Musical creation is always most revealing about the society and period that were witness to its birth. What do we actually know about creation between 1914 and 1918? What do we know of the repertory by composers mobilized and, for some, victims of the conflict, as with those written at the same moment in the rear? What was the impact of the conflict on the composers’ inspiration?

Published by Hortus Editions, the collection The Musicians of the Great War strives to provide a response to these questions. Endorsed by the Centenary Mission in 2014, the 33 volumes already published make up a patrimonial corpus, multifarious yet coherent, of more than 200 works. Of rare musical and emotional quality, they were written by more than 120 composers of 12 different nationalities. They bring to light the intensity of creation during this period, its significance to our cultural and musical history, the metamorphosis of an entire world in its waning days and a new one emerging. This representative panorama of musical creation by the nations implicated in the conflict allows works by well-known composers, who for reasons of age or health remained behind the lines, to share the scene with those by composers forgotten today, mobilized and alas in some cases wounded or killed. All deserve an attentive hearing, not only for their musical quality but also for their incomparable emotional value.
Homage to Maurice Maréchal, Alain Meunier & Anne Le Bozec, cello & piano

Homage is paid by Alain Meunier to his mentor, the great cellist Maurice Maréchal, a combatant at the side of Caplet and Durosoir (sonatas by Brahms, Debussy and Honegger).

The Birth of a New World, Thomas Duran & Nicolas Mallarte, cello & piano

Works not only from all geographic horizons within a Europe in the throes of reciprocal bloodshed, but also from quite varying aesthetic standpoints. What a fine discovery, the sonata by Joseph Boulnois, who died in 1918! All the musical vibrancy of the postwar period is foreshadowed in a noble vision, with passion and emotion.

Songs, Foresight – Insight, Marc Mauillon, baritone & Anne Le Bozec, piano

The Great War was to cut down a number of talents on the very threshold of their careers. In their songs written on the eve of the conflict one perceives the foresight these composers often possessed of the drama yet to come and also, once the latter had occurred, their urge to escape it or simply to comment upon it.

Metamorphosis, Thomas Monnet, organ of Dudelange (Luxembourg)

The tensions of the Great War nourished creative minds. The 19th century vanished well behind the horizon, allowing uncertainty to take hold. With the organ, there is an entire musical world undergoing total metamorphosis, as an elegant choral by Joseph Boulnois and a surprising transcription of the Tombeau de Couperin cross paths with Reger’s Trauerode, a funeral ode dedicated ‘to those who have fallen’.
Violists in the fray, Vincent Roth & Sébastien Beck, viola & piano

The singing lyricism of the viola offered by four very different musical personalities (Hindemith, Vaughan Williams as well as Schmitt and Koechlin, whose Sonata is the real gem of the CD): a revealing testimony to the musical searchings carried out during this terrible period.

Vespers, Vincent Genvrin at the organ of St. Peter’s Collegiate Church in Douai

The Fifteen Versets for the Vespers of the Common of the Feasts of the Holy Virgin or Fifteen Pieces (1919) by Marcel Dupré: a crucial document implicating, on the heels of the Great War, the art of improvisation which saw the modernity of this rich musical epoch meshing with a potent, centuries-old tradition, played here on the Mutin-Cavaillé-Coll organ funded by war reparation money.

Celebrations at the organ of the Invalides by Philippe Brandeis and the Brass of the Garde Républicaine

On the organ of the Cathedral of the Armed Forces, not only are musicians killed in action honoured but also those who fought and survived, or who supported the war effort from behind the lines. Celebrations as well – this time accompanied by the brass – by those who after the War wrote in memory of the victims, with a splendid rendition of Dupré’s Poème héroïque.

Two Concertos for the Left Hand, Orchestre national de Lille, Nicolas Stavy, piano; conducted by Paul Polivnick

Two rarely-recorded 20th-century masterworks, commissioned by the famous pianist Paul Wittgenstein who lost his right arm on the front lines: a surprising (and exuberant!) one by Korgold (1923), and Diversions by Britten (1940), a piece full of life and lyricism.
In a Europe at war, and with a surprising variety of expression, composers called upon the harmonium as a solo instrument or by including it in a small ensemble. Schmitt revisits patriotic song, Kunc and Jongen sacred music and hymns to the dead. Karg-Elert explores spheres knowingly removed from the conflict, whereas Casella, illustrating images from silent cinema, proposes his war impressions.

