

NINO GVETADZE  
DEBUSSY



ORCHID CLASSICS

## CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

1	Arabesque No.1 (Andantino con moto)	4:49
2	Arabesque No.2 (Allegretto scherzando)	3:27
3	Preludes Book 1 - Danseuses de Delphes	3:22
4	Preludes Book 1 - Voiles	3:49
5	Preludes Book 1 - Le vent dans la plaine	2:17
6	Preludes Book 1 - Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir	3:57
7	Preludes Book 1 - Les collines d'Anacapri	2:57
8	Preludes Book 1 - Des pas sur la neige	4:19
9	Preludes Book 1 - Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest	3:29
10	Preludes Book 1 - La fille aux cheveux de lin	2:33
11	Preludes Book 1 - La sérénade interrompue	2:31
12	Preludes Book 1 - La cathédrale engloutie	6:07
13	Preludes Book 1 - La danse de Puck	2:40
14	Preludes Book 1 - Minstrels	2:31
15	Estampes - Pagodes	5:18
16	Estampes - La soirée dans Grenade	5:49
17	Estampes - Jardins sous la pluie	3:46
18	Clair de lune (from Suite bergamasque)	5:10

### Total time

**69:00**

## NINO GVETADZE piano

## DEBUSSY IN PICTURES

I have been waiting for the moment to record Debussy's music for some time. While playing his pieces I had the urge to keep playing, to keep discovering the colours, the touch, almost trying to reach for a perfection, which of course is not possible; and the further I went, the deeper I looked, I kept discovering endless possibilities for fantasy, and the images flew one after another into my head.

I did not want my next CD to be just the next CD; I wanted to do something useful and as we are often discussing the lack of classical music education among children and young people, I decided to do something about it from my side and organized workshops mostly for children, but also for adults.

I decided that the best way for me to awaken musical interest in children, to really lead them through music, was via drawings, so I asked them to close their eyes, to listen to the sound, rhythm, harmony, melody and imagine what would it look like if this piece was a drawing or a painting. Debussy's music was perfect for this project, as he gives you endless space for imagination. The result was unexpected even for me, the enthusiasm that I saw in my young public's eyes and the range of fantasy was truly amazing.

I worked with more than 200 children and received more than 200 beautiful drawings. I may not have changed the world, but at least I opened the doors to music to some children and I hope they will follow the route to this beautiful Muse throughout the years.

*Nino Gvetadze*  
29.10.2013

There are few composers who have made as significant a contribution to piano music as Claude Debussy (1862-1918). A pianist of great skill, and well versed in the masterworks of previous generations, Debussy did not simply rework existing forms; he revolutionised music for the piano in a way that would indelibly alter our understanding of the instrument's capabilities. The music of Chopin and Liszt had already broken down boundaries in this field, with their explorations of the piano's colours and resonances. Debussy took this process into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a new, subtle conception of the instrument's colouristic and 'spatial' properties, communicated through a harmonic language that was increasingly daring.

20<sup>th</sup>-century composers were explicit in expressing the debt their music owed to Debussy. Writing in 1941, Benjamin Britten referred to Debussy's 'luscious harmony', while French composer Olivier Messiaen paid tribute to this central figure in his own musical heritage in his piano *Préludes* of 1929. One, entitled *Un reflet dans le vent...* refers both to Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau* from his *Images*, and to the wind-themed pieces of his own first book of *Préludes*. The message was clear: Debussy's work represented a vital precedent in the composition of new piano music.

To modern ears, the 'Impressionism' of Debussy's piano music may sound more pleasant than revolutionary, but it is important to remember that his style underwent a fascinating journey, from the romanticism of early works, to the innovations of later pieces. Two of the more romantic works are the *Deux Arabesques*, which were completed and published in 1891, and are in keeping with the style of salon music fashionable at the time. The first is rippling and dreamy, and its rapid triplets are emulated in the central section of the second *Arabesque*, creating a subtle relationship between the two. In the livelier, witty second *Arabesque*, in G major, the right hand plays a distinctively Debussian four-note figure, moving up a step from the initial note, then back again, then dropping down.

Hailed by Ravel as 'admirable masterpieces', Debussy's first book of *Préludes* was issued in 1910. Debussy had been contemplating such a collection for a

few years before their publication, but once he began work on them the music flowed quickly. He drew inspiration from the great piano music of Chopin, and from a variety of literary sources and personal experiences. However, Debussy insisted that every title should appear at the end of each piece, rather than at the beginning; his desire was that the music should speak for itself, and conjure up whatever impressions it made in the listener's mind, rather than imposing a definite programme.

