CLAUDE DEBUSSY

THE COMPLETE PIANO MUSIC, VOL. IV

BENNETT LERNER, PIANO

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Any hardy soul who has listened to (or learned to play) the complete piano music of Claude Debussy cannot fail to be struck by the wide range of styles encompassed in this oeuvre. A great creative mind like Debussy's does not stand still and delights in constant self-renewal, self-revelation, and self-realization. Debussy himself wrote, "There is…no greater pleasure than plunging down into oneself, stirring up one's whole being, searching for new and hidden treasures. What a joy it is to find something new there, something that surprises and pleases the composer" (Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, Gallimard, 1987, 311; quoted in Carlos Caballero, *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 138). Yet no matter in what style or from what period, Debussy's music is always recognizable, with (as I wrote in the booklet notes to Volume I of this series of CDs) "the color, the sensuality, the ecstasy" that are uniquely his.

The earliest of Debussy's styles was Russian-influenced. In the four early pieces presented here, dating from 1890 to 1892, we can find the moods and gestures of Borodin, Glazunov, and Tchaikovsky (though not yet of Mussorgsky). Around 1918 the poet Jean Cocteau wrote, "Debussy translates Claude Monet into Russian" (Cocteau, *Le Rappel à l'ordre*, 1948; quoted in Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré; A Musical Life*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 432). As in *Danse bohémienne* and *Intermède* (works from the same period recorded in Volume 1 of this series), we have the modal qualities of Russian melodies; the uneven time signatures of Russian folk dance (the 7/4 of the middle section of Nocturne); what Roy Howat (*Russian Imprints in Debussy's Piano Music*, lecture, Claude Debussy International Conference, University of Texas, 2006) calls a "sense of narrative"; and the perhaps extreme repetition of motifs (sometimes recalling the endless strophic songs found in the operas of Rimsky-Korsakov, for example *Sadko*). This "Russianness" is one reason I choose to group these pieces together.

Another reason for this grouping is that the abstract and non-pictorial titles of the pieces recall the titles favored by Chopin. Debussy's affinity with Chopin is here explicit, as it was in his late years when he edited Chopin's works for Durand and dedicated his own *Études* to the Polish composer. Moreover, Debussy's first piano teacher, Mme. Antoinette-Flore Mauté de Fleurville, was, or at least claimed to be, a pupil of Chopin. Debussy thought of her when working on his Chopin edition. As he wrote in a letter to Durand, "It is a pity that Mme. Mauté de Fleurville, to whom I owe the little I know about

the piano, is dead. She knew many things about Chopin" (Dietschy, *A Portrait of Claude Debussy*, tr. Ashbrook and Cobb, Clarendon Press, 1994, 20n). I sometimes refer to this group of four pieces as "Debussy's Chopin Group."

About the **Ballade** (*andantino con moto, tempo rubato*), it must first be noted that the original title was, in fact, "not nicked from Chopin" (as Roy Howat put it), but was *Ballade slave*, and was, perhaps, thus more Russian than Chopinesque. (Chopin, being Polish, was nevertheless a Slav.) The piece is tender and serious, with more than a touch of melancholy in it. After five pianissimo bars to set the calm mood, the first theme enters, a lullaby-like tune in oscillating thirds. This tune is repeated quite insistently until 2:21 when the second theme is heard, a scale-like motif whose setting recalls Debussy's song of 1887, "Il pleure dans mon coeur" from *Ariettes oubliées*. At 3:27 we have a tender and loving early example of Debussy's favored technique of avoiding and spreading out a climax. A typically long and gentle coda, filled with angelic harps and flutes, brings the work to a peaceful end.

