<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chopin (200th Anniversary) – The Piano Music</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Etudes, Preludes, Polonaises, Ballades, Scherzos and Sonatas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Nocturnes, Mazurkas, Impromptus and Waltzes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro &amp; Rondo, Fantasy, Berceuse, Barcarolle, Andante Spianato &amp; Grande Polonaise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schumann (200th Anniversary) – The Piano Music</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata #1 in F-sharp minor, Humoreske, Papillons, Fantasiestucke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata #2 in G minor, Faschingsschwank aus Wien (Carnival of Vienna)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata #3 in F minor (Concerto without Orchestra), Kinderszenen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesänge der Frühe(Songs of Dawn), Blumenstück, Romances, Waldszenen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novellettes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ravel – The Piano Music</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaspard de la Nuit, Jeux d’eau, Pavane, Sonatine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Tombeau de Couperin, Valses Nobles et Sentimentales, Menuet Antique</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miroirs, Sérénade Grotesque, Menuet-Haydn, Prélude, a la manière-Borodine/Chabrier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Debussy – The Piano Music</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Études, l’Isle joyeuse, Preludes (Books I &amp; II)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images, Children’s Corner, Arabesques, Danse, Masques</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pour le Piano, Estampes, Suite Bergamasque, Rêverie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Plus que Lente, Mazurka, Nocturne, Ballade, Valse romantique</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cahier d’esquisses...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Albéniz – Iberia</strong>, Navarra</td>
<td>Apr 3/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Granados – Goyescos, El Pelele</strong></td>
<td>Apr 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beethoven: The 32 Piano Sonatas &amp; Diabelli Variations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sundays 3:00pm Studio Hollywood) (limited seating, by reservation only; call 917.753.6701 or email: <a href="mailto:Director@Studio-Hollywood.com">Director@Studio-Hollywood.com</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sonata</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Apr 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>incl “Pathétique”</td>
<td>May 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>incl “Moonlight”, “Pastorale”</td>
<td>May 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-21</td>
<td>incl “Tempest”, “Waldstein”</td>
<td>May 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-26</td>
<td>incl “Appassionato”, “Les Adieux”</td>
<td>May 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-29</td>
<td>incl “Hammerklavier”</td>
<td>Jun 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-32</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jun 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Diabelli Variations</td>
<td>Jun 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rachmaninoff – The Major Works</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Etudes-Tableaux; MomentsMusicaux</td>
<td>Apr 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Preludes</td>
<td>May 1*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Sonatas (No. 1 in D minor, No. 2 in B-flat minor)</td>
<td>May 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stravinsky</strong> (Petrouchka), Prokofiev (Sonata #7), Scriabin (Sonatas No. 2, No. 5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medtner (Sonata ‘Reminiscenza’), Balakirev (Islamey)</td>
<td>May 15*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brahms – Handel Variations, Paganini Variations, Sonata #3 in F minor</strong></td>
<td>May 22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schubert – Middle Period Sonatas</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- in A minor, G major; “Wanderer” Fantasy</td>
<td>May 29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Late Period Sonatas - in C minor, A major, B-flat major (Op. Posth.)</td>
<td>June 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Franz Liszt – Major Works</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata in B minor, Sonetti del Petrarca, Au bord d’une source, Vallée d’Obermann</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dante Sonata, Hungarian Rhapsody, Spanish Rhapsody, Mephisto Waltz</td>
<td>June 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental Etudes</td>
<td>June 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Programs, Notes (pdf) and Calendar updates available at: [www.studio-hollywood.com](http://www.studio-hollywood.com)
Claude Debussy – The Piano Music

l’Isle joyeuse

The Etudes

i. pour les « cinq doigts »
ii. pour les tierces
iii. pour les quartes
iv. pour les sixtes
v. pour les octaves
vi. pour les huit doigts
vii. pour les degrés chromatiques
viii. pour les agréments
ix. pour les notes répétées
x. pour les sonorités opposées
xi. pour les arpèges composés
xii. pour les accords

Alan Murray, piano
Sunrise Music Series (2010/11)
at the First Unitarian Society of Westchester
Sunday, February 27, 2011

Claude Debussy – The Piano Music

Two Arabesques

Danse

Children’s Corner

Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum
Jimbo’s Lullaby
Serenade of the Doll
The Snow is Dancing
The Little Shepherd
Golliwogg’s Cakewalk

Masques

Images

Book I
Reflets dans l’eau
Hommage à Rameau
Mouvement

Book II
Cloches à travers les feuilles
Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut
Poissons d’or

