



# Paul DUKAS

## *Fanfare pour précéder la Péri*

**Paul Abraham Dukas** (1 October 1865 – 17 May 1935) was a French composer and prominent critic. While Dukas's name might not be as widely known to audiences as that of his contemporaries, Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, his piece, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1897), is recognizable to many upon hearing. Made famous through its appearance in Disney's *Fantasia* (1940), this symphonic poem is based on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 1797 poem of the same name. However, Dukas's legacy in classical music far exceeds Mickey Mouse's famous enchanted broom scene. Dukas entered the Conservatoire de Paris in 1881 at the age of 16, where he befriended Debussy and studied under Georges Mathias, Théodore Dubois, and Ernest Guiraud. Despite winning several prizes, Dukas was disappointed to only place 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Conservatoire's most prestigious prize, the Prix de Rome, in 1888 (a prize which his friend, Debussy, won in 1884). His discouraging result led him to leave the conservatory the following year. Unfortunately, Dukas continued to have a less prolific career as a composer than his contemporaries, as he was famously self-critical and destroyed most of the works he began. To this day, there are only 15 known works by Dukas, which includes a symphony, 2 major piano works, the ballet *La Péri* (1911), and the opera *Ariane et Barbe-bleue* (1899-1907). In conjunction with his lack of early success as a composer, Dukas became active in Europe as a music critic. This was considered unordinary by some, as contemporaries Gabriel Fauré and Debussy began reviewing music only after they became well-known as composers. On the other hand, Dukas's first publication – a review of Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* conducted by Gustav Mahler – occurred in 1892, the same year as his Parisian debut as a composer. As an artist during the 1890s, Dukas was a major figure in the culture of "fin-de-siècle". An era marked by a revolt against the romantic past, and a cynicism toward the oncoming 20<sup>th</sup> century, much of France became ideologically divided into progressive and conservative factions. Dukas, however, maintained relative neutrality, gaining admiration from his peers on both sides. Rather exemplary of this, Fauré – a musical progressive who refused to sign a French declaration calling for a ban on contemporary German and Austrian music – dedicated his Second Piano Quintet to Dukas, while Camille Saint-Saëns – the leader of that same French movement to ban German music – worked with Dukas to complete an opera by Ernest Guiraud, among other projects they completed together. In his later years, Dukas was a prominent teacher of composition, with his students including Olivier Messiaen, Yvonne Desportes, Manuel Ponce, and Xian Xinghai.

*Fanfare pour précéder la Péri* (1912) was written as an opening to Dukas's one-movement ballet, *La Péri*, a year after the ballet's publication. The piece depicts a young Persian prince, Iskender (Alexander the Great in Persian) who travels to the Ends of the Earth in a quest to find the Flower of Immortality, coming across its guardian, the Péri (fairy). Recognizing the ballet's quiet opening pages, Dukas added the Fanfare to give the typically noisy audiences of early 20<sup>th</sup> century France time to settle into their seats before the drama began. The piece was originally commissioned by Ballets Russes, but Serge Diaghilev cancelled the production as he did not feel that Natalia Trouhanova (as the Péri) was skilled enough to dance with Vaslav Nijinsky (as Iskender). In the end, Trouhanova did get to play the Péri as she commissioned Ivan Clustine to choreograph the music for its premier at the Théâtre du Châtelet on April 22, 1912.

This energetic fanfare uses the orchestra's brass section to herald the start of the ballet (or any concert!). The emphatic opening presents the French horns and trumpets alternating triumphant triplets, after which all instruments join in unison to modulate chromatically through a series of brilliant, angular chords. The piece continues to develop as the trombones and tubas lay the foundation for the others' melodic development in the middle and upper register. After the French horns and trumpets continue to embellish and escalate their melody, the piece grinds to a rhythmic halt. The texture becomes much more homophonic, as the ensemble works together to rise once again to the heroic opening. The chromatic chords are expanded upon to reach a final resolution which seemed far out of reach just a moment ago.