

Debussy's Traces

Gaillard • Horszowski • Debussy

Marik • Fourneau 1904 - 1983



ARBITER

*Debussy's Traces: Marius François Gaillard,
Marik, Ranck, Horszowski, Garden, Debussy, Fournau*

CD I:

Marius-François Gaillard:

1. Valse Romantique	3:30
2. Arabesque no. 1	3:00
3. Arabesque no. 2	2:34
4. Ballade	5:20
5. Mazurka	2:52
6. <i>Suite Bergamasque:</i> Prélude	3:31
7. <i>Suite Bergamasque:</i> Menuet	4:53
8. <i>Suite Bergamasque:</i> Clair de lune	4:07
9. <i>Pour le Piano:</i> Prélude	3:47
10. <i>Pour le Piano:</i> Sarabande	5:08
11. <i>Pour le Piano:</i> Toccata	3:53
12. Masques	5:15
13. <i>Estampes:</i> Pagodes	3:49
14. <i>Estampes:</i> La soirée dans Grenade	3:53
15. <i>Estampes:</i> Jardins sous la pluie	3:27
16. <i>Images, Book I:</i> Reflets dans l'eau	4:01
17. Rêverie	3:45
18. La plus que lent	3:54
19. <i>Preludes, Book I:</i> Danseuses de Delphes	2:50
20. <i>Preludes, Book I:</i> La Fille aux cheveux de lin	2:24
21. <i>Preludes, Book I:</i> La Sérénade interrompue	2:27
<i>CD I total time:</i>	79:30

CD II:

1. <i>Preludes, Book I:</i> La Cathédrale engloutie	4:55
2. <i>Preludes, Book I:</i> Minstrels	1:57
3. <i>Preludes, Book II:</i> La puerta del Vino	3:10
4. <i>Preludes, Book II:</i> Général Lavine	2:13
5. <i>Preludes, Book II:</i> Ondine	3:03
6. <i>Preludes, Book II:</i> Homage à S. Pickwick, Esq.	2:39
7. <i>Estampes:</i> Pagodes	3:56
8. <i>Estampes:</i> La soirée dans Grenade	4:49
<i>Irén Marik:</i>	
9. <i>Preludes, Book I:</i> Des pas sur la neige	3:10
10. <i>Preludes, Book II:</i> Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses	3:03
<i>Mieczysław Horszowski: Childrens Corner Suite:</i>	
11. Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum	2:48
12. Jimbo's lullaby	3:16
13. Serenade of the Doll	2:52
14. The snow is dancing	3:01
15. The little Shepherd	2:16
16. Golliwog's Cake walk	3:07
<i>Mary Garden & Claude Debussy: Ariettes oubliées:</i>	
17. Il pleure dans mon coeur	2:05
18. L'ombre des arbres	2:25
19. Aquarelles-Green	1:33
20. <i>Pelleas et Melisande:</i> Mes longs cheveux	1:42
<i>Irén Marik & John Ranck: En blanc et noir:</i>	15:11
21. Avec emportement.	4:18

22. Lent. Sombre. 6:31
 23. Scherzando. 4:12
Marie-Thérèse Fourneau:
 24. Étude X: Pour les sonorités opposées 4:52
CD 2: total time: 78:53

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 1928.VII.22:CDI:15;1929.IV.5:CDI:19-21,CDII:1,2
 1930.II.3:CDI:5,18;1930.III.2:CDII:3,4
 1930.III.22:CDI:4;
 1930.VI.6:CDI:1,12,13;CDII:5,6
 1930.X.23:CDI:6-9;1954.VI.4:CDII:7.8
 1953.XI.25:CDII:24;1960's:CDII:9,21-23
 1971:CDII:10;1983.VIII.13:CDII:12-16.
 panel photos: *outer:* Claude Debussy; *inner:*
 Javanese dancers, Gaillard, Horszowski
p.19: Fourneau; *back cover:* Marik*

“Listen, Claude,” I risked at the moment I was about to leave him, “these Debussyistes really irritate me.” Debussy: “And me? They’re killing me!”

– René Peter.