Alan Murray, piano

Sunrise Music Series (2010/11)
at the First Unitarian Society of Westchester
Sunday, March 6, 2011

Claude Debussy – The Piano Music (conclusion)

Rêverie

Pour le Piano
Prélude
Sarabande
Toccatana

Estampes
Pagodes
Soirée dans Grenade
Jardins sous la pluie

Suite Bergamasque
Prélude
Menuet
Clair de lune
Passepied

Alan Murray, piano
Sunrise Music Series (2010/11)
 at the First Unitarian Society of Westchester

Sunday, March 27, 2011

Claude Debussy – shorter works (conclusion)

La Plus que Lente

Le Petit Nègre

d’un Cahier d’esquisses

Valse romantique

Nocturne

Mazurka

Ballade

Alan Murray, piano

Sunrise Music Series (2010/11)
The *Sunrise Music Series* is a series of early morning musical offerings hosted by the First Unitarian Society of Westchester with the intention of providing members and visitors from the community with an hour of quality weekly listening in a contemplative setting, surrounded by the natural beauty visible from the Society’s sanctuary room. The performances are intended to be informal but well-prepared offerings, as an interim step toward concert preparation.

****

**The Etudes, l’Isle joyeuse**

Debussy’s artistic creed, regarding breaking down or obscuring formal models, is captured in his statement (1907): “I feel more and more that music, by its very essence, is not something that can be cast in a rigorous, traditional form. It consists of colors and of rhythmized time.”

Notes by: Laurent Barthel (l’Isle joyeuse); Annette Nubemeyer/ Paul Jacobs/Misha Donata (Etudes)

**l’Isle joyeuse**: L’Isle joyeuse (the Isle of Joy) is perhaps Debussy’s best-known stand-alone work for piano and the most fully developed and virtuosic of all of his piano works. It is jubilant and apparently autobiographical: it is said to have been inspired by Watteau’s Embarcation for Cythera. But Cythera could just as well be Jersey, the island that Debussy visited with Emma Bardac. L’Isle joyeuse ends with a peroration both luminous and precise in the form of a sun-drenched apotheosis of breathtaking power that seems light-years removed from the uninhabited symbolism of other works, such as his Preludes and Images.

**Etudes**: Debussy’s twelve Etudes – his last, and in many ways his most profoundly original, adventurous, inventive, pianistically advanced, and stylistically forward-looking piano works – were composed in during a brief period in 1915 and are broadly acknowledged as his late masterpieces. The Etudes arose out of the same final burst of creative energy that gave rise that same year to his “En blanc et noir” (In Black and White), the cello sonata and the sonata for flute viola and harp. Only the violin sonata, written in the early months of 1917 was still to come. The Etudes are the summation of a lifetime’s experience as a composer of piano music, and they present formidable challenges to the performer. The composer, himself no mean player, confessed that some of the pieces were technically beyond him. “I shall be able to play you these Studies which strike fear into your fingers” he told the publisher and his friend, Durand in Sept,1915. “You can be sure that mine come to a halt when faced with certain passages. I have to get my breath back... Truly, this music hovers on the limits of performance.” More importantly, he noted their transcendental quality, writing that they “conceal a rigorous technique beneath the flowers of harmony”.

The Etudes – which are dedicated to Chopin, whom Debussy greatly admired and whose works he was editing in 1915, for Durand – are, like Chopin’s Etudes, both revolutionary and as much studies in composition as in keyboard technique. Debussy knew that they occupied a special place among his works. His late works generally fell into neglect after his death in 1918, but it was Olivier Messiaen – struck by Debussy’s extraordinary love of tone color, and by the formal boldness, complexity and modernism of the Etudes, among Debussy’s Etudes and other late works – who drew the attention of post-war musician to them in his legendary classis in analysis at the Paris Conservatoire. Like Chopin’s Etudes, their wealth of musical invention goes far beyond their apparent pedagogical value. The materials, as well as the moods and expression, juxtapose kaleidoscopically, to produce forms that are continually self-renewing, iridescent and mercurial. Tempos are rarely fixed. Rubato is often specified or implied, although the performer must always relate each etude to a basic tempo as a reference, so that the deviations are sensed by the listener.

