

# DEBUSSY

COMPLETE MUSIC FOR  
PIANO SOLO

CHRISTOPHER DEVINE

PIANO  
CLASSICS



## CLAUDE DEBUSSY 1862-1918

<b>Early Period Works</b>	<b>79'36</b>	<b>Images, Works for Children and other Middle Period Works</b>	<b>76'06</b>		
Suite Bergamasque L75 (1890-1905)		<b>Images, Livre I L110 (1905)</b>		35. Le petit Nègre L114 (1909)	1'00
1. Prélude	3'57	20. Reflets dans l'eau	5'00	36. Hommage à Haydn L115 (1909)	1'56
2. Menuet	3'53	21. Hommage à Rameau	5'43	37. La plus que lente L121 (1910)	3'22
3. Clair de Lune	4'57	22. Mouvement	3'21	38. Morceau de concours (Pièce pour piano) L108 (1904)	0'39
4. Passepied	3'54			'Second Suite Bergamasque'	
5. Danse bohémienne L9 (1880)	2'02	<b>Images, Livre II L111 (1907):</b>		39. Masques L105 (1904)	4'43
		23. Cloches à travers les feuilles	4'08	40. D'un cahier d'esquisses L99 (1903)	3'58
Deux Arabesques L66 (1888, 1891)		24. Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut	5'37	41. L'isle joyeuse L106 (1904)	5'46
6. Première Arabesque	3'44	25. Poissons d'or	3'24		
7. Deuxième Arabesque	3'20			<b>Preludes</b>	<b>79'04</b>
8. Mazurka L67 (1890?)	2'18	<b>Images (oubliées) L87 (1894)</b>		Préludes, Livre I L117 (1909-1910)	
9. Rêverie L68 (1890?)	4'25	26. Lent	3'55	42. Danseuses de Delphes	3'09
10. Tarantelle styrienne (Danse) L69 (1890)	4'51	27. 'Souvenir du Louvre' (Sarabande)	4'19	43. Voiles	4'10
11. Ballade slave (Ballade) L70 (1890)	6'34	28. Quelques aspects de 'Nous n'irons plus au bois'	3'25	44. Le vent dans la plaine	2'21
12. Valse romantique L71 (1890)	2'44	<b>Children's Corner L113 (1906-1908):</b>		45. «Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir»	3'01
13. Nocturne L82 (1892)	6'12	29. Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum	2'16	46. Les collines d'Anacapri	2'44
Pour le piano L95 (1894-1901)		30. Jumbo's Lullaby	3'09	47. Des pas sur la neige	4'13
14. Prélude	4'01	31. Serenade for the Doll	2'31	48. Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest	3'21
15. Sarabande	4'48	32. The Snow is Dancing	2'48	49. La fille aux cheveux de lin	2'09
16. Toccata	4'11	33. The Little Shepherd	2'21	50. La sérénade interrompue	2'32
		34. Golliwogg's Cakewalk	2'35	51. La cathédrale engloutie	5'59
Estampes L100 (1903)				52. La danse de Puck	2'45
17. Pagodes	4'56			53. Minstrels	2'31
18. La soirée dans Grenade	5'10				
19. Jardins sous la pluie	3'28			Préludes, Livre II L123 (1912-1913)	
				54. Brouillards	3'22
				55. Feuilles mortes	3'14
				56. La puerta del Vino	3'31
				57. «Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses»	3'11
				58. Bruyères	2'45
				59. 'Général Lavine' - eccentric	2'43
				60. La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune	4'50
				61. Ondine	3'27
				62. Hommage à S.Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C.	2'21
				63. Canope	3'21
				64. Les tierces alternées	2'41
				65. Feux d'artifice	4'29
				<b>Ballets and other Arrangements</b>	<b>73'40</b>
				66. Khamma, Légende dansée L125 (1910-1912)	20'11
				67. 'Prélude' from 'La damoiselle élue' L62 (1887-1888)	
				<i>arranged for piano solo by the composer</i>	4'41
				68. Jeux, Poème dansé L126 (1912-1913)	17'19
				69. Intermède (2nd movement from the Piano Trio in G L3 (1879) <i>arranged by Maurice Dumesnil for piano solo</i> )	4'12

La Boîte à joujoux, Ballet pour enfants L128 (1913)		85. Étude retrouvée (1915), a first version of 'Pour les arpèges composés', <i>realised by R. Howat</i>	4'26
70. Prélude: Le sommeil de la boîte - Tableau I: Le magasin de jouets	12'02		
71. Tableau II: Le champ de bataille	7'41	Six épigraphes antiques L131 (1914), version for 2 hands by Debussy	
72. Tableau III: La bergerie à vendre - Après fortune faite - Épilogue	7'30	86. Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été	2'18
		87. Pour un tombeau sans nom	3'38
		88. Pour que la nuit soit propice	2'42
<b>Etudes and other Late Period Works</b>	<b>79'07</b>	89. Pour la danseuse aux crotales	2'27
Douze Études L136 (1915)		90. Pour l'égyptienne	3'09
Livre I:		91. Pour remercier la pluie au matin	2'18
73. Pour les cinq doigts	3'05		
74. Pour les tierces	3'44	92. Berceuse héroïque L132 (1914)	4'44
75. Pour les quartes	5'44	93. Page d'album - (pour l'œuvre du 'Vêtement du Blessé') L133 (1915)	1'10
76. Pour les sixtes	4'22	94. Élégie L138 (1915)	2'32
77. Pour les octaves	2'46	95. «Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon» (1917)	2'03
78. Pour les huit doigts	1'43		
Livre II:			
79. Pour les degrés chromatiques	2'15		
80. Pour les agréments	5'03		
81. Pour les notes répétées	3'07		
82. Pour les sonorités opposées	6'00		
83. Pour les arpèges composés	4'47		
84. Pour les accords	4'52		

### Tracks 1-19 Early Period Works

Claude Debussy's mature piano evocations have—with good reason—established such a reputation that it can be a surprise to remember that they mostly date from a period of twelve or thirteen years late in his life, from 1903 onwards, when he was already in his forties. Debussy's composing career, however, was already under way by 1880, and his early music evokes a distinct world of its own, with influences like Massenet, Delibes, Chabrier and Fauré spiced by Debussy's growing discovery of Russian music. Like any composer, Debussy in later years hardly wanted to be represented by works written in a much earlier idiom, and he could be pretty withering about them. A century later, however, one can appreciate these earlier pieces in their own right, now that they have established their own place in the repertoire. Indeed, Debussy's early music has much to teach us about playing his later music; far from being pallid or immature, its robust spans and dancelike rhythms call for vigour, breadth and delicacy in equal measure.

*Suite bergamasque* identifies a topic central to much of Debussy's music, the *commedia dell'arte* (Pierrot, Harlequin, Columbine and company), as explored especially in the poetry of Verlaine. As a nine-year-old in 1871, Debussy had taken his first piano lessons with a Madame Mauté who claimed to be a pupil of Chopin, and whose daughter Mathilde had then just married Paul Verlaine. No record survives to tell us if the young Achille-Claude at that time met the poet whose verses he was later to set in song. In *Suite bergamasque* the allusions to Verlaine emerge most notably from 'Clair de lune', named after one of Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes* poems, which Debussy had already set to music (as had Fauré). Debussy originally planned to call this piece 'Promenade sentimentale' (also after a Verlaine poem), so the title can be seen as generally atmospheric rather than literally programmatic.

Like Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes* poems, *Suite bergamasque* blends emotional and structural robustness with subtly archaic accents, opening with a Couperin-like flourish that somehow suggests a graceful bewigged bow. It's almost like watching the curtains opening on a Molière play, with décor à la Poussin. Indeed, Debussy may have taken the care he did over revising the suite because of its role in the revival of the French keyboard suite: in retrospect it can be seen to have paved the way for later works like Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. *Suite bergamasque* also has telling echoes of Chabrier and Fauré, notably a series

of sudden key changes in the central part of the 'Menuet' that vividly echoes Fauré's *Pavane*, published in 1889. The suite's finale even was originally headed 'Pavane', a title Debussy changed at the eleventh hour doubtless to avoid finger-pointing comparisons with Fauré's *Pavane* (the two pieces are also in the same key). Debussy's piece, anyway, is somewhat on the nimble side for a pavane, nearer in character to Delibes's entrancing 'Passepied' of 1882 for *Le roi s'amuse*. (Delibes's piece also provides Debussy with something of an alibi for writing a *passepied* in duple time, since *passepieds* are traditionally in triple time...)