During the Great War it was the art song that best expressed the deepest, highly diverse feelings of the soldiers on the front lines as well as composers away from the battlefield: eternal ideals laden with nostalgia, tenderness and poetry (Lili Boulanger, Ropartz) as well as reactions born of the conflict, in turn sarcastic (Vellones), dramatic or imbued with feelings for the loved one with Jacques de la Presle. This programme offers as yet unrecorded pieces (Migot, de la Presle), rarely-heard works (Vellones) as well as the complete song cycles Odelettes and Clairières dans le ciel.

Three quartets were composed far from the front lines (Milhaud, Stravinsky) or after the war (Hindemith): in fact, each in its own way constitutes a final stage of maturation in this form over the course of the War (Milhaud, Hindemith) or, in a broader sense for Stravinsky, an evolution undertaken from 1913 with The Rite of Spring. It was upon a young, as yet inexperienced composer, Jacques de la Presle, that the task would fall, on the front where he was holed up in a tunnel beneath the bombing, to demonstrate that music is more potent than death all around, ennui and hopelessness. On the side of the Triple Alliance forces, the Austrian Ernst Toch as well took refuge in music to show forth his will to survive.
What diversity of expression – both literary and musical – in these melodies from the Great War! Some are disconnected with all concrete situations (Stephan, Halphen, Roussel); others evoke tragic events, be it implicitly (Lili Boulanger) or with various tints: nostalgic (Gurney, Antoine), melancholic (Debussy), pathetic and revolted, even with Caplet, whereas Reynaldo Hahn seeks appeasement.

‘Into the heavy atmosphere – came doubt and discouragement. But distant sounds, clear and pure, rang out, and people marched, confidently, tenderly, seriously, towards the hope of a better life’.

Nadia Boulanger, Vers la vie nouvelle.

Any number of composers and poets were drafted in connection with Verdun. A vast array of as yet unrecorded songs and chansons is brought together in these Feuillets de Guerre. This record expresses nostalgia, religious feeling or bears witness to the engagement of women in the War (Les Tourneuses d’obus), or to the ardencies of a strong and confident France (Le Tambour).

‘Three destinies in black and white. The shadow of death came down hard on the budding genius of Rudi Stephan, who left behind works of rare maturity, or on the son of Louis Vierne to whom his father was to dedicate a quintet at once tender and tragic. Lucien Durosoir, for his part, returned from the war with the creative impetus to pen an astonishingly luminous Poem.’

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‘Three destinies in black and white. The shadow of death came down hard on the budding genius of Rudi Stephan, who left behind works of rare maturity, or on the son of Louis Vierne to whom his father was to dedicate a quintet at once tender and tragic. Lucien Durosoir, for his part, returned from the war with the creative impetus to pen an astonishingly luminous Poem.’
The works brought together here partake of that mosaic which speaks diversely of man in the face of conflict. The Czech Schulhoff and the Italian Casella, with their opposing ideals and like the German Hindemith, explore new paths far removed from Romanticism, each via his own personality. Meanwhile, an unpublished sonata by the Belgian Moulaert is oblivious to the agitation of the conflict whereas Vierne thrusts us into the depths of a human drama where war is intertwined with personal pain.

Exiled in Switzerland during the war, Vierne experienced bitter trials: the worsening of his eyesight problems, grief over the loss of his son, his brother and several musician pupils, all fallen in action. To the piano he confides his poetic dreams in three marvelous Nocturnes and sets loose his anxieties, rage and solitude via his 12 Préludes wherein he draws close to the world of children via refined miniatures (Silhouettes d’enfants). Louis Vierne, composer on the home front, overcomes despair and with his art transcends the tragic night into which the War years have thrust him.
Damned War
Fionnuala McCarthy, soprano
Klaus Häger, baritone
Karola Theill, piano

A programme of highlights within a concert-like atmosphere. Expression via melody of the diversity of emotions: from enthusiasm in combat to dismay engendered by death, from the evoking of warlike brutality to the soldier’s disillusionment, from lamentation to striving for peace.