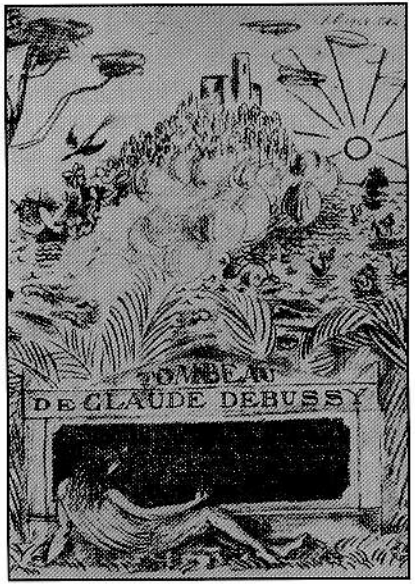
Debussy's **Mazurka** (*scherzando, assez animé*) is, true to its genre, a dance piece in triple time, in this case with an emphasis on the second beat. This is established clearly in the opening two measures. The piece is joking and cheerful (*scherzando*) but also proud. The main subject, made of up short motifs, is repeated perhaps too frequently. What is interesting here is Debussy's skill, already evident in this early work, in varying repetitions of motifs by changing the underlying harmonies, thereby giving a musical idea (a rhythm or motif) a new and different meaning. (Compare the opening to 0:54 or 2:10.) The middle section, *risoluto*, introduces a new motif, a rising arpeggio in dotted rhythm, which has a touch of that noble haughtiness sometimes found in the mazurkas of Chopin. A surprising scale brings the piece to a vigorous conclusion.

Nocturne (*lent*) is one of the few works of Debussy in which I sense the influence of Fauré. After a mysterious five-bar introduction we hear the main theme, which in both its shape and the texture of its accompaniment recalls the manner of Debussy's elder colleague. This work is expressive and sweet, dreamy yet passionate. At the beginning of the middle section (2:23) Debussy has written *Dans le caractère d'un chanson populaire* ("In the character of a folk song"). This tune, whose opening notes were hinted at in the introduction, is overtly Slavic in style and would not be out of place in a work by Rimsky-Korsakov or Borodin. (Roy Howat suggests it is "an obvious quote" from Borodin's *Petite Suite* of 1888.) As mentioned earlier, it is in 7/4 meter, which gives it a floating, unanchored feeling quite characteristic of Russian melodies, based as they often are on Russian Orthodox chant. The strummed accompaniment recalls the Russian gusli (a zither-like folk instrument; see, again, Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Sadko*, which tells the tale of a gusli player and his dreams). After a repeat of the introduction, now made even more mysterious by the flattening of its motif's highest note, the main theme returns, its harmonies now varied. A coda (5:04) ends the piece *très léger* (very lightly) with a rising, angelic, harp-like sonority.

Valse romantique (*tempo di valse, allegro moderato*) is, of the four pieces presented here, the most unblushingly in the genre of salon music. (The ghost of Benjamin Godard vies with that of Chopin.) The piece is charming and elegant and contains some surprising sonorities, the most Debussyan moment being at 1:54 where long pedals sustain three simultaneous levels of texture, producing a delightful effect. The piece begins seductively and ends passionately.

Debussy on his death bed (Othon Frieze)

In December of 1920, not quite three years after Debussy's death (March 25, 1918), the French periodical La Revue Musicale published an issue in his memory containing articles on his music, reports of performances and -- what concerns us here -- a collection of musical compositions collected under the title **Tombeau de Debussy** (*Debussy's Grave*). The cover was designed by the painter Raoul Dufy and the pieces included such masterpieces as Igor Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (the final chorale arranged for piano solo) and Maurice Ravel's *Duo* for violin and cello, as well as a song by Eric Satie, a guitar solo by Manuel de Falla, and piano pieces by Béla Bartók, Paul Dukas, Eugène Goosens, Gian-Francesco Malipiero, Albert Roussel, and Florent Schmitt. I have chosen to include four of these works on this CD; bonus tracks, as it were.



Cover of Tombeau

The first of these is by Béla Bartók (Hungary, 1881-1945), his **Improvisation No. 7** (*sostenuto, rubato)* from his *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs*, Op. 20. It is a setting of a lullaby in an archaic Hungarian dialect. The enigmatic text (in an 18th century variant) reads, "Sleep, my son, sleep. You are not the son of your father but the son of an office clerk." According to Hungarian Nabokov scholar Andrea Tompa, "the song refers to the period of the Hungarian-Turkish war, when several children were born not of Hungarian, but of Turkish (or in the transformation of the song, in later variations, of non-Hungarian) fathers, and the song says that the son's father is Hungarian (i. e., office clerk), and not Turkish" (personal correspondence, October 15, 1997). This movement of the *Improvisations* is dedicated "to the memory of Claude Debussy."