In 1880, just as he was turning eighteen, Debussy spent the summer and autumn in Florence as musical tutor and household pianist to the family of Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky's famous patroness. That stay possibly inspired his earliest surviving instrumental works, the *Danse bohémienne* and a Piano Trio, the latter lost for many years until its rediscovery in the late 1980s. The piano duets Mme von Meck played over that summer with her young 'Bussik' included Tchaikovsky's new Fourth Symphony, and Tchaikovsky's influence suggests itself in the bold colours and rhythms of *Danse bohémienne*. Mme von Meck sent the piece's manuscript to Tchaikovsky, who responded with a few grumbling remarks about its relatively unsophisticated form—unmoved it seems by a freshness and sureness of gesture impressive for a neophyte composer. (Given what Tchaikovsky later said about Brahms, Debussy doubtless got off fairly lightly.) For over half a century the manuscript of *Danse bohémienne* remained with the von Meck family, unknown to the world at large until 1932 when Mme von Meck's grandson, in post-revolutionary impoverishment, sold it to the German publisher Schott.

The *Deux Arabesques* were published in 1891 by Durand & Schœnewerk, who many years later were to become Debussy's exclusive publisher. Many years later Jacques Durand related that this publication—along with that of Debussy's *Petite suite* for piano duet—was a calculated risk: at first the pieces attracted little attention (being widely considered far too complicated), and between 1891 and 1903 each *Arabesque* hardly sold more than a thousand copies. In the wake of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, however, sales suddenly rocketed to over 100,000 of each *Arabesque* between 1903 and Debussy's death in 1918. Determined not to live in his past, Debussy remained largely indifferent to this, and pianists who tried to play him the *Arabesques* were met with a wry grimace and deftly

diverted to more recent pieces. Nonetheless the *Arabesques* encapsulate much of Debussy's musical philosophy, notably his love of unstuffy counterpoint in which the melody can move freely through the texture from one voice to another, overlaid by ornamental tracery as in

This hypothetical dating is lent further support by the more ambitious scope of the other piano pieces Debussy produced in 1891. *Danse*, *Ballade* and *Valse romantique* he sold as a set early in 1891 to the publisher Choudens, who published them later that year. (The first two pieces were then called *Tarantelle styrienne* and *Ballade slave*; they were retitled *Danse* and *Ballade* when the pieces were republished in 1903.) Whether Debussy intended the three pieces to make up a distinct set is not known, but they go well together, and *Valse romantique* makes an apt finale. Like *Réverie* and *Mazurka*, the three pieces were bought back by Georges Hartmann in 1895. Debussy, however, seems to have been happier about their republication in 1903—which may even have been planned before Hartmann's death—for he skilfully revised *Danse* and *Ballade* for the occasion, as well as renaming them. (Only one incurable note in *Ballade* irked him: on an exemplar of the piece dedicated to Emma Bardac in 1903 he wryly wrote next to a bass note, "This D-sharp is really bad. Cl.D.") He even planned to orchestrate *Danse*, but this never came about (after his death the piece was orchestrated by Ravel). *Danse*, one of Debussy's longest piano pieces, shares its main theme with both the song 'L'échelonnement des haies' and Debussy's *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra, both similarly composed in the years 1890<sup>1</sup>.

The vibrant cross-rhythms of *Danse* also anticipate some of Debussy's later pieces, notably *Masques* of twelve years later. Perhaps these cross-rhythms are reflected in the piece's curious original title *Tarantelle styrienne* (suggesting a mixture of waltz and tarantella). As for *Ballade*, its original title *Ballade slave* reveals the piece's ancestry to be more Russian than Chopinesque. The piece's opening texture—harp-like arpeggios pierced by a horn call—already suggests the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* that Debussy was to write not long after. *Valse romantique* alludes to Chabrier, whose *Valses romantiques* for two pianos Debussy and Paul Vidal had played to Liszt in Rome in 1886 (and which remained favourites of Debussy's all his life). Debussy's piece shares Chabrier's characteristic energy and audibly anticipates several later pieces, from *La plus que lente* to the *Étude* 'Pour les octaves'.



Debussy's only *Nocturne* for piano first appeared in a magazine in August 1892, and although it has been in print ever since, it remains surprisingly little known. (A Dover edition of Debussy's works up to 1905 overlooked it entirely.) Already it points in new directions: its outer sections foreshadow the slow movement of the String Quartet on which Debussy was already embarking, and its central section springs a surprise with a 7/4 episode that could easily have come from the pen of Balakirev or Borodin (who, along with Mussorgsky, had by then usurped Tchaikovsky's place in Debussy's russophile affections). Debussy's father—normally little involved in music—may have played a role in the *Nocturne's* fortunes, for the piece first appeared from the publisher Paul Dupont, for whom Debussy *père* worked as a printer's assistant.

*Pour le piano*, published in 1901, is almost a genre of its own in the way its robust classicality contrasts with Debussy's more delicately evocative later piano suites. Its title simply means 'For the piano', and the movements carry the laconic headings 'Prélude', 'Sarabande' and 'Toccata'. Since Debussy had his name deliberately omitted from the edition's front cover, some humour is inferred, suggesting that he wanted the edition to look innocently like an old classical anthology—naturally with a few surprises. There may be a relationship here to the *Chansons de Bilitis*, with which Debussy's friend Pierre Louÿs had recently hoodwinked the Parisian literary world, by passing off poems of his own as translations of supposed inscriptions found on a tomb. Debussy, in on the secret from the outset, had set three of the poems as songs, in an edition whose cover and general layout were imitated in the first edition of *Pour le piano*.

In *Pour le piano*, the 'Prélude' repeatedly echoes Bach's A minor organ Prelude (BWV 543), and the movement's final chords grandly suggest an echoing cathedral organ. To follow it, Debussy refashioned a 'Sarabande' he had originally composed in 1894 for a set of *Images* that remained unpublished during his lifetime (recorded on volume 2). Ravel so liked this 'Sarabande' that after Debussy's death he gave it another garb by orchestrating it. The 'Toccata' is a cheekier affair, starting with a Poulenc-like parody that somehow mixes a fragment from Daquin's *Le Coucou* with the Prelude from Bach's E major violin Partita. A few seconds later we hear what sounds like Handel's Queen of Sheba arriving at the double. Into all this Debussy works various classical procedures including textural and rhythmic augmentation; combined with the piece's

kaleidoscopic colours, this results in a welter of humour, passion and evocation.

In summer 1903, aged forty, Debussy completed his *Estampes*, the first of his picturesquely titled piano suites. As a title, *Estampes* reflects Debussy's mania for Japanese prints, and the music matches this with precise melodic etching and vivid but delicately chosen colours. Like Mallarmé, Debussy preferred to evoke by stealth, and 'Pagodes' illustrates this neatly by the way its opening right-hand arabesques rise in layers, subtly suggesting the outlines of a pagoda roof. 'Pagodes' also blends Chinese-style chants with the rhythms and timbres of Indonesian gamelan, a genre that had enchanted Debussy at the Paris World Exhibitions of 1889 and 1900. Exactly how close 'Pagodes' comes to gamelan is often debated, for it's obvious that the piece goes well beyond pastiche...

'La soirée dans Grenade' takes us, still in the manner of Japanese prints, to Andalusia and Granada. The young Manuel de Falla soon discovered the piece and was astonished to find the flavour of Andalusia so vividly evoked by a Frenchman. Years later, when Falla went to Paris and befriended Debussy, he was astonished to discover that Debussy had never visited Spain. (That discovery prompted a postcard to Debussy that later inspired 'La puerta del vino', but that's another story.)