In the Health Services, the Piano Mobilized
Amaury Breyne, piano Steinway D 1906

Two attitudes or reactions of the composers mobilized in the health services: whereas some, like Jacques Ibert and Jean Huré, use the piano to exorcise the horrors of the war, others, like Déodat de Séverac, attempt an imaginary escape, taking their audience far from the front, towards much more peaceful scenes, be they imaginary or nostalgic.

XXIV

Requiem for fallen brothers
“Kastalsky” Men’s Chorus of Moscow, A. Roudnevsky, dir.
Cologne Figuralchor, dir. Richard Mailänder
Choir of the Cathedral of Graz, dir. J. M. Doeller
Ekaterina Yassin скаia, soprano
Lioubov Chichkanova, organ
of the Moscow Philharmonic
Dir. Vladimir Degtiarev
Sylvain Heili, organ of the Collegiate Church of Saint-Peter in Douai

The Great War was pervaded by a religious sentiment in all the countries caught up in the conflict. Requiem for fallen brothers, a grand oratorio by Alexandre Kastalsky (1856-1926), written in memory of the Russian soldiers and their allies fallen on the battlefield, is an emblematic illustration thereof. Reflecting this, three pieces for organ written by composers belonging to the opposing nations underscore the fervent call given out by Kastalsky.

Sacrifice
The Flowers of War
Dir. Chris Latham

The Battle of the Somme (1916) with a million casualties may be counted among the most deadly events in history. Numerous musicians perished, for the most part British. Their names deserve to remain in our hearts. It is the duty of remembrance that the Australian violinist Chris Latham and his musicians, The Flowers of War, have with passion and emotion endeavoured to honour.

The Flowers of War
Christine Benoist, voice,
Zbigniew Kornowicz, violin,
Joanna Rezler, violin,
Paul Mayes, viola,
Catherine Delanoue, cello,
Andrew Goodwin, tenor,
David Novak, accordion,
Jordan Aikin, bagpipes,
Christopher Latham, violin, arranger and director
| XXVI | War Romance  
|------|-----------------|
|      | Ambroise Aubrun, violin  
|      | Steven Vanhauwaert, piano  

As the long months of the Great War wore on, society clung to its former codes, to habits belonging to prewar times. Many composers, whether far removed from the conflict like Elgar or wallowing in the mud of the trenches like Philippe Gaubert, were convinced that the sonata, which for over a century had been playing on the salons’ heartstrings, was not about to die. If the Elgar sonata is well-known, the works of Philippe Gaubert and all the more those of Blair Fairchild, unfairly forgotten, deserve a revival.

| XXVII | CATHARSIS  
|------|-----------------|
|      | Yasmine Hammani, violin  
|      | Pierre Pouillaude, flute  
|      | Amaury Breyne, piano Steinway D 1906  

Déodat de Séverac, Philippe Gaubert and Jacques Ibert were all drafted into the Health Services of the French Army. Beyond the traits of their respective languages, or their social and geographic origins, they provide us with an opportunity to hear music still bearing the mark of Fauré, made of earnest restraint (Ibert) but also of joy and lightheartedness (Gaubert, Séverac). As did others, all three thus felt the urgent necessity there was for healing wounds, for recuperating a visceral life force, for preparing the future.

| XXVIII | The man who stumbled along in the war  
|-------|---------------------------------|
|       | Albena Dimitrova soprano, Yann Toussaint baritone  
|       | Narrator: Thierry Gaches  
|       | Chœur Capriccio, Marie-France Messager, dir.  
|       | L’Orchestre de la Musique de la Police Nationale, Jérôme Hilaire, dir.  
|       | Amaury Breyne, piano Steinway D 1906  
|       | Françoise Masset, soprano  
|       | Anne Le Bozec, piano Erard (1877)  