When a new phenomenon takes places in the arts and letters, it is often due to a virus targeting a specific place, people, and time. Soon after a certain Parisian bookshop opened, its own peculiar cultural strain began to flourish, in a fertile testing ground that impelled many habituées to engage in discussions, demonstrations, and meetings that led to radical transformations. *Librairie de l art indépendant*, founded in 1889 by Edmond Bailly, an idealist lacking any business sense, maintained his Montmartre caravanserai until 1917 for voyagers such as Villiers de l’ Isle-Adam, Mallarmé, Satie, Debussy, Odilon Redon, Toulouse-Lautrec, Huysmans, even Gustave Moreau. As described by Victor-Emile Michelet, “In the Independent Art bookshop, various poets of the Symbolist period, happy to be published (Bailly’s new small press) under the house’s logo, a strange composition by [Félicien] Rops that represented a mermaid on a beach who showed her two great wings over her legs that ended in a fish’s tail. The winged mermaid was accompanied by a proud motto: *No hic piscis omnium.*” Baudelaire was gone but his editor and friends were on hand, crucial to this emergent Debussy who spent much of his life reading, especially Baudelaire’s translations of Edgar Allan Poe, and planning works on his texts.

Debussy often showed up with Satie. Michelet recalls: “In a back room furnished with an excellent piano, Debussy played works that he had recently composed and enchanted us with the prestige of his fascinating genius of being without a spine. I never heard a pianist with a touch as Debussy’s. Under his strong finger, formed to knead out a musical dough, the instrument sang with a voice twelve times lively and rich with all its timbres, a human voice or of

brass instruments, bowed and wooden. The pallid face of its player belied his placidity only by the gleam flaming in his eyes, as we deliciously inhaled this newly minted music, this sonorous powder exploded the fascination with Wagner that weighed upon the atmosphere of that time. Those who had first heard Debussy’s music there, as played by its creator, were far from believing that it would take less than two years for him to triumph. After the first few notes of *Pelleas et Mélisande* I once recalled to Debussy the old feeling about it: ‘I didn’t believe that this music would have been so quickly swallowed,’ to which he replied, ‘Uh! It was swallowed, but not digested.’”

One literary eyewitness offered her observations:

“Whenever I met Claude Debussy it was in the warm, rather feverish atmosphere of people wholly enamored of music. At the piano, a composer. His elbows on the back expanse of the grand piano, propping up his head, a tenor glued to his armchair, a soprano, head upturned, effortlessly pouring out her vocal line like the smoke of a cigarette. No sooner did Louis de Serres leave the keyboard than his place would be taken by Charles Bordes, or by Déodat de Séverac. The absent-minded Vincent d’Indy, reclining on a sofa, would break into an astonishingly vulgar waltz, suddenly cutting himself short, with shame. It would then be the turn of Gabriel Fauré and André Messager, finding themselves rivals for once, to improvise a duet at the piano. Off they would start at a perilous rhythm, watching out for the trap for each modulation on the way.

“At times like these music seemed to intoxicate Debussy. Warm and dark of complexion, his Pan-like head surmounted by entangled locks of hair needed only the background of a grapevine. He was set trembling by some inner excitement. In his unrelenting gaze the pupils of his eyes seemed momentarily to dart from one spot to another like those of animals of prey hypnotized by

their own searching intensity. He responded to music as a bell-shaped crystal awaits the shock of vibration to produce its perfect purity of tone.

“We were together one Sunday evening, having heard the first performance of *Antar*, unless I am thinking of *Sheherazade*. Overcome by the work, Debussy was turning it over in his mind in an attempt to reconstruct it. He started with some kind of low buzzing then presently lingered on a high-pitched note like the sound of vibrating wires at a telegraph pole, groping all the time in his memory for the line of one of the themes. Suddenly his forbidding expression lit up. ‘Just a minute, just a minute,’ he exclaimed, ‘it goes like this . . . *mmmm* . . . and then presently . . . *mmmm*. . . .’ One of us leaped at these snatches of a forgotten theme and went on to develop it. ‘That’s it, that’s it!’ Debussy agreed, ‘and while that goes on, the cellos in the bass have *mmm* . . . and the drums, directly they come in very softly, there’s that sudden explosion in the brass, and then . . . and then . . .’ Humming, and soon caterwauling, when it came to imitating the violins, and eventually panting, he seemed to be almost annihilated by the battle of instruments in his mind. Grasping a poker, he hammered away with it on the lid of the piano, and while still holding on to it he discovered another sound by running his fingers along the window pane. (In another version he provides a pizzicato on the basses by hurling a cork at the window pane.) Smacking his lips he produced the sound of a xylophone, and went on in a crystalline voice to imitate the liquid sounds, *doug doug*, of the celesta.