Book I (Etudes I-VI) begins with a ‘five-finger’ exercise (“d’après Monsieur Czerny”, as marked in the score) and conclude with a four-finger one, with double-note studies in increasing intervals (thirde, fourths, sixths and octaves) comprising the other four. Book II (Etudes VII-XII) is concerned primarily with pianistic problems related to musical figurations.
The published edition is prefaced by a note by Debussy explaining the lack of fingering indications, in which he acknowledges that each person’s hand is different and that fingering appropriate for one player would not necessarily suit another. His note concludes, “Let us each search for our own fingerings! C.D.” Ravel, too, rarely indicated piano fingerings, even for his most virtuosic works, but with Ravel the pianist is never in doubt as to fingerings, for the music is conceived directly for the hand and lies comfortably. In Debussy’s case, the music seems to be conceived more abstractly: certain configurations are prompted primarily by compositional demands, and in some cases even the most logical fingers prove awkward.

Etude I (for the five fingers) begins with the musical direction ‘sagtement’ (well-behaved); a wrong note mischievously intrudes upon the child’s (no doubt his daughter Chouchou’s) dutiful practicing and transforms the five-finger exercise into a lively and marvelously inventive gigue. Etude II (for thirds) provides ever-shifting colors and sonorities (‘unheard-of effects’ wrote Debussy) in a harmonically complex study, ending with unexpected passion and violence. Etude III (for fourths) is perhaps the most radical of the set; believing the interval of the fourth to be inherently uninteresting, Debussy invented a study in which the materials are constantly changing. Etude IV (for sixths) is addressed by a note from Debussy to Durand, “the use of sixths long gave me the impression of pretentious demoiselles væarly doing needlework, while enyng the scandalous laughter of crazy ninths!... yet I am writing this study... and it’s not ugly!” Etude V (for octaves) has a tempo indication of “joyous and transported, freely rhythmic” and is the most extroverted of the twelve Etudes. Etude VI (for the eight fingers) is written almost entirely in patterns of four notes played alternately by each hand, and is meant to be played without the use of the thumb. Etude VII (for chromatic degrees) is a fantastical piece in which slithering chromatic scales provide a continual backdrop for dancing melodic fragments. Etude VIII (for ornaments) was the last finished and is one of the longest and most complex of the set. Structurally, it satisfies Pierre Boulez’s description of some of his own music, which he liked to an aquarium ‘where the fish are sometimes motionless and sometimes regrouping themselves in nervous bursts of energy’. Debussy said of this etude, “It borrows the form of a barcarolle, on a somewhat Italian sea.” Etude IX (for repeated notes) is a dance-like piece whose changing scales and chromatic movement barely suggest a key center. Etude X (for opposed sonorities) is a mysterious piece that is a study in opposing emotions or moods. The distant horn call, marked ‘clear and joyous’, reappears in the end in another context. The final chord seems like a stab of pain. Etude XI (for composite arpeggios) is the sweetest, most flirtatious and Puck-like of the set. The finale, Etude XII (for chords) is perhaps the most Liszt-like: a bold, but rhythmically ambiguous three-part piece whose first and last sections are in triple meter, but with constant regroupings of value that displace the principal beat. In the quiet middle section — the meter’s ambiguity gives the music a floating, timeless quality.

**The Preludes**

In terms of their title and number, Debussy’s Preludes are the French composer’s tribute to his Polish predecessor Chopin, who — inspired by Bach — had brought unprecedented freedom to this musical form. That Debussy added his titles only at the end of each piece, at the moment when the music relapses into silence and induces a state of wistful rêverie in the listener, is no accident. Here we find an appropriate metaphor for the Baroque notion of the “prelude to” something else.

**Preludes — Book I**

Debussy’s first book of Preludes was published in Paris in April 1910. It seems likely that Debussy had been thinking of the project for two or three years, but the final elaboration of these twelve pieces took place within a two-month period. As usual with him, the printed order was different from the one in which they were composed.

