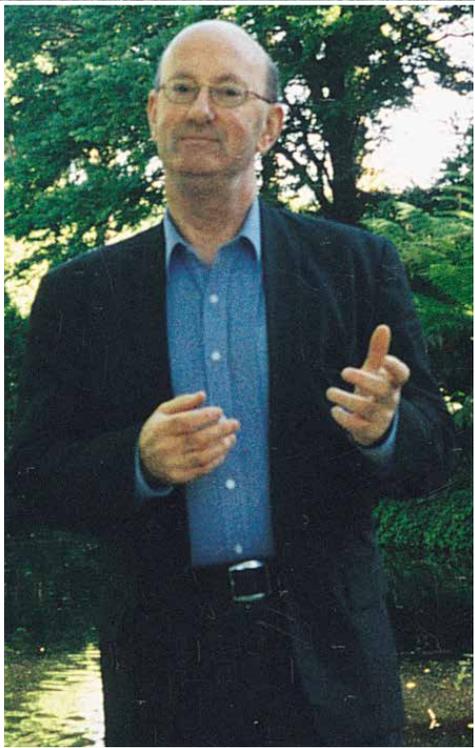


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Stephen McIntyre
The Impressionists
piano music of Debussy Ravel Satie

Stephen
McIntyre
**The
Impressionists**

Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

Images (1)

- 1** *Reflets dans l'eau* 5'39
- 2** *Hommage à Rameau* 7'10
- 3** *Mouvement* 3'26

Images (2)

- 4** *Cloches à travers les feuilles* 3'54
- 5** *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut* 4'58
- 6** *Poissons d'or* 3'31

Children's Corner

- 7** *Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum* 2'22
- 8** *Jimbo's Lullaby* 3'25
- 9** *Serenade for the Doll* 3'09
- 10** *The Snow is Dancing* 2'42
- 11** *The Little Shepherd* 2'25
- 12** *Golliwog's Cakewalk* 2'58

Maurice RAVEL (1875-1937)

Gaspard de la Nuit

(Trois poèmes pour piano d'après
Aloysius Bertrand)

- 13** *Ondine* 6'37
- 14** *Le Gibet* 7'15
- 15** *Scarbo* 9'36

Erik SATIÉ (1866-1925)

Trois Gnossiennes

- 16** *Gnossiennes No 1* 3'03
- 17** *Gnossiennes No 2* 1'46
- 18** *Gnossiennes No 3* 2'28



Claude Debussy

(1862-1918)

The importance of the music of Claude Debussy for the development of the art in the 20th century cannot be overstated. His inventiveness, his harmonic investigations, his interest in orchestral colour and timbre were the source of inspiration for many of the major musical developments of the century.



His works for piano are also of unparalleled importance, for similar reasons, not least of all, his ability to explore the orchestral qualities of piano sound. Some of these pianistic effects were already part of the equipment of the great virtuoso artist of the end of the 19th century. But it was the originality of Debussy's musical thought which incorporated these instrumental qualities into an aesthetic whole, whose expressiveness transcended the known boundaries.

His early piano works, written in the last decade of the 19th century, were only pale indications of the masterpieces that were to come, although the famous *Clair de Lune* can be found in the *Suite Bergamasque*, written from 1890-1905.

Debussy's greatest gift was the ability to take impressions that were visual, literary or dramatic and reinterpret them in sound. His was an art which showed a perfect mating of inspiration and method. The feelings communicated were often of

surpassing delicacy and subtlety. Alfred Cortot, one of his principal early interpreters, described it as "a new poetry, where bubbling laughter and murmured sighs, heard a thousand times in every note, whisper of an Ariel with invisible wings for whom the scented night holds no secrets, who hears every stirring of the wind on water, all the voices of the breeze, and every breath of human emotion".

Debussy himself said that the quality which moved him most in certain works was the translation into musical feeling of what is invisible in nature.

The first set of *Images* were published in 1905. They show very clearly the mature musical language that Debussy was to use for the rest of his life in writing for the piano.

Reflets dans l'eau is a marvel of invention, where small musical cells are outlined, reflected, disturbed through flashing arpeggios and luminous chords. *Hommage à Rameau* is a magnificent outpouring of grave dignity, celebrating not only the composer of its title, but the universal emotion associated with the greatness of the past. By contrast, the principal quality of *Mouvement* is a constant energy, a perpetuum mobile of triplets shot through with flashes of melodic design.

