

COREY J. SEAPY | SAMPLE PROGRAM NOTES

Dionysiaques (1913)

Florent Schmitt (1870-1958)

Though he is often forgotten nowadays, Florent Schmitt was one of the most important French composers of the 20th century, along with contemporaries Maurice Ravel and Albert Roussel. He won the coveted Prix de Rome in 1900 for a cantata entitled *Sémiramis*, and his subsequent travels took him throughout Europe, Turkey, Algeria, and Morocco before he settled in Paris in 1906. Traveling influenced his early impressionist style, which he learned from teachers including Massenet and Fauré, and his scoring became increasingly colorful and exotic. His output includes two symphonies, ballet music, film and stage music, vocal music, and many works for piano, organ, and chamber ensembles.

Dionysiaques was composed for the 100-member Garde Républicaine Band in Paris in 1913, mere months after Schmitt attended the premiere performance of Stravinsky's Rite of Spring. Its own premiere had to wait until 1925 because of World War I, but it has been performed frequently since the mid-20th century. It now stands as one of the cornerstone pieces of the early wind band repertoire. The title comes from the "Dyonisia" – ancient Greek celebrations honoring Dionysus, the god of wine. He was thought to have provided man with the vineyard, and subsequently the harvest, winemaking, drunkenness and the means for mystical trances.

The piece itself begins ominously as the low brass and woodwinds set the stage for an exotic and almost hypnotic journey. Schmitt's impressionistic tendencies are immediately evident; wandering melodies emerge in the woodwinds and gradually gain momentum. Their fluidity is slowly abandoned in favor of festivity, encouraged by the 'fluid' of Dionysus, be it red or white. The bacchanal eventually bursts forth, brimming with rhythmic vitality and a relentless insistence on partying all the way to the verge of control, and perhaps a bit beyond.