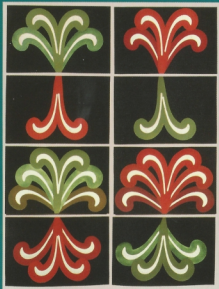


Family Classics

ARSIS

French piano duets inspired by childhood



Gabriel Fauré
Dolly, op. 56

Georges Bizet
Children's Games,
op. 22

Maurice Ravel
Mother Goose Suite

Florent Schmitt
A Week in the Life of
"Ol' Shut-Eye," op. 58

Timothy & Nancy
LeRoi Nickel
pianists

FAMILY CLASSICS

French Piano Duets Inspired by Childhood

Timothy & Nancy LeRoi Nickel, pianists

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924): *DOLLY*, op. 56

| | | |
|---|---------------------------|------|
| 1 | <i>Berceuse</i> | 2:30 |
| 2 | <i>Messieu Aoul</i> | 1:55 |
| 3 | <i>Le Jardin de Dolly</i> | 2:36 |
| 4 | <i>Ketty-Valse</i> | 2:26 |
| 5 | <i>Tendresse</i> | 3:01 |
| 6 | <i>Le pas espagnol</i> | 2:10 |

Georges Bizet (1838-1875): *JEUX D'ENFANTS*, op. 22

(Children's Games)

| | | |
|----|---|------|
| 7 | <i>L'Escarpolette</i> (The Swing), <i>rêverie</i> | 2:32 |
| 8 | <i>La Toupie</i> (The Top), <i>impromptu</i> | 1:04 |
| 9 | <i>La Poupée</i> (Merry-Go-Round), <i>berceuse</i> | 2:14 |
| 10 | <i>Les Chevaux de bois</i> (The Doll), <i>scherzo</i> | 1:25 |
| 11 | <i>Le Volant</i> (Badminton), <i>fantasie</i> | 1:15 |
| 12 | <i>Trompette et Tambour</i> (Trumpet and Drum), <i>marche</i> | 2:17 |
| 13 | <i>Les Bulles de Savon</i> (Soap Bubbles), <i>rondino</i> | 1:22 |
| 14 | <i>Les quatre coins</i> (Puss in the Corner), <i>esquisse</i> | 2:32 |
| 15 | <i>Colin-Maillard</i> (Blindman's Buff), <i>nocturne</i> | 1:51 |
| 16 | <i>Saute-Mouton</i> (Leap Frog), <i>caprice</i> | 1:22 |

| | | |
|--|--|------|
| 17 | <i>Petit mari, petite femme!</i> (Little Husband, Little Wife), <i>duo</i> | 2:32 |
| 18 | <i>Le Bal</i> (The Ball), <i>galop</i> | 2:01 |
| Maurice Ravel (1875-1937): <i>MA MÈRE L'OYE</i> (Mother Goose Suite) | | |
| 19 | <i>Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant</i> (Sleeping Beauty) | 1:44 |
| 20 | <i>Petit Poucet</i> (Little Tom Thumb) | 3:04 |
| 21 | <i>Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes</i> (Empress of the Pagodas) | 3:08 |
| 22 | <i>Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête</i> (Beauty and the Beast) | 4:06 |
| 23 | <i>Le jardin féerique</i> (The Fairy Garden) | 3:14 |
| Florent Schmitt (1870-1958): <i>UNE SEMAINE DU PETIT ELFE</i> | | |
| <i>FERME-L'OEIL, OPUS 58</i> (A Week in the Life of "Ol' Shut-Eye") | | |
| 24 | <i>La noce des souris</i> (The Mouse Wedding) | 2:56 |
| 25 | <i>La cigogne lassé</i> (The Weary Stork) | 3:44 |
| 26 | <i>Le cheval de Ferme-l'oeil</i> (The Horse of Ol' Shut-Eye) | 1:54 |
| 27 | <i>Le mariage de la poupée Berthe</i> (The Marriage of the Doll Bertha) | 3:14 |
| 28 | <i>Le ronde des lettres boiteuses</i> (The Exercise of the Lame Letters) | 1:23 |
| 29 | <i>La promenade à travers le tableau</i> (A Walk into a Landscape Painting) | 3:51 |
| 30 | <i>Le parapluie chinois</i> (The Chinese Umbrella) | 4:21 |

Total CD Time: 74:00

The French *joie de vivre* seems to include all aspects of life – food, wine, language, culture, and even childhood. The notion of childhood really began as a nineteenth-century concept and French romantic composers did their part to capture the innocence and infectious spirit of the young. Fairy tales by Charles Perrault and Hans Christian Andersen were a constant source of inspiration, along with depictions of animals, games played perhaps in the Tuileries Gardens in Paris, cradle songs, and other tender domestic moments. Georges Bizet's *Jeux d'enfants* marks the beginning of French piano duet music as a genre in 1871. During the next thirty years, many French composers followed his lead, including Gabriel Fauré and his students Maurice Ravel and Florent Schmitt, in creating original pianistic masterpieces inspired by childhood experience for two pianists to play at one instrument.