The second set of *Images*, completed in 1907, are both simpler and more complex. *Cloches à travers les feuilles* suggests a multiplicity of bells heard tolling plaintively and thunderously through the stirring of leaves. *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut* sets a tranquil scene of moonlight over ruined temples, a profound contemplation in which harmonic idiom and the uses of the sustaining pedal of the piano enter into a new relationship. *Poissons d'or*, perhaps inspired by an illustrated Chinese screen is a brilliantly virtuosic work in which goldfish dart and tumble with sparkling vivacity.

Children's Corner with its English titles, perhaps inspired by an English nanny, is dedicated to Debussy's daughter "my darling little Chouchou, with fatherly apologies for what follows". It is a collection of scenes from childhood, with obvious similarities to the *Kinderscenen* of Schumann, but with a depth of feeling and wit that even surpasses Schumann's. The gentle mockery of the child practising the nasty piano studies of Clementi, gives way to Doll serenades and a wistful child's face at the window watching the snow falling; a day spent indoors with her toy animals, instead of being allowed to go out to the music hall where the Cakewalk is the new jazz sensation of Paris.

Only such a great artist as Debussy could extract such a depth of musical feeling from such trifles. In spite of what might seem abstract tone colours, Debussy evokes from his chosen instrument, a range of tone colours that exactly match his expressive needs. Pianists everywhere are eternally grateful.

Maurice Ravel

(1875-1937)

I have always considered Ravel as a major composer for the piano. But it is always a surprise to discover how few works make up his total output for the instrument. All his compositions for piano can be performed in under two and one half hours. What is equally remarkable is the high quality of each of these compositions. There is no single work that I would describe as less than successful, even including the early pieces, which bear many traces of Chabrier, Faure and Satie. In the way he uses these influences rather than submitting to them, Ravel is immediately himself.

Art, for Ravel, was a fabulous construct which portrayed the spirit in a number of disguises. He was adept at assuming qualities he did not possess. His Spanish music - the *Alborada del gracioso*, the opera *L'heure espagnole*, the infamous *Bolero* - is more Spanish than that of most Spanish composers. His assumption of classical disguise - *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, the *Sonatine* - shows a fascination with eighteenth century musical forms. The tension imposed by the juxtaposition of these forms against his idiosyncratic harmonic language was a source of energy and inspiration for him. Above all, he was



most at home in the fields of magic and mythology - *Daphnis and Chloe*, the *Ma mère l'oye* Suite and *Gaspard de la Nuit*.

He had a great love of artifice and was quite pleased when his compositional method was compared to that of a jeweller. Perhaps his sensibility was one that was unable to express itself fully except in the world of the unreal.

However he was an archetypal twentieth century artist in the way he sought objective musical symbols, creating a world with its own laws and logic.

Perhaps Ravel's most important work for piano is the Suite *Gaspard de la Nuit* of 1908. In this year he also wrote the set of children's pieces for piano duet *Ma mère l'oye* (Mother Goose). Both works have their starting point in that field of magic and enchantment that was such an important part of Ravel's aesthetic. The contrast between the works is interesting- in *Ma mère l'oye* he achieves a most concentrated form of expression by the use of very tiny means.

From *Ma mère l'oye* to *Gaspard de la Nuit* is a journey from white magic to black. Ravel had a liking for romantic subjects, but his treatment of them is highly idiosyncratic and controlled. In *Gaspard*, Ravel set out to write music of transcendental virtuosity. All pianists will ruefully acknowledge that he has succeeded in combining a dazzling variety of pianistic innovations and a profoundly moving emotional language.

The first piece, *Ondine*, is dedicated to the elaboration of an endless melodic line, coloured but not obscured by ornate decoration. *Le Gibet* piles sophisticated harmonies on a repeated bell-like B flat; while *Scarbo* is a bravura celebration of the possibilities of three beats to a bar. The precision of the musical argument makes the romantic exaltation of the poetry more pronounced. Ravel has transcended his means.

Ondine

“Ecoute!-Ecoute!-C’est moi, c’est Ondine qui frôle de ces gouttes d’eau les losanges sonores de ta fenêtre illuminée par les mornes rayons de la lune; et voici, en robe de moire, la dame châtelaine qui contemple à son balcon la belle nuit étoilée et le beau lac endormi. “Chaque flot est un ondin qui nage dans le courant, chaque courant est un sentier qui serpente vers mon palais, et mon palais est bâti fluide, au fond du lac, dans le triangle du feu, de la terre et de l’air.” “Ecoute!-Ecoute!-Mon père bat l’eau coassante d’une branche d’aulne verte, et mes soeurs caressent de leurs bras d’écume les fraîches îles d’herbes, de nénuphars et de glaïeuls, ou se moquent du saule caduc et barbu qui pêche à la ligne.” Sa chanson murmurée, elle me supplia de recevoir son anneau à mon doigt, pour être l’époux d’une Ondine, et de visiter avec elle son palais, pour être le roi des lacs. Et comme je lui répondais que j’aimais une mortelle, boudeuse et dépitée, elle pleura quelques larmes, poussa un éclat de rire, et s’évanouit en giboulées qui ruisselèrent blanches le long de mes vitraux bleus.

