

Sunrise Music Series (2010/11)

at the First Unitarian Society of Westchester (8:00am; *7:30am, unless otherwise noted)

Alan Murray, piano

Program	Date
Chopin (200th Anniversary) – The Piano Music	
the Etudes, Preludes, Polonaises, Ballades, Scherzos and Sonatas	✓
the Nocturnes, Mazurkas, Impromptus and Waltzes	✓
Intro & Rondo, Fantasy, Berceuse, Barcarolle, Andante Spianato & Grande Polonaise	✓
Schumann (200th Anniversary) – The Piano Music	
Fantasy, Carnaval, Arabeske, Kreisleriana, Symphonic Etudes, Davidsbündlertänze, Toccata	✓
Sonata #1 in F-sharp minor, Humoreske, Papillons, Fantasiestücke (Fantasy Pieces)	✓
Sonata #2 in G minor, Faschingsschwank aus Wien (Carnival of Vienna)	✓
Sonata #3 in F minor (Concerto without Orchestra), Kinderszenen (Scenes fr Childhood)	✓
Gesänge der Frühe (Songs of Dawn), Blumenstück, Romances, Waldszenen, Novellettes	✓
Ravel – The Piano Music	
Gaspard de la Nuit, Jeux d'eau, Pavane, Sonatine	✓
Le Tombeau de Couperin, Valses Nobles et Sentimentales, Menuet Antique	✓
Miroirs, Sérénade Grotesque, Menuet-Haydn, Prélude, a la manière-Borodine/Chabrier	✓
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 d'esquisses..	✓
Albéniz – Iberia , Navarra	Apr 3/10
Granados – Goyescas , El Pelele	Apr 17
Beethoven: The 32 Piano Sonatas & Diabelli Variations (Sundays 3:00pm Studio Hollywood) (limited seating, by reservation only; call 917.753.6701 or email: Director@Studio-Hollywood.com)	
(1) Sonatas #1-4	Apr 17
(2) Sonatas #5-10 (incl "Pathétique")	May 1
(3) Sonatas #11-15 (incl "Moonlight", "Pastorale")	May 8
(4) Sonatas #16-21 (incl "Tempest", "Waldstein")	May 15
(5) Sonatas #22-26 (incl "Appassionata", "Les Adieux")	May 29
(6) Sonatas #27-29 (incl "Hammerklavier")	Jun 5
(7) Sonatas #30-32	Jun 12
(8) Diabelli Variations	Jun 19
Rachmaninoff – The Major Works	
the Etudes-Tableaux; Moments Musicaux	Apr 24
the Preludes	May 1*
the Sonatas (No. 1 in D minor, No. 2 in B-flat minor)	May 8
Stravinsky (Petrouchka), Prokofiev (Sonata #7), Scriabin (Sonatas No. 2, No. 5) Medtner (Sonata 'Reminiscenza'), Balakirev (Islamey)	May 15*
Brahms – Handel Variations, Paganini Variations, Sonata #3 in F minor	May 22
Schubert - Middle Period Sonatas - in A minor, G major; "Wanderer" Fantasy	May 29
the Late Period Sonatas - in C minor, A major, B-flat major (Op. Posth.)	June 5
Franz Liszt – Major Works	
Sonata in B minor, Sonetti del Petrarca, Au bord d'une source, Vallée d'Obermann	
Dante Sonata, Hungarian Rhapsody, Spanish Rhapsody, Mephisto Waltz	June 12
Transcendental Etudes	June 19

Programs, Notes (pdf) and Calendar updates available at: www.studio-hollywood.com