Fauré's *Dolly Suite* was inspired by and dedicated to Mademoiselle Hélène Bardac, whose anglicized nickname was Dolly. She was the daughter of Fauré's good friend, the singer Emma Bardac, who later became Debussy's second wife. Fauré presented the opening cradle song to Dolly on her first birthday in 1893, although the music had been written some thirty years earlier. The second piece of the suite was a gift for Dolly's second birthday and has often appeared under the feline-inspired title *Miaou*. The pianist Marguerite Long, who knew both Faure and the Bardac family well, made it clear that this is not a portrait of the family cat but rather a portrait of Dolly's older brother Raoul, whose very proper name – *Messieur Raoul* – was too much for Dolly to pronounce correctly. Likewise, the fourth section, presented on her fourth birthday, is not a "Kitty-Waltz" but a waltz for Dolly's dog Ketty. The Spanish Dance that brilliantly concludes the work was inspired by Dolly's favorite bronze statue of a horse. The third section, a stroll in Dolly's garden, and the fifth section entitled "Tenderness" reveal all the rich, elegant, unexpected harmonies and counterpoint of Fauré's style. The suite was completed in 1896 and has been orchestrated and adapted for other instruments.

Georges Bizet was a virtuoso pianist who chose, instead, to compose for the operatic stage. Luckily, he left one undisputed masterpiece for the piano - his set of twelve *Children's Games* for one piano, four hands. Bizet preferred the genre titles for the pieces, such as reverie, impromptu, march, and nocturne, which he used in the original edition. However, the pieces are clearly descriptive: the undulating swing, the spinning top, the volley of the badminton shuttlecock, the blindfolded person groping and stumbling about, and leapfrog played directly on the piano keyboard, for

example. These charming *Children's Games* were very popular when they first appeared and served as models for later French composers. Bizet's *berceuse* "The Doll" could have been the inspiration for the *berceuse* which begins Fauré's Dolly Suite and the *duo*, an intimate talk between the Little Husband and Little Wife, looks ahead to the conversation between Beauty and the Beast in Ravel's Mother Goose Suite. Bizet orchestrated five of the Games, published under the title of *Petite Suite*.

Ravel wrote his *Mother Goose Suite* in 1910 for Jean and Mimi Godebski, the children of a good friend of his who maintained a celebrated artistic "salon" in Paris. The first two pieces are based on familiar fairy tales by Charles Perrault, first published in 1697. The simple pavane for the Sleeping Beauty of the forest has all the enchantment of the spell that put the princess and her entire court asleep for a hundred years. The changing meters at the beginning of Tom Thumb suggest just how lost Tom is in the forest. A cuckoo's song is heard as the bread crumbs Tom leaves to mark his trail are pecked at and eaten by birds. Using mostly the black notes on the piano, Ravel paints a vignette of the miniature Empress of the Pagodas taking a bath accompanied by her musicians playing on stringed instruments the size of almond nut shells. The conversation between Beauty and the Beast is set as a waltz. Beauty speaks first in the treble followed by the beast in the bass. Their song and dance becomes gradually more animated with the two themes combined until, with a white-note glissando, a kiss turns the Beast into a prince and Beauty takes up his song. The fairy garden has no specific story. Instead, it distills the nature of fairy tales into pure enchantment with everyone living happily everafter.

With the exception of Franz Schubert, no composer has written as extensively and well for the piano duet medium as Florent Schmitt. Although Schmitt's music is not well-known outside of his native country, he was a celebrated and influential composer and critic in France during the first half of the 20th century. His *Week in the Life of Ol' Shut-Eye* is based on a series of seven stories, one for each day of the week. They were written by Hans Christian Andersen and told to a little boy named Hjalmar by a character resembling the Sandman. This "Ol' Shut-Eye" sprinkled sand in Hjalmar's eyes to put him asleep, opened a colorful umbrella over his bed and shared the stories excerpted as follows:

1. The Mouse Wedding. Ol' Shut-Eye introduces young Hjalmar to a little mouse who invites him to a wedding. Hjalmar shrinks to the size of a mouse, dresses up like a tin soldier, and rides in a thimble under the floorboard of his mother's closet to the

wedding celebration. The mouse notes the delicious smell of the passageway and wedding hall which were greased with bacon.