**Danseuses de Delphes** (Delphic Dancers) provides a beginning that is wholly characteristic of Debussy, who liked to lead the listener gently from the material world to the immaterial, even spiritual, one of the composer’s imagining, using for this purpose a religious tone. The air of mystery here is enhanced by the burial of the principal line in the middle of the opening chords, from which it emerges in the third bar. According to one of Debussy’s biographers, the title refers to a sculpture of three dancers in the Louvre. The title **Voiles (Sails or Veils)** continues to be the subject of debate. Edgard Varèse said they were the veils of the dancer Loie Fuller, and Debussy himself said the piece “is not a photograph of the beach”. But he could be mischievously misleading about such things. Either way, there are connotations of floating and billowing, brought out by Debussy’s use of the vague and undirected whole-tone scales, and a clear link to the action of the wind in the third prelude, **Le Vent dans la plaine (The Wind on the Plain)**. This is a reference to a pair of lines by 18th century poet C.S. Favart, “Le vent dans la plaine / Suspend son haleine” (The wind on the plain / holds its breath), which Debussy had quoted as an epigraph in another work. In all three of these opening preludes the note B is predominant. But from here onwards, the tonal perspective begins to open out, in preparation for a parallel opening out of sensibility. For the moment, though, this still remains private. As in the previous prelude, the title **Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir** (Sounds and Scents Swirl in the Evening Air) looks back to one of Debussy’s early songs, here to a line from Baudelaire’s “Harmonies du soir”, which he had set to music in 1889. There are no direct quotations from the song, but Debussy manages to capture the effect of the poem’s complex scheme of repetitions which, like the sounds and scents, seem to turn in upon themselves by manipulating a limited number of intervals, to evoke a heady, hermatically sealed atmosphere. Into this, **Les collines d’Anacapri (The Hills of Anacapri)** bursts with an explosion of Mediterranean light and color, and in the central section the public “popularity” element makes its first appearance, in the form of a pseudo-Neapolitan folksong. Debussy’s **pudeur** immediately reasserts itself in the next piece, **Des pas sur la neige (Footprints in the Snow)**, whose halting ostinato rhythm “should sound like a melancholy, frozen landscape”. This piece continues further along the same path of his opera Pelléas et Melisande. The next two preludes return to specific literary models for their inspiration. **Ce qu’a vu le vent d’ouest (What the West Wind Has Seen)** refers to Hans Christian Andersen’s story **The Garden of Paradise**; in which the four winds are sent out and return to tell of what they saw, and possibly also to Shelley’s **Ode to the West Wind**, which Debussy had read in French translation some 25 years earlier. **La fille aux cheveux de lin (The Girl with the Flaxen Hair)** describes a damsel of pre-Raphaelite aspect, with long eyelashes, gentle curls and cherry lips. Debussy originally notated the piece in B-flat major, only later transposing it so that the opening arabesque lies on the black keys. No direct literary source has been found for **La sérenade interrompue (The Interrupted Serenade)**, but it follows Debussy’s habitual concept, where things Spanish were concerned, of writing on two interlocking planes: here, the private world of the serenade is twice interrupted by public strumming noises, borrowed from Debussy’s own **Iberia**. In contrast, **La Cathédrale engoultie (The Sunken Cathedral)** returns to the unified, quasi-religious vision of the first prelude, though on a much larger scale. Debussy may have known of the Breton legend of the drowned City of Ys from a number of sources, including Lalo’s opera **Le Roi d’Ys**. Debussy’s prelude, with its ghostly bells and chanting, may even be heard as an epilogue to Lalo’s opera, which ends with the city’s submersion. **La danse de Puck (Puck’s Dance)** is the only reference in Debussy’s piano output to Shakespeare, one of his favorite writers. This prelude celebrates the great dramatist’s ability to blend the magical and the poetic with the common touch. Finally, **Minstrels (Minstrels)** is a wholly public piece, inspired by a group of red-jacketed musicians playing saxophones and guitars who paraded through the streets of Eastbourne in 1905, when Debussy was there orchestrating La mer. Here he not so much blends the vulgar and the poetic, as finds poetry within vulgarity.

**Preludes — Book II**

Debussy’s second book of preludes was begun in 1911 and published in April 1913. Even some of Debussy’s stoutest supporters expressed disappointment at the number of less striking pieces it contained. Of course, sequels are always hard to bring off, and Debussy seems to have made no particular effort to avoid areas he had already explored in Book I, such as Spain, fairies or popular entertainment. But the layout of the second book on three staves, instead of the two employed for Book I, shows that the composer was thinking in terms of different, possibly more orchestral, textures.