Closer to home, 'Jardins sous la pluie' has a few stories attached. Jacques-Emile Blanche, who painted Debussy's portrait twice, later recalled a summer afternoon in his Parisian garden in 1902: as a sudden storm broke, "everyone took refuge in the house, except Claude, determined to savour to the full the scent of soaked earth and the soft patter of raindrops on the leaves". Marguerite Long, who worked on the piece with Debussy, reported that Debussy equally wanted "*Du soleil!*" ("Sunshine!"), and the sense of children playing in the Luxembourg Gardens after the rain had ended. This makes particular sense to the closing pages with their sense of sun, rainbow and fresh scents rising from the earth. Always a child in his sense impressions, Debussy weaves two children's songs ('Do, do, l'enfant do' and 'Nous n'irons plus au bois') into the piece's toccata tapestry.

#### **Tracks 20-41 Images, Works for Children and other Middle Period Works**

"Above all, make me forget the piano has hammers", Debussy is quoted as advising pianists. It's not that he doesn't want *fortissimo* where it's marked

(his orchestral music makes that clear), it's more that he wanted to hear the instrument's resonance rather than just the impact of hammer on string. He might equally have said "make me forget it's a piano", for the music on the present disc evokes anything from voice, flute, harp, violin, horns, trumpets, orchestra and cathedral organ to bells, finger cymbals, Indonesian gamelan and banjo—or just the patter of rain and roar of the wind.

Debussy himself was well aware of the quality of his *Images*, to the extent of dropping his usual reserve in letters to his publisher Jacques Durand. "Have you tried the *Images*?", he wrote to Durand on 11 September 1905: "I think these three pieces stand up well and will take their place in the piano literature ... to the left of Schumann or the right of Chopin ...*as you like it.*"

Those quotations, however, are merely final stops to longer stories. As early as December 1901 — when his only published piano suite was *Pour le piano* — Debussy amazed his new friend, the Catalan pianist Ricardo Viñes, by playing him two new pieces entitled 'Reflets dans l'eau' and 'Mouvement'. "Marvellous", wrote Viñes in his diary. Almost four more years were to elapse before the pieces saw print, surrounding the nobly elegiac 'Homage à Rameau' to form the first series of *Images*. The summer of 1905 found Debussy still polishing the suite while on holiday in Eastbourne: dissatisfied with 'Reflets dans l'eau', he completely rewrote it in three days, before finally sending the long-awaited triptych to his publisher that August.

"A little circle in the water ... a pebble dropping into it" was Debussy's advice to Marguerite Long for the opening motive of 'Reflets dans l'eau', while the bell and gong sonorities of the piece's closing bars reflect his love of Javanese gamelan music. The piano writing of the opening bars (pebbles in the left hand, ripples in the right) also suggests another oriental source dear to Debussy, the Chinese drawing technique of a firm ink line quickly painted over with a moist brush. 'Homage à Rameau', in saraband rhythm, pays tribute to the classical French master of two centuries before, whose operas and ballets had enchanted Debussy in the course of several revivals in 1903. 'Mouvement', a spinning saltarello dance, teases us with mysterious snatches of the *Dies irae* plainchant, a dramatic central episode that veers towards (but never into) the key of B, and a whole-tone ending that all but dissolves the home key of C.

The second series of *Images* was also planned in outline by 1901 and its titles

decided by summer 1903; not until 1907, however, did the music reach final form. 'Cloches à travers les feuilles' alludes to a rural tradition recounted by Debussy's friend Louis Laloy: on All Saints' Day church bells are rung from Vespers until Requiem, "the bells mingling through the yellowing forests from village to village in the evening silence." Laloy, a keen orientalist, may also have had a hand in the title 'Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut', whose alexandrine rhythm pleased Debussy, and whose air of exotic mystery is reflected in the piece's unusual modality. 'Poissons d'or', by way of contrast, plunges us into a sort of shimmering aquatic waltz, complete with swishing tailfins — homage again to the orient, taking its title from an ornate Japanese lacquered panel showing two carp in graceful motion under a willow-bough. (This panel, which hung on Debussy's wall, is now conserved at the Musée Claude Debussy in St Germain-en-Laye.)

Free as those pieces sound, closer study reveals their forms to be amazingly strict, based on exact symmetries and golden section proportions worked out to a very sophisticated degree. One begins to understand why Debussy considered his music classical, and insisted on performers playing it "exactly in time"— far from views of him still widely current.

The *Images* of 1894 survive in a manuscript Debussy dedicated to Yvonne, the adolescent daughter of his painter friend Henry Lerolle. (This same young lady was respectively photographed and painted at the piano by Degas and Renoir.) Dating from the same time as the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and the first draft of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the three pieces reveal Debussy already confidently mature at the piano. Early in 1896 the central piece was printed in a newspaper, with the promise that all three *Images* were about to be published; for reasons unknown this never happened. Not until 1977 was the complete suite published, as *Images (oubliées)*, a title devised to prevent confusion with the two 'official' sets of piano *Images* published in 1905 and 1907.<sup>2</sup>

In an elegantly affectionate preface Debussy describes the pieces as "not for brilliantly lit salons ... but rather conversations between the piano and oneself." This obviously customised commentary for the young Yvonne Lerolle continues above the second *Image*: "In saraband tempo, that is, solemn and slow, even a bit like an old portrait, souvenir of the Louvre, etc..." In turn the third piece is headed, 'Some aspects of the song "Nous n'irons plus au bois", because

the weather is dreadful'. Above the piece's central avalanche of arpeggios Debussy continues the badinage: "Here the harps imitate to perfection peacocks spreading their tails—or the peacocks imitate harps (*as you like it!*) and the sky cheers up again in summer clothing."

For sheer expressive beauty the untitled opening piece is almost unsurpassed in Debussy's output, and its closing cadence echoes the end of Act 1 Scene 1 of *Pelléas et Mélisande* (as well as foreshadowing the end of 'La soirée dans Grenade'). After it comes an early and somewhat lush version of the 'Sarabande' that reappeared in 1901 in the suite *Pour le piano*; the differences between the two versions are well summed up by the different modal colours and richer textures in the first eight bars of the 1894 version. Émile Vuillermoz has described how Debussy played this Sarabande "with the easy simplicity of a good dancer from the sixteenth century",<sup>3</sup> and Debussy's stepdaughter recalled how he used to emphasise the characteristic sarabande 'lift' in the piece's second bar.

The final *Image* shares its mood, its toccata texture and its use of the French nursery song 'Nous n'irons plus au bois' with Debussy's later *Estampe* 'Jardins sous la pluie'; otherwise, though, the earlier piece is quite different, for its opening theme relates it to Debussy's String Quartet of 1893, and its last pages imitate a clanging bell with harmonic oppositions that suggest Debussy's lifelong enthusiasm for Mussorgsky. Above this passage Debussy completed his commentary for Yvonne Lerolle by writing "A bell that keeps no beat" (not entirely true in musical terms), followed by the gruff remark above the closing bars, "Enough of the bell!"

*Children's corner*, reveals a composer still a child at heart. Of all the women in Debussy's often complex life, the one who inspired his purest love and gave him greatest joy was his only child Emma-Claude, born to Emma Bardac in October 1905 and fondly known as Chouchou. Chouchou was obviously in Debussy's mind when, in 1906, he was asked to contribute a piece to a colleague's piano tutor, and responded with a delicately playful waltz titled 'Sérénade à la poupée' (Serenade for the doll). By the middle of 1908 he had added five pieces around 'Serenade for the doll' to make up the *Children's corner*, whose title page bears the touching dedication "To my dear little Chouchou, with her father's tender apologies for what follows." Debussy was doubtless also inspired by

Mussorgsky's song cycle *The Nursery* (which includes a 'Doll's Lullaby'), a work he had enthusiastically praised in print some years earlier.

The English titles of *Children's corner* are in mock deference to Chouchou's English nanny. Originally they included the odd spelling 'Jimbo'—which, in French pronunciation, approximates to the English 'Jumbo'. (The title was thus never meant to be pronounced 'Jimbo' in the English manner; as early as 1910 Debussy's friend André Caplet had it corrected to 'Jumbo's Lullaby' in his orchestration of the suite, made with Debussy's blessing.) It can be added, in Debussy's defence, that his spelling of 'Golliwogg' correctly follows that of Florence Upton's original.

'Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum' launches the suite with teasing echoes of Clementi's *Gradus ad Parnassum* piano exercises, until the music takes flight into an enchanted world where Chouchou's toys come to life. Behind the childlike façade of the titles lie some of Debussy's most tender inspirations—notably 'The little shepherd' which quietly echoes *L'isle joyeuse*, and 'The snow is dancing', a pure Japanese print in music. 'Jumbo's Lullaby' introduces elephantine ragtime, and was never meant to be too slow (Jumbo has to be rocked, not bored, to sleep), and its middle section suggests quadruped dreams of trotting through jungles. Such tender treatment of elephants, incidentally, was not altogether new for France, for in 1798 the post-revolutionary government conducted socio-psychological experiments that included playing music to the elephants in Paris's *Jardin des Plantes*. (Thanks to Elise Grosser for this entrancing information.) The oft-maligned 'Golliwogg's cakewalk' is skilfully wrought – Debussy's well-known parody of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* is most explicit in the middle of the piece, where he makes Wagner's portentous opening phrase sound like an enormous yawn, followed by frivolous laughter. That's just part of the story, though, for even the piece's opening bars (and the off-beats from bar 10) literally 'rag' Wagner by repeatedly banging out the celebrated opening chord of *Tristan*. (Did Cosima ever hear this, one wonders? Would she have grasped what was going on?)

If only video recording had existed to capture Debussy playing this music to Chouchou... Debussy's recording of the suite on a Welte piano roll attests to his directly straightforward way of playing, though some technical problems suggest that the roll doesn't reliably reproduce his original tempi. Harold Bauer,

who gave the suite's concert premiere in 1908, later recounted that Debussy was too nervous even to sit in the hall (he paced outside, chain-smoking as usual). After it was over, Bauer reassured him that the audience had indeed laughed, in the right places, and saw a look of relief flood through a composer often described by his friends as "un grand enfant".

*Le petit Nègre* was composed in 1909 as a contribution to a book of children's piano pieces. Debussy rewards patient young pupils by allowing them a gratifying whack at the last chord. Since the 1930s the piece has been published on its own with the last section repeated (doubtless to make buyers think they're getting more for their money), but this repeat is not authentic. In 1913 Debussy reused the piece's tune in his ballet *La boîte à joujoux*, this time to depict an English soldier. Amusingly, closer inspection shows that it is basically the same melody as that of the *Prélude* 'La fille aux cheveux de lin', just with a very different rhythm!

1909 was also the centenary of Joseph Haydn's death, for which the monthly *Revue musicale* commissioned short homages from Debussy, Ravel, Dukas and d'Indy, based on the musical motive B-A-D-D-G (obtained by fitting Haydn's name to the keyboard with the German usage of H for B-natural, and continuing upwards for N and Y). In keeping with Haydn's own love of pranks, Debussy opens with a slow café waltz over which the 'Haydn' motive is announced, first with mock bewigged solemnity, then with seeming incredulity, before a lively scherzo takes over.

*La plus que lente* of 1910 attests again to Paris's craze for the slow waltz, a genre Erik Satie had unabashedly milked in his song *Je te veux*. To the growing pile Massenet had also contributed a *Valse très lente* (Really Slow Waltz) and a *Valse folle* (Crazy Waltz); *La plus que lente* was probably Debussy's cheeky riposte to these (he always admitted to a soft spot for Massenet). The title is an untranslatable verbal compaction à la Couperin, and can only be rendered approximately as 'The slow waltz outwaltzed' (the piece is not essentially very slow). For all its gleefully rampaging sentiment, *La plus que lente* is crafted with Debussy's usual exquisite attention. Two spacious full cadences in the course of the piece give it almost the air of a suite of waltzes, after which the final page puns repeatedly on the earlier cadences, coyly taking various apparent wrong turns until the music reluctantly slithers into its last line of sentimental farewell.

Debussy was very fond of the piece, and when his publisher Durand had a hack orchestration made of it in 'genre brasserie', Debussy took a look at the result and decided to replace it with his own orchestration, starting with an added cimbalom cadenza. This appendage was "absolutely necessary", he frivolously explained to Durand, "because you can't start the same way in a brasserie as in a salon." Debussy's later piano roll recording of the piece reveals several judicious retouches that are incorporated in the present recording.

This disc's next short piece was intended for an overture, to a planned short opera based on Edgar Allen Poe's ironic tale *The Devil in the Belfry*. It's an enormous pity Debussy never completed this, for his plans included a whistled part for the devil and an overture in quasi-ragtime rhythm—a clear riposte to anyone expecting him to write another *Pelléas et Mélisande*. A single fragment of the planned music reached print, after Debussy was asked to contribute a page to a spot-the-composer contest featured in the January 1905 issue of the magazine *Musica*. The short piano piece he produced for the occasion uses the main part of his sketched *Devil in the Belfry* overture. Only a few readers correctly guessed the composer (the winner's prize was a piano), and this lively little *Morceau de concours*—which could almost have been by Gershwin—then lay forgotten until its rediscovery in the 1970s.

'*2nd Suite Bergamasque*' has been adopted here as an unofficial title for the largest and most symphonic of all Debussy's piano triptychs, one that was dispersed in the oddest of circumstances. In summer of 1903 Debussy started to play to his friend Ricardo Viñes parts of a new *Suite bergamasque* in three movements, ending with 'L'île joyeuse'; in January 1904 he played Viñes all three pieces, and at about the same time adverts by the publisher Fromont identified the opening piece as 'Masques'. The suite, though, never appeared as such; in its place Fromont published, in 1905, a totally different four-movement *Suite bergamasque* that Debussy had composed in 1890, and in autumn 1904 *Masques* and *L'île joyeuse* appeared as two separate pieces from the publisher Durand.

This mysterious story involved, among other things, a probable conflict of publishers, a creditor who forced the publication of the 1890 *Suite bergamasque* in the teeth of Debussy's protests, and, to top it all, Debussy's elopement to Jersey—his own 'isle joyeuse'—with Emma Bardac in July 1904.<sup>4</sup> Over that summer he rewrote *Masques* and *L'île joyeuse*, whose anglicised



respelling suggests an added autobiographical allusion to Jersey. Meanwhile the missing central piece is not hard to identify. In January 1904—exactly when he first played the complete new suite to Ricardo Viñes—Debussy completed and dated the manuscript of a piece called *D'un cahier d'esquisses*, which was promptly printed in the magazine *Paris illustré*. At that time Debussy wrote single pieces only for special commissions, and such magazine publications usually had the purpose of publicising a larger collection to come. *D'un cahier d'esquisses* (literally 'from a sketchbook') thus suggests an announcement along the lines of 'work in progress' or even 'watch this space', and might eventually have taken on a more definitive title. Most telling of all, it forms a perfect prologue to *L'isle joyeuse*: its closing chord leads naturally into the latter piece's opening trill and 'quasi-cadenza', its barcarolle rhythm anticipates the central part of *L'isle joyeuse*, and its repeated cadenza fanfare returns triumphantly in the last part of *L'isle joyeuse*.

Unfortunately *D'un cahier d'esquisses* was sold early to the Brussels publisher Schott, some months before Durand—who was soon to become Debussy's exclusive publisher—persuaded Debussy to sell him *Masques* and *L'isle joyeuse*. Durand may have hoped to recoup rights to the central piece (no papers survive to prove exactly what happened), but this never eventuated. Such banal circumstances appear to have broken up a great triptych. Restoration of the suite not only makes optimum sense of *L'isle joyeuse* (especially its opening), but also rescues its two distinguished companion-pieces from years of neglect. According to the pianist Marguerite Long, Debussy was especially attached to *Masques*, which he considered to be not "*The Comédie Italienne* ... but the tragic expression of existence"—implicit comment, too, on the orchestral *Nocturne* 'Fêtes' which ends almost identically. Intriguingly, the form and proportions of *Masques* are precisely mirrored by its opposite 'twin' *L'isle joyeuse*—until the exact point where the latter piece's coda opens out jubilantly, leaving all sombre echoes of *Masques* behind.