“There he stood in front of all of us, using his voice, his arms and his feet while his two spiral locks of black hair danced wildly about on this forehead. His laugh of a faun found no echo in our own laughter: it was the expression of something within him, and I drew in my mind the vision of the great master of French music inventing before us the music of the jazz band.” – *Colette*

Michelet indicates how Debussy immersed himself into “the spiritual broth of the time, one that took painting away from the school of Gauguin and Van Gogh that had to remain entangled in the music. Debussy allowed himself to be impregnated with hermeticism. He had read up on the subject and engaged in conversations with Bailly, who had studied the esoteric along with Asian and Western music, Debussy learned of Hindu sacred music first hand through the patronage of the Sufi Inayat Khan and his two brothers.

“Edmond Bailly was the first person I knew in Paris,” said Khan. The Sufi master took his veena to Paris and played for Debussy in his home, presenting him with raga scales and instrumental technique. After recognizing traces of Asian music in Debussy’s compositions, Satie also tried to use its themes and shapes in his own music. When brought to his attention, Satie objected that he lacked the technical means to properly express it: “Hey! Here’s a Debussy phrase that seems to be Satie.” The latter responded “Yes, it’s Satie, but Debussy does it better than me.” At that time Satie played for Sar Peladan’s Rosicrucian cult. Debussy may have briefly participated in their mystical sect but covered up traces of any involvement.

Debussy’s genius thrived and expanded through contacts with remarkable persons. During an earlier residence at the French Academy in Rome he and Paul Dukas had the chance to play for and hear Liszt at the piano. Debussy recalled an early teacher who spoke to him about Chopin. “With all due respect to his great age, what Saint-Saëns [age eighty in 1915] says about the pedal in Chopin is not quite right, for I remember what Mme. Mauté de Fleurville told me. Chopin wanted his pupils to practice without using the pedal and only to use it sparingly when performing. It was this use of the pedal as a kind of breathing that I noticed in Liszt, when I heard him in Rome.” When Liszt sensed Debussy’s need for an alternative to Wagner, the Abbé, with his

long straight white hair, clad in black cassock and nursing a cigar, leaned over and casually asked the young satyr-headed fellow if he had ever been to *Santa Maria dell' Anima*, a German-run church near *Piazza Navona*. From Rome in November 1885 Debussy writes his Paris friend E.-H. Vasnier:

"I must tell you of the single time I went out this month. I went to hear two masses, one of Palestrina, the other of Orlando di Lasso. The Anima is the only place to hear such music, which is the only church music I can allow. That of Gounod and company seems to me to derive from an hysterical mysticism and produces the effect of a sinister farce. The two above-named people are masters, especially Orlando who is more decorative and human than Palestrina. The effects they produce entirely from their great knowledge of counterpoint are tremendous feats. You probably are not aware that counterpoint is the most forbidding thing in music. In their work, however, it is wonderful for it is made to underline the significance of the words of which it brings out incredible depths; and sometimes there are winding melodic lines that recall illuminated manuscripts and missals."

After Liszt's hint exposed Debussy to earlier modal polyphony, more revelations soon followed. Chabrier's copy of the score to Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* arrived from Russia, and Debussy attended concerts of new Russian music at the 1889 Exposition where Rimsky-Korsakov conducted his works and many by his colleagues. Debussy was fixated by an ensemble from Java that performed dance and gamelan music, spending hours daily to absorb their sounds and movement. Asia also resided in books by Lafcadio Hearn kept alongside his Poe for a connection to the Japan that inhabited his treasured lithographs.

Debussy gave a revealing interview to a French-speaking American reporter.

"I don't know how I compose; really I don't," said Claude Debussy, shrugging his shoulders and reaching out for another cigarette.