Where **Voiles** expressed indecisiveness through whole-tone harmonies, the fog in **Brouillards (Mists)** is harmonically bold, with the simultaneous sounding of chords a semitone apart.
(a sound his erstwhile supporters found hard to take, perhaps?). Feuilles mortes (Dead Leaves) re-creates the world of Des pas sur la neige, again with bolder harmonies and relying less firmly on an ostinato rhythm, while the bipartite nature of Debussy’s Spanish style is observed once more in La Puerta del Vino (Wine Gate) marked to be played “with brusque oppositions of extreme violence and passionate tenderness”. Debussy had been sent a postcard showing the famous Moorish gate by the Alhambra in Granada. “Les fées sont d’exquises danseuses” (Fairies are Exquisite Dancers) derives from an illustration by Arthur Rackham to J.M. Barrie’s Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, which Debussy’s daughter Chouchou had been sent as a New Year’s present in 1912. A fairy dances on a single thread of a spider’s web, partnered by a grasshopper, while a spider in the corner plays the cello. After the gentle strains of Bruyères (Moors), from internal evidence possibly a piece he had had by him for some time “Général Lavine” – eccentric (General Lavine, eccentric) strives on to the stage, “a comic juggler, half tramp and half warrior, but more tramp than warrior”, as he was later described. He specialized in a peculiar jeryk walk and in playing the piano with his toes. It was this piece, together with Minstrels, that shocked the straightlaced young Darius Milhaud, who thought that great composers should not demean themselves thus...

The title La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune (The Terrace for Moonlight Audiences) was taken from a description in a French newspaper of the coronation festivities of George V as Emperor of India in December 1912. The final phrase in the original reads, “au clair de lune”, which makes better sense, but Debussy’s version is now hallowed by use. Ondine (Undine), a less innocent figure than La fille au cheveux de lin (also placed seventh in this book), may again have been taken from a Rackham drawing. Certainly Debussy was aware of Ravel’s more elaborate portrait of the water nymph in Gaspard de la Nuit, published in 1909, and was not afraid to court comparison. Debussy’s love of things English, already demonstrated in the references to Shakespeare, Barrie, and Rackham, surfaces again in Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C., complete with God Save the King. He was always amused by the English habit of putting letters after their names (these are said to stand for “Perpetual President-Member, Pickwick Club”), but in general he approved of the sense of order which he observed among the English of those days and which, in the final bars, triumphs effortlessly over the urchin’s cheeky whistle. Canope (Canopic Jar) takes us back to the ancient Egyptian city of Canopus, famous for its funerary jars covered by lids in the form of the head of Osiris. Debussy kept two of these jars on his worktable. The piece is built round the opposition of “public”, hieratic chords and “private” melismata, of the sort increasingly present in Debussy’s later works. For the penultimate prelude in the book, he had been trying to write a “Toumoi des éléphants”, after Rudyard Kipling’s Jungle Book (1894), but this proved impossible. Its replacement, Les tierces alternées (Alternating Thirds) seems out of keeping with the others. However, since Debussy insisted on the titles coming only after each piece, it could be seen as a kind of joke, rewarding our imaginative efforts with a bucket of cold, academic water. Feux d’artifice (Fireworks), however, is the epitome of the public face of these preludes, behind which private thoughts are always present. Never before or since have the echoes of the Marseillaise sounded so poetic – and never, Debussy seems to say, is the artist so lonely as in the middle of a crowd. (Notes by Roger Nichols)

Images, Children’s Corner

Debussy’s artistic creed, regarding breaking down or obscuring formal models, is captured in his statement (1907): “I feel more and more that music, by its very essence, is not something that can be cast in a rigorous, traditional form. It consists of colors and of rhythmicized time.”

Images: Even as early as 1903 Debussy had already drawn up a firm plan for his two volumes of Images and was able to write to his publisher Jacques Durand to inform him of his six titles. But it was only after he had replaced the first number, “Reflets dans l’eau” (Reflections in the Water) with a new one that he sent the first set to Durand in August 1905. “I decided to write another, based on different ideas in accordance with the most recent discoveries of harmonic chemistry,” he explained. Debussy’s exploration of sonority and his individualized approach to tone color established a new type of piano writing that most contemporary listeners categorizes as “impressionistic”. This was in fact a term that Debussy himself resisted as he was reluctant to apply the aesthetics and techniques of painting to music in general and to his own music in particular. “I’m trying to write ‘something else’ – realities, in a manner of speaking – what imbeciles call “impressionism”, a term employed with the utmost inaccuracy, especially by art critics.”