### Tracks 42-65 Preludes

Around 1908 Debussy began sketching his first book of Preludes, completing it in a burst of creative energy over Christmas and New Year 1909-10. The volume appeared in 1910, suggesting one of the many centenary homages to

Chopin that took place that year. Even more precisely, the music's very first chord (starting 'Danseuses de Delphes') comes verbatim from the final chord of Chopin's Prelude in B-flat—complete with the latter's unusual voicing, in which the main melody is tucked into the middle of the texture. In other ways, though, Debussy's Preludes are a different breed, with pictorial titles placed at the end of each piece so that the music acts as a prelude to the title. In that respect Debussy's Preludes relate to Couperin and Rameau, via Chabrier, Schumann and Liszt. All the pieces are dances of some sort (even the slow tread of 'Des pas sur la neige' invites tasteful choreography), ranging from the sarabande of 'Danseuses de Delphes' to a wild saltarello for 'Les collines d'Anacapri', via an underlying slow waltz in 'La Cathédrale engloutie'; or from the antique minuet of 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' to the banjo ragtime of 'Minstrels'.

The individual titles come from a range of sources that suggest Debussy's never-ending sense of wonder at the world and at literature; a closer look shows us how far the music goes beyond any mere postcard aesthetic:

'Danseuses de Delphes': dancing Bacchic priestesses, their robes swirling in the air, on a Greek sculpture displayed in plaster reproduction in the Louvre. The prelude's form subtly imitates the shape of a Greek temple façade, reaching its tonal and dynamic peak halfway through the piece.

'Voiles': this can mean either 'sails' or 'veils', and Alfred Cortot presumed the former. Cortot's composer cousin Edgard Varèse, however—who knew Debussy well at the time—claimed the allusion was to the long trailing silk veils of the dancer Loïe Fuller (who in 1913 choreographed Debussy's orchestral *Nocturnes*).

'Le vent dans la plaine': allusion to a couplet by Charles Favart ('Le vent dans la plaine / suspend son haleine' = The wind in the plain holds its breath). Verlaine quotes this as an epigraph to his poem 'C'est l'extase langoureuse', which Debussy set as a song in the 1880s. Debussy plays on Favart's lines by letting the prelude alternately blow and hold its breath.

"'Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir'" may sound like an idyllic scene, but the poem from which it comes, Baudelaire's 'Harmonie du soir', more ironically reveals a poet reflecting on past love, while the swooping sound of a café violin reacts with his intake of wine (or other narcotics) to make him dizzy with *Weltweh*. Debussy, who had set the poem to music twenty years earlier, knew such feelings well from his often turbulent love life, and responds with

what Alfred Cortot called a '*valse bleue*', sometimes lurching into five-in-the-bar, and laced with passing hints of tango.

Nobody's sure of the exact source for 'Les collines d'Anacapri', though it has been said that the idea came from the label on a wine bottle. Maybe Debussy knew *The Story of San Michele* and other tales by the Paris-based writer Axel Munthe that tell of Anacapri, the high western end of the isle of Capri. The prelude's opening notes suggest bells of the goats from which Capri takes its name, and the closing bars hang in the air like the heat haze that surrounds Capri over summer.

The exact source of 'Des pas sur la neige' is untraced, but the prelude has been linked to 'Le tombeau des naïades', the third of Debussy's *Chansons de Bilitis*.<sup>5</sup> Four of the twelve preludes thus relate to Debussy's songs.

'Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest' refers to Hans Christian Andersen's tale *The Garden of Paradise*, in which the four winds brag to their mother of their destructive exploits. "He really was a wild boy", wrote Andersen of the West Wind—the same was sometimes said of Debussy. The music suggests the moods of some of Turner's wilder seascapes, but also has a curious musical link, for the striking modal ostinato that starts on the second page follows, note for note, the dominating ostinato in one of Liszt's *Hungarian historical portraits*, published only in the 1950s! Perhaps the resemblance is thus merely fortuitous, yet one fact remains to tease us: Debussy and Liszt met several times in Rome in 1886. One wonders what Liszt might have played to the young Frenchman, and what may have remained in the latter's memory. Liszt's piano playing certainly did, for many years later Debussy described it vividly, in a letter written in 1915.

'La fille aux cheveux de lin' takes the title of a poem Debussy had set to music almost thirty years earlier, from Leconte de Lisle's collection *Chansons écossaises*. The prelude's gentle minuet rhythm and opening flute melody suggest that Debussy may even have known de Lisle's original inspiration, Robert Burns's *Lassie with the lint white locks*, a tender love song from a shepherd to a shepherdess (a background less obvious from Leconte de Lisle's poem, where the poet is more interested in her cherry-red lips). Some years later the second of Debussy's three Mallarmé songs, similarly set "in the tempo of a slow minuet", uses some of the same rhythms to serenade a shepherdess painted on a porcelain teacup.

Although the piece doesn't explicitly say so, 'La sérénade interrompue' suggests an epitaph (or '*déploration*') for Debussy's friend Isaac Albéniz who had died in 1909, aged forty. As Albéniz's fellow-Catalan composer Carles Guinovart observes, the prelude's title might be read on one level as an allusion to Albéniz's overshoot life. In the classic tradition of the *déploration*, the prelude is set in Albéniz's idiom and quotes fragments of 'El Albaicín' (a favourite of Debussy's) from Albéniz's *Iberia* collection. The second 'interruption' in Debussy's prelude comes from his own orchestral *Image* 'Ibéria'. On the music's immediate surface a Spanish serenader, less lucky than Robert Burns's shepherd, suffers ever more enraging interruptions before he finally curses and packs up in disgust.

'La Cathédrale engloutie' follows a Celtic myth of the submerged city of Ys (birthplace of Yseult or Ysolde), which, legend has it, rises once a year through sea mists with pealing cathedral bells, organ and chanting monks, before sinking again. The last part is a miracle of piano writing, the chant gradually submerged in a sea of pealing bells. Debussy's piano roll recording of the piece solves a notorious problem in the score: some parts of the piece should be played twice as fast as printed (this actually makes the piece sound more coherent and continuous). Several witnesses of Debussy's playing have confirmed this vital correction (now printed in the *Œuvres complètes* edition), as does an orchestration by Debussy's colleague Henri Büsser.

'La danse de Puck' possibly took its stimulus from a deluxe edition of *A Midsummernight's Dream*, published in 1908 with illustrations by Arthur Rackham. Puck of Pook's Hill may have played a secondary role, for Debussy was also a devotee of Rudyard Kipling.

'Minstrels', according to Debussy's stepdaughter Dolly de Tinan, is a souvenir of the family's 1905 summer holiday in Eastbourne, where American clowns in blackface performed on the promenade.

"Who can know the secret of musical composition? The noise of the sea, the curve of the horizon, the wind in the leaves, the cry of a bird; all leave impressions on us. And suddenly, when one least wills it, one of those memories spills out of us and expresses itself in musical language." Thus Debussy in an interview in 1911, just as he was starting to put his second book of Preludes to paper. The opening of the second prelude, 'Feuilles mortes',

suggests precisely 'the wind in the leaves', aptly followed by leaves lazily falling to the ground. Debussy was a skilful mimic, as his friends knew to their amusement, and this humorous talent takes a place, together with tenderness and all musical moods, in epigrammatic pieces that are often character studies as much as nature scenes.

Completed early in 1913, the second book of Preludes differs visually from the first book in that the music is luxuriously spread out over three staves (sometimes four in Debussy's manuscript), giving it a more spacious, orchestral appearance. There are some clear counterparts to the first book: 'Bruyères', in the style of a slow antique minuet, elaborates on 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' from book 1, and 'General Lavine', like 'Minstrels' from book 1, is set in cakewalk rhythm (a strutting ragtime dance with humorously exaggerated offbeats). 'General Lavine' is a tribute to an American clown, Ed Lavine, popular at the Théâtre Marigny for his wooden puppet-like walk, tightrope juggling and other antics that reputedly included playing the piano with his toes. Debussy's other caricature in the collection uses a deliberately flat-footed saraband to depict the silly but ultimately likeable Mr Pickwick.

