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## RAFAEL PAYARE CONDUCTS *DAPHNIS ET CHLOË*

PRESENTED BY

 **Desjardins**

ORCHESTRE SYMPHONIQUE  
DE MONTRÉAL

Choral Ensemble of the Festival  
Andrew Megill, chorus master  
Roseline Blain, assistant chorus master  
Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano  
Rafael Payare, conductor

**JULY 29 2022 | 8:00 PM**

**Amphithéâtre  
Fernand-Lindsay**

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# RAFAEL PAYARE CONDUCTS *DAPHNIS ET CHLOÉ*

## PROGRAM

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**Samy Moussa** (1984–)  
*Elysium\**

\*Commissioned by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, co-commissioned by the Festival de Lanaudière, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

**Alexandre Scriabine** (1871–1915)  
Prometheus : Poem of Fire, Op. 60

INTERMISSION

**Maurice Ravel** (1875–1937)  
*Daphnis et Chloé*, complete ballet

ORCHESTRE SYMPHONIQUE DE MONTRÉAL

**Choral Ensemble of the Festival**

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## PROGRAM NOTES

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### An imaginary vision of Greek myths

It was in the air: Ancient Greece was an object of fascination for artists at the turn of the 20th century. Their view of this distant past varied, however, from culture to culture. In Germany, for example, references to Hellenism emanated from archaeology and classical studies while in France, artists idealized the Greek heritage by creating fantasy visions more allegorical than historically accurate.

Two musical works related in time and location are evidence of this *Belle Époque* trend: Scriabin's *Prométhée, Poème du Feu* (1910) and Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912). Both were produced during a period of effervescence in Parisian musical life. Both composers moved in the same circles connected with Les Ballets Russes and Serge de Diaghilev, the company's visionary leader. Scriabin, also a performer, conceived an innovative art that combined sound, colour, and light. Ravel, for his part, gave Les Ballets Russes a commissioned choreographic symphony. One could not imagine more conceptually divergent works aspiring to the same legacy.

Scriabin discovered the myth of Prometheus not through reading, but exchanging with the Symbolist painter Jean Delville. In Delville's studio stood a monumental painting (1907) of the Titan carrying a torch shaped as a five-pointed star, ascending through dark turbulent clouds. Delville explained: "The fire which, according to the myth, is stolen from Heaven, is not physical fire, but that of intelligence in Man, symbolized by the five-pointed star. Esoteric and symbolic conception of human mental evolution to which I have given a clearly pictorial and plastic character. Indeed, it is not a visual illustration of a story, but a work replete with symbols, heralding the dawn of a new order and the awakening of humanity's consciousness." Scriabin was fascinated by Delville's painting and the expressive force emanating from the figure of the Promethean Man, and transferred his own insights in a symphonic poem. For him, a composer must pursue the Promethean mission with the conviction that he will change human destiny through art, music and philosophy. The resulting work

was innovative, countering the prevalent Wagnerian total artwork trend: to integrate colours and light in a colossal orchestral ensemble was novel indeed. The influence of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the theme of the Übermensch—the Superman—is also present in the figure of the fire bearer who will free humanity from its destiny.

In the beginning, there was a myth: Prometheus, brave and cunning descendent of the Titans, fomenter of discord between the gods and men. Original accounts, of which those of Hesiod, Aeschylus, and Plato are significant, relate that Prometheus dared to rebel against Zeus with the purpose of endowing the human race with the mastery of fire, thus correcting the injustice of humankind's fragility and destitution within the animal order. He steals the sacred fire from the forges of Hephaestus while also appropriating from Athena the divine power of artistic creation destined to mortals. Through these gifts, Man would be almost equal to the gods and the master of Nature. But in so doing, Prometheus committed an essential oversight by leaving Athena's most precious talent behind: wisdom.

The myth then recounts Zeus' revenge against the rebel who threatened to destabilize the cosmos, and against the human race whose arrogance defied the gods. The cruelty of the Olympian seems disproportionate to the Promethean gifts to mortals. The lesson of wisdom only became relevant, however, generations later in the mid twentieth century, when human technology would threaten Nature, humankind, and the gods.

An ode to the glory of Promethean Man, *The Poem of Fire* was the product of synesthesia, in a hybrid process incorporating the features of the symphonic poem, piano concerto, and cantata. Scriabin scored it for orchestra, piano soloist, mixed choir, and an original instrument of his invention: a keyboard that emits lights and projects coloured beams on the musicians in synchronism with modal and harmonic changes. Today's technology has enabled us to adapt these coloured light effects without the keyboard in the original score.

The work's overall structure, which adheres to the Golden Ratio, develops in a vast crescendo devoid of tonal or thematic reference points. The only building block is a chord made up of six superimposed fourths, dubbed "synesthetic" or "The Mystic Chord" and identical to the harmonics of the fundamental C:

Inversions, transpositions, and linear digressions produce unprecedented sounds; the work's chromatic language eschews interval consonances until the last chord, the only perfect one, on F# major. Its powerful orchestration is nuanced by voices singing vowel sounds and humming, and the bravura of the piano solo part is notable for defying the gods of the keyboard. Blazing lights add to the mystique of this particular form of total artwork.

