

Claude Debussy (1862 - 1918)

Works for Piano

with commentary by

Kevin von der Heydt

piano

Introduction by Dr. James Caplinger

Danse (1890-91)

Deux Arabesques (1888-91)

Andantino con moto

Allegretto scherzando

Pour le piano (1894-1901)

Prélude

Sarabande

Toccata

~ *Intermission* ~

Images I (Pictures) (1904-05)

Reflets dans l'eau (Reflections in the Water)

Hommage à Rameau (Homage to Rameau)

Mouvement (Movement)

Images II (1907-08)

Cloches à travers les feuilles (Bells Through the Leaves)

Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut (And the Moon  
Sets Over the Temple That Was)

Poissons d'or (Golden Fish)

All invited to a Reception in the Old Stone Room following the Concert

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Sunday, June 19, 2016, 3:00 pm  
Carnegie Hall, Lewisburg, WV

## Debussy Biography

Claude Debussy was born on August 22, 1862, in St. Germain-en-Laye, a small town just northwest of Paris. His parents were not musicians but his father's sister, Aunt Clémentine, who was Debussy's godmother, seems to have played an important role in starting the boy's musical education. He would pick out chords on her piano and when he stayed with her for longer visits she arranged for piano lessons. In 1871, Madame Mauté de Fleurville taught Debussy for a year. She claimed to be a student of Chopin; Debussy always believed this but it was most likely untrue. However, she was an inspiring teacher for the boy and was influential in getting him admitted to the Paris Conservatoire in 1872, where he studied for the next 11 years.

Anton Marmontel, his piano teacher there, noted Debussy's artistic temperament and despite being "scatterbrained and inaccurate" predicted he would become a distinguished musician. His other teachers recognized his intelligence and ingenuity but he

refused to be constrained by their rules. As a budding composer, Debussy set his sights on winning the Prix de Rome, the highest honor that the Conservatoire conferred. After two failed attempts he finally won in 1884, probably because he conformed more to the judges' sensibilities with his winning composition, the cantata "L'Enfant prodigue".



This painting inspired "Poissons d'or".

Debussy found inspiration in the works of other poets, artists and musicians, as well as nature. He wrote songs to the poetry of contemporary French poets such as

Verlaine, Baudelaire and Mallarmé. The paintings of Turner, Whistler and others influenced him. His large orchestral work “La Mer” was inspired by his love of the sea, as well as Oriental art and music. Debussy used his own print of the now famous picture by the Japanese artist, Hokusai, of “The Great Wave” for the cover of his publication of “La Mer”. His piano piece “Poissons d’or” from “Images II” was inspired by a Japanese lacquer panel that hung in his study.

In 1889, the World’s Fair in Paris coincided with the centenary of the French Revolution for which the Eiffel Tower was built. Music and culture from all over the world was showcased and Debussy was greatly impressed by the Javanese gamelan orchestra from Indonesia. When he heard this collection of bronze gongs and metallophones, he wrote: “If you listen without European prejudice to the charm of their percussion, you have to admit that ours is no more than the primitive noises of a traveling circus”. Although Debussy admired the Italian Renaissance composer Palestrina, he thought the complexity and counterpoint of the gamelan orchestra made “Palestrina seem like child’s play”. This musical influence is clear in many of Debussy’s subsequent pieces. His frequent use of the pentatonic scale is Western music’s approximation of the 5-note scale called “sléndro” used by the gamelan orchestra.



Indonesian Gamelan Orchestra

The whole-tone scale is also frequently employed by Debussy. This is a 6-note scale that it seems he used to erase one's preference of hearing major or minor modes. For some of his listeners this gives Debussy's music a dreamy quality and perhaps is one reason his music has been labeled "impressionistic". He hated being so categorized and said: "I'm trying to do something else - in a way realities - what imbeciles call 'impressionism', a term misused as it could possibly be". However, when a critic compared his music to the paintings of Monet, the artist most associated with that label, Debussy said, "You do me a great honor by calling me a pupil of Claude Monet".