. . . a delightful house with an atmosphere of peace and work about it, full of wonderful pieces of antique pottery and Oriental curios. The lightly carved walls are painted white in almost Colonial simplicity. The heavy buff carpet on the floor shows off to perfection the handsome Oriental rugs spread on it. In his study M. Debussy has few pictures, but many books. In one corner is his piano, which, at the time of my visit he had just left to sit down at his desk. Such meticulous order as his desk showed! The blue blotter almost entirely free from ink stains, a score book lying neatly on it: a couple of writing pads placed geometrically, an inkwell or two, and a rather large jar of handsome green pottery for cigarettes. If at first the jar seemed too large for the purpose, a few minutes conversation with M. Debussy made one come to the conclusion that it could not be large enough—so fast did he smoke.

"No," he continued, taking up the strain of his first sentence. "I do not know how I compose. At the piano. No, I can't say I do. I don't know how to explain it exactly. It always seems to me that we musicians are only instruments, very complicated ones it is true, but instruments which nearly reproduce the harmonies which spring up within us. I don't think any composer knows how he does it. If he says he does, it seems to me he must be deluding himself. I know I could never describe the process.

"Of course, in the first place, I must have a subject. Then I concentrate on that subject, as it were—no, not musically, in an ordinary way, just as anybody would think of the subject. Then gradually after these thoughts have simmered for a certain length of time music begins to center around them, and I feel that I must give expression to the harmonies which haunt me. And then I work unceasingly.

“There are days and weeks and often months that no ideas come to me. No matter how much I try I cannot produce a work that I am satisfied with. They say some composers can write, regularly, so much music a day—I admit I cannot comprehend it. Of course, I can work out the instrumentation of a piece of music at almost any time, but as for getting the theme itself—that I cannot do.

“I have tried it. I have forced myself to work when I felt least like it, and I have done things which did not seem so bad at the time. I would let those compositions lie for a couple of days. Then I would find they were only fit for the waste basket.”

M. Debussy had finished another cigarette and was beginning a third. An extremely sensitive man he seems to be, and entirely unaffected. Very reticent toward strangers, among friends he is a delightful talker. His rough blue suit, immaculate as his desk and well cut, seemed to typify the man to whom frills and fancies are abhorrent, and yet who, at the same time, in no way neglects his personal appearance. Around M. Debussy, as in his studio, there was no air of “artistic temperament.” Probably M. Debussy, like most men who amount to anything, has so much artistic temperament that it takes the form of work, not of disorder and of outlandish clothes.

“Don’t expect me to talk of myself.” he went on. “Please don’t ask me to. No, I was in no wise an infant prodigy. I think that some musicians, in talking of their youth, are inclined to embroider their memories, and they will tell you they did this and they did that at the tender age of 10 or 11. No, I confess, I did not write an opera at the age of 3½ nor did I conduct an orchestra at 7.”

M. Debussy’s eyes sparkled mischievously. Strange that the touch of humor did not show itself before. It brightens his discourse wonderfully.

“No, you see. I was quite an ordinary child in every way, very disobedient and very confident that my ideas were the right ones.

“Well, like many other young men, I was sent to the Conservatoire. From the very beginning I was dissatisfied, I was taught that this chord must be like this and another like that—this is a case of perfect harmony, I was told, and this is not. Then, as now, I believed there was no such thing as a perfect chord. For a long time I did not want to what I considered foolishness. Then I realized that I must at least pretend to study in order to get through the Conservatoire. So I studied, but all the time I worked out my own little schemes, and whenever we taught anything I made a note in my mind as to whether I considered it right or wrong. Don’t imagine for a moment that I told any one of this. I kept it all to myself. Until I could give a proof of my ideas I did not care to talk of them.

“Well, finally, as I left the Conservatoire I won the *Prix de Rome*. So I went to Rome. In the beginning I was bored to death, then, gradually I began to work and finally got along quite well. Then I returned to France and didn’t know exactly what to do with myself until I came across *Pelléas and Mélisande*. Since then you know what I have done.