The order of composition differs from the published order of the pieces, yet the *Préludes* flow as a coherent set from a composer-pianist at the peak of his powers. The **Danseuses de Delphes** (Dancers of Delphi) is a piece inspired by an ancient sculpture of a trio of dancers, observed by Debussy in the Louvre in Paris. That this is a solid stone sculpture is conveyed by the steady gravitas of Debussy's chords, yet the sensuality and movement implied by the artwork are there, too, in smoother sonorities.

**Voiles** begins with a descending whole-tone line in parallel thirds; this whole-tone material dominates the outer sections, with pentatonic material in the central passages. Debussy's widow argued that the piece depicts not sails, but veils; in any case, the billowing, sensuous movement of fabric is suggested by the sinuous piano lines and enigmatic harmony.

The title of **Le vent dans la plaine** comes from a couplet of poetry by 18<sup>th</sup>-century poet Charles-Simon Favart: 'Le vent dans la plaine / Suspend son haleine': 'The wind on the plain / Holds it breath'. Debussy depicts this with suddenly withdrawn patches amid the otherwise frenetic texture, vividly conjuring up the capricious gusting of the breeze. It is a theme from which the composer gained inspiration more than once: in the third movement of *La Mer* (1903-1905), he had depicted the 'Dialogue of the wind and the sea', and the violence of the wind is explored in the seventh *Prélude*, *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest*.

The fourth *Prélude*, **Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir** (The sounds and perfumes circle in the evening air), derives its title from a poem by Baudelaire, 'Harmonie du soir', which Debussy had already set for voice and

piano in the late 1880s. This *Prélude* is characterised by the interval of a fourth, both rising and falling, and by its seductive, nocturnal atmosphere. **Les collines d'Anacapri** (The Hills of Anacapri) brings rays of Mediterranean sunshine, Debussy shifting the mood between spritely energy and languid relaxation. In contrast, the haunting stillness of **Des pas sur la neige** (Footprints in the snow) is truly chilling, evoking bleak isolation in a cold world.

Unlike the more picturesque gusts of *Le vent dans la plaine*, the seventh *Prélude*, **Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest** (What the west wind has seen), portrays the wind in all its tempestuous might. As was so often the case, Debussy sought inspiration from literature; here, his sources include a story by Hans Christian Andersen, *The Garden of Paradise*, in which the four winds are sent out before returning to describe what they have seen, and possibly Shelley's poem *Ode to the West Wind*, which refers to 'the tumult of thy mighty harmonies'. As well as being fiendishly technically demanding, the piece demonstrates Debussy's increasingly liberal approach to tonality, the rapid figurations muddying harmonic clarity.

**La fille aux cheveux de lin** (The girl with the flaxen hair) is a masterpiece of understated eroticism, its apparent simplicity beguiling the listener into what seems, initially, to be an innocent world, but proves to be deeply sensual. The piece was, in part, inspired by a poem by Leconte de Lisle, but the composer's widow hinted that this *Prélude* portrays 'something else more definite, more real, far less literary, that I can't commit to paper...' As with the second of the *Deux Arabesques*, Debussy uses his distinctive, rapid, four-note figure in the right hand (rising and falling by one step, then dropping down).

**La sérénade interrompue** (The interrupted serenade) begins with a number of halting false starts, before Debussy blurs the texture into something more seductive. The unfolding of the scene is quite dramatic, juxtaposing intimacy and openness, stuttering and singing, and leading to a rather apologetic ending. **La cathédrale engloutie** (The sunken cathedral) is a glorious example of Debussy's ability to use the 'space' of the piano, layering chords in parallel fifths to create a wonderfully resonant sonority. We hear tolling bells from the

submerged depths, and, in the central part of the piece, grand, widely-spaced chords are used to sound like the cathedral's organ, with majestic effect.

The last two of this first book of *Préludes* were greeted with particular enthusiasm when Debussy first performed them; both were encored when premiered in 1910 and 1911 respectively. It seems likely that Debussy first encountered the character of Puck in a 1908 edition of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In **La danse de Puck**, Debussy's lively, magical piano writing captures the character's skittish and playful nature. The inspiration for **Minstrels** came from a group of musicians in red jackets playing guitars and saxophones outside the Grand Hotel in Eastbourne in 1905, portrayed in this piece with humorous affection. However, Debussy had mixed feelings about the musical distractions he encountered in England, writing to his friend Louis Laloy from Eastbourne:

I have been here a month. It's a little English seaside place, silly as these places sometimes are. I shall have to go because there are too many draughts and too much music – but I don't know where... I have written a certain amount of music as I have not done for quite a time.

The three *Estampes*, composed during the summer of 1903, represented a significant shift in Debussy's piano writing, with signs of his characteristic, idiomatic treatment of the instrument emerging with greater assurance than before, paving the way for later achievements such as the *Préludes*. In 1889 Debussy had visited the Paris Exhibition, where he was deeply struck by the Balinese and Annamite gamelan ensembles performing there. Debussy's use of exotic modes and pentatonic materials stems from this experience, memories of which are encapsulated in the perfumed delicacy of **Pagodes**, the first of the *Estampes*.

