

Reveries

This recording almost requires a subtitle, lest someone think that the word “Reveries” suggests “Nap Time.” Yet, after considering—and rejecting—such expanded titles as *Reveries: An Orchestral Showcase* or *Reveries: Journey Music* as too academic, we decided to leave “Reveries” alone. Listeners will immediately discover on their own that there is nothing sleepy, and certainly nothing academic, about this CD.

In the Reference Recordings tradition of providing a state-of-the-art sonic experience, the Minnesota Orchestra has chosen some of the repertoire's best show-off music—hence, our urge to subtitle this CD “An Orchestral Showcase.” Beautiful solo playing by English Horn Marni J. Hougham, Principal Cello Anthony Ross, Principal Flute Adam Kuenzel and the support of exquisite ensemble performance recreate some of the highest achievements in orchestral writing of the late Romantic era.

And here's the surprise: This showcase eschews the dizzying tempos of the usual demonstration of orchestral technique in favor of the measured pace of basic human rhythms. When we thought of calling it “Journey Music,” we had a special kind of journey in mind. A journey on foot. A journey of the mind. A journey into the human heart. To put a virtuoso orchestra into the service of music that unfolds temperately is to find musical vitality and energy in a whole new context.

Once upon a long time ago—in the 1600s—composers and instrumentalists considered the human organism as the authoritative source and basis for their music. Just as surely as everyone now agrees that water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit, and that it freezes at 32 degrees, they then agreed that music had a particular beat, or tempo. Musicians declared that the standard beat for music was 60 per minute—the predictable rate of the human heart at rest, the number of steps paced by an average human in motion.

This human pace so appealed to all the composers on this CD that they harnessed their music to it; yet, they produced orchestral statements of such variety that a listener might not immediately discern their common tempo. The musical term “andante” suggests a walking tempo, and walk we might to Fauré's *Pavane* or Tchaikovsky's *Andante Cantabile* from his String Quartet No. 1. But such is the difference in their characters that we might be moved to a mental journey with other works, similarly marked “andante” in their scores. The *Swan of Tuonela* and *Solveig's Song* pull our thoughts and spirits into a world paced by the human heartbeat.

And so we stayed with “Reveries,” a word redolent of dreams and mental journeys. It suggests “lost in thought,” a condition that this music sustains powerfully.

A curious coincidence . . .

Was there something in the European water around the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century that prompted so much luxurious orchestral writing? The fact is that all of the music on *Reveries* had its origin in that era, a time that the French called “la belle époque.” The term itself prompts us to fall into a state of daydreaming about “the beautiful era”—never mind that it wasn't entirely beautiful—when the world knew a good measure of peace and prosperity, and the fine arts flourished in the great capitals of the West such as Paris, St. Petersburg, Berlin, and Vienna. Even composers who encountered personal economic struggles and recognized society's inequities maintained the capacity to create gorgeous sonic worlds of substance and complexity, music that has endured to inspire generations of listeners with its beauties.

Erik Satie (1866-1925)

Gymnopédie No. 1

Of the dozens of piano works that the eccentric French composer Erik Satie created, none has found such a wide audience as the set of three *Gymnopédies* that he composed for piano solo in the late 1880s, early in his career. Eager to escape the constraints of life with his father and stepmother, Satie fled in 1887 to a life of bohemian individualism in Montmartre, where he found employment as house musician and conductor at the Chat Noir cabaret. He had already attempted, and ultimately rejected, classes at the Paris Conservatoire, where his piano teacher Emile Descombes described him as the laziest student in the institution. Satie, for his part, regarded the Conservatoire as “a sort of local penitentiary” and he railed against its inflexible rules. His eventual output of substantial compositions, along with his influential thinking on the subject of music theory, proved that what passed for laziness in the young man had simply disguised the creativity and originality of a truly unique composer. In the last 120 years—and isn’t it amazing that something so evocative of today could be that old?—many musicians have adapted Satie’s *Gymnopédies* for other instruments, including his friend Claude Debussy, who, in the late 1890s, created orchestrations of Nos. 1 and 3 (Track 12).

