rhapsody in Blue* of 1924. It was commissioned by Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony and premiered on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1925 with the composer as soloist. It has become the most popular, performed and highly regarded piano concertos of the twentieth century.

**Debussy** dedicated his Children's Corner suite to his baby daughter Claude-Emma. *Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum* is a reference to a set of well-known piano exercises published by Czerny and Clementi. *Images Oubliées* date from 1894. They were

unpublished in Debussy's lifetime, with 'Oubliées' (forgotten) added posthumously to distinguish them from his two later sets of *Images*. Debussy did publish a revised version of the second piece *Sarabande* in his suite *Pour le piano* of 1901.

Debussy's famous *Clair de Lune*, meaning moonlight, takes its title from Verlaine's poem of the same name.

**Faure's** sixth Nocturne is one of his greatest and best known. It was composed in 1894 while spending the summer at his parents-in-law's. It has three contrasting ideas with different time signatures. Faure delights as always in unexpected modulations, irregular length phrases and searching chromatic harmonies. Floating above it all is continuous singing melody.



**Steve Law** is a composer, arranger and pianist who lives with his wife Lorna in Wadhurst. He studied music at Bristol University under Raymond Warren and received a Masters degree in composition for his opera *Heaven On Earth*.

Steve's music mixes classical and popular styles with catchy melodies and jazzy rhythms. His *Piano Concerto* was released by Navona in 2022 on *Symphonic Chronicles Vol.1*. with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and pianist Joseph Havlat conducted by David Watkin. It received an Oppenheim John Memorial Trust award and a *BBC Music Magazine* 4 star

review, being described as 'a likeable collection of modern, robustly tonal orchestral music.' Steve's *Violin Concerto* was premiered in 2017 in Scotland by violinist Mark Wilson and conductor Paul Wood. *3 Poems by Lorna Law* were performed at *Harrow Summer Music* in 2018 by Ferrier award winning baritone Gareth Brynmor John. *Musicweb International* described Steve's first CD of piano music as 'kaleidoscopically varied works...engagement with melody, impressionistic... jazzy syncopation....slowly burning passion'.

Steve has recorded numerous albums of his own music including *Resonance* (2011) from which *Forgiveness* can be found.

Steve is also one of the most accurate note for note transcribers of piano music from recordings. His sheet music arrangements of Dudley Moore's album *Songs Without Words* are published by Faber and his transcriptions of all Gershwin's improvisations from the 1920s and 30s are in the process of being published in the *Gershwin Critical Edition* based at the University of Michigan. Arrangements by Steve of recreating Fats Waller, Russ Conway, Elton John, Billy Taylor etc. are available to buy at *Sheet Music Direct* along with original compositions.

Steve has often performed his own music alongside favourite composers like Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Debussy and Prokofiev. He has a long association with Scott Joplin, Gershwin and Billy Mayerl. In 2012-13 Steve performed unique tribute concerts, starting at St James's Piccadilly, recreating the music and jazz of Dudley Moore. Dudley phoned and invited Steve to meet him in London in 1999. Steve co-founded *Harrow Summer Music* in 2014.