Sunrise Music Series (2010/11)

at the First Unitarian Society of Westchester

Claude Debussy – The Piano Music

Etudes
Images
Preludes
Estampes
Children's Corner
Suite Bergamasque
Pour le Piano
Danse
Rêverie
Masques
Arabesques
La plus que lente
Other Works

in 5 programs, February 13 – March 27, 2011

Alan Murray, piano

Sunrise Music Series (2010/11)

at the First Unitarian Society of Westchester

Sunday, February 13, 2011

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 20, 2011

Claude Debussy – The Piano Music

The Preludes

Book I

- No. 1 – *Danseuses de Delphes*
- No. 2 – *Voiles*
- No. 3 – *Le vent dans la plaine*
- No. 4 – *«Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir»*
- No. 5 – *Les collines d'Anacapri*
- No. 6 – *Des pas sur la neige*
- No. 7 – *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest*
- No. 8 – *La fille aux cheveux de lin*
- No. 9 – *La sérénade interrompue*
- No. 10 – *La Cathédrale engloutie*
- No. 11 – *La danse de Puck*
- No. 12 – *Minstrels*

Book II

- No. 13 – *Brouillards*
- No. 14 – *Feuilles mortes*
- No. 15 – *La Puerta del Vino*
- No. 16 – *«Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses»*
- No. 17 – *Bruyères*
- No. 18 – *«Général Lavine» - excentric*
- No. 19 – *La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune*
- No. 20 – *Ondine*
- No. 21 – *Hommage à S. Pickwick, Esq., P.P.M.P.C.*
- No. 22 – *Canope*
- No. 23 – *Les tierces alternées*
- No. 24 – *Feux d'artifice*

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

Toccata

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.

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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 rhythmicized time.*"

Notes by: Laurent Barthel (*L'Isle joyeuse*); Annette Nubbemeyer/ 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 *Embarkation 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 (thirds, 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 'sagement' (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 wearily doing needlework, while envying 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 at 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 Préludes 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 dan 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, hermetically 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 "popular" 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 *Pelleas 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 sérénade 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 *Ibéria*. In contrast, **La Cathédrale engoutie (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 bolder, with the simultaneous sounding of chords a semitone apart

(a sound his erstwhile supporters found hard to take, perhaps?). *Feuilles mortes (Dead Leaves)* recreates 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 – excentric (General Lavine, eccentric)*" strides 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 jerky 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 name (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 "*Toomai 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 their 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 austere". 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. Laloy 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 governess. 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 motive. *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

meanwhile accompanied by delicate voicing. The piece is written in D minor, typically a somber key, and contains rather 'doubting' harmonies. The bell-like effects evoke the sounds of the gamelan that fascinated Debussy in the *Paris Exhibitions* of 1889 and 1900. **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**. **Golliwogg'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 Nubbemeyer (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 Debussyian. 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-style moment. The differing colors and the general tone of this prelude suggest orchestral writing, 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 is most readily identified with Debussy and Chopin's mature keyboard compositions. Both have a unique reverence for the pianist's position as a master of an exceptional instrument and a language that is specific to it.

In the second movement, *Sarabande*, is actually a revision of the "Sarabande" found in his *Images* (oubliées) 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*)

Estampes Debussy liked composing sets of piano pieces in threes, as evidenced by the *Images* oubliées (1894), *Images*, Book I (1904—1905), *Images* Book II (1906—1907), and *Estampes* (1903). "When you don't have any money to go on holiday, you must make do by using your imagination," Debussy wrote, and the first two pieces in his triptych *Estampes* constitute an exotic travelog; the third piece is stay-at-home music, watching the rain. "Estampes" means print or engraving, and these three pieces are musical depictions of particular moments at particular locales. They also represent an interior journey of sorts, a newly personal idiom for Debussy, who is now seemingly unconcerned with the conventions and expectations of the salon and the concert hall.

Pagodes (*Pagodas*) is the leadoff piece in Debussy's triptych *Estampes*. It shares certain similarities with another work in his output, *Cloches à travers les feuilles* (*Bells through the leaves*), the first piece in another triptych, *Images*, Book II. Both compositions imitate exotic, bell-like sonorities. Debussy was an admirer of the Gamelan, an ensemble of bell-like percussion

instruments of Javanese and Siamese origin whose sounds he depicted here in *Pagodes*. In the later *Cloches à travers les feuilles*, he ostensibly evoked the sonorities of bells, but the same kind of exoticism in the piece associated with the Gamelan can be heard. *Pagodes* opens in an ethereal mood, its main theme a mixture of the soothing and the exotic, its upper-register writing ringing and chiming, its harmonies evoking Eastern images and flavors. Throughout, in fact, the mood remains gentle and exotic, though in an alternate guise the theme takes on a muscular demeanor, with belled sonorities loudly ringing out. The piece quietly ends and must be counted among the more successful exotic creations in the composer's keyboard output.

