

## RHENÉ BATON

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René-Emmanuel Baton was known as Rhené-Baton.

He was born in Courseulles-sur-Mer, Normandy on 5 September 1879.

His family originated from Vitre in Catholic Brittany and young René returned to that area when he was about nineteen years of age, the area he loved as did many other Breton composers including Roussel and Ropartz.

Rhené-Baton studied piano and theory at the Paris Conservatoire with tutors such as Andre Gedalge.

Gedalge was born on 27 September 1856, the year Schumann died, and Gedalge himself died on 5 February 1926. He wrote ballets and comic operas including *Caught in the Trap* and *Le Petit Savoyard*, three symphonies (1893, 1902, and 1910), a quartet entitled *The touchstone of the musician*, a piano concerto and a violin concerto, two sonatas for violin and piano and other things. He was a highly respected teacher and a friend of Pierné, Ravel, Honegger and Koehlin to name but a few.



Rhené Baton's own career began as a choral director at the Opera-Comique in 1907 and as conductor of various orchestral groups including the Society of St Cecelia in Bordeaux and the Societe Populaire in Angers (1910-1912). In 1910, he was selected to head the French Festival of Music in Munich. Diaghilev chose him to conduct the Ballet Russes in London and South America during 1912 and 1913.

During World War I, Rhené-Baton was the director of Dutch Royal Opera (1916-1918).

Albert Roussel dedicated his Symphony no 2 of 1919-1921 to Rhene-Baton. That was a great honour and some esteem Roussel as the greatest French composer.

As to his works, it has to be said that some of his piano music is excruciatingly difficult. The piano music of Jean Roger-Ducasse is even more difficult. However Rhené-Baton did compose some much easier pieces such as the *Album Rose*, six preludes and three short pieces *Pour Yvonne* dedicated to his friend Yvonne Billot.

The six piece suite *Au pardon de Rumengol* is based on the centuries old pilgrimage to Rumengol in Brittany to the church of Our Lady. This tradition is very old and was only suspended during the French Revolution and this tradition stands for forgiveness and pardon, hence the title.

The six pieces begins with *A l'aube sur la route de Rumengol* and is in the style of a march. It begins in C passes through G sharp minor and E flat before returning to C. It dwells on the intervals of fourths and fifths. The second piece, *La procession sort de l'église* is one of the pieces in this set dedicated to Louis Aubert. The third piece is in the tempo of a march routed in the key of A with some fascinating music and big chords. Next comes an *Idyll* which key wise is in ABA form, D flat, G sharp minor, D flat. *Le coin des commères* is a brilliant scherzo mainly in D and expertly written. The *Ronde* is a

gracious allegretto with many key changes, D, B, A, B, C and D which keeps the music interesting. The final movement *Soir de fête* is a vivace with many key changes D, F, G, B flat, A flat, E, D flat, D, D flat, E and A flat. It captures the various types of character at the end with its festivities.

I suppose this is programme music telling the story of the pilgrimage. In the history of music we have had periods where programme music fell out of favour but this work owes its success to the quality of the music.

There are some exquisite songs such as *Hindoustana* and the *Idylle Morte* which he dedicated to Duparc. There were two Evening Prayers Op 27 and another set of Breton songs Op 21.

Some of his works concern death as, for example, in *La mort des amants*, *Idylle Mort* and *Cortège Funèbre d'un Samourai*, Op 37.

Rhené-Baton's *Serenade fantastique* for piano dates from 1901. His Opus 2 is a set of eight Breton songs. 1904 saw his *Variations on a theme in the Aeolian mode* for piano and orchestra. His love of Brittany is further shown in his *En Bretagne* Op 13 for piano of 1909 and his orchestral work *Symphonic Piece for the funerals of Breton sailors* of 1925. There is a cello sonata of 1903, Op 28, and a Piano Trio in A flat of 1924, the second movement is a divertissement on a Breton air. That year saw the appearance of his *Elegiac Poem* Op 32 for cello and orchestra and in 1926 his *Fantasie Oriental*, Op 34 for violin and orchestra. There are no concertos as such, and no symphony.

The *Fantasie Orientale* is scored for double woodwind, four horns, trumpet, harp, celeste, percussion including a Basque tambour, solo violin and string orchestra and is dedicated to Mademoiselle Noela Cousin. It is a 40 page full score and the key alternates between G sharp minor, and its relative major key of B, and B flat. A slow andante leads into an allegretto scherzando. It is very attractive music and beautifully orchestrated which makes one wonder why he did not write more works for the orchestra. They are as charming as Saint Saens's short works for violin and orchestra.

He died at Le Mans, about 113 miles from Paris, on 23 September 1940. He was 61.

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