II. The Weary Stork. One rainy night, Ol' Shut-Eye opens Hialmar's bedroom window to find water up to the sill with a lake outside and a ship afloat. Hialmar stands in his best clothes upon the deck and sails through the streets, around by the church, and out to sea. They sail on until land can no longer be seen. They see a number of storks migrating south, flying in a row, one behind the other. One of them is so weary that his wings will scarcely carry him any farther. He sinks with outspread wings onto the rigging of the ship and glides down upon the deck. When the stork has rested, Hialmar watches him spread his wings and fly away. He promises the stork, "Tomorrow we shall make songs of you."

III. The Horse of Ol' Shut-Eye. On another evening Ol' Shut-Eye introduces Hialmar to his brother (whose name is also Ol' Shut-Eye) who rides upon his horse wearing a silver-embroidered coat and a black velvet cloak that flies behind him as he gallops along. He takes young people as well as old upon his horse and he never comes more than once to anyone. Those who have not been very good he places behind him on his horse and tells them a most terrible story. Those who have been good ride in front of him on his horse while he tells them a story that is so beautiful no one in the world can imagine it.

IV. The Marriage of the Doll Bertha. One evening Ol' Shut-Eye takes Hialmar to the hundred and first wedding of his sister's doll, Bertha. After the ceremony, all the pieces of furniture sing a beautiful song in honor of the newlyweds. The new couple refuses to accept gifts of any sort, since they plan to live on love alone. When they discuss honeymoon plans, Bertha rejects the swallow's advice to travel to a far-off sunny land with beautiful mountains and vineyards. She prefers the hen's advice to stay at home, and tells her new husband, "we will go into the sand pit beyond the gate and walk about in the cabbage garden," and so it is settled.

V. The Exercise of the Lame Letters. On another night when Hialmar had gone to bed, Ol' Shut-Eye hears a crying sound coming from Hialmar's desk drawer. Inside, Ol' Shut-Eye finds Hialmar's school slate nearly shaken to pieces from a wrong number in a math problem that is written on it. And there are weeping sounds from Hialmar's copybook where the letters he has tried to copy are so weak that they are falling over the notebook lines on which they should be written. Ol' Shut-Eye makes the letters get up and exercise until they stand tall and slender. Sadly, the next morn-

ing Hialmar finds the letters looking as weak and miserable as ever.

VI. Promenade into a Landscape Painting. A large picture in a gilded frame hangs over Hialmar's chest of drawers. When Ol' Shut-Eye touches the picture with his magic wand, the landscape comes to life. Now he lifts Hialmar up to the frame and puts his legs right into the picture where he now stands in the tall grass and listens to the birds singing around him. By the water's edge sits a little red and white boat pulled by six swans who take him on a long journey. Trees and flowers speak to him along the way.

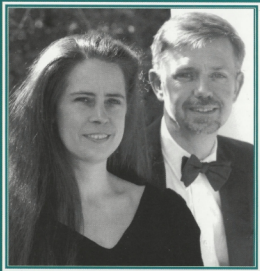
VII. The Chinese Umbrella. On the final evening, Ol' Shut-Eye spreads his beautiful picture umbrella over Hialmar. It looks like a large Chinese plate with blue trees and arched bridges with miniature Chinese figures nodding their heads. Ol' Shut-Eye tells Hialmar that he must put the world in order tonight since tomorrow is Sunday, a holy day. The church bells must be inspected to see if the goblins have polished them well. The leaves and grasses must be checked to see if the winds have dusted them clean. The hardest job of all, however, is to take down all the stars from the sky, brighten them up, and put them back in their proper place in the heavens.

— Timothy Nickel

TIMOTHY AND NANCY LEROI NICKEL are celebrating over 25 years of performing ensemble keyboard music as the **LeRoi-Nickel Duo**. They have performed twice at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall in New York, gave their London debut in 1990 in the Purcell Room, and were invited to appear at the South Bohemian Music Festival in the Czech Republic in 1996. The Nickels received the Advanced Certificate at the Guildhall School in London. They live in Portland, Oregon and teach at Marylhurst University. They are the creators and artistic directors of the annual Piano Duet Festival by the Sea in Lincoln City, Oregon, a summer festival dedicated to the performance, study, and teaching the repertoire of original music for one piano-four hands. Other ARSIS CDs by Timothy and Nancy LeRoi Nickel (still available at www.arsisaudio.com) are:

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ARSIS CD 104, "For Two to Play" for Organ, works by Samuel Wesley, Thomas Tomkins, Nicholas Carleton, Frank Ferko, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johann G. Albrechtsberger, Franz Schubert, Franz Lachner, and Kenneth Leighton.



The LeRoi-Nickel Duo

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