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Reverie

Debussy’s *Reverie* affords an opportunity for imaginative mental wanderings. Among the earliest of his compositions, *Reverie* came to Debussy in the same period as such well-known piano works as *Claire de lune* and the *Two Arabesques*. At the time of its composition, 1890, Debussy’s life was taking on added dimensions, and his subsequent piano writing became more sophisticated. In 1889 he had first encountered exotic Javanese gamelan music at the Paris Exposition and he was finding stimulating associations with other artists and poets of the era in cafes and salons. In the early piano writing, however, Debussy had already set his priorities on the clarity, tonal colors, and atmosphere that were ever the hallmarks of his music. *Reverie* has prompted numerous arrangements for other instruments, such as this orchestration by Hubert Mouton.

Gabriel-Urbain Fauré (1845-1924)

Pavane, Opus 50

Pavane can easily call up images of dance motions, as listeners innately respond to its stately movement. Although he wrote music for the theater in the form of incidental music, Fauré never wrote a formal ballet. Yet, he clearly conceived of this composition as dance music (a pavane is a slow Spanish court dance), and it has inspired many dance performances over the years since its premiere in 1887.

Fauré dedicated the *Pavane* to the Countess Greffulhe, a reigning member of

Parisian high society. In fact, Fauré created a version of *Pavane* that utilized a hidden chorus singing texts written by the Countess's cousin, Robert de Montesquiou. (What Fauré, a true master of vocal writing, thought about the pallid poetry, we can only guess, but there's a good reason that the choral version of *Pavane* with the Montesquiou text is seldom performed.) What Fauré himself described as the "elegant" line of the flute melody was bolstered by chorus, orchestra, mimes, and dancers in a nocturnal festivity staged by the Countess Greffulhe in July 1891 in the Bois de Boulogne. That Parisian parkland, where the wealthy paraded in their carriages by day and dined elegantly in restaurants by evening, made a suitably fanciful setting for the event.

Subsequently, companies such as the Paris Opéra (1895) and the Ballets Russes (1917) choreographed and staged their own versions of *Pavane*. In our era, the music has endured as a beloved concert work for orchestra alone.

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) ***Solveig's Song, from *Peer Gynt****

The legendary *Peer Gynt*, of Norse folklore, inspired the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen to write a monumental verse drama for which he solicited his compatriot Edvard Grieg to compose incidental music. *Peer Gynt* premiered in an Oslo theater in 1876, with Grieg's music underscoring Ibsen's characterizations in vivid terms. "The music is rarely just music," Grieg wrote. "I have taken risks by trying to characterize and to caricature...in order to make the audience understand the poet's intention." The hero, *Peer Gynt*, is a man of fabulous imagination, a self-important braggart who engages in a fantastic series of world-wide adventures, while the loyal love of his youth, Solveig, languishes at home. Near the end of his life he returns to Norway, where Death awaits him. He hears his faithful Solveig, still alone, still beautiful, singing of her love for him. Her song, piercing in its sublime simplicity, shames him, and the two are ultimately united shortly before *Peer Gynt's* death.

Jules Massenet (1842-1912) ***The Last Sleep of the Virgin***

Massenet is overwhelmingly known for his operas, which, after those of his countryman Gounod, found the greatest success of any in the French repertoire. Three of the most well-known, *Manon*, *Werther*, and *Thäïs*—composed between 1885 and 1894—still receive performances throughout the world. Between the time of his winning the Grand Prix de Rome (1863) and his first big success as an opera composer, Massenet completed a "legende sacrée," a sacred legend, in four scenes, on the Christian story of the Virgin Mary. Completed in 1878, *La Vierge* (The Virgin) is a large-scale work for orchestra, chorus, and soloists. It has disappeared long since from the concert stage—with the exception of this lovely prelude to the last scene, "The Last Sleep of the Virgin." The cello solo is reminiscent of the lyricism that distinguishes Massenet's operatic masterpieces.

Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari
Intermezzo No. 1 from *The Jewels of the Madonna*

Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari, the son of an Italian mother and a German father, became one of the most successful opera composers of the early twentieth century. Wolf-Ferrari achieved particular success in the first decade of that century with such operas as *Il segreto di Susanna* (Susanna's secret being that she smoked, heaven forbid, cigarettes) and *I gioielli della Madonna* (The Jewels of the Madonna). Premiered in Berlin in 1911 as *Der Schmuck der Madonna*, the opera was performed in Italian, its original language, in January 1912 in Chicago, where Wolf-Ferrari's operas were highly successful. The tranquil arioso of the Intermezzo, the introduction to Act II of *The Jewels of the Madonna*, reveals Wolf-Ferrari's connections to the *bel canto* origins of his maternal heritage.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun

The Prelude constitutes a reverie within a reverie—the sleepy, lascivious desires of a faun, brought to the sensuous light of a summer day by the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé. Originally conceived as a work for the theater, Mallarmé's idea found little public success until, on his third try, he created a long pastoral poem that struck an imaginative vein. He published *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (The Afternoon of a Faun) in a beautifully printed and bound edition with a drawing by Edouard Manet, and his friend Claude Debussy adapted the story for his own use. In October 1894, Debussy completed composition, and an audience first heard the siren sound of his flute on a December concert in Paris that same year. What must the winter-chilled listeners have imagined, when, with that sensuous, languorous flute call, Debussy drew them into a summer afternoon of dreamy eroticism?

In the poem, as in the music, we find the faun lost in thought, imagining the most delicious life for himself. "These nymphs I would perpetuate," he muses (in the translation by Roger Fry). "So clear their light carnation, that it floats in the air heavy with tufted slumbers. Was it a dream I loved?" To complement images of nature and ancient mythical beings, Mallarmé introduced the sounds of reeds and panpipes, directing Debussy's own muse toward the woodwinds that he employed so enchantingly. In the end, the faun relinquishes his passionate fantasies "to midday's proud silence" and sighs, with the flute, "No more, I must sleep, forgetting the outrage, on the thirsty sand lying, and as I delight open my mouth to wine's potent star. Adieu, both!" he murmurs to the nymphs of his imagination, "I shall see the shade you became."

Charles Gounod (1818-1893)
Le sommeil de Juliette, from *Roméo et Juliette*

In the decade following his great success with *Faust*, the opera he based upon Goethe's play of that title, Gounod once again turned to one of the masters of literature for inspiration. The 1867 Paris premiere of *Roméo et Juliette* re-established Gounod as a universally acclaimed composer. As they had done with *Faust*, Gounod and his librettists took liberties with the plot of *Roméo et Juliette* in order to add musical drama to Shakespeare's concept. The orchestral interlude "Juliette's Sleep" precedes such a departure from Shakespeare that affords the young lovers an exquisite love duet before dying. The orchestral interlude, as well as the duet itself, which ends the opera, exhibit Gounod's lyric gift at its finest.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
Pavane for a Dead Princess

Gabriel Fauré's *Pavane*, composed in 1887, had already established itself as a familiar work when Maurice Ravel wrote his own stately *Pavane*. A student of Fauré at the Paris Conservatoire, Ravel no doubt meant the *Pavane pour une infante défunte* as an homage to his professor, a tribute to the man and his musical craft. Ravel frequently composed music for the piano that he subsequently orchestrated in his typically brilliant instrumental style. Having written the *Pavane* in 1887, Ravel returned to the piece in 1910 to create this exquisite orchestral version. In keeping with the older period to which he paid tribute, Ravel used instrumental colors of great clarity and refinement, creating a meditation that carries the listener into a suspended world.

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
***Andante Cantabile* from String Quartet No. 1, Opus 11**

Although Tchaikovsky did not imagine this music in relationship to a folk epic like the Norse *Peer Gynt* or the Finnish *Kalevala*, the *Andante Cantabile* from his First String Quartet nonetheless connects the listener with the world of folk song. Early in his career, Tchaikovsky had had great success with his beautiful orchestral work *Romeo and Juliet*. In 1871 he decided to produce a concert of his own works in order to earn some money and he set out specifically to compose a string quartet of "pure" music, not based on the kind of story element that he had exploited so successfully with *Romeo and Juliet*. Yet, he created the second movement, the lovely *Andante cantabile*, from a folksong that he had collected at Kamenka. The lovely melody has surpassed the remainder of the Quartet in catching the public ear. This string orchestra arrangement by Clark McAlister captures Tchaikovsky's ability to balance the asymmetry of the folk tune with the formal nature of the string quartet.