'La Puerta del Vino' took its inspiration from a postcard of the Moorish gate at Granada's Alhambra, showing dazzling contrasts of light and shade, which Debussy wanted to recreate musically. Later in the volume, 'Canope' refers to the ancient Egyptian city, evoked in Debussy's imagination by two Canopic jar lids he kept on his worktable. The title that inspired probably the richest moments of mystery in the whole volume—'La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune'—was simply a phrase lifted from a newspaper article about coronation festivities in India. The closing page of this magnificent slow waltz—which Debussy rewrote just before the volume went to print—includes several echoes of Chabrier, one of Debussy's musical heroes.

""Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses"" refers to J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, in a luxury edition illustrated by Arthur Rackham (a Christmas present from a family friend to Debussy's infant daughter Chouchou). Rackham's illustration to the line 'Fairies are exquisite dancers' depicts fairies dancing along a cobweb tightrope, accompanied by a clarinet-playing cricket and a cellist spider (with the cello spike resting on the cobweb). Debussy responds with a transparent waltzing scherzo that wittily includes not only clarinet-like

flourishes but also a cello-like solo quoted straight from the alto line of a famous Brahms waltz. 'Ondine', very different from Ravel's 'Ondine' of four years earlier, was also probably inspired by Rackham illustrations, this time to De la Motte Fouqué's *Undine*, the story of a playful water-nymph who fell in love with a mortal.

These preludes are replete with musical jokes and allusions, often subtly disguised, including several echoes of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (the left hand opening and close of 'Brouillards' and the opening fanfare of 'General Lavine'), Stephen Foster's *Camptown races* (in the middle of 'General Lavine'), two obvious national anthems, and, in 'La terrasse des audiences', echoes of *Au clair de la lune* as well as Debussy's own song 'Clair de lune'. In 'General Lavine' alert listeners can even spot the Coronation scene from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (a work Debussy adored), whose famous alternations of D and A-flat 7th chords are impishly put into ragtime here! (A few years earlier Debussy did the same thing with the famous opening chord of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, at the start of 'Golliwogg's cakewalk'.) 'Les tierces alternées' contains the most topical quotation, an unmistakable fragment from the *Rite of Spring*, which Debussy had sight-read with Stravinsky as a piano duet in 1912, several months before the ballet's scandalous premiere. (Debussy's quotation therefore reached print before *The Rite* itself did.) This eleventh prelude, a dancing toccata whose more abstract nature foreshadows the later *Études*, was the last to be composed, early in 1913; it replaced an abandoned attempt at a prelude based on Kipling's 'Toomai of the elephants'. As a final reward to the hardworking pianist, Debussy closes with the subtly brilliant 'Feux d'artifice', in which he not only conjures up the colours and shapes of varied fireworks—we can almost see the rockets, cascades and Catherine wheels—but effectively paints the whole atmosphere of Bastille Day celebrations. In the opening bars one can imagine him leading little Chouchou by the hand across the Bois de Boulogne to the annual display, the haze of cordite and firework flashes gradually coming nearer. In the closing bars we can equally imagine them wandering home through nostalgic echoes of *La marseillaise* (in the wrong key) that suggest Debussy quietly signing himself '*musicien français*'.

### Tracks 66-72 Ballets and other Arrangements

The keyboard versions of Debussy's ballets, are something of piano rarities. In

fact all Debussy's three ballets, *Khamma*, *Jeux* and *La boîte à joujoux*, were first completed and published in piano score, and only *Jeux* was fully orchestrated by its composer. It has to be added that they were all ultimately intended for orchestral performance; the main purpose of the piano scores was for rehearsal, and also for the pleasure of musicians with only a piano at their disposal (though the first tableau of *La boîte à joujoux* in particular makes a wonderful concert item). The ballets are intermediated on this disc by two arrangements, one of Debussy's own, and one by made by Maurice Dumesnil: the prelude from *La damoiselle élue*, and *Intermède*, the second movement from his early Piano Trio (1880).

In the midst of health problems, and while he was forced to take extensive loans from his publisher Durand, Debussy accepted the commission for *Khamma* in 1910 from Canadian dancer Maud Allan, who, following appearances at the height of her fame in 'The Vision of Salome', turned to Debussy for another exotic work culminating in an ecstatic, sacrificial dance.

The somewhat naïve scenario, written by William Leonard Courtney (then literary editor of the daily Telegraph and Oxford Don) is set in Ancient Egypt:

The high priest in the inner temple of Amun-Ra, the ancient sun-god, prays for deliverance as Thebes is threatened with invasion. He then sends a young, veiled virgin, Khamma, to dance before Amun-Ra's statue by moonlight. She fearfully complies, and produces three dances as an offering. At the close of the third dance, Khamma sees the head and shoulders of the stone god move, hands rising from the knees, palms upturned. Khamma's fear suddenly disappears, she dances again, but now with ecstasy and joy – until she is struck by lightning. The third scene depicts the temple at dawn, a crowd gathering to celebrate the city's granted supplication, when the sight of Khamma, sacrificed, halts proceedings. The piece ends with a lament, and the high priest giving a blessing over Khamma's body.

Debussy, struggling to find the time for his eventually uncompleted opera *La Chute de la Maison Usher*—for which he wrote his own libretto—condemned the plot to *Khamma* as “shallow and dull”, but nonetheless found the inspiration to turn out a piano reduction in 1912. Various contractual wrangles with Allan would lead to Debussy calling the project “the wretched little Anglo-Egyptian ballet”, and things turned worse when Allan demanded modifications to length

and instrumentation. Debussy backed out, declaring to Durand, “here comes this little madam to give me lessons in aesthetics... who talks of her taste and that of the English!” Following bar fifty-five of the first scene, the orchestration was entrusted to his younger colleague Charles Koechlin, Debussy slightly disgustedly giving him carte blanche to do with it as he pleases. Finally however, due to various reasons, though not through lack of pursuit, Allan had to relinquish her plans, and *Khamma* was not performed until 1924, in concert version in Paris. Its ballet premiere, to choreography by Jean-Jacques Etcheverry, took place over twenty years later, also in the French capital.

Musically, Stravinsky resonates strongly throughout *Khamma* with sharp timbral contrasts and bitonal passages. The dark, undulating and murmuring arpeggios and distant trumpet calls of the opening bars apply vivid strokes, with Debussy writing to Durand in early 1912 “When will you come and hear the new version of this curious ballet—and its trumpet-calls which give the effect of revolt and fire, and send a shiver down your back?”. Despite its troubled conception, *Khamma's* tightly knit dramatic structure and mysterious harmonies yield exquisite and exotic Debussy, which makes the fact he didn't complete the orchestration all the more deplorable.

Much earlier, Debussy was able to spend three years at the Villa Medici in Rome after winning the 'Prix de Rome' in 1884, and in return was obliged to present a composition to the 'Académie des Beaux-Arts' in Paris each year. The cantata for soprano (*Damoiselle*), mezzo-soprano (*Narrator*), women's chorus and orchestra, with the title *La Damoiselle élue*, was Debussy's third such presentation, and the first successful and favourable one. Adapted from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's symbolist poem 'The blessed Damozel', the story tells of a deceased woman leaning against Heaven's golden balustrade, contemplatively looking down upon Earth and pining for her lover. Due to its great success, the *Prélude* to *La Damoiselle élue* was published by Durand in 1909 as a piano solo arrangement, for which Debussy was able to link together two purely orchestral passages taken from the beginning and the end. The result is a calm, dreamy and languid piano piece, which should not go missing in any complete collection of his piano music.