According to its performance marking, the second Image, “Hommage à Rameau” (Homage to Rameau), is to be played “in the style of a sarabande, but not too austerely”. The piece is a tribute to the great 18th-century French composer with whom Debussy felt a particular affinity. A performance of Castor et Pollux at the Paris Schola Cantorum in 1903 inspired him to remark that if Rameau’s major contribution to music was his ability to find “sensibility” in his harmonic language: “He succeeded in capturing effects of color and certain nuances that, before his time, musicians had not clearly understood.” The three pieces that make up the second part of Images were dedicated to three of Debussy’s friends, the artist Alexandre Charpentier (No. 1), the music critic Louis Laloy (No. 2) and the pianist Ricardo Viñes (No. 3). It was Viñes who gave the first performances of both sets of Images in Paris in 1906 and 1908. All three pieces from the second set were notated on three staves, allowing the various layers and tone colors to be captured with greater clarity and individuality. According to Laloy, the first Image – “Cloches à travers les feuilles” (Bells through the Leaves) – was inspired by a letter in which he told the composer about the “affecting use of the funeral bell that tolls from Vespers on All Saints’ Day until the Mass for the Dead on All Souls’ Day, passing from village to village through fading forests in the evening silence”. From the first bar onwards a five-note motif based on a pentatonic scale determines the tonality of the piece, which is permeated by the sound of bells that range in volume from a gentle tinkling to a thunderous peal. In “Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut” (And the Moon Descends on the Temple that Was) Debussy uses a sequence of chords as a melody. Latoy admired this compositional idea for its ability to conjure up so intense a melody that it could dispense with every external support. “Poissons d’or” (Goldfish) is said to have been inspired a black lacquer panel in the composer’s workroom that was inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold.

Children’s Corner: Completed in 1908, Children’s Corner is dedicated to Debussy’s daughter, Claude-Emma (known as “Chou-Chou”), who was three years old at the time. The pieces are not intended to be played by children; rather they are meant to be evocative of childhood. Emma-Claude was born on October 30, 1905 in Paris, and is described as a lively and friendly child who was adored by her father. She died of diphtheria on July 14, 1919, scarcely a year after her father’s death. There are six pieces in the suite, each with an English-language title. This choice of language reflects Debussy’s anglophilia, and may also be a nod towards Chou-Chou’s English governance. The title of Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum alludes to Muzio Clementi’s collection of instructional piano pieces Gradus ad Parnassum (“Steps to Parnassus”), which begins similarly to Bach’s Prelude in C major, the initial piece from the Well-Tempered Clavier. Debussy’s piece incorporates elementary piano techniques, such as the crossing of the hands. It starts in C major and makes brief forays into E minor, G minor, and B flat major as it modulates to a small middle section in D flat, then it returns back to the original theme in C. Jimbo’s Lullaby maintains a gentle sense of humor and a peaceful and quiet atmosphere. In this lullaby the lowest registers of the piano are completely magnified. Debussy quotes the French lullaby “Do, do, l’enfant do,” several times in the course of the piece and uses the interval of the major second, the sole melodic material of that lullaby, as an important accompanimental motif. Serenade of the Doll is a light and iridescent piece in triple meter. It is evocative of girls playing with their dolls. Debussy notes that the entire piece should be played with the soft pedal depressed except where the music is marked forte. The Snow is Dancing integrates precise staccato playing in both hands, which is
The Little Shepherd is a witty piece in a pastorale style. It contains colorful harmonies, and alternates between monophony and polyphony. The monophonic passages bear a rhythmic and harmonic resemblance to the flute solo at the beginning of Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun which was composed 14 years prior to Children’s Corner. Goliwogg’s Cakewalk is a lively, ragtime-inspired piece in ternary form with a crisp, bouncing A section marked by extreme dynamic contrast and a consistent rhythmic structure. The B section of this cakewalk is interrupted on several occasions by quotations of the opening of Richard Wagner’s opera Tristan und Isolde, marked avec une grande émotion (with great feeling). Each quotation is followed by a sort of musical chuckle in staccato chords.

Notes by: Annette Nubemeyer (Introduction, Images) / Wikipedia (Children’s Corner)

**Pour le Piano, Estampes, Suite Bergamasque**

*Pour le Piano* Claude Debussy began his three movement piano suite, *Pour le piano*, 1896 and completed it in 1903. The suite’s opening Prélude has a fast, savvy infectiousness, using the whole-tone scale and closing with a harp-like cadenza flourish that is unmistakably Debussian. There is a broad palette of tone colors at work in the opening movement, featuring wide contrasts in register and breadth of chords. The opening builds from an initial, fast and steady line into a grand, overture-like section within the first minute. From there the opening material is then transformed into a totally different texture that heads to the same declamatory, ritornello-like effects that most minuets share. Rather than being very airy and dainty, this piece is written in D minor, and contains rather ‘doubting’ harmonies. The bell-fluent sound introduces a sense of joyful menace. Out of the rhythmic drive emerges a theme of playful character, which is what Debussy’s hero, Chopin, abhorred in Beethoven’s solo piano music. On the whole, the effect is both familiar and exotic, with shades of near-ancient music (such as Rameau’s), and Javanese gamelan. Chopin comes to mind as well, though it is easy to imagine him taking exception to this comparison. It is undeniable, though, that the real power of French piano music remains gentle and exotic, though in an alternate g

