

A black and white portrait of Caio Pagano, a middle-aged man with a receding hairline, smiling and resting his chin on his right hand. He is wearing a white tuxedo jacket over a white shirt and a white bow tie. His left hand is resting on a piano keyboard. The background is a colorful abstract painting with shades of blue, yellow, and red.

# Caio Pagano

French  
PIANO  
Music

*César Franck*

Symphonic  
Variations  
for PIANO  
& ORCHESTRA

*Satie • Debussy • Ravel*

**T**his CD represents two distinct currents in music of late nineteenth-century France, first the mastery of techniques and expression that had evolved during the course of the century and then the adumbration of the individuality that was to grace the new century's art.

Not only is César Franck's ***Variations symphoniques*** (1885) one of his finest works but it also stands as a distinctive contribution to a compositional genre quite popular at that time, the orchestral variation set. The piece avoids the depressing addiction to gargantuan length then so common, is highly original formally and exhibits concerto-like features such as piano/orchestra confrontation without lapsing into pianistic pyrotechnics. The composition is not a conventional variation "set" so much as an evolving form marked by apparently spontaneous variation technique. Its structural bones are as follows. Initially the principal theme is confronted by an aggressive orchestral motive which keeps it off balance until it receives an unaccompanied statement by the piano. As the theme seems unsure how to proceed, it continues to remain subject to interruptions by the orchestra. The fantasia character of the opening then recedes at the appearance of an unassuming second theme whose first clear statement is announced by the soloist. In contrast to the first theme the latter melody is clearly defined and becomes the subject of a series of more traditional-sounding variations. Perhaps impressed by this procedure, the principal theme then submits to similar treatment before bursting into a vigorous concluding section in which the second theme now reappears as a continuation of the first.

Only three years later there appeared compositions which, by measure of the opulence of their time, would have been regarded as excessively plain, or perhaps merely the skeletal remains of an archaic music, had they been at all widely known. Now probably the best known works by Eric Satie, his three ***Gymnopédies*** (1888),

radically simple for the period, stand among the most original works of the last quarter of that century. Single-note melodies, devoid of embellishment, are supported by bare accompaniment consisting of a gentle flow of chords divorced from their conventional relationships. The title refers to festivals of ancient Sparta at which nude boys danced for spectators. Certainly the passively ceremonial quality of Satie's dances is enhanced by the absence of contrast; the spirit of each piece seems to reside within the others, transporting us into a far distant realm.

In at least the title of his ***Suite Bergamasque*** (1890) Claude Debussy allowed something of the evocative spirit of symbolist poetry to penetrate. Its title likely was derived from a poem by Verlaine, already set as a song by the composer, which speaks of a landscape in which “*masques et bergamasques*” dance and play the lute, yet remain sad beneath their theatrical disguises. The suite belongs to another *fin-de-siècle* genre, the suite of dances “in olden style.” Both a set of parlor piano pieces and a statement of individuality, however, the composition shuns mere pastiche; this is not the music of a pseudo-antiquarian. The *Prelude* has more in common with the like-named character pieces Debussy composed years later than with its baroque-era namesakes. In its formal spontaneity the *Menuet* is a minuet in name and meter only, while the *Passepied* is set in “incorrect” duple meter. Yet clearly the spirit and technique of François Couperin resides in these fastidious miniatures. Beginning to surface in Debussy's style are modal nuances, intriguing voicings of chords of the seventh and ninth and certain distinctive features such as the avoidance of melodic accents on down beats in the limpid opening of *Clair de lune*.

When Debussy returned to composition for solo piano with a modestly titled suite called ***Pour le piano*** (1900), his approach to the instrument embraced new brilliance in both concept and technique. Still nominally within the baroque suite manner, each movement exhibits the confidence of his early maturity. In the *Prélude* (the term may imply

a Bach-derived idiom here) basic musical materials, primarily diatonic modality and whole-tone-based sonorities, are juxtaposed even at climactic moments and within the cadenza and concluding chords. In the *Sarabande* Debussy adheres rather closely to traditional texture, phraseology and rhythm of the dance type. To be played “avec *élégance grave*” it seems to owe something to Satie's austere sarabandes of 1887. The *Toccata*, moving in a kind of latter-day *fortspinnung*, achieves equilibrium of melody, harmonic thrust and rhythmic sweep in largely diatonic contexts far from the harmonic determinism of the nineteenth century.