Bartók's musical debt to Debussy is well documented and in this piece he makes subtle references to Debussy's style. For example, the opening presents music on different levels with different dynamics, the melody loud with soft bells surrounding it, recalling "Pagodes" from *Estampes* and also "La Cathédrale engloutie." The end of the piece, which comes to rest with a sigh on a middle C surrounded by a delicate sonority of thirds and seconds, is similar to the end of "Voiles" from *Préludes*, Book II.

For his contribution, **La Plainte au loin du faune** (The Plaint in the Distance of the Faun) (*assez lent*), Paul Dukas (France, 1865-1935), chose to comment on one of Debussy's most famous early works, the *Prélude à "L'Après-midi d'un faune"* (1894). Opening with a bell-like repeated G, heard throughout most of the piece, and, in the second measure, quoting the languid and bittersweet initial bars of Debussy's etude "Pour les sixtes," Dukas then presents the opening flute solo of *L'Après-midi*. In the words of Alfred Cortot (*French Piano Music*, Oxford, 1932, tr. Hilda Andrews, 207), Debussy's "sensuous pastoral...with its drowsy chromaticism" is here transformed into "a mood of oriental languor." The distance of the title is, I suggest, temporal and not spatial and the aged faun is here remembering his early years, which he spent in unending sensual play, passing his time seducing nymphs. At the end of the piece he moans, mourning his lost youth. To quote Cortot again, "It is impossible to imagine a more moving evocation of a style or a more intimate understanding of a lyrical spirit than is revealed here in these few pages steeped in sad tenderness."

Homenaje (Homage) (*mesto e calmo*) by Manuel de Falla (Spain, 1876-1946) was originally a guitar solo, but de Falla himself made a piano transcription. To maintain the sad and calm character of the piece and the soft and muffled character of a guitar, de Falla instructs the pianist to "use the una corda pedal throughout the piece, even in the spots marked forte." He also gives detailed instructions as to which notes are to be "a bit accentuated and lightly held back," "a little hurried," and "very rhythmical," thus creating the characteristic Spanish rubato. De Falla has been quoted as saying that Debussy's "La Soirée dans Grenade" from *Estampes* was "the piano piece...the most expressive of Spain" (E. Robert Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*, Duell, Sloan, and Pierce, 1950, 85), and just before the end of Homenaje de Falla quotes that work, in what Marian Wheeldon (*Tombeau de Claude Debussy*, lecture, Claude Debussy International Conference, University of Texas at Austin, 2006) called "a wonderful example of musical reciprocity."

The last of the four works I have chosen is by Florent Schmitt (France, 1870-1958), his **Et Pan, au fond des blés lunaires**, s'accouda (And Pan, Deep in the Lunar Wheat, Leaned Back on his Elbows). The title is from a poem by Paul Fort and the piece was later published as one of the two *Mirages*, Op. 70. Containing no quotes (though its main theme sounds suspiciously like a theme in the third movement of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*), but recalling the sonorities of Debussy's *La Mer, D'un Cahier d'esquisses*, the etude *Pour les agréments*, and *Syrinx*, the piece is densely written and pianis-

tically quite uncomfortable (with much hand-crossing, many awkward leaps and positions, and complicated polyrhythms). It is, nevertheless, or perhaps as a result, sumptuous, with some marvelous sonorities, notably the delicate throbbing accompaniment at 3:05 and the crystalline setting of the main theme at 4:20. Pan is, of course, the faun of both Debussy and Dukas.

Estampes (Prints) (1903), the most "touristic" of Debussy's pictorial triptychs, takes us on a thirteen-and-a-half-minute journey around the world, sending us picture postcards from Java (Indonesia), Granada (Spain), and the Luxembourg Gardens (Paris, France).