In contrast, **La soirée dans Grenade** (The evening in Granada) draws upon Spanish and Arabic influences, depicting groups of singers and guitarists with pulsating rhythms and delicious harmony. Debussy, who admired the impression

of 'flower-scented Spanish evenings' created by Spanish composer Albéniz, would again pay homage to Spain in his orchestral work *Ibéria* (1905-8). In **Jardins sous la pluie**, the rapid, pronounced figurations perfectly illustrate heavy raindrops. Debussy captures childhood frustration at the pleasures of the garden thwarted by the elements by looking to his own musical past, with references to popular songs and even to the *Liebested* from *Tristan und Isolde*. Debussy had been fixated with Wagner, and his unresolved use of the 'Tristan chord' in *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894) broke down the rules of harmony in a manner that was highly significant for the development of modern music. However, tonality is still well in evidence at the end of *Jardins sous la pluie*, which concludes with welcome rays of sunshine in the bright key of E major.

Debussy initially submitted his *Suite bergamasque* for publication in 1890, but he later revised and published the work in 1905 – by which time his style has evolved considerably. The third of this four-movement suite, **Clair de lune** (Moonlight), was inspired by a poem of the same title by Verlaine, whose poetry, along with that of Mallarmé, was close to Debussy's heart. In early versions of the score, *Clair de lune* includes the subtitle 'Promenade sentimentale', hinting that while the tender, romantic character of the piece was undeniably part of its conception, it should perhaps be taken at a walking pace, rather than being played very slowly.

Either way, the piece is one of limpid beauty, and justly famous, Debussy evoking moonlight with the precisely chosen piano textures and sublime harmony that set his piano music apart as amongst the most accomplished and distinctive in music history. For all his considerable influence both on his contemporaries, and on composers ever since, Debussy's was a unique voice. He and Ravel are often lumped together as 'Impressionists', yet their compositional approaches were often quite different, and clearly identifiable. As Debussy stated in an interview, soon after he had completed the first book of *Préludes*: 'There is no school of Debussy. I have no disciples. I am I.'

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NINO GVETADZE (piano)

"... a born pianist, gifted with ability to speak to the heart"

Dutch NRC Handelsblad

"... a sensation [...]!"

German Hannoverische Allgemeine

Born and raised in Tbilisi, Nino Gvetadze studied with Veronika Tumanishvili, Nodar Gabunia and Nana Khubutia. After her graduation Nino moved to the Netherlands to study with Paul Komen and Jan Wijn. Nino has received various awards, including Second Prize, Press Prize and Audience Award at the International Franz Liszt Piano Competition 2008. She received the prestigious Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award 2010.

Nino Gvetadze has performed with many outstanding conductors such as Michel Plasson, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Michel Tabachnik, John Axelrod and Jaap van Zweden and with the Rotterdam, The Hague, Brussels, Seoul and Netherlands Philharmonic, Bergische and the Rheinische Philharmonie amongst others. She has toured with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Kammerakademie Potsdam and Amsterdam Sinfonietta.

Nino has given various recitals all over the world, including Hannover (PRO MUSICA Preisträger am Klavier-Zyklus), Bayreuth, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, with Jean-Yves Thibaudet at the Spoleto Festival, Lucerne Piano Festival, Bunka-kaikan Hall Tokyo and twice at the Festival Piano aux Jacobins (Toulouse).

Nino's repertoire stretches from Bach, Mozart and Beethoven to Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninov and further to contemporary music. Most of the selected pieces are very virtuoso and demanding, but in her interpretation Nino always brings forward its poetry and characteristic colours. The St. Gallen Tagblatt wrote: "absolutely thrilling" about her performance of Tchaikovsky's 2<sup>nd</sup> Piano Concerto and "Poetry and Phantasy dominated indefatigably over the pure brilliance."

Concertonet wrote : "Schubert's *Wanderer Fantaisie* was expressed with a total and admirable knowledge of the architecture of the score, enthralling with an outstanding feeling for timbre and colour."

Nino has recorded three solo CDs: piano works by Mussorgsky (Brilliant Classics), Rachmaninoff Preludes Op.23 and Op.32 (Etcetera) and "Widmung" with Liszt piano works (Orchid Classics ORC100017). Her recordings and interviews are often broadcast on European radio and TV Stations.

Nino plays on a Steinway Grand Piano, kindly lent to her by the Dutch National Music Instrument Foundation.

[www.ninogvetadze.com](http://www.ninogvetadze.com)

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*Inspired by and dedicated to my daughter Mariam*



Also available: ORC100017