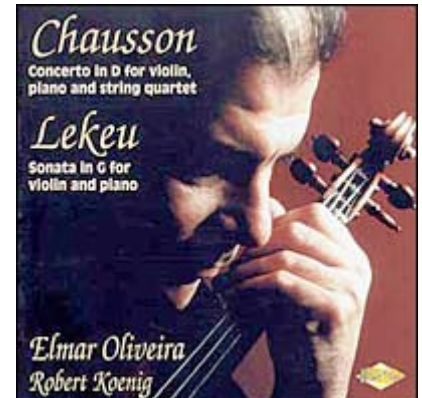




## Lekeu Violin Sonata & Chausson Concert for Elmar Oliveira & co's recording (Artek Recordings)

Eyes always blazing and tongue quick to lash, he went around in a private creative universe, like a young Beethoven amid the courtiers. That he rarely took a step without clutching up his copy of the last Quartets serves to prove his powers of unconscious identification.<sup>2</sup> So Laurence Davies captures the image of the young lion that was Guillaume Lekeu.



By the time Lekeu died at the age of 24 he had proved himself the great white hope of the band of young composers gathered around the strangely charismatic figure of César Franck. Born in Belgium in 1870, Lekeu was a brilliant student, not only of music but of classics, science and philosophy. Rather than attending the Paris Conservatoire, he took private composition lessons. Franck was at first reluctant to take on a new pupil at a late stage in his own life, but the two became increasingly close.

Idolising Beethoven and Wagner - he fainted after hearing the Tristan<sup>1</sup> prelude at Bayreuth - Lekeu appears to have been driven by emotion alone. In his letters he affirms that the artist's creative quest is to master the plenitude of different shades of feeling. His views on the close relation between beauty and sorrow are reflected in most of his music. Tragically, Lekeu died the day after his 24th birthday, having contracted typhoid fever from eating contaminated sherbet.

Of the youthful but highly accomplished works he left, the Violin Sonata - commissioned by no less a personage than Eugene Ysaÿe - is the most enduring. It opens with a slow introduction, the themes of which are the basis for the passionate outpourings that follow. The chromatic twists and turns of this music bear the stamp of influences from both Franck and Wagner

- the former more in the harmonic language, the latter more in the sheer scale of its emotional conception. The second movement, an intense and inward *molto lento*, adopts the unusual 7/8 time signature; and the finale reprises the main themes of the earlier movements, set amidst a torrent of restless, chromatic, contrapuntal writing.

Ernest Chausson lived long enough to find greater personal and artistic fulfillment than did Lekeu - he achieved considerable recognition for his work, had five children and a more than comfortable lifestyle - but his life too was cut short. He was in his early forties when he died in a bicycling accident. He came from a wealthy family; born in Paris in 1855, he was the son of a contractor who worked on the great boulevards instigated by Haussmann. Two older brothers had died in infancy, so the young Ernest found himself overprotected and kept away from normal childhood activities. He wrote to a confidante:  
<sup>3</sup>This relative solitude, along with the reading of a few morbid books, caused me to acquire

another fault: I was sad without quite knowing why, but firmly convinced I had the best reason in the world for it.<sup>2</sup>

Chausson was also multi-talented. He took a law degree to please his parents, and was a gifted painter. One of his closest friends was the artist Odilon Redon, and he collected a fine array of works by artists such as Degas, Corot and Renoir. But despite his enthusiasm for the arts and his presence in the prestigious salons of the day, he hated city life and would spend his summers in the country, where he did most of his composing.

The introversion and melancholy evident in Chausson's music was typical of the prominent Symbolism<sup>1</sup> movement, springing from the literary works of Mallarmé, another good friend of Chausson. The Symbolist aesthetic encouraged living through the inner world - the English critic Arthur Symonds described it as <sup>3</sup>an over subtilising refinement upon refinement<sup>1</sup>. Other influences prominent in Chausson's music are, again, the mystical chromaticism of César Franck and a love-hate relationship with Wagner. These combining into a highly perfumed, deeply sensual and aching sorrowful voice that was Chausson's alone.