The first piece, **Pagodes** (Pagodas) (*modérément animé*), was inspired by the Indonesian orchestras heard at the Exposition Universelle held in Paris in 1889. Debussy and his contemporaries were fascinated by the exotic sounds, costumes, and dances of the Indonesian performers. The bright, clangorous sound of the gamelan's metallophones (bells, gongs, xylophones) and the pentatonic modes of the music lead directly to Debussy's "Pagodes." Moreover, the multi-leveled textures of Indonesian music led him to a refinement of the textural aspect of his style. The piece opens with three different sounds: a low gong, a medium gong (both of these in open fifths), and a somewhat higher bell (a major second). Over these enters a pentatonic melody that recalls, in its rising, undulating shape, the multi-leveled roofs of a Southeast Asian pagoda (an example of which can be seen in the photo which accompanies my biography in this booklet). At 0:24 another melody enters, somewhat low, adding a fifth level of sonority. For the pianist, the challenge is to give each of these levels its own color. From the beginning the music has been pentatonic but at 0:50 a new melody enters with a chromatic accompaniment under its pentatonic shape and creates a moment of agitation. After an avoided climax the music recedes into stasis and at 1:29 the development of what is actually a fairly straightforward sonata-form movement begins with a plaintive tune heard under delicate bells. After a sparkling climax, this tune is heard again, this time with the bells above it, and, later, under an intense and trembling trill. The opening returns (the recapitulation) but this time the previously avoided climax is allowed full sway in a passage that, in its clangorous din, recalls the Southeast Asian penchant for firecrackers and noisemakers at New Year's celebrations. The excitement dissolves and in the final pages, like water trickling down a wall or rain dripping from the many roofs of a pagoda ("as pianissimo as possible"), the music evaporates.

In an article in the aforementioned *Revue Musicale*, Manuel de Falla wrote of **La Soirée dans Grenade** (Evening in Granada) (*mouvement de Habanera*), "The power of evocation integrated in the few pages of Evening in Granada borders on the miraculous when one realizes that this music was composed by a foreigner guided by the foresight of genius. There is not even one bar of this music that is borrowed from Spanish folklore, and yet the entire composition, in its most minute details, conveys, admirably, Spain." Indeed the Hispanic quality of the music is here much more overt than in *Pour le piano* and the piece is, moreover, pictorial and even in a narrative

mode. But what I think miraculous here is the musical continuity, which I experience as cinematic. I find here musical analogues of the techniques of film, for example, those of montage, dissolve, and fade. A few illustrations: at 1:08, as the sensuous habanera fades out, the stronger rhythm of the following section is heard quietly in the bass and then, in a crescendo, fades in. This is like a cinematic dissolve. A similar thing happens at 2:47. At 3:05, so much is happening simultaneously -- the pianist feels that his hands must be in three places at once -- it is almost like having a triple-split screen. At 3:17 there begins a wonderful fade-out, which is followed, from 3:26 on, by so many sudden juxtapositions of highly contrasting material that I find myself thinking of Russian-style montage or Nouvelle Vague jump cuts. At the very end of the piece there is no clear final cadence. Instead, we have what might be called a slow fade to black.

The third and final piece of *Estampes*, **Jardins sous la pluie** (Gardens in the Rain) (*net et vif*), takes us on a rainy-day outing to the park with a French nanny and her charges. To depict the rain, Debussy here indulges in his favorite virtuoso pianistic mode -- also found in "Quelques aspects de 'Nous n'irons plus au bois'," the third of the *Images (oubliées)*, the "Prelude" of *Pour le piano*, and "Dr. Gradus ad Parnassum" from *Children's Corner* -- of alternating one note in the left hand with three notes in the right. The piece begins briskly, with a light shower, perhaps, and, in a long crescendo -- interwoven with references to the lullaby "Fais do, fais do do", which we have encountered previously in *Children's Corner* -- the storm gradually increases in intensity until it arrives at a climax at 1:31. The music then quickly subsides into a murmur over which we hear the children nervously whimpering the nursery song "Nous n'irons plus au bois" -- which we have heard earlier in "Quelques aspects" -- only to be answered by the consoling contralto of their nanny. At 2:00 the sun begins breaking though the clouds in a glorious crescendo, "announcing that something is going to happen in E major," as Debussy put it, and, after one last flash of lightning, which sends everyone scurrying for cover, and, at 2:27, two more drops of rain, the clouds clear at last. "Nous n'irons" is heard in glistening flutes and abstergent trumpets, which sweep the sky clean, and the sun emerges, triumphant.