Le Gibet

Ah! ce que j’entends, serait-ce la bise nocturne qui glapit, ou le pendu qui pousse un soupir sur la fourche patibulaire? Serait-ce quelque grillon qui chante tapi dans la mousse et le lierre stérile dont par pitié se chausse le bois? Serait-ce quelque mouche en chasse sonnante du cor autour de ces oreilles sourdes à la fanfare des hallali? Serait-ce quelque escarbot qui cueille en son vol inégal un cheveu sanglant à son crâne chauve? Ou bien serait-ce quelque araignée qui brode une demi-aune de mousseline pour cravate à ce col étranglé? C’est la cloche qui tinte aux murs d’une ville, sous l’horizon, et la carcasse d’un pendu que rougit le soleil couchant.

Ondine

“Listen! Listen! It is I, Ondine, who brush with these raindrops the sounding mullions of your window lit by moonbeams; and here, robed in watered silk, is the lady of the castle, contemplating from her balcony the beautiful starlit night and the lovely slumbering lake.” “Each wave is like a water-sprite swimming in the current, each current is a path that winds towards my palace, and my palace is water- built at the bottom of the lake within the triangle of fire, earth, and air.” “Listen! Listen! My father flays the croaking waters with a wand of green alder, and my sisters caress with their arms of foam the fresh isles of grass, nenuphars and sword- flags or mock the decrepit and bearded willow that angles in the waters.” Having murmured her song, she implored me to place her ring about my finger, to be the consort of an Ondine, to visit her palace and to be King of the Lakes. And when I told her that I loved a mortal, sulky and vexed, she let fall a few tears, burst out laughing and vanished amid showers that descended in white streams the length of my blue windowpanes.

Le Gibet

What do I hear? Could it be the howling of the night wind, or the hanged man sighing on the gallows? Could it be the song of a cricket nestling in the moss and barren ivy which the wood wears from compassion? Could it be a questing fly sounding a fanfare about those ears, deaf to the blowing of the mort? Could it be the cockchafer, that plucks in its blundering flight a bloody hair from that bald pate? Or could it be a spider embroidering half an ell of muslin to ruff that strangled neck? ’Tis the bell that tolls at the walls of a city beneath the horizon, and the hanging corpse reddened by the setting sun.

Scarbo

Oh! que de fois je l’ai entendu et vu, Scarbo, lorsqu’à minuit la lune brille dans le ciel comme un écu d’argent sur une bannière d’azur semée d’abeilles d’or! Que de fois j’ai entendu bourdonner son rire dans l’ombre de mon alcôve, et grincer son ongle sur la soie des courtines de mon lit! Que de fois je l’ai vu descendre du plancher, pirouetter sur un pied et rouler par la chambre comme le fuseau tombé de la quenouille d’une sorcière! Le croyais-je alors évanoui? le nain grandissait entre la lune et moi comme le clocher d’une cathédrale gothique, un grelot d’or en branle à son bonnet pointu! Mais bientôt son corps bleuissait, diaphane la cire d’une bougie, son visage blémissait comme la cire d’un lumignon - et soudain il s’éteignait.

Scarbo

Oh how often have I heard and seen him, Scarbo, when at midnight the moon shines in the sky like a silver shield on an azure banner spangled with golden bees! How often have I heard the rumble of his laugh in the shadow of my alcove, and the scratching of his nail against the silken curtains of my bed! How often have I seen him climb down from the ceiling, pirouette upon one foot, and roll round the room like the spindle fallen from a witch’s distaff! Then I would think he had vanished, but the dwarf would loom between the moon and myself like the belfry of a gothic cathedral - a golden bell swinging at the point of his bonnet! But soon his body would turn blue, diaphanous as the wax of a taper, his face pale like the tallow of a candle end - then suddenly, he was extinguished.

