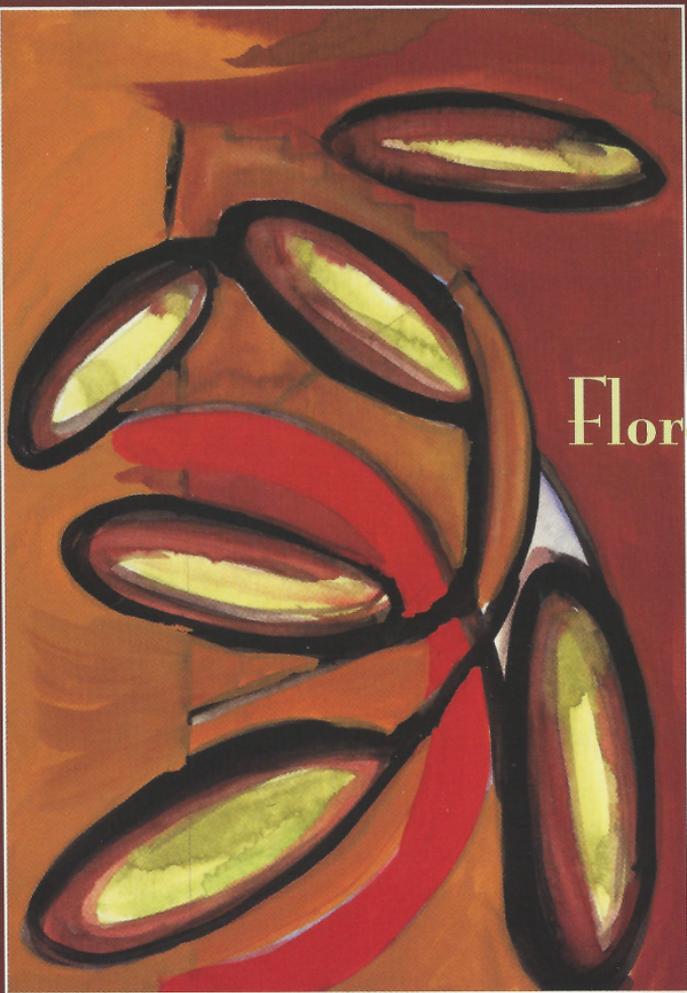


ARSIS

The Piano
Duet Music of

Florent Schmitt
(1870–1958)

Timothy & Nancy
LeRoi Nickel
pianists



The Piano Duet Music of Florent Schmitt (1870-1958)

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Feuillets de voyage, op. 26

(Pages of a Travel Journal)

1	Sérénade	3:31
2	Visite (Company)	2:24
3	Compliments (Greetings)	1:00
4	Douceur du soir (Twilight)	1:55
5	Danse britannique (Dance of Brittany)	1:32
6	Berceuse (Cradle song)	4:29
7	Mazurka	1:25
8	Marche burlesque	2:37
9	Retour à l'endroit familial (Home, Sweet Home!)	2:21
10	Vals (Waltz)	4:35

Humoresques, op. 43

11	Marche militaire	3:16
12	Rondeau	1:47
13	Bucolique	4:02
14	Scherzetto	2:46
15	Valse sentimentale	2:55
16	Danse grotesque	2:12

Reflets d'Allemagne, op. 28

(Reflections of Germany)

17	Heidelberg	2:48	21	Vienna	2:49
18	Coblenz	2:41	22	Dresden	1:37
19	Lübeck	2:36	23	Nuremberg	3:00
20	Werder	2:26	24	Munich	3:50

Total CD Time: 64:34

Recorded on March 25-27, 2008 at St. John the Baptist Episcopal Parish on the campus of the Oregon Episcopal School, Portland, OR.

Steinway piano, courtesy of Sherman Clay Moe's Pianos, Portland OR

Recording engineer and digital editing: Rob Gwynn, Palatine Recordings, Portland, OR

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Like Schubert, Dvorak, and Mozart, Florent Schmitt had a special affection for the piano duet medium. His ten collections of music for one piano, four hands comprise sixty-five separate pieces. Some are instructional pieces, but five of the ten collections are full-length concert fare. The three works on this disc are the first complete recordings of this charming music, written within a ten-year period before the devastation of the First World War. (Schmitt's *Une semaine du petit Elfe Ferme-l'oeil*, op. 58, based on stories of *Ol'Shut-Eye the Sandman* by Hans Christian Andersen, is available on Arsis CD #137, also recorded by the LeRoi Nickel Duo.)