The Concerto for violin, piano and string quartet was Chausson's first mature chamber work, begun the same year that Lekeu fainted at Bayreuth, 1889, and dedicated like Lekeu's sonata to Ysaÿe. The work is fairly unique in its treatment of the two solo instruments which - despite the virtuosity required from them - are not soloists in the same sense of either a traditional concerto or a concerto grosso, but rather emerge as if in a relief-frieze against the quartet background. The Concerto is a cyclical work, with earlier themes returning in the last movement. The first movement is alternately sparsely dramatic and lyrical; the second is a Sicilienne which emotionally adds up to more than the sum of its parts, perhaps thanks to the rhapsodic cascades of the piano accompaniment. The third movement is deeply tragic and introverted, but the finale restores energy in force, even if it does not dispel the subtle sense of pessimism and longing that permeates the work.

## **Elmar Oliveira, Violin**

Elmar Oliveira has taken his place as one of the most commanding violinists of our time, with his unsurpassed combination of impeccable artistry and old-world elegance. Mr. Oliveira is one of the few major artists committed to the entire spectrum of the violin world - constantly expanding traditional repertoire boundaries as a champion of contemporary music and rarely-heard works of the past, devoting energy to the development of the young artists of tomorrow, and enthusiastically supporting the art of modern violin and bow makers.

Among his generation's most honored artists, Elmar Oliveira remains the first and only American violinist to win the Gold Medal at Moscow's Tchaikovsky International Competition. He is also the first violinist to receive the coveted Avery Fisher Prize, in addition to capturing First Prizes at the Naumburg International Competition and the G. B. Dealey Competition.

Mr. Oliveira has become a familiar and much-admired figure at the world's foremost concert venues. His rigorous international itinerary includes appearances in recital and with many of the world's greatest orchestras, including the Zurich Tonhalle, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestras; the New York, Helsinki, Los Angeles and London Philharmonic Orchestras; and the San Francisco, Baltimore, Saint Louis, Boston, Indianapolis, Oregon, Vancouver, Taiwan and Chicago Symphonies, and the Orpheus

Chamber Orchestra. He has also extensively toured the Far East, South America, Australia, New Zealand, and regularly performs at the Mostly Mozart, Seattle, Grant Park, Blossom, and Chautauqua summer music festivals. Engagements this season include the Chicago, Atlanta, Vancouver, New World, San Francisco, New Mexico, Winnipeg, and Nashville Symphonies, the New York Chamber Symphony, and the Louisiana Philharmonic.

Mr. Oliveira's repertoire is among the most diverse of any of today's preeminent artists. While he has been hailed for his performances of the standard violin literature, he is also a much sought-after interpreter of the music of our time. He has premiered works by such distinguished composers as Morton Gould, Ezra Laderman, Charles Wuorinen, Joan Tower, Andrzej Panufnik, Benjamin Lees, Nicholas Flagello, Leonard Rosenman, Hugh Aitken, and Richard Yardumian. He has also performed seldom-heard concerti by Alberto Ginastera, Einojuhani Rautavaara, Joseph Achron, Joseph Joachim, and many others. In recent seasons, he gave the World Premiere of Leonard Rosenman's Violin Concerto No. 2 at Carnegie Hall with the American Composers Orchestra, and the Spanish Premiere of Krzysztof Penderecki's Second Violin Concerto, conducted by the celebrated composer.

A prodigious recording artist, Elmar Oliveira is a two-time Grammy nominee for his CD of the Barber Concerto with Leonard Slatkin and the Saint Louis Symphony. His discography on Angel, SONY Masterworks, Artek, Vox, Delos, IMP, Ondine, and Melodiya ranges widely from works by Bach and Vivaldi to the present. His best-selling new recording of the Rautavaara Violin Concerto with the Helsinki Philharmonic (Ondine) won a Cannes Classical Award and has appeared on Gramophone's "Editor's Choice" and other Best Recordings lists around the world. Other recent recordings include the Joachim Concerto "in the Hungarian Manner" with the London Philharmonic (IMP) and the Tower Concerto (written for him) with the Louisville Orchestra (d'Note). Also recently released is the rarely heard Pizzetti and Respighi sonatas (Artek), the Chausson Concerto for Violin, Piano, and String Quartet, and the Lekeu Sonata, and a recording of the Brahms and Saint-Saens B minor Concerti with Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony (Artek). Of great historical significance are two unique projects: a major CD released by Bein & Fushi of Chicago, featuring Mr. Oliveira performing on some of the world's greatest violins (fifteen Stradivaris and fifteen Guarneri del Gesù), and a recording of short pieces highlighting the rare violins from the collection of the Library of Congress.