“At present I’m working on two operas centring around Poe’s stories, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and *The Pit and the Pendulum*. When shall I finish them? I don’t know. I am sure. I’ve been working on them a long time already, and I’m afraid it will take some time yet. As I said before, I can’t force myself. It’s just like producing vegetables or anything else. If you put a lot of chemicals and goodness knows what in the earth you may be able to raise salad in Winter, but it is not the real, true salad and doesn’t taste like it. And in the same way music born under such conditions is not true music—it is a hot house product.

“No, I have never been in America. In fact I never go any place where my work is being performed. I never go to hear my own work. I can’t.”

M. Debussy almost trembled with emotion. One felt the musician's soul striving for expression and unable to find it.

"It is too terrible for me. The interpretation is always so different from what I mean it to be; not in the singers, but in the general interpretation. An opera is not like a drama. In a drama the words go directly to the spectator's brain or to his heart, as the case may be. At any rate he understands them. But in music it is so different.

"In the first place how many persons really understand music? Of course, most people are fond of music of some form of it. I mean they like to hear it, but how many think in music? How many associate music with ideas? While the dramatist's words may not always reach the spectator's heart they at least reach his brain, and thus the dramatist stands a much greater chance of being understood than the musician, who has to work with what is an unknown quantity to most of the audience.

"In the second place, the dramatist makes his words felt directly. He does not have to have a third person interpret them. A composer's works have to pass through a conductor. If the conductor is at all good, even though he may try to render the composer's idea, he will put in his own soul, and the moment the conductor puts in his own soul, the composer is already in the background. So it pains me to hear my own work." And it seemed to pain him merely to think of it.

"Music is so much a part of myself that I do not recognize it when it is handled by others. To give you an example: the other night a few friends spent the evening with us and one of the ladies favored us with a song. 'One of your own compositions,' she said. I'm glad she said it: otherwise I should scarcely have known it. Her conception was entirely different from mine."

M. Debussy paused for an instant, and one felt how he suffered at the re-

collection of certain performances of his works.

"No," he continued, "I cannot bear to have my work interpreted just the contrary of the way I want it. Ah, indeed, it is hard to be a musician. You are quite right: my compositions are part of myself, almost like my own children. I hate to see them grow up, for then they have to leave me. They must in time, of course, and one knows it all the while, so one tries to have them behave as well as possible after they have left the home—but one never knows what their fate will be, and that always causes suffering.

"Success or failure is about the same thing. Of course, you like to have your work admired—and then, on the other hand, do you? I don't know how to express what I feel, but to me music is almost like a human being. Now, you know, if you love a person very much and you can be alone with that person, you do not ask for anything more. And the more the loved person or art is admired, the more it is taken away from you. And you only have to share with many what you previously had entirely to yourself. So that celebrity means nothing to me. I do not care for it."

There was no affectation about M. Debussy. It was entirely natural, this shrinking away from the public gaze. In fact, when M. Debussy talks one feels it is because his ideas demand expression, and not because he wants to talk. One seems to see his brain work and force his mouth to speak. He would rather say nothing at all.

"Yes, I was always fond of music. What kind of music? All kinds. Here you hit upon what I think is the greatest mistake of the present day, the desire to classify all music. How can you do that? You speak of German music, Italian music, Impressionistic music, and various other kinds. What is the difference? I mean, if you are speaking of a work of art, you cannot say definitely that it belongs to any group. It is a work of art, and that is enough.

“There is no vital difference between French music and German music, for instance. There is a difference between the temperaments of the various composers, that is all. Of course, as a rule, we French people have a love of clearness of expression and of harmony, (which we are losing, by the way) which the Germans do not have to such a great extent. Italian music may have more melody, you say. Yes—in a way. I really don’t know. What do I think of it? That all depends upon the humor I am in. I may go to hear a Verdi opera when in a pleasant state of mind, and I find it admirable: I go another day less well disposed and I find it abominable.

‘Italian music commonplace? I don’t know. You say it is like a woman who is beautiful, but has no intelligence. But beauty is a great deal—a very great deal. Indeed, and not everybody can have that. See how people are carried away by Italian music. It touches a chord in their hearts. Beauty in a woman—and in music—is a great deal, a very great deal.’ Again M. Debussy paused and took another cigarette. He was evidently thinking over what he had said. Suddenly he leaned back in his chair and made some rings of smoke. Then he leaned forward again.