Of Debussy's myriad pieces with picturesque titles, those found in **Préludes, Book I**, (1909-10) are the most explicitly pictorial, descriptive, narrative, and illustrative. We find portraits, picture postcards, stories, and landscapes. This, in spite of the fact that Debussy placed his titles at the ends of the pieces in parentheses and, moreover, preceded by an ellipsis, suggesting (in vain) that these pieces were to be heard primarily as abstract music.

Danseuses de Delphes (Delphic Dancers) (*lent et grave, doux et soutenu*) was inspired by the caryatids of an ancient Greek temple, specifically the temple of the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. Like another of Debussy's "antique" pieces, "Canopes" from *Préludes*, Book II, the piece is sad and noble. In this stylized saraband, the dancers move slowly and gracefully, punctuating their movements with the sounds of finger cymbals (*crotales*).

Voiles (Sails or Veils) (*modéré, dans un rythme sans rigueur et caressant*) is titled ambiguously, with two possible translations. According to Roy Howat, the composer Edgar Varèse, who knew Debussy well, said the reference was to the ethereal and luminescent costumes of the American modern dancer Loie Fuller. Others see an image of sailboats rocking at anchor. Both images are appropriate. For me, this piece is the best illustration of one of the main characteristics of Debussy's style, the simultaneous presentation of a variety of musical materials at different levels. It opens with two flutes in thirds (*très doux*, very sweet), perhaps a depiction of Fuller's veils. Then, we hear a low B-flat ostinato, perhaps the boats rocking at anchor, which is followed by an expressive and gently-arched theme in octaves. These three elements float around each other throughout the piece with a feeling of independence that is uniquely Debussyan. "Voiles" is, moreover, the favored example of Debussy's use of exotic scales. The whole piece is in one whole-tone scale with the exception of the rush to the climax (*emporté*, carried away), which is pentatonic. "Voiles" ends, *très apaisé et très atténué jusqu'à la fin* (very calm and very soft until the end), on a single third, the C and E in the very middle of the piano, which brings the floating ideas to a rest.

The title of **Le Vent dans la plaine** (The Wind in the Plain) (*animé, aussi légèrement que possible*) is a line from a poem by Charles Favart, *Le vent dans la plaine suspend son haleine* (The wind in the plain holds its breath) and, indeed, of all the many "wind and air" pieces by Debussy, this is the most breathless, whirling almost incessantly, stopping only occasionally to sigh (0:19). A wisp of a melody hitches a ride at 0:31 and at the one loud spot in the piece (0:56) the wind suddenly gusts violently. In the last measures the flurries come to a rest on a middle-range B-flat.

"**Les sons et parfums tournent dans l'air du soir**" (Sounds and Perfumes Turn in the Evening Air) (*modéré, harmonieux et souple*) is another line of poetry, this time from Charles Baudelaire's "Harmonie du Soir", which Debussy had set as the second of his *Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire* of 1889. The poem is a *pantoum*, which is a complex poetic structure in which every other line of a stanza is repeated in the following stanza but in a different position in the stanza. Debussy's piece reflects this structure. For example, the opening idea is repeated, though always varied, many times throughout the piece. A perfect description of Debussy's music (or perhaps Debussy's music perfectly illustrates the description) is found in this line of Baudelaire's poem: *valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige* (melancholy waltz and languorous intoxication). Although beginning in the time signature of 5/4, the piece is, indeed, a waltz, one of many to be found in Debussy's oeuvre (such as *Valse romantique*, "Les Fées sont d'exquises danseuses," and "La Terrasse des audiences du clair de lune," the latter two from *Préludes*, Book II). The end, *comme une lointain sonnerie du cors* (like a distant calling of horns), recalls the many horn calls to be found in *Préludes*, Book II.

Les Collines d'Anacapri (The Hills of Anacapri) (*très modéré*) is, like the pieces in Estampes, a picture postcard, this time from the Bay of Naples.