**Estampes** Debussy liked composing sets of piano pieces in threes, as evidenced by the Images oublées of 1894. In it, the composer is having a very personal conversation through the piano. Like Debussy’s D’un cahier d’esquisses, the keyboard is a vehicle for an extra-musical level of communication; the listener seems almost beside the point as the composer maintains a loving dialogue with music; there are no fireworks whatsoever. The suite’s finale is a Toccata that is poised and energetic, extroverted and graceful. Performers will find it daunting and enlightening. Demanding poise, it concludes the suite admirably with the message that Debussy has mastered the piano’s unique language on his own terms. (source: *the Piano Society*)

**Suité Bergamasque** The Suité bergamasque was first composed by Debussy around 1890, but was significantly revised just before its publication in 1905. It seems that by the time a publisher came to Debussy in order to cash in on his fame and have these pieces published, Debussy loathed the earlier piano style in which these pieces were written. While it is not known how much of the Suite was written in 1890 and how much was written in 1905, we do know that Debussy changed the names of at least two of the pieces. “Passepied” was called “Pavane”, and “Clair de lune” was originally titled “Promenade Sentimentale.” These names also come from Paul Verlaine’s poems. The Prélude is full of dynamic contrasts with a vigorous beginning and ending. Debussy’s style was inventive, yet he drew inspiration from archaic techniques such as the prelude, minuet and passepied. It is a festive piece, which holds much of the baroque style that is commonly found in preludes. The Menuet’s playful main theme contrasts with an alternatingly mysterious and dramatic middle section. This piece is particularly original, as it does not conform to the particular style that most minuets share. Rather than being very airy and dainty, this piece shows much more raw comedy. Again, Debussy sets a very novel piece in the guise of an old song style. “Clair de lune (Moonlight) comes from Paul Verlaine’s poem of the same name, which also refers to ‘bergamasques’ in its opening stanza. The final movement “Passepied” is a type of dance, which originated in Brittany, and means “pass foot”. Debussy’s Passepied is a happy, yet strangely mediaeval piece, which is surprisingly faster than its Baroque counterparts. Throughout most of its duration, the piece is played with staccato arpeggios in the left hand. (source: *Wikipedia*)

**Shorter works**

La plus que lente (The more than slow) is a waltz for solo piano written by Debussy in 1910, shortly after his publication of the Preludes, Books 1. The piece debuted at the New Carlton Hotel in Paris, where it was transcribed for strings and performed by a popular
Romany band. The title may be translated as "The even slower waltz" or, word-for-word, "The more than slow". Despite its translation, La plus que lente was not meant to be played slowly; "lente," in this context, refers to the valse lente genre that Debussy attempted to emulate. Typical of Debussy's caustic approach to naming his compositions, it represented his reaction to the vast influence of the slow waltz in France's social atmospheres. However, as Frank Howes noted, "La plus que lente is, in Debussy's wryly humorous way, the valse lente [slow waltz] to outdo all others."

Debussy was supposedly inspired for La plus que lente by a small sculpture, "La Valse," that he kept on his mantelpiece. However, others point to various sources of inspiration, some citing the resemblance between this waltz and Debussy's earlier work, Ballade. More recently, La plus que lente has been re-arranged and performed by notable jazz musicians.

**Le Petit Nègre** - Long before the 1911 arrival of the popular classic Alexander's Ragtime Band by Irving Berlin, the music of the African-American community had become increasingly fashionable as a form of entertainment. Ragtime music was widely heard in Europe, particularly in the sandy beaches of the fashionable bathing resorts of Edwardian England's southern coast. Many of these deep-south songs were in jaunty cakewalk rhythm. Cakewalk contests became extremely popular in the U.S. during the latter part of the nineteenth century and indeed, well into the twentieth. The cakewalk was originally popularized by vaudeville artists a gesture which was judged as politically incorrect and insensitive as the original genre itself. Debussy's Le Petit Nègre for solo piano followed the enormous popular success of his Golliwogg's Cakewalk, the last piece from his suite Children's Corner, and was written and published in 1909. The work was commissioned as a piano tutor called Methode de piano, written and edited by Theodore Lacke. The intention was to provide aspiring young pianists with a volume of pieces which were equally well calculated to afford modest technical advancement, and to provide delight and musical insight for both players and listeners alike. The title in its original French "Le Petit Nègre" was Debussy's own.