As a composer, Florent Schmitt is revered in his native France but little known to the larger musical world. He was born in the town of Blamont near Strassbourg in 1870 and entered the Paris Conservatory at the age of nineteen. His teachers included Massenet and Fauré. He won the coveted Prix de Rome in 1900, a composition award that combined study in Italy with European travel. Two of the three works on this disc were the result of that travel experience. The *Feuillets de voyage*, begun in 1903, were probably musical sketches in his journal. Only the *Danse britannique* is inspired by a particular place. The *Reflets d'Allemagne*, however, are specific musical portraits in waltz form of eight German and Austrian cities, published in 1905. The composer orchestrated both works. The six *Humoresques* date from 1911.

Three pieces by Schmitt that are still in the general repertory were written in this same period, *The Tragedy of Salome*, *Psalm 47*, and the *Piano*

Quintet, opus 51. His large compositional output covered most musical forms, including orchestral music, ballet and film scores, chamber music, choral and instrumental works, and music for piano solo, piano duet, two pianos, and organ. Schmitt was a member of the Société Musicale Indépendante and President of the Société Nationale de Musique. He served as the director of the Lyon Conservatory and later as the acerbic music critic for *Le temps*, known to preempt his print deadline and pronounce his judgments during the performance he was reviewing. He traveled widely and appeared as soloist in his *Symphonie Concertante* for piano and orchestra in Boston in 1932. Schmitt received much recognition from the French government, including Commander of the *Légion d'honneur* and the Grand Prix Musical de Paris. He died in Neuilly-sur-Seine in 1958.

Florent Schmitt was a modest but constant presence in French musical life from "La Belle Epoch" through the middle of the 20th century. Winning the Prix de Rome was no simple matter. Debussy, Massenet, Bizet, Gounod, and Berlioz all won this award from the *Académie des Beaux Arts* for a four-year stipend at the Villa Medici in Rome. Maurice Ravel failed in all five of his attempts to win the coveted scholarship. Schmitt, however, was a good friend of Ravel, beginning in their student days at the Conservatoire. They were members of "Les Apaches," a wild group of young Bohemian composers and poets working in Paris at the turn of the century. Schmitt was often seen in intense conversation with Erik Satie and did his best to shout down the crowd during the famous riot that greeted the 1913 premiere of the *Rite of Spring*. While the composers around him affected

him during this time, it is clear that Schmitt exercised an even stronger influence upon them. Stravinsky wrote that he listened closely to Schmitt's 1907 ballet *Salome* while composing the *Rite of Spring*. Even his teacher, Gabriel Fauré, learned from his student. The pianist Marguerite Long, in her book *At the Piano with Fauré*, recalled hearing a work by Schmitt involving the whole tone scale, after which an agitated Fauré said to her, "Me, too. I'm going to write a piece in whole tones."

The qualities of Schmitt's style include an intense lyricism (as in the *Retour*), humor (the bold *Marche militaire* that loses its courage), irony (see the *Marche burlesque* and *Danse grotesque*), driving rhythms (in the *Danse britannique* and *Munich*), a languid quality (*Bucolique*), thick texture and sometimes violent extremes (as heard in *Vienna*, *Heidelberg*, and the waltz that ends the *Feuillets*), sentimentality (*Dresden* and the *Valse sentimentale*), tenderness (the *Berceuse*), and pianistic color (like the ravishing depiction of twilight.) His music is always well crafted and distinctive, never forced, arbitrary, or egotistical. It has a genuine and direct quality. Fauré offers this advice in an often-quoted letter to Schmitt's early benefactress:

Artistic conscience alone should guide him (Schmitt) – the desire to express his sentiments faithfully and for perfection of form, without concern for immediate or eventual external success. To express that which is within you with sincerity, in the clearest and most perfect manner, would seem to me always the ultimate goal of art.

—Timothy Nickel

Timothy and Nancy LeRoi Nickel specialize in the research, study, and performance of original music for one piano, four hands. They have performed twice at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall in New York City and gave their London debut in 1990 in the Purcell Room. After graduate study at the University of Illinois and the University of Portland, the Nickels received the Advanced Certificate from London's Guildhall School in 1984. They have recorded two CDs of piano duet music on the ARSIS label, *Romantic Connections* (ARSIS CD114) including music by Schumann, Mendelssohn and Herman Goetz, and *Family Classics* (ARSIS CD137), works inspired by childhood by Fauré, Bizet, Ravel, and Florent Schmitt. As an organ duet team, the LeRoi Nickel Duo has recorded two discs. *For Two to Play* (ARSIS CD104) features music by composers from Elizabethan England to the present day, including Beethoven, Schubert, Samuel Wesley, Thomas Tomkins, and Frank Ferko. *Music for Organ Duet* on the Palatine label (PI9-0501) contains works by Mozart, Liszt, and Igor Stravinsky. The Nickels live and teach in Portland, Oregon.



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