Commissioned by the government and premiered in 1998 at the Historial de la Grande Guerre in Peronne, this is a secular oratorio, at once shimmering and moving, for soloists, speaker, chorus and orchestra. The libretto is the work of Arielle Augry after writings by Ernst Jünger, Cendrars, Apollinaire, Barbusse, Rolland... Isabelle Aboulker (1938) is the granddaughter of the composer Henry Février who wrote several songs in Verdun during the conflict (volumes 4, 16 and 29 of the collection The Musicians of the Great War).

| XXIX | To Have Done with War  
|------|-----------------|
|      | Françoise Masset, soprano  
|      | Anne Le Bozec, piano Erard (1877)  

Families’ anguish or the suffering of women in mourning are expressed by the voices of the poets and composers brought together here. This treasury of songs, often unpublished, poignant at times and consistently touching, is construed as coming to terms, in retrospect, with the years of conflict, to have done at last with the war. An homage replete with affectation and respect bestowed by the two artists upon those who disappeared in the Great War.
The Great War in Marseillaise Settings

Jean-Philippe Lafont, baritone
Cyrille Lehn, piano

For over 200 years the Marseillaise has accompanied the history of our country, through the trials endured as well as in its celebrations. In the course of the two World Wars, as events unfolded, our national anthem also underwent all sorts of adaptations, unforeseen uses and reappropriations: the ‘familiar tune’ for writing songs, widely disseminated at the time and affording the advantage of being easily memorized and spread around. Whether emanating from frontline soldiers or those in the rear, these compositions profit from having been composed in the heat of things, bearing witness to the evolution of mentalities. Performance of these scores provides audiences, teachers and scholars with a totally pristine, fascinating material in sound.

La Harpe consolatrice

Kyunghie Kim-Sutre, harpe

During the Great War the harp, given its light, gentle timbre tinged with femininity, came to be associated with nurses attempting to assuage victims’ suffering. The young, mobilized composers, through their works, were to offer us a vision that was at once intimist and delicate, often profound and moving as well. The great harpist Henriette Renié stands for all those women who discretely went through the war with all its suffering and trials, while equaling men in coming to the defence of art.

Ode à la France

Fiat Cantus choir
Cond. Thomas Tacquet
Piano Pleyel 1892

Music for choir most often expresses the feelings of a united throng. This collective utterance takes on a religious connotation in works allowing for hope in a return to peace (A Prayer). It also surpasses religious sentiment to take its place in history and national unity, as in Ode à la France by Debussy or Les Cathédrales by Pierné, once a vehement War Cry (Cri de Guerre) has been expressed.
**PROGRAMMES**

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Albéric Magnard, une mort mythique

- Sonate pour violoncelle et piano (1909-10) / En Dieu mon espérance et mon espéce pour ma défense (1888) / Trois Pièces (1887-1888) / Promenades (1893)

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1913, Au carrefour de la modernité

- Igor Stravinsky  Le Sacre du printemps pour piano à quatre mains (1913) / Claude Debussy  En Blanc et Noir pour deux pianos (1915) / Ferruccio Busoni  Fantasia Contrappuntistica pour deux pianos (1910-21)

**VOL. 3**  
Hommage à Maurice Maréchal

- Gabriel Fauré  Élégie (1880) / Johannes Brahms  Sonate pour violoncelle et piano en mi mineur (1882) / Claude Debussy  Sonate n°1 pour violoncelle et piano (1915) / Arthur Honegger  Sonate pour violoncelle et piano (1920)

**VOL. 4**  
Mélodies: Prescience – Conscience


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- Marcel Dupré  Fifteen Pieces founded on Antiphons (1920) – Cortège et Litanie (1921) – Pastorale (1931) – Carillon (1931)

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- Benjamin Britten  Diversions for piano main gauche et orchestre (1942) / Erich Wolfgang Korngold  Concerto pour piano, main gauche en ut # (1923)

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**VOL. 12**  
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- Lili Boulanger  Clairières dans le ciel (1918) / Joseph-Guy Ropartz  Quatre Odelettes (1914) / Georges Migot  Sept petites images du Japon (1917) / Jacques de la Presle  Chanson de la rose • La branche d’acacia • Heureux ceux qui se débinent (1918) / Pierre Vellones  Lettre du front • Aux Gonces qui se débinent (1915)
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