Delville drew another Prometheus on the cover of Scriabin's orchestral score, using theosophical symbolism of which both artists were impassioned.

Maurice Ravel developed a different facet of Ancient Greece with his ballet *Daphnis et Chloé*, whose colours and mythological references bridge with Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* (1894). Debussy's work is a free illustration of a poem by Mallarmé suggesting "the different atmospheres, in the midst of which evolve the desires, and dreams" of a faun surrounded by nymphs. Ravel's ballet, on the other hand, is a pastorale that relates the awakening of two young people in love. The plot is borrowed from a romance by the poet Longus (2nd century A.D.), a rather obscure figure whose influence, nevertheless, spanned the centuries and made its way into the works of Shakespeare, Goethe, George Sand, and in painting, Chagall. Ravel adapted Longus' text to the requirements of a musical performance wherein the choreography also imposes its criteria, and the ballet evolves through a series of short scenes that render the lyrical and dramatic moments of the story.

"My intention in writing it was to compose a vast musical fresco, less concerned with archaism than with fidelity to the Greece of my dreams," Ravel said of *Daphnis and Chloé*. But its radical divergence from the vision of the librettist and choreographer Fokine did not make for a long run on the Ballets Russes stage. To extend its function, the

composer fashioned two orchestral suites out of the ballet score and in the process, created a work which defies categorization and became a pillar of major orchestras' repertoire.

The action, simplified by Fokine, takes place in a bucolic setting facing the nymphs' cave: young shepherds come to bring offerings to the gods of Nature. The scene is enlivened by their seductive dances; among them is Daphnis, whose gaze charms Chloé. Then, festivities are interrupted by a band of pirates who abduct Chloé. The shepherds implore the nymphs, who, in their turn, invoke the god Pan to rescue the young shepherdess. Dramatic tension reaches its apex in the pirates' lair, where Chloé dances to obtain her liberation. Finally, it is the god Pan who intervenes and frees her. At daybreak, Nature participates in the reunion of Daphnis and Chloé, embellishing the celebratory mood with birdsong, quivering springs, and leaves rustling in the wind. As for Pan, he too takes part in the rejoicing, recalling his amorous devotion to the nymph Syrinx as the flute sings of lost love's nostalgia. Returning to the nymphs' cave, the pastoral ends in a wild dance to celebrate the lovers' reunion.

For this concert, the choreographic symphony will be performed in its entirety.

The narrative dynamics of the ballet-pastoral are transformed into a masterpiece of absolute music, whose magical sounds are the product of Ravel's peerless orchestration, with the voices merging in a fluid, cadence-free sweep devoid at moments of any tonal reference point. In their imagination, listeners can follow the theatrical play suggested by this musical fresco, or simply be carried away by its shimmering harmonies.

The Quebec premiere of the orchestral work *Elysium* (2021) by Samy Moussa (b. 1984) opens the concert. This young Canadian composer and conductor has already produced an impressive body of internationally acclaimed works, in which Greek mythology comes into play in two other instances: the oratorio *Antigone* (2020) and the piece for piano and chamber orchestra *Orpheus* (2017).

The title *Elysium* evokes the dwelling place of the blessed in the kingdom of Hades. According to Homer, Elysium is located at the confines of the earth, near the ocean where eternal spring reigns, and where time stands still. The Champs Élysées or Elysium welcomes the spirit of heroes and men who have lived a good life, meaning in harmony with Nature and the cosmos. Elysium is akin to the Paradise of the Ancients, to which all mortals aspire, as related by poets since Pindar, and by Virgil, and later by Dante and Rabelais.

One should not look for a program or a tableau in Moussa's *Elysium*. It is above all pure music, composed in three great arches of brass-laden sounds with the *prima materia* of chromatically shifting chords supporting a melody in disjunct intervals first played softly by the flutes and clarinets, then by the trumpets punctuated by percussions. The music creates the impression of successive waves that grow in intensity, through the harsh harmonies and the accelerating movement until they reach a climax. The coda returns to the beginning, the final cadence resting on the initial perfect chord heard at the outset of the composition.

Thanks to its admirable orchestration, *Elysium* brilliantly explores a vast palette of instrumental timbres. By its inspiration and reminiscence of Ancient Greece, Moussa's work enriches this concert evoking Hellenic heritage.

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ARTISTS







# Benoit Brière

## A passionate spokesperson

Mr. Brière is basically wedded to classical music, given that his spouse is a cellist—and in addition, Joliette-born. “A person who marries must adopt their wife’s hometown.” One might say that our Spokesperson is steeped in classical music everyday from morning to night!

“Don’t search for me this summer: I’ll be at the Festival de Lanaudière.”

Get to know him, his passion for acting and the importance of music in his everyday life. [READ+](#)



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