**D'un cahier d'esquisses** - The title of Debussy's D'un cahier d'esquisses (From a Notebook of Esquisses; 1903) aptly describes the work's origin as a sketch for the composer's massive symphonic work La mer (1903 - 05). The work is quietly ethereal and highly original; at the same time, it presents a mixture of styles and ideas that prevent a cohesive effect (unsurprising, perhaps, given its purpose). Though rarely played, it survives as an exquisite novelty and provides a glimpse into the creation of one of the composer's best-known works.

**Valse romantique** - Although, in terms of piano compositions, Claude Debussy was primarily known for his mature works of 1903 - 1915, early pieces, such as Valse romantique (1890), encourage listeners to discover his lesser-known piano creations by tracing their histories. Primarily a pianist, Debussy explored formal structure in his early works for the instrument. It was only later as a mature musician, while altering and adding to the applications of piano techniques and investigating tonality that his artistic personality emerged, when he created a "sonorous bass region to the upper register, imparting a sweetness and gentleness that immediately summon middle-period Liszt. The ensuing theme, too, more than vaguely suggests Liszt at the outset, but then suddenly turns playful and somewhat capricious, then passionate and romantic, allowing in more sunlight than the work's title might suggest. The material from the opening returns, as does the main theme and secondary themes, all now more forceful, more passionate. The whole piece has a brightness in its romantic outpourings and a hesitantly, almost Scriabin-esque sense of lyrical flow.

**Mazurka** - The date of Debussy's Mazurka (ca. 1890) remains uncertain; stylistically, it seems an earlier work than the date shown on the manuscript would indicate. Indeed, it has more in common with the two Arabesques (1888 - 91) than with the Danse (1890) or the Rêverie (1890). Unlike most of Debussy's works of this period, the Mazurka shows the strong influence of Chopin, who, decades earlier, had essayed this spirited, compact dance genre more than sixty times. Mme. Mauté de Fleurville, Debussy's piano teacher, was a student of Chopin, and it seems that the Mazurka could have been a product of Debussy's own student years; if written later, it was, perhaps, intended as an homage.

**Ballade** - Concerning Claude Debussy and his equally original musical language, it could be said of him with some justification that "he was nothing but an ear." And it is interesting to find the germinal spirit of Debussy's particular form of musical Impressionism already taking shape palpably within a number of his earliest works, not least his piano pieces written before the end of the nineteenth century. Debussy himself once remarked that "every sound you hear can be reproduced. Everything that the keen ear perceives in the rhythm of the surrounding world can be represented musically. To some people, rules are of primary importance. But my desire is to reproduce only what I hear."

(source: ClassicalArchives.com)

* * *
Sunrise Music Series (2010/11)
at the First Unitarian Society of Westchester

Claude Debussy – The Piano Music

Debussy – The Piano Music
Etudes, l’Isle joyeuse
Preludes (Books I & II)
Images, Children’s Corner, Arabesques, Danse, Masques
Pour le Piano, Estampes, Suite Bergamasque, Rêverie
La plus que lente, Mazurka, Nocturne, Ballade, Valse romantique, Cahier...

Feb 13
Feb 20
Feb 27
Mar 06
Mar 27

Alan Murray studied piano with Frances Wazeter, Allen Weiss and Robert Preston and has appeared as a concerto soloist with orchestra and in solo and chamber music recitals. He holds a degree in physics and languages from Cornell, where he also received a special University award for distinguished piano soloist. A specialist in the Financial Institutions Group at Moody’s Investors Service, Alan focuses on the U.S., Latin American and worldwide developing markets.

Alan continues his musical interests in part by providing music at the early Sunday morning services of the First Unitarian Society of Westchester, where he enjoys blending diverse musical traditions from around the world. Alan’s near-term projects include programming a series of exhibits and musical events at his studio (www.Studio-Hollywood.com), beginning with the Masters Series Concerts for the September-June 2011/12 season, and others devoted to jazz, classical and diverse cultural music and dance programs, literary readings, and exhibits of paintings, sculpture and live arts.

Alan resides in Hastings with his wife Amada and daughter Celia, where they also own and operate Galápagos Books (www.GalapagosBooks.com), a bookstore devoted to world language, children’s and general interest books and multimedia educational materials.