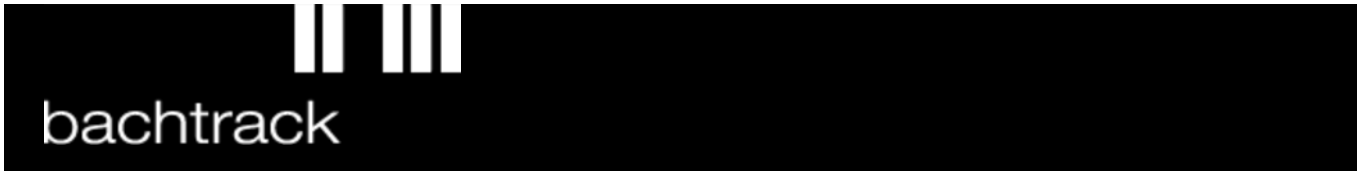



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Erotic and Exotic: François-Frédéric Guy and Jean-Efflam Bavouzet at Wigmore Hall

★★★★☆

By Frances Wilson, 03 July 2012

In a neat piece of programming, Monday's Wigmore Hall lunchtime concert brought together two French master-pianists to play two French masterpieces for the ballet, Debussy's *Jeux* and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, both transcribed for two pianos.

**Reviewed at Wigmore Hall
2 July 2012**

PROGRAMME

Debussy, *Jeux, poème dans deux pianos* by Bavouzet)

Stravinsky, *Le Sacre du Printemps* (*Rite of Spring*) (for two pianos)

PERFORMERS



François-Frédéric Guy

© Guy Vivien, and Jean-Efflam Bavouzet © Paul Mitchell

The works are, in fact, old friends, and were both introduced to the world by the Ballets Russes, in 1913. Unfortunately, *Jeux* was rather overshadowed by its more controversial cousin, and the riotous reception *The Rite of Spring* received when it was first performed. In any event, *Jeux* is not an easy piece to comprehend: a musical stream of consciousness, cast in a single movement, with no recognisable structure. Instead, Debussy offers an endless array of variants and transformations, and a sense of the spontaneous in the work's daringly liberated harmonies and lissome rhythms. It was one of the most audacious scores of the 20th century. The piano transcription was arranged by the composer, and the original, for solo piano, is virtually impossible to play as written, though Jean-Efflam Bavouzet has recorded it, with details added from the orchestral score. He has also transcribed the work for two pianos, and the result is more comprehensive, and as effective as the orchestral original.

The piece portrays a twilight scenario in which a tennis ball gets lost. A young man and two young girls come looking for it in a park, and in doing so, engage in a game of hide-and-seek, they chase each other, they sulk, they kiss. The charm is broken when another tennis ball is thrown by some malicious unknown hand, and, surprised and alarmed, the young people disappear into the park at night. The game suggested in the music is unmistakably erotic rather than sporting.

Seated opposite one another with the full eight feet of concert Steinways stretched before them, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet and François-Frédéric Guy gave a performance of conviction, colour, humour, warmth, subtlety, and split-section precision. Moments of veiled eroticism, intoxication, ecstasy, and playfulness, so typical of Debussy's later works, were offset by passages which trilled and shimmered in the upper registers, both pianists achieving a clarity and luminosity

François-Frédéric Guy, *Pian*

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, *Pian*

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Evan Mitchell, 4th Decem

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Maxim Vengerov began hi with the Oxford Philomusi chamber recital accompar orchestra's director Marios Papadopolous. This passi concert was delivered wit and a smile.

★★★★★ **RI**

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Guy, François-Frédéric

Bavouzet, Jean-Efflam

of tone to remind us that Debussy's music is not all about softness and muted, blurry harmonies. Motifs were shared between the players, as notes and phrases were tossed across the stage. The applause came almost before the last notes died, the audience caught up in the sheer delight of the music and the performance, and the pianists saluted each other cheerfully from either side of the stage as they took their bows.

Stravinsky first performed his own four-handed version of *The Rite of Spring* with Debussy, the arrangement created to accompany rehearsals for the first performance of the ballet. It remains a vertiginously challenging work for piano duet, straining the medium to its limits and demanding as much from the performers now as it always did. This music was born on the piano, written in a tiny room, so Stravinsky tells us, on an upright piano. Even when performed on two pianos, it retains an exhilarating and precarious excitement. Forget the orchestral version: here is a work of raw energy, convulsive rhythms and pagan exoticism, aptly described by Debussy as "a beautiful nightmare".

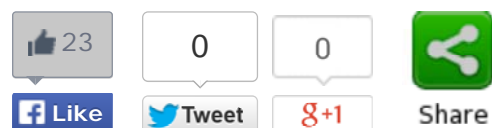
For this performance, the pianists switched pianos and once again demonstrated their complete understanding and sympathy with one another in a performance full of folksy motifs, powerful dissonances and unexpected colours and textures, eerie shrieks and scurrings across the keyboard, haunting harmonies and mysterious melodic fragments. The famous stamped-out chords were percussive and metallic, almost industrial, redolent of heavy machinery, pistons and steam engines. (Let us not forget this piece received its first performances as Europe was preparing for the most mechanised and destructive war in its history.) On a weekday lunchtime at the Wigmore Hall, Stravinsky's revolutionary vision of a strange pagan ritual was brought to life in a fantastical and bravura performance.

Le Sacre du Printemps (The Spring)

Jeux, poème dansé

Debussy, Claude

Stravinsky, Igor



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