

A black and white portrait of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a dark turtleneck. He is looking directly at the camera with his hands clasped in front of him. The background is dark.

RUBICON

YUVAL ZORN

MASQUES IMAGES HOMMAGES

RAMEAU · SZYMANOWSKI · DEBUSSY

MASQUES IMAGES HOMMAGES

JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU 1683–1764

Nouvelles Suites de pièces de clavecin

- | | | |
|---|----------------|------|
| 1 | III. Sarabande | 3.33 |
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KAROL SZYMANOWSKI 1882–1937

Masques Op.34

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|---|---------------------------|-------|
| 2 | I. Schéhérazade | 11.20 |
| 3 | II. Tantris le bouffon | 6.24 |
| 4 | III. Sérénade de Don Juan | 7.00 |

CLAUDE DEBUSSY 1862–1918

Images, Book II CD 120

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 5 | I. Cloches à travers les feuilles | 4.24 |
| 6 | II. Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut | 6.26 |
| 7 | III. Poissons d'or | 4.37 |

Images, Book I CD 105

- | | | |
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| 8 | I. Reflets dans l'eau | 5.39 |
| 9 | II. Hommage à Rameau | 6.50 |
| 10 | III. Mouvement | 3.46 |

JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU

Nouvelles Suites de pièces de clavecin

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| 11 | IV. Les Trois Mains | 4.08 |
| 12 | V. Fanfarinette | 2.40 |
| 13 | VI. La Triomphante | 2.06 |

Premier Livre de pièces de clavecin

- | | | |
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| 14 | Sarabande | 3.47 |
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YUVAL ZORN piano



This album was created during a time of war, the full impact of which is yet to be understood, and making it provided me with a much-needed safe haven from the turbulence outside. Much like Debussy's 'And the moon sets upon the temple that was' (from *Images II*), the music here embodies not only the decay of an old order but also the potential growth of a new one, with its hopes and perils.

I would like to thank several people who made this recording possible: Matthew Cosgrove for his trust in my vision; Oscar Torres for his dedicated work; the Wyastone Studio team; Daniel Thomas, Fazioli's agent at Jacques Samuels Pianos; my brother, Daniel, for his generous support throughout the process; and, last but not least, my partner, Ori, and our daughter, Yaël, who are a constant source of joy and inspiration in everything I do.

This album is dedicated to the memory of my piano teacher and mentor, Professor Benjamin Oren, a rare man of renaissance and a lover of all things beautiful.

YUVAL ZORN

'Karol arrived two days later... I was burning with curiosity to hear his new compositions,' recalled the great pianist Arthur Rubinstein in his second volume of autobiography (*My Many Years*, Jonathan Cape, 1980). 'There was a wealth of beautiful violin pieces and three exotic-sounding pieces for piano called "Masques": the first, *Schéhérazade*, written in a Debussyan Oriental style; the second, *Tantris der Narr*, from a German poem... The music is beautiful but terribly difficult to bring to life on the piano. It demanded orchestration. The third piece called *Don Juan's Serenade*, dedicated to me, was a colourful and brilliant piece which I played successfully in public.'

Rubinstein and Karol Szymanowski were lifelong friends. Born into an aristocratic and cultured land-owning Polish family in Tymoszkówka (now in Ukraine), Szymanowski is routinely categorised as the first notable Polish composer since Chopin (which, to this writer, seems a little unfair on Paderewski and Stojowski) but his is a distinct voice. Chopin is there early on, but it is the influence of Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky and Scriabin that is most apparent in works like *Mythes* (for violin and piano), his most-recorded work, and the near-contemporary tone poems *Métopes* (for piano) and *Masques*.

Masques was written in Tymoszkówka to where Szymanowski had returned in 1914. Inspired by mythological characters who hide their real faces behind masks, 'Tantris the Buffoon' and 'Don Juan's Serenade' were written in the summer and autumn of 1915; 'Sheherazade', completed in 1916, was planned as the concluding part yet finally moved to the beginning. Each was dedicated to a different pianist: the first to the short-lived Alexander (Sasha) Dubyansky (1900–1926); the second one to Heinrich Neuhaus; and the third to Rubinstein. Dubyansky gave the premiere of *Masques* in St Petersburg on 12 October 1916. Scheherazade is the key protagonist in the Arabian book of *One Thousand and One Nights*; Tantris (an anagram of Tristan) is based on a poem by the German Ernst Hardt. Under this false name he masquerades as a jester in order to enter Isolde's apartment one night. Don Juan is the unscrupulous seducer familiar from Mozart's opera and Byron's poem. In 1917, only months after the premiere of *Masques*, the Bolsheviks plundered Szymanowski's ancestral home and burnt it to the ground, destroying his two grand pianos.

Masques was also the title of a piano work by Debussy (written in 1903–04). And it is to Debussy that Yuval Zorn turns his attention to next. *Images* – not to be confused with the composer's *Images* for orchestra (1905–12) – were published in two sets of three pieces each, Book I written between 1901 and 1905, Book II in 1907. 'Without false pride,' Debussy wrote to his publisher Durand regarding Book I, 'I feel that these three pieces hold together well, and that they will find their place in the literature of the piano ... to the left of Schumann, or to the right of Chopin.'

'Reflets dans l'eau' ('Reflections on the water'), one of Debussy's finest and most famous piano works, is a masterpiece in the tradition of keyboard water music. The sombre 'Hommage à Rameau' is no stylistic pastiche of Rameau, Debussy's composer predecessor. He was editing some of Rameau's music at the time he was composing this first set of *Images*, and was no doubt inspired by a performance of *Castor et Pollux* which he reviewed in 1903. 'Mouvement' is self-explanatory and is marked to be played with 'a fantastical but precise lightness'.

In the chronology of Debussy's works for solo piano, *Images* Book I comes just after *Suite pour piano* and is followed by *Estampes* ('Pagodes', 'La Soirée dans Grenade', 'Jardins sous la pluie'), *L'Isle joyeuse*, *Masques* and *Children's Corner* Suite. The second set of *Images* came next, though Debussy had planned the titles as early as 1903. While those he assigned to the first set were more or less descriptive, for the second they were more arcane: 'Cloches à travers les feuilles' ('Bells through the leaves') and 'Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut' ('And the moon sets upon the temple that was'). Debussy first heard the sound of a gamelan orchestra at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1889 played by Javanese musicians. The sounds of the gamelan stayed with him as you can hear in the tantalising suggestion of an East Asian gamelan ensemble in these two pieces and 'Poissons d'or' (not 'Goldfish' as it is sometimes mistakenly translated but 'Golden Fish'). The piece is said to be inspired by a Japanese lacquer panel that Debussy owned depicting two golden koi.

The album begins and ends with Yuval Zorn's own homage to Jean-Philippe Rameau with pieces from the composer's first and third *Pièces de clavecin* for harpsichord that appeared in 1706, 1724 and 1726 (or 1727, opinions vary). Like the second volume, the third and final book (*Nouvelles Suites de pièces de clavecin*) contains two suites, the first of which, in A minor, is comprised of seven numbers. *Sarabande*, *Les Trois Mains*, *Fanfarinette* and *La Triomphante* are numbers 3, 4, 5 and 6. From the first book (*Premier Livre de pièces de clavecin*) Zorn plays the *Sarabande*.

JEREMY NICHOLAS

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