Erik Satie

(1866-1925)

Satie was an eccentric, iconoclastic figure in late 19th century music, whose influence over a large number of later artists



from musical, figurative and theatrical backgrounds far outweighs the slender compositions he wrote for piano. He enjoyed a close relationship with Debussy, was vigorously promoted by Jean Cocteau, wrote the music for Parade at the instigation of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. He combined in one life, the qualities of mystic and cabaret performer; he delighted in choosing bizarre titles for many of his piano pieces, with equally bizarre instructions to the performers. The three *Gnossiennes* of 1889 are slight pieces but their hypnotic quality lingers in the mind long after they have gone - as does the shadow of their composer.



Credits

Introductory notes:

Stephen McIntyre

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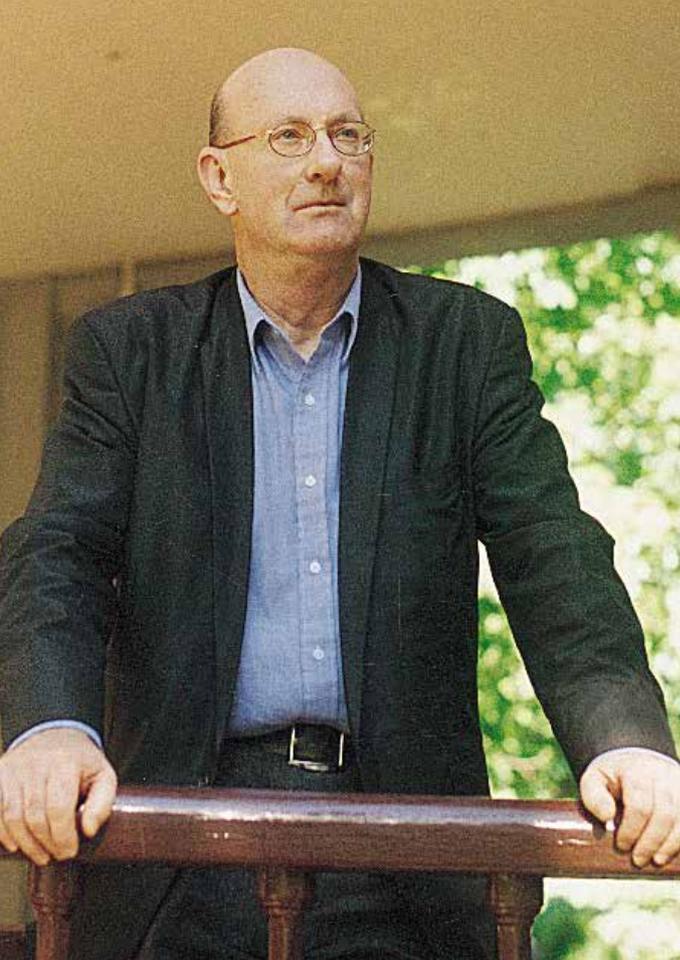
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Piano:

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Stephen McIntyre

Stephen McIntyre is known nationally and internationally as one of Australia's most eminent pianists. He is the chosen accompanist of many singers and instrumentalists, a sought-after concerto artist and chamber music player. He has performed in France, UK, Italy, Germany, Holland and also in Japan, Singapore and India.

Born in Melbourne, Stephen McIntyre's teachers included Ada Freeman, Nadia Boulanger and Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. From 1963 to 1975

he was based in Europe, returning to Australia to take up a foundation teaching post at the Victorian College of the Arts, where he continued as Head of the Piano Department until 1994. Stephen McIntyre made a major impact on the Australian concert scene with his cycle of the complete piano music of Ravel, for which he won the National Critics Award. He was invited to repeat the cycle in Paris.

Within Australia, Stephen McIntyre has performed as concerto soloist with all the major ABC orchestras; appeared as associate artist with violinists Valery Klimov, Viktoria Mullova, and Nelli Shkolnikova, and toured nationally with violist Wolfram Christ and the renowned cellist Anner Bylsma. Recent Musica Viva tours have included the highly successful Composers Portrait Series with Dene Olding, Anner Bylsma and Elizabeth Campbell.

Stephen McIntyre was a founding member of Australian Chamber Soloists, Principal Artistic Advisor for Musica Viva during 1995/96, and in 1999 was awarded a prestigious Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award for his role as Director of the highly successful chamber music program of the Melbourne International Festival since 1989.

Engagements in the last several years have included performances with the Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras, recitals in South East Asia with cellist Phillip Green, and the Australian Festival of Chamber Music in Townsville. He has appeared at Musica Viva Domaine Chandon Festivals, undertaken a tour of South America with Helen

Noonan in *Recital* for Chamber Made Opera, devised and performed a Rossini concert series for the Adelaide Festival.

Stephen McIntyre is Associate Professor in piano in the Faculty of Music at the University of Melbourne.