*Jeux* ('Games') was written feverishly quickly, from mid-August to mid-September 1912, for the Ballets Russes of Sergei Diaghilev to choreography by

Vaslav Nijinsky, and was to remain Debussy's last completed work for orchestra. According to Nijinsky's Diaries, made during the weeks before his psychological breakdown, Diaghilev intended the music to describe a homosexual encounter between three young men, while Nijinsky wanted to include an airplane crash. Debussy had initially objected to the "idiotic" scenario, but reconsidered the commission when Diaghilev doubled the fee, and the plot was changed. The final version of the story involved a man, two girls, and a game of tennis, and was described to the audience at the premiere as follows:

"The scene is a garden at dusk; a tennis ball has been lost; a boy and two girls are searching for it. The artificial light of the large electric lamps shedding fantastic rays about them suggests the idea of childish games: they play hide and seek, they try to catch one another, they quarrel, they sulk without cause. The night is warm, the sky is bathed in pale light; they embrace. But the spell is broken by another tennis ball thrown in mischievously by an unknown hand. Surprised and alarmed, the boy and girls disappear into the nocturnal depths of the garden."

Whilst writing his twirling rhythms, Debussy had told André Caplet, he needed "to find an orchestra without feet for this music". The 'poème dansé' ('danced poem') struggled to make impact at its premiere—perhaps because Nijinsky had "with his cruel and barbarous choreography... trampled my poor rhythms underfoot like weed", but more objectively, it was probably most of all due to the seismic premiere of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* a couple of weeks earlier—, but *Jeux*'s fluidity of rhythm and form later became an inspiration to generations of composers. The number of tempo markings in *Jeux* is around sixty, with mainly two-bar building blocks forming a collage and motifs in constant flux. Yet, there is an underlying coherence; as Pierre Boulez put it: "the general organisation of *Jeux* is as changeable instant by instant as it is homogenous in development."

*Intermède* emerged early in 2001 in a manuscript copy made by Debussy's younger colleague Maurice Dumesnil. The piece is a solo piano version—which we now know to have been devised by Dumesnil rather than Debussy—of the 'Scherzo-Intermezzo' from Debussy's Piano Trio of 1880 (of which Dumesnil had been given the manuscript by Debussy's widow). Despite its not being an original solo piece by Debussy, it is of considerable interest. In the same key

as *Danse bohémienne*, it suggests the world of Tchaikovsky's ballets, including a few moments that Debussy had made the acquaintance of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, still fairly warm off the press in 1880. Moreover, Dumesnil did his transcription well, and the piece in several places is more pianistic than even Debussy's own piano part in the *Trio* from which it came.

Debussy composed the music to *La boîte à joujoux* in the summer of 1913, as a further offering (after the *Children's corner*) to his daughter Chouchou. With performances tentatively planned, he began to orchestrate it in 1914, but production problems and then the war intervened, and the orchestration had to be completed after his death by his friend André Caplet.

The story and music blend pathos and mischief, with obvious echoes of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (which had entranced both Debussy and Chouchou), plus humorous references to several stalwarts of the French stage, including *Carmen* and Debussy's own *Pelléas*. (Equally intriguing are some passages that anticipate moments of Debussy's *Études* that were to follow in 1915.) "Toyboxes are really sorts of towns in which toys live like people...or perhaps towns are merely toyboxes in which people live like toys", begins the preamble. In this toybox, a cardboard soldier falls in love with a doll, who unfortunately is besotted with a lazy and quarrelsome *polichinelle*. The soldiers and *polichinelles* have a battle; our soldier, wounded, is taken care of by the doll (whom the *polichinelle* has abandoned); they marry, buy an abandoned farm and raise many happy sheep, geese and children, while the *polichinelle* becomes a drunken country *gendarme*. Side roles—presumably a catalogue of contents of Chouchou's toybox—include a London bobby ('le policeman'), Debussy using as previously mentioned the tune from *Le petit Nègre*, plus Chouchou's elephant (already a celebrity from the *Children's corner*). The latter's 'Indian' chant, complete with a tongue-in-cheek footnote in the score, may in fact attest to Debussy's friendship at the time with the Indian Sufi musician Inayat Khan.

### Tracks 73-95 Etudes and other Late Period Works

By 1914, with the piano Preludes and the ballet *Jeux* complete, Debussy was suffering a crisis of creative exhaustion, aggravated by the devastating outbreak of war. With German editions of classics unavailable, his publisher Jacques Durand persuaded him to prepare a new edition of Chopin's music. This seems



to have both diverted and calmed Debussy, for by late spring 1915 he had quietly started work on the two-piano suite *En blanc et noir* and, a few weeks later, on a Cello Sonata. In July he set off, with his wife Emma and daughter Chouchou, to Pourville for the summer: within days he had begun work on twelve piano *Études*. His return to Paris that October brought with it the richest summer harvest of his life: *En blanc et noir*, the Cello Sonata, the Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp, and *Douze Études*, a crop of masterpieces whose quality and originality have taken posterity more than half a century to digest.

Almost exactly ten years later, the completing stages of his twelve *Études* are documented in his letters to Durand over August and September 1915: "I've put a lot of love and faith into the future of the *Études*... You'll agree with me that there's no need to weigh down technique any more, just to appear more serious, and that a bit of charm never spoils anything, as Chopin proved..." "In truth this music soars on the summits of piano technique! There will be amusing records to establish..." "I confess I'm happy to have brought forth a work which, without false vanity, will have a special place." <sup>6</sup>

It is small wonder, then, that the *Études* are suffused with a sense of jubilation, as well as tenderness, intimacy (the middle of 'Pour les Accords'), brilliance, pathos, drama (the surprise ending of 'Pour les Tierces'), subtlety of every sort and, not least, sheer fun (five of the pieces contain the instruction "scherzando"). For some of the humour we can thank Chouchou, the adored apple of her father's eye: then aged nine, she was taking piano lessons, and Debussy's letters bear amused witness to her practice sessions, sometimes sounding through the wall as he tried to compose... His revenge on Czerny opens the *Études*, and one can only guess at the reaction of the pieces' first public audience: Debussy pushes the burlesque to a grotesque sequence of grinding contrary motions, before the music, with a few facetious laughs, dances off to a jig. As usual, with a few musical brush strokes Debussy has deftly set the scene, humorously telling us what these *Études* are *not* about.

In the graceful tradition of French classical music, each *Étude* has a title beginning '*Pour*...', but avoiding the picturesque allusions of Debussy's earlier piano works. If this reflects his constant preoccupation with classical clarity, it also challenges the performer's imagination, for the music is as evocative as anything from his pen. Some musical reflections emerge from Debussy's

letters to Jacques Durand while composition was in progress. One letter records his satisfaction at making strings of sixths ('Pour les sixtes') go beyond banal evocations of "pretentious young misses in a salon, left uninvited and sulking beside the dance floor, envying the scandalous laughter of the mad ninths." Another letter tells Durand that 'Pour les agréments' takes the form of "a barcarolle on a somewhat Italian sea" (possibly a slip of the pen for 'Pour les sonorités opposées', a truer barcarolle which includes a passing echo of Gabriel Fauré's Fifth Barcarolle). A further unidentified *Étude* (presumably either 'Pour les Octaves' or 'Pour les Accords') has its left-hand writing compared to "Swedish gymnastics".

More familiar traits also appear: 'Pour les notes répétées', a pizzicato-like scherzo, shares the ragtime rhythm of the piano prelude 'Minstrels' and the central movement of the Violin Sonata, while the light-as-air scherzo (again) of 'Pour les huit doigts' recalls Puck of the piano preludes. 'Pour les degrés chromatiques' is a close relative of yet another scherzo, the one that completes *En blanc et noir*. Echos can also be heard of Schumann and Chabrier, the latter in the joyous waltz of 'Pour les Octaves' as well as in the luxuriant ornaments of 'Pour les Agréments' and 'Pour les Arpèges composés'. However, the largest debt of all underlies Debussy's repeated question to Jacques Durand: "Should the *Études* be dedicated to F. Chopin or F. Couperin?" Chopin was eventually chosen, making a simultaneous quiet tribute to Debussy's childhood piano teacher Madame Mauté, a claimed pupil of Chopin whose teaching Debussy revered all his life. Dedication notwithstanding—or perhaps especially because of it—Debussy was careful to avoid raw imitation, and his closest approaches to Chopin are either brief (the central part of 'Pour les Sixtes' relative to Chopin's *Nouvelle Étude* in A-flat) or harmonically transformed (the contrary motion leaps of 'Pour les Accords' relative to the Scherzo of Chopin's 'Funeral march' Sonata).