In his turn Maurice Ravel created stylized evocations of the art of the *clavecinistes*, as well. His *Pavane pour une infante defunte* (1899) cultivates the stately, rather pensive lyricism that characterized this dance form; its style is further reflected in regular phrase lengths and sectional form. Distinguishing the composition are not only its piquant melody and lush harmony but also the characteristically exquisite chord voicings. The deceased infanta of the title, regrettably, seems to have been an imaginary creature invented by Ravel for evocative purpose.

- Wallace Rave

## Paul Freeman

Paul Freeman has conducted over 90 of the world's leading orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland and Chicago Symphonies. He has won numerous awards and made over two hundred recordings.



# Caio Pagano

Loved by audiences and critics alike for his "commanding technique" (*London Times*), and "power and bravura" (*Berlin Die Welt*), Caio Pagano is in great demand in major musical and cultural centers around the world. The New York Times called his Beethoven "superb, absolutely first-class". Twice voted best Brazilian pianist, Pagano has been presented in more than 500 performances as recitalist, chamber musician, and soloist with orchestras throughout Central and South America, the United States, and Europe. He has collaborated with many leading conductors, among them Ernest Bour, Andreas Delfs, Szimon Goldberg, Sergiu Comissiona, Eleazar de Carvalho, Jose Serebrier, James Sedares, and Paul Freeman who is featured on the present recording with the Slovakia National Orchestra.

Among Caio Pagano's many awards are the International Beethoven Award in Portugal, the International Award in Barcelona, and the Grand Prix of the National Piano Competition in Brazil. He appears regularly on radio and television as a Steinway Artist, has toured with renowned performers such as Pierre Fournier and Janos Starker, and has been a featured artist at international music events such as the Miami New World Festival, the Washington Inter American Fest, the Grenoble Festival, the Megève Festival, and many others.

While serving as Professor at the University of São Paulo, Brazil, Caio Pagano created the International Biennial of Music. Now, as a Regents' Professor of Music at Arizona State University, he attracts some of the brightest students on the horizon today. He is also a noted scholar with publications on three continents, and a prolific recording artist with more than a dozen albums to his credit, including this CD of French Piano Music.

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## **FRANCK (1822-1890)**

### **1 SYMPHONIC VARIATIONS**

for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 46

16:03

**CAIO PAGANO**, piano

**SLOVAKIA NATIONAL ORCHESTRA**

conducted by **PAUL FREEMAN**

## **SATIE (1866-1925)**

### **TROIS GYMNOPIEDIES**

**2** Gymnopédie No. 1, Lente et douloureux 3:29

**3** Gymnopédie No. 2, Lent et triste 3:17

**4** Gymnopédie No. 3, Lent et grave 2:56

## **DEBUSSY (1862-1918)**

### **SUITE BERGAMASQUE**

**5** Prélude 4:01

**6** Menuet 5:25

**7** Claire de lune 5:09

**8** Passepied 3:50

### **SUITE POUR LE PIANO**

**9** Prélude 3:58

**10** Sarabande 5:49

**11** Toccata 3:48

## **RAVEL (1875-1937)**

**12** PAVANE POUR UNE INFANTE DEFUNTE 6:39

(Ravel) SDRM/United Music Publishers Ltd.

**PLAYING TIME: 65'05"**

**Caio Pagano is a Steinway Artist.**

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French  
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Music

*Franck*  
*Satie*  
*Debussy*  
*Ravel*



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CAIO PAGANO, Piano FRANCK SATIE DEBUSSY RAVEL SR1017



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## French PIANO Music

*Franck* (1822-1890)

SYMPHONIC VARIATIONS

for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 46

*Slovakia National Orchestra*

conducted by

*Paul Freeman*

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TROIS GYMNOPIEDIES

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PAVANE POUR UNE

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