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

The Swan of Tuonela, from *Legends*, Opus 22

Like Ibsen and Grieg, with their Peer Gynt creation, Jean Sibelius turned to Nordic folk materials for his inspiration in *Four Legends from the Kalevala*, the great Finnish epic. He composed the work in the 1890s. The second of the *Legends*, “The Swan of Tuonela,” continues the story begun in the first installment, “Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of Saari.” In that portion of the legend, the hero, Lemminkäinen, had eloped with the fairest of Saari’s maidens, Kyllikki. In the second chapter, Lemminkäinen has been sent to kill the swan of Tuonela in order to prove his worthiness for Kyllikki. Through Tuonela, which is the mythological underworld in the Kalevala, flows a dark river, and upon that river floats the swan, singing soulfully. The English horn, with its haunting and sonorous texture, conveys all the mystery of the Finnish landscape, as well as the centuries of legend that have contributed to this vibrant tale. With a melody as achingly beautiful as this, it is no surprise that Lemminkäinen ultimately meets his death, by snakebite, upon the river of Tuonela.

Erik Satie (1866-1925)

Gymnopédie No. 3

In addition to his forward-thinking eclecticism (see notes for Track 1), Erik Satie also turned his musical attention to the aesthetics of the Medieval period, particularly plainsong. During his younger years, during which he composed the three piano *Gymnopédies*, Satie’s studies of that era supported his own tendency toward simplicity of melodic line and of harmonic motion. Like his visual artist colleagues who admired the art of the Middle Ages, Satie used the older aesthetic to produce works that sound at once ancient and modern. The *Gymnopédies*, even in their Debussy orchestrations, make perfect examples of that duality.

—Sandra Hyslop

EIJI OUE

Eiji Oue became the ninth music director of the Minnesota Orchestra in 1995. Before joining the Minnesota Orchestra, Eiji Oue served as music director of Pennsylvania's Erie Philharmonic from 1991 to 1995. He has guest conducted widely throughout the United States, Europe and Japan. In 1996 Oue became music director of the Grand Teton Music Festival. Oue was named chief conductor of Germany's Radio-Philharmonie Hannover of the NDR in 1997 and he has served as professor of conducting at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hannover since 2001. In April, 2003, Oue assumes the role of music director of the Osaka Philharmonic in Japan.

A native of Hiroshima, Japan, Eiji Oue studied at the Toho School of Music, where he began his conducting studies with Hideo Saito, who had been the teacher of Seiji Ozawa. Oue first came to the United States in 1978 when Ozawa invited him to spend the summer studying at the Tanglewood Music Center where he was awarded an artist diploma in conducting. He subsequently studied at the New England Conservatory of Music. While at Tanglewood, Oue became a protégé of Leonard Bernstein. During the summer of 1990, Oue assisted Bernstein in the creation of the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan, serving as resident conductor for the Festival Orchestra.

Eiji Oue has won numerous honors and awards, among them the Koussevitzky Prize at Tanglewood in 1980 and both first prize and the Hans Haring Gold Medal in the 1981 conducting competition at the Salzburg Mozarteum. And some honors are unofficial: the family of Leonard Bernstein presented Oue with the baton and concert jacket from the maestro's last concert.



MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

The Minnesota Orchestra, founded in 1903 as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, has long been recognized as one of America's leading symphony orchestras. Eiji Oue carries on the tradition embodied in the ensemble's roster of celebrated music directors: Edo de Waart (1986-95), Sir Neville Marriner (1979-86), Stanislaw Skrowaczewski (1960-79), Antal Dorati (1949-60), Dimitri Mitropoulos (1937-49), Eugene Ormandy (1931-36), Henri Verbrugghen (1923-31) and Emil Oberhoffer (1903-22).

The Minnesota Orchestra's radio history began in 1923 with a national broadcast under guest conductor Bruno Walter and continues today with a broadcast series produced by Minnesota Public Radio for the Public Radio International network and carried on more than 100 stations in the United States as well as on the cable system of WFMT, Chicago's commercial fine arts radio station. Historic recordings of this orchestra, which date back to 1924, include releases for RCA Victor, Columbia, Mercury "Living Presence" and Vox Records. In more recent seasons they have been augmented by discs on the Telarc, EMI/Angel, CBS, Philips and Virgin Classics labels.

Recorded: May 1–2, 2002 at Orchestra Hall, Minneapolis MN

Producer: J. Tamblyn Henderson, Jr.

Associate Producer: Giancarlo Guerrero

Recording Engineer: Keith O. Johnson

Executive Producers: Marcia Martin, JTH

Editing / Mastering: Paul Stubblebine, JTH

Design: Bill Roarty, JTH

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