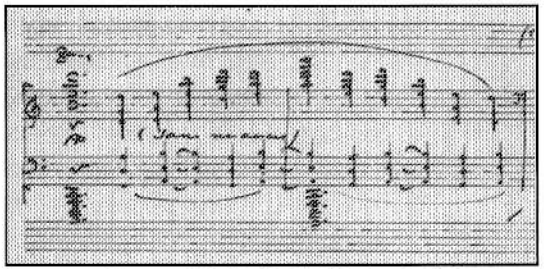
The music is sunny, filled with the joys of wine and Neapolitan good humor. After an introduction of bells and distant tarantellas, a dance, *joyeux et léger* (joyous and light), is heard. At 0:55, *avec la liberté d'une chanson populaire* (with the freedom of a folk song), we hear a seductive, murmuring bass, which is followed at 1:28 by a veritable Neapolitan love song, *una serenata*. At 2:09 our young *innamorato*, beside himself with love and perhaps a little drunk from too much Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio, is about to burst with joy. The piece ends, like "Jardins sous la pluie" from *Estampes*, with an exhilarating, sunny sweep into the upper register of the piano.

Des Pas sur la neige (Footsteps in the Snow) (*triste et lent*) is, like "The Snow is Dancing" in *Children's Corner*, in the "cold" key of D minor. Depicting a bleak, wintry landscape, this piece is built on a rhythmic ostinato, heard nearly throughout the whole piece, of which Debussy writes, *Ce rythme doit avoir la valeur sonore d'un fond de paysage triste et glacé* (This rhythm must be the equivalent in sound of a sad and frozen landscape). A fragmented melody, *expressif et douloureux* (expressive and dolorous), bravely makes its way though this barren scene. At 2:31, *comme un tendre et triste regret* (like a tender and sad regret), it succumbs to the desolation that surrounds it with a note-by-note descent to one of the coldest final chords ever composed. The footsteps? Perhaps the footprints are those *d'un bouc* (of a buck), which are discovered in "Le Tombeau des Naïades" ("The Tomb of the Naiads") -- the third song of Debussy's song cycle *Chansons de Bilitis* (1898) -- which is another wintry, ostinato piece. In that song, the narrator follows what he thinks is *la trace du satyre; ses petits pas fourchus alternent comme des trous dans un manteau blanc* (the prints left by the Satyr, his tiny forked hooves alternately marking the snow like holes in a white coat), only to learn that, *Les satyres sont morts. Les satyres et les nymphes aussi. Depuis trente ans, il n'a pas fait un hiver aussi terrible* (The Satyrs are dead. The Satyrs and the Nymphs, too. For thirty years there hasn't been such a terrible winter). (The text is by Pierre Louÿs.) In any case, snow, i. e., frozen water, is an image of death.

Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest (What the West Wind Saw) (*animé et tumultueux*) is Debussy's most violent piece, a wild improvisation, a vision of terror. (Everyone has his or her own images of terror. Mine are of poor Turkish workers being beaten up by Bavarian louts, which I saw almost every night during my student days in Munich. When playing this piece, I always think of the victims' cries.) The piece opens with life-threatening arpeggios over which we hear a moaning motif borrowed from another "wind piece" in *Préludes*, Book I, "Le vent dans la plaine." After a ferocious sweep up and down the keyboard there is a moment of calm in parallel chords (like those in "La Cathédral engloutie"). A terrifying crescendo and accelerando lead to the first climax (0:54) after which outburst (*strident*) the music subsides into anguished (*angoissé*) moans. A second, more powerful climax (2:12) is followed by a shortened repeat of the opening. A sort of crazed jig ends this nightmare.

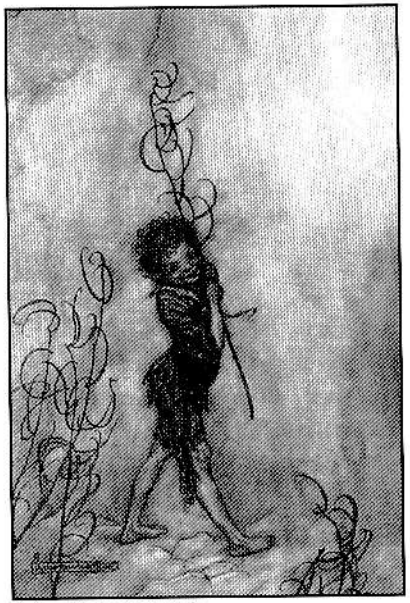
As if to console us, Debussy follows up the bad dream with one of his most peaceful, beatific portraits, **La Fille aux cheveux de lin** (The Girl with the Flaxen Hair) (*très calme et doucement expressif, sans rigueur*). The title comes from a poem by Leconte de Lisle. (The Scotsman Roy Howat suggests translating the title after the Robert Burns' poem "The Lassie with the Lint-white Locks.") In the same mood as another of Debussy's Scottish pieces, "Bruyères," from *Préludes*, Book II, this piece is tenderly painted in pastels and reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings of Burne-Jones.