La soirée dans Grenade (*Evening in Granada*) is the middle work. It had caused a minor controversy shortly after its premiere when Ravel asserted that Debussy borrowed a feature (C sharp octaves) from his 1895 *Habanera* for use in it. He may have had a point, but Debussy would have been the last to admit to such theft, not least because his effort here is quite brilliant apart from any influence. As can be suspected from the title, *La soirée dans Grenade* is yet another Debussy work with a Spanish flavor. It opens quietly, rhythms and thematic bits suggesting nocturnal Spain. Gradually, the music turns livelier, especially with the introduction of a rising rhythmic motif appearing in the outer sections of the work. The main theme appears at last, a festive, proud creation that calls to mind gaudy colors, lively dancers, and romance under a setting sun. It is elegant and graceful, but subtly sensual and alluring, especially as its succeeding music softens and reverts to more nocturnal moods. This colorful piece ends after two brief, galloping episodes yield to the serenity of the evening.

Jardins sous la pluie (*Gardens in the rain*) is the last of the three pieces and evokes a vivid sense of the scene suggested by the title in brilliant colors—one can almost hear the raindrops pelting the foliage, almost feel them on one's head while racing toward shelter. Debussy had a keen sense for capturing nature scenes and this piece evidences that ingenious talent. The piece opens with an energetic, rhythmic idea, raining its busy notes all over the sonic canvas and creating a sense of joyful menace. Out of the rhythmic drive emerges a theme of playful character, first daintily in the upper register, then more substantially in the middle register. Soon the theme takes on some intensity, issuing its tones in the lower regions. There is further thematic development, through which the mood remains bright and sunny. (*source: the Piano Society*)

Suite Bergamasque The *Suite 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. "Passepiéd" 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 *passepiéd*. 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 alternatively 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 "Passepiéd" is a type of dance, which originated in Brittany, and means "pass foot". Debussy's *Passepiéd* 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 on 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 just 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 halo" by blending patterns. The time which precedes that development accounts for the early formation of elements which appeared, with lesser emphasis, in some of his best-known works.

One of the immediate goals that Debussy set while studying at the Paris Conservatoire was to win the Prix de Rome. He achieved this accomplishment in 1883, and left Paris to spend little more than two of the prescribed three years at the Villa Medici, Italy. It was there, that he received inspiration to compose *Valse romantique*. The experience exposed him to many new elements that had an impact on his later compositions. The work, by its virtuoso vigor as well as its title, is a homage to Chabrier's two-piano *Valses romantiques*, which was published in 1883. Debussy adored and performed them at the Villa Medici, with

his fellow student Paul Vidal for Franz Liszt. The textures and contrary motions between voices, found in this composition, appeared in *Debussy's* later works, such as his *Préludes* and *Etudes*.

Valse romantique appeared in the early 1890s when Debussy sold a group of his piano compositions to the publisher Choudens. These works might have received more attention if it weren't for the composer's wish to repress them, refusing to dwell in his own musical past.

Nocturne – This is a relatively early work by Debussy and thus does not divulge the Impressionist style that would permeate his keyboard compositions a few years hence. Still, it contains a sufficient quantity of his stylistic fingerprints, notably in its rich harmonies, to leave no doubts about authorship. That said, it also displays hints of Liszt in the opening, and of Massenet and perhaps even Fauré, in its thematic lushness. The piece opens with a short, mysterious theme, rising from the 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 hesitant, 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	Feb 13
Preludes (Books I & II)	Feb 20
Images, Children's Corner, Arabesques, Danse, Masques	Feb 27
Pour le Piano, Estampes, Suite Bergamasque, Rêverie	Mar 06
<u>La plus que lente, Mazurka, Nocturne, Ballade, Valse romantique, Cahier..</u>	<u>Mar 27</u>



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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.