The son of Portuguese immigrants, Mr. Oliveira was nine when he began studying the violin with his brother John. He later continued his studies with Ariana Bronne and Raphael Bronstein at the Hartt College of Music and the Manhattan School of Music, where Mr. Oliveira also received an honorary doctorate. He has served on the juries of some of the most prestigious violin competitions, including the Montreal, Indianapolis, Naumburg, and Vianna da Motta. He has appeared on international TV including Good Morning America, CBS Sunday Morning, the Today Show, and A&E's Breakfast with the Arts among others. The Prime Minister of Portugal recently awarded Mr. Oliveira the country's highest civilian honor - The Order of Santiago. Elmar Oliveira performs exclusively on an instrument known as the <sup>3</sup>Stretton<sup>2</sup>, made in 1729-30 by Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù, and on an exact copy of that violin made by Curtin and Alf in 1993.

### **Robert Koenig, Piano**

Pianist Robert Koenig performs regularly in many of the major centers throughout North and South America, Europe and Asia. His 1998-1999 season included performances in Montreal, Dallas, Seattle, Alice Tully Hall in New York City, and the Kennedy Center in

Washington D.C. In Europe his recent engagements have included London, Paris, Milan, Frankfurt, Munich, Amsterdam and Moscow. While in Asia, he has performed in Tokyo's Suntory Hall, the National Theater of Taipei and the Seoul Arts Center.

Mr. Koenig has appeared at many festivals including Aspen, Ravinia, Banff, the Campos do Jordao Festival in Brazil, the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, Festival d'ete du Quebec, and the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York. He has collaborated with such noted artists as Aaron Rosand, Elmar Oliveira, Sarah Chang and Pamela Frank. He is frequently heard on radio and television including the CBC Network in Canada, WQXR Radio in New York, the BBC in London, National Public Radio and ABC's <sup>3</sup>Good Morning America<sup>2</sup>. Since 1992, Mr. Koenig has been staff pianist at the Juilliard School of Music in New York and the 1998-1999 season saw him in residence as visiting artist at The Curtis Institute of Music. In January 1999, his most recent CD on the Biddulph Label with violinist Elmar Oliveira performing Chausson's Concerto for violin, piano and string quartet was released.

Commencing with the September 2000 academic year, Mr. Koenig was appointed Assistant Professor of Piano Chamber Music at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

Born in Canada, Mr. Koenig began his formal training at the Vancouver Academy of Music with Lee Kum Sing and Gwen Thompson and later studied at the Banff School of Fine Arts and the Academie di Chigiana in Sienna, Italy. During this time he received several awards from the Canadian Government including a Canada Council Project Grant. Mr. Koenig completed both his Bachelor and Masters Degrees in Accompanying from The Curtis Institute of Music where he studied with Dr. Vladimir Sokoloff and chamber music with Felix Galimir and Karen Tuttle. Currently he resides with his violinist wife Elaine in Lawrence.

## **Lekeu**

### **Sonata in G for violin and piano**

1 I Tres modéré 11:51

2 II Tres lent 11:36

3 III Tres animé 8:36

## **Chausson**

### **Concerto in D for violin, piano and string quartet\***

4 I Décidé Animé 13:23

5 II Sicilienne: Pas vite 3:48

6 III Grave 8:38

7 IV Tres animé 10:15

with The Vista Nuova Ensemble\*

(Regis Iandiorio, violin I, Abraham Appleman, violin II;  
Sandra Robbins, viola; Maxine Neuman, cello)

### **Producer:**

Eric Wen

### **Recording Engineer:**

Da-Hong Seetoo

**Recording date:**

30 August 1995

**Recording location:**

SUNY Purchase, New York

**Programme notes:**

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**Cover photo:**

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