La Sérénade interrompue (The Interrupted Serenade) (*modérément animé*) is another picture postcard from Spain, like "La Soirée dans Grenade," and, as the title suggests, a picturesque narrative of love, like "Les Collines d'Anacapri." Unlike our Neapolitan lover, our Spanish *amante* has no luck. The piece opens, *quasi guitarra*, with some aimless plucking of strings, both to warm the fingers and to embolden the nervous heart, as he stands in front of his beloved's balcony. Our young man starts to sing in earnest, *expressif et un peu suppliant* (expressively and a bit beseechingly), only to have a bucket of water thrown on him from above, perhaps by his girl's *dueña*. He persists in his song with greater intensity, breaking into a passionate unaccompanied solo at 1:19, only to be interrupted -- twice! -- by a happy-go-lucky donkey boy. *Rageur* (furious), our beleaguered *muchacho* explodes. But his love overcomes his rage and he sings with increasing sweetness and tenderness; though now with a resigned awareness that tonight is not the night. At the end, after two whimpering moans, he slips away.



Measures 14 & 15 of La Cathédrale engloutie

La Cathédrale engloutie (The Engulfed Cathedral) (*profondément calme, dans une brume doucement sonore*) takes us to the coast of Brittany and the mythical Cathedral of Ys (where Yseult, or Isolde, came from). According to legend, the cathedral was "engulfed in the fourth or fifth century because of the impiety of the inhabitants, but allowed to rise again and to be seen (as an example to others) at sunrise" (Schmitt, 155). The piece begins "profoundly calm, in a sweetly sonorous mist," the rising chords assuming the shapes of Romanesque arches. A melody, *doux et fluide* (sweet and flowing), though not really Gregorian in its intervals, calls to mind monks chanting. At 0:52, one of the piano literature's most satisfying crescendos begins, rising to a grand choral climax, *sonore sans dureté* (sonorous without harshness) in parallel chords. This fades out and at 2:41 we hear a mournful single-line melody, reminiscent of the desolate English horn solo at the beginning of the third act of Wagner's opera Tristan und Isolde. After another crescendo and a dissolve, the choral theme is heard pianissimo, *comme un écho* (like an echo), as

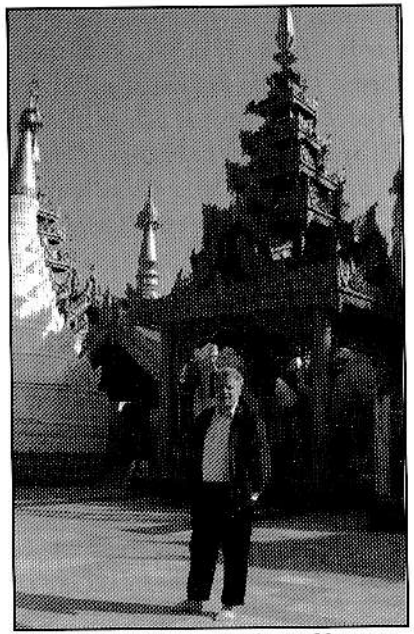


Arthur Rackham's Puck

if coming from under the water. The final measures recall the opening sonority, and also the concentric ripples in the water of "Reflets dans l'eau" from *Images*, Series I.