A six-page manuscript from Debussy's posthumous papers, headed 'Pour les Arpèges composés', had always been assumed to contain sketches for the *Étude* of that name. Closer examination yielded the surprise that the manuscript in fact was a continuous draft of a quite different piece. From manuscript evidence it became clear that Debussy had worked in 1915 on two distinct versions of 'Pour les Arpèges composés', finally choosing one and keeping the other among his

papers, probably with a view to later use. (The collapse of his health in 1916, alas, put a stop to further plans.) This rediscovered draft, now known as *Étude retrouvée*,<sup>7</sup> needed only the completion of some partly sketched figurations, plus a few clefs and key signatures, to be playable. While Debussy would undoubtedly have refined it further, the version that survives still provides a fascinating glimpse into his compositional workshop, as well as a beautiful piano *Étude* in its own right.

In the last fragile weeks of peace in July 1914, Debussy returned to some still unpublished music he had composed in 1901 to accompany readings of his friend Pierre Louÿs's *Chansons de Bilitis*. Louÿs had published these daringly sensual poems in the late 1890s, ostensibly as translations of writings he had found on the ancient Greek tomb of the young girl Bilitis; only gradually did it emerge that Louÿs had in fact made up the poems himself. Debussy, who was always in on the secret, set three of them as songs before composing separate incidental music for Chamber ensemble. That incidental music he now reworked as the *Six épigraphes antiques* originally for piano four hands in 1914 - here in the rarely played version for piano solo from 1915 - retaining the titles of the poems involved, though mysteriously omitting any mention of either Louÿs or Bilitis.

The disc's three following pieces were all contributions to war relief efforts. October 1914 found France deep in war and Belgium overrun by German troops. Too distraught to contemplate major projects, Debussy wrote to his publisher Jacques Durand, "If I dared, I'd write a *Marche héroïque*." Within a month the idea found form as the *Berceuse héroïque*, when the London *Daily Telegraph* requested a contribution to *King Albert's Book*, a compilation of album-leaves dedicated to the king and people of Belgium. Through the music come echoes of the Belgian anthem *La Brabançonne* and even, on the last page, of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. For all its lament, the piece avoids heaviness by indicating two-in-a-bar, with a title that combines the heroic and the tender. Like Ravel in *Le tombeau de Couperin*, Debussy was adamant about maintaining the grace and dance of old French tradition even in tragic contexts.

In June 1915 Debussy helped his wife Emma with *Le vêtement du blessé*, a charity for war-wounded, organising a concert and contributing an autograph page of music for auction. The page in question—an exquisite little waltz that repeatedly puns on its opening cadence—fortunately survives in a copy Debussy

gave Emma on her name-day, and was eventually published in 1933 as *Page d'album*. The much more sombre *Élégie* appeared in 1916 in autograph facsimile, in a fundraising book called *Pages inédites sur la femme et la guerre*; its cello-like melody and D-minor key recall the Cello Sonata that Debussy had completed the previous summer. Under the last bar appears the date 15 December 1915; a week earlier Debussy had undergone a cancer operation from which he never properly recovered, and this short piece might well be seen as a farewell to both the Europe and the Claude Debussy of old.

Given the various Debussy discoveries of the last few decades, enthusiasts often ask if all Debussy's piano music is now known. The answer is, one never knows. For many years Debussy's *Études* of 1915 were thought to be his last piano work, until in the 1970s the *Élégie* was discovered, but in November 2001 an even later piece surfaced. The manuscript, now in the Parisian collection of Eric van Lauwe, reveals an extraordinary story. During the hard wartime winter of 1916-17 Debussy's coal merchant, a Monsieur Tronquin, managed to supply (or divert) scarce supplies of fuel to the Debussy household. As reward M. Tronquin, apparently a man of culture, received the beautifully written manuscript of the present piece—which may equally have served as part payment, given that Debussy was usually as short of cash as Paris then was of fuel.

According to some accompanying letters from Debussy to M. Tronquin, the piece must have been written in February or March 1917, shortly before Debussy finished his last completed work, the Violin Sonata (already very ill with cancer, he died in March 1918). With characteristic humour, Debussy heads the piano piece "'Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon'" ("Evenings lit by glowing coals"), a line from Baudelaire's poem 'Le balcon' which Debussy had set to music many years before. This is matched by another Baudelairean allusion, for the piece opens with a melodic allusion to Debussy's earlier Prelude "'Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir'", again an apt quotation from Baudelaire (see above). A few other echoes can be heard (though not direct quotations) from Debussy's Second Book of Preludes, and these give the piece almost the air of a nostalgic postlude to the Preludes (oddly, rather than to Debussy's later *Études*). The piece's central melody is equally informal in mood: like 'Les sons et les parfums', it somehow blends the atmosphere of a café or night club with Debussy's habitual refinement.

## CHRISTOPHER DEVINE *piano*

- 1 See Roy Howat, *Debussy in proportion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- 2 Claude Debussy, *Images (oubliées)*, Theodore Presser Co., Bryn Mawr, 1977; and *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy* series 1 vol. 2, Paris, Durand, 1998.
- 3 See Roger Nichols, *Debussy remembered*, London (Faber), 1992, p. 156.
- 4 For more details see R. Howat, 'En route for *L'isle joyeuse*: the restoration of a triptych', *Cahiers Debussy* vol. 19 (1995), pp. 37-52.
- 5 See Nicholas Routley, '*Des pas sur la neige*: Debussy in Bilitis's footsteps', *Musicology Australia* vol. 16 (1993), pp. 19-27.
- 6 Letters are quoted from *Lettres de Claude Debussy à son éditeur, publiées par Jacques Durand*, Paris, Durand, 1927.
- 7 Published as *Claude Debussy: Etude retrouvée*, realized by Roy Howat, with facsimile of the original manuscript: Bryn Mawr, Theodore Presser, 1980.

Christopher Devine, born in 1982, is a versatile musician and was born and raised in the Netherlands, from a German mother and a Scottish father. He studied piano and composition at the Royal Conservatory of the Hague with Marcel Baudet, Marlies van Gent and Roderik de Man, and attained his Master of Music degree in 2006. He continued his piano studies with Stefan Vladar in Vienna, where he has resided since 2007. His musical development was enriched further due to personal contact with Leslie Howard, Janina Fialkowska, Maria João Pires & Elissò Virsaladze. He also studied conducting with Georg Mark at the 'Konservatorium Wien', and leads the choir 'Choram Publico' in Vienna since 2013. In the same year, he also took up the post of Senior Lecturer at the University for Music and Performing Arts Graz.

As a pianist, Christopher Devine has been active for over two decades performing concerts on 5 continents. His repertoire consists of more than a thousand works, including about 30 piano concertos. He has played as a soloist with numerous orchestras such as the 'Residentie Orkest' of The Hague, The Orchestra of Gelderland and 'l'Orquestra Simfònica del Vallès' in Spain.

Christopher Devine is also a keen chamber musician. He is a member of the Gustav Mahler Piano Quartet and forms a piano duo with his wife Mehrdokht Manavi. Together they have a daughter (Aryana, born in 2014).

Christopher Devine has won several international competitions, among which is the Ricard Viñes Competition in Lleida, Spain (2004), named after Debussy's aforementioned close friend.

Apart from being an interpreter Christopher Devine is also known for his work as a composer. In 2001, his work 'Mirkwood Music' was performed in the 'Beurs van Berlage' (Amsterdam), by the Dutch Chamber Orchestra. He also regularly plays his own works for solo piano. Moreover, his 'Overture Winfried'

was premiered in Amsterdam in May 2010, where the composer also had his first outing as a conductor.

Apart from the present CD-Box, Christopher Devine's discography includes music for Violin and Piano with Birthe Blom (2001), a debut solo CD with works by Beethoven and Liszt (2010), and a live recording from Rachmaninoff Hall in Moscow with the Gustav Mahler Piano Quartet (2013).