“Don’t talk to me about elevating public taste.” he exclaimed. “That is the greatest bluff one can din into your ears. How would you do it? By what means? Just think for a moment what the public is composed of. How many persons in an audience understand music? How many devote themselves to music during the day? An infinitesimal number. The rest, where do they come from? From offices, stores, business houses of some kind. Or they come from insipid afternoon teas and gossip. And then they go to hear an opera.

“Most of them are tired after the day’s work or idleness. And such people you expect to take an interest in anything new or serious? You demand the impossible. No: the only thing a composer can do for the public—and for a

limited part of the public at that—is to lift it for one moment, out of its daily thoughts. Music may, for one short moment, make the auditor forget his financial operations or his social rebuffs. And with that we have to be content.

“Under such conditions, what difference does it make whether you have German, Italian, or French opera? There is no immovable truth in art; you cannot say that this is so or so. And what difference do the means make, as long as the end is accomplished? If Italian opera is more effective than German, what does it matter? All art is untruth. You may have been told that art is eternal because it is true, but there you are mistaken. Art is the most beautiful of all lies, but it is a lie.

“There is nothing sad in that. It is quite obvious. Art is beautiful, divine, but it is not true. What is truth? It is the exact rendering of things as they are. When do you find that in art? You may sometimes find what one man says he considers the truth, but even then, does he really believe so, at the bottom of his heart? Does any man really ‘paint the truth as he sees it?’ He often pretends he does. But does he? Take the example of Wagner—a man whose music seems to express the most wonderful magnanimous soul, and who in real life was extremely petty and whimsical.

“No, there will always be in an enormous breach between the soul of the man as he is and the soul he puts into his work. A man portrays himself in his work, it is true, but only part of himself. In real life, I cannot live up to the ideals I have in music. I feel the difference there is in me, between Debussy, the composer, and Debussy, the man. And so, you see, from its very foundations, art is untrue. Everything about it is an illusion, a transposition of facts. It neither represents the man who produced it, nor life as it is. Art is the most wonderfully beautiful lie, but it is a lie.”

The interviewer looked at M. Debussy and had great difficulty in not

shouting, “But M. Debussy, you are the absolute contradiction of what you have been saying!” For as M. Debussy said that the artist and his work were entirely separated, he spoke with such warmth, he was so carried away, that one felt how the work of the French composer is exactly a reproduction of his soul – a sensitive, delicate soul, yet determined and firm. Debussy the man and Debussy the composer, were but one being. *NY Times*, 26 VI 1910.

Among the many who perform Debussy’s piano works, we find in **Marius-François Gaillard** (1900-1973) an unmatched grasp of the individuality in each and every Debussy composition. The performers who began recording Debussy’s music soon after Debussy’s passing reduced his music to uniformity that overlooks his innovations. Alfred Cortot panned *La plus que lente* as “half a parody, half serious, and beyond question totally insignificant” as it didn’t fit his idea of Debussy and Ravel as “enchanting impressionism.” Soon after the composer’s death, Cortot visited his family and after playing a few *Préludes* for his daughter Chouchou, he asked her if it was anything close to the way her father played. She hesitated: “Yes, but Papa listened more carefully.”

Irén Marik (1905-1986) kept close to Debussy’s music and is heard with John Ranck. **Mieczysław Horszowski** (1892-1993) attended Bergson’s lectures at the *Sorbonne* and, according to his wife Bice Horszowski Costa, once heard Debussy play several *Préludes*. Horszowski’s performance of the *Children’s Corner Suite* took place at a beloved church in the Tuscan mountain town of Castagno d’ Andrea. *Jimbo’s Lullaby* evokes a sleeper’s subconscious. Debussy’s four recordings are with Mary Garden, who created *Melisande* two years earlier. **Marie-Thérèse Fourné** (1927-1990) was a subtle sensual yet unjustly obscured artist who, with the others heard in our collection, brings us ever closer to this enigmatic master.

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Supplemental writings, interviews, and recordings by Debussy, Gaillard, and others that provide crucial documentation are accessible on our website:

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