If one were so inclined, one could find in **La Danse de Puck** (The Dance of Puck) (*capricieux et léger*) an encapsulation of the whole story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, seen from the point of view of one of its characters, the mischievous fairy sprite Puck, the one who causes all the misalliances in Shakespeare's play. (Debussy may have gotten some inspiration from Arthur Rackhams's illustrations for a deluxe 1908 edition of the play.) Debussy's Puck is witty, sly, capricious, and lazy. At the beginning of the piece, he idly ambles around the forest, only to be interrupted by Oberon's call, a horn motif that we hear for the first time at 0:11. Puck ignores the fairy king's summons. At 0:41 he "revs up" his wings and at 0:48, overcoming gravity, he takes flight (*aérien*). At 1:07 Oberon summons him more forcefully and repeatedly and Puck comes down to earth to receive his orders. At 1:24 he rushes around looking for the other characters and at 1:40, following Oberon's orders, he gently drops a love potion into various (and wrongly matched) lovers' eyes. Oberon scolds him at 1:51 but Puck just dances away. After two lazy and, perhaps, exasperated sighs at 2:02, he revives and takes to the air again. Yet, at 2:28, we can see that he has been changed by his encounter with human love, for his scampering is hesitant and a sad melody is heard underneath it. But, as is his nature, Puck quickly recovers his *élan* and, in spite of two distant calls from his king, disappears, *rapide et fuyant* (rapid and evasive), in a rising scale. "La Danse de Puck" is a quintessential example of Debussy's subtle use of sonority to depict character.

Minstrels (Minstrels) (*nerveux et avec humour*) brings us very much down to earth and for our finale we enter the Parisian music hall of the early 20th century, where American ragtime was being discovered. Debussy wrote quite a few ragtime (or cakewalk) pieces, such as "Golliwogg's Cake-walk" from *Children's Corner* and in "Minstrels" he applies his light and humorous touch. As the great French pianist Robert Casadesus put it when teaching this piece (Casadesus, *First Family of the Piano*, DVD, 2004), "Comic. Comic. Clown. Absolutely clown!" But as comedy often depends on misfortune for its effects, we have here our share of nervousness and pratfalls (as in "'General Lavine' -- eccentric" from *Préludes*, Book II). At 0:52 the music turns mocking (*moqueur*) and at 1:20 a snare drum announces, *quasi tambouro*, a sentimental number. The decisive final chords of "Minstrels" bring to an end *Préludes*, Book I and, moreover, the final volume of this survey of Debussy's complete piano music. One hopes that Debussy's ghost is pleased.



Lerner at Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon, Myanmar

American pianist Bennett Lerner is well known as a performer of new music and has premiered piano works by composers such as Aaron Copland, Alexander Tcherepnin, Christopher Berg, David Diamond, Irving Fine, Marc Blitzstein, Narong Prangchareon, Otto Leuning, Paul Bowles, Phillip Ramey, Roger Zahab, Roy Harris, Samuel Barber, Tison Street, Virgil Thomson, and Vittorio Rieti.

Highlights of Mr. Lerner's career include a 1985 performance of Aaron Copland's *Piano Concerto* with the New York Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta, performances with the Los Angeles Symphony, the Boston Pops Orchestra, the Indianapolis Symphony, the Minnesota Symphony, the Sand Point Music Festival Orchestra, and at the Teatro Massimo in Palermo, Sicily. In 2002 he was soloist with the National Symphony of Thailand in the world premiere performance of *Bhawanka* by Thai composer Narong Prangchareon. In 2006 Mr. Lerner participated in the first performance of Prangcharoen's *Anusorn (Commemoration)* for cello and piano in New York City, and for the past two years has been a featured performer at the Thailand International Composers Festival. His recordings include *American Piano Music, Vols. 1* and *2*, *Alexander Tcherepnin: Piano Works*, and *Exposition: Paris 1937*, all on the Etcetera label, *Music By My Friends*, on Albany Records, and *Claude Debussy: The Complete Piano Music, Volumes 1, 2,* and *3*, on Bridge Records.

Mr. Lerner's primary teachers were the Chilean virtuoso Claudio Arrau (through whose teacher, Martin Krause, can be traced a direct lineage to Liszt, and through Liszt to Czerny and Beethoven), Arrau's assistant Rafael de Silva, the famous Cuban pedagogue German Diez, the American pianist-composer Robert Helps, and the Argentine virtuosa Arminda Canteros (a friend and pupil of the great German Debussy player Walter Gieseking).

Mr. Lerner has his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the City University of New York and his Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the Manhattan School of Music. He has lived in Thailand since 1990 and is currently a lecturer in the Music Department of Payap University in Chiang Mai, where he recently produced a two-year-long Debussy Festival featuring piano, vocal, and chamber music, both Western and Southeast Asian. Future projects include "Nocturnes and Barcarolles," a two-year festival featuring the music of Gabriel Fauré, and a series called "American Masters."

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