Debussy had tempestuous relationships with women, starting when he was 18 with an affair with the wife of a Parisian civil servant. He was briefly engaged to a singer while living with another woman. In 1899 Debussy married his first wife, Lilly. After 5 years he started an affair with Emma Bardac, the wife of a banker. Lilly tried to commit suicide by shooting herself in the chest, but survived. Emma and Debussy each got divorced in 1905 and had a daughter, Claude-Emma, nicknamed Chouchou that year. They were finally married in 1908. Debussy lost many friends because of his irresponsible behavior. He even said, "An artist is in the main a detestable interior kind of man and perhaps also a deplorable husband". Emma stayed with Debussy until his death from cancer on March 25, 1918 precisely as the Germans were besieging Paris with aerial and artillery bombardment. Poor Chouchou died only a year later from the diphtheria epidemic of 1919.

Debussy composed in all forms, including songs, choral works, one completed opera, ballets, orchestral and chamber works, and enough piano music to fill 4 or 5 CD's. Although the critics severely judged much of his music at its premiere, Debussy was widely respected as a great composer by the end of his life.

Just as Beethoven's music was intimidating to many composers of the early 19th century, the huge music dramas of Richard Wagner cast a large shadow in the late 19th century. Curiously, Debussy said of Wagner: "He retains the glory of having gathered together into a single recipe several centuries of music. That's

surely something - and only a German was able to try it. Our mistake was to try for too long a time to follow his lead". After his early admiration for Wagner, Debussy rebelled against his teachers and the "Wagneristes" around him, following his own genius to create enchanting new sonorities and magical imagery. He wrote of his search for the "Inexpressible, which is the ideal of all Art".

Despite absorbing many other influences, Debussy, being a proud Frenchman, finally called himself simply a "musicien français" and summed up the virtues of art and music like this: "Painters and sculptors can only present us with the beauty of the universe in their own free somewhat fragmentary interpretation. They can capture only one of its aspects at a time, preserve only one moment. It is the musicians alone who have the privilege of being able to convey all the poetry of night and day, of earth and sky".

Kevin von der Heydt



20 franc French note featuring Debussy.



Hokusai "The Great Wave", inset the cover of "La Mer".

Kevin von der Heydt was born in Cincinnati, Ohio and started studying piano at the age of four. He is a graduate “magna cum laude” of the widely acclaimed Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington, Indiana. There he received his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in piano performance. While there, he was also a favorite accompanist for the students of the Distinguished Professor of Violin, Josef Gingold.

Following his university studies, Kevin worked in Mexico City, and the Braunschweig State Theatre in Germany as an accompanist and music coach. After a short stint as a freelance musician in New York City, he accepted a full-time position at The Greenbrier Hotel as pianist, where he worked for many years. In this position he performed a wide variety of classical pieces with violin and solo pieces, as well as various other collaborative performances with instrumentalists, singers and dancers.

Kevin has been developing a series of “Concert and Commentary” programs that focus on bringing a single composer’s life and works to a greater understanding with the audience. He has presented the complete Chopin Nocturnes in two programs, a Beethoven sonata program, and a program of Debussy’s piano works. It has been written that Kevin plays with a “most beautiful balance of heart and mind.”



*This concert is dedicated in memory  
of four music lovers who were lost to us in the last year:*

**Monaver von der Heydt**, Kevin's mother and greatest supporter

**Fran Keuling-Stout**, longtime friend and dispenser of poetry and wisdom

**Mimsie de Olloqui**, wonderful supporter of the local arts

**Dr. Daryn Straley**, Kevin's doctor and new friend

Special Thanks to the following volunteers:

**Nancy Angiello, Marti Goetz, Kalli Schoening,**

**Lisa von der Heydt, Lori von der Heydt, Keith von der Heydt**

This is not a Carnegie Hall sponsored event.