

A photograph of pianist Ralph Votapek. He is wearing a black tuxedo with a white shirt and a black bow tie. He is leaning forward over a grand piano, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a solid blue color.

RALPH
VOTAPEK

*Debussy
Préludes
Books I & II*

IVORY
CLASSICS

RALPH VOTAPEK ~ *Debussy 24 Préludes*

Préludes, Book I (1909-1910)

37:13

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 1 | I. Danseuses de Delphes (Lent et grave) | 2:59 |
| 2 | II. Voiles (Modéré) | 3:09 |
| 3 | III. Le vent dans la plaine (Animé) | 2:07 |
| 4 | IV. Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir (Modéré) | 3:10 |
| 5 | V. Les collines d'Anacapri (Très modéré) | 2:57 |
| 6 | VI. Des pas sur la neige (Triste et lent) | 3:47 |
| 7 | VII. Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest (Animé et tumultueux) | 3:23 |
| 8 | VIII. La fille aux cheveux de lin (Très calme et doucement expressif) | 2:29 |
| 9 | IX. La sérénade interrompue (Modérément animé) | 2:28 |
| 10 | X. La cathédrale engloutie (Profondément calme) | 5:54 |
| 11 | XI. La danse de Puck (Capricieux et léger) | 2:40 |
| 12 | XII. Minstrels (Modéré) | 2:10 |

Préludes, Book II (1912-1913)

36:04

- | | | |
|----|--|------|
| 13 | I. Brouillards (Modéré) | 2:38 |
| 14 | II. Feuilles mortes (Lent et mélancolique) | 2:55 |
| 15 | III. La Puerta del Vino (Mouvement de Habanera) | 3:19 |
| 16 | IV. Les Fées sont d'exquises danseuses (Rapide et léger) | 2:56 |
| 17 | V. Bruyères (Calme) | 2:42 |
| 18 | VI. Général Lavine — eccentric (Dans le style et le mouvement d'un Cakewalk) | 2:28 |
| 19 | VII. La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune (Lent) | 3:59 |
| 20 | VIII. Ondine (Scherzando) | 3:08 |
| 21 | IX. Hommage à Samuel Pickwick, Esq., P.P.M.P.C. (Grave) | 2:25 |
| 22 | X. Canope (Très calme et doucement triste) | 2:53 |
| 23 | XI. Les tierces alternées (Modérément animé) | 2:31 |
| 24 | XII. Feux d'artifice (Modérément animé) | 4:10 |

Total Time 75:35

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)



“Debussy encompassed most fully the French, with its dramatic contrasts of reason and sensuality, of irony and tenderness, stiffness and grace. From France, the home of liberty, too, came the firm freedom of Debussy’s style and structure. Among all our musical masters, I should say, Claude Debussy was the least weighed upon by the dead hand of formula.”

Virgil Thomson, 1950

By the time he began writing the first book of preludes, Claude Debussy had established himself as an important and prolific composer having already produced most of the works that history would label masterpieces. As for his piano compositions, after he completed the second book of preludes the only major work for the instrument that remained to be written was the collection of *Études* which appeared in 1915 and which was published a year later. Therefore, the twenty-four preludes composed between 1909 and 1913 represent not only Debussy’s last programmatic offerings for the piano, but also his most mature ones. These are the workings of a master of color and expression, light and darkness, harmony and melody, texture and rhythm. Each prelude is complete with its own sense of individuality; each one is like a carefully selected gem, that when placed among the others creates the most



Debussy as a child

finely exquisite necklace.

When the term ‘impressionism’ was first applied by critic Louis Leroy to the painting by Monet titled, *Impression: soleil levant* in 1874, it was with negative connotations. Such was also the case when, in 1887, Debussy entered the Prix de Rome for the second time with *Printemps*. The symphonic suite was criticized by the secretary of the Académie des Beaux Arts for ‘lacking in structural precision as a direct consequence of the composer’s exaggerated sense of musical color,’ warning that ‘such vague impressionism was one of the most dangerous enemies of truth in art.’ However, after a performance of his String Quartet in 1894 Debussy was praised for the impressionism found in the work, and by 1905 the term would be commonly used to describe not only the compositions, but the composer.

“In literature, in painting, in music, the aim of these kindred artists was to suggest rather than to depict; to mirror not the object but the emotional reaction to the object; to interpret a fugitive impression rather than to seize upon and fix the permanent reality.”

Oscar Thompson, 1937

Debussy may have contributed the last important evolution to the prelude. The most important early example of the prelude being exemplified in the forty eight preludes and fugues of Books I and II of *The Well Tempered Clavier* of Bach, where the prelude served to establish the tonal center of the fugue that followed it. While preludes were carefully constructed, containing well-developed melodies and motifs, throughout the baroque and classical eras their principal purpose was as an introduction to some more important movement which followed. Even today we hear Bach's keyboard fugues frequently excerpted and performed (especially on student recitals), conversely no one ever programs the complete preludes of the *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Imagine going to a concert and hearing the prelude (or whatever the first movement might be) to a Bach suite or partita, but none of the following movements; the idea is absurd.

This changed when Chopin adopted the prelude as an independent, aphoristic character piece in which he could express his achingly beautiful melodies and rich (and sometimes experimental) harmonies while still maintaining a convincing structure. Several other Romantic era composers would follow, each writing sets of preludes where each individual piece held an important emotional or dramatic message.

Debussy's contribution to the genre was a characteristically impressionist one. He not only infused each work with the harmonic language and compositional techniques of the period, but he also made the listener an important partner in the sharing of his most intimate thoughts and feelings. Debussy chose to place the titles at the end of each prelude as if to suggest that the listener's interpretation of each selection is equally important to his own. It would seem that he desires for the audience to connect individually with the music, letting every listener find personal meaning in each prelude; only after the fact will Debussy share his own inspiration.

Preludes, Book One (1909-1910)



I. *Danseuses de Delphes* (Delphic dancers). The first prelude evokes images of religious dancers in the ancient Greek city of Delphi, located at the bottom of Mount Parnassus at the site of the Temple of Apollo.

Most likely influenced by ancient sculptures and vases which depicted young maidens dancing and performing on musical instruments, Debussy creates lightly brushed harmonies that surround the melody as if the veiled dancers are gliding through wisps of burning incense. *Danseuses de Delphes* is filled with many techniques that will be developed in the following twenty-three preludes including fragments of chromatic, diatonic, and modal scales as well quasi orchestral effects such as layered textures, detached accompanying chords (which appear above, below, and surrounding the melody), and the percussion-like accents of major seconds which may represent the finger cymbals used by the dancers and other Greek mythological characters.



Debussy in 1879

II. *Voiles* (Sails or veils). Suggesting “sailing boats anchored to a fixed pedal-point,” this prelude is a brilliant example of the composer’s use of the whole-tone scale; the absence of the half-step, as well as the dissonances that it can create, leaves Debussy with a unique set of colors from which to paint (however, he does briefly employ the chromatic scale and a pentatonic collection). The opening motif is a musical description of the billows of the ship’s sails as a breeze gently pulls them tight and then relaxes, and the pulsing B-flat pedal tone which follows represents the ship’s anchor, supporting the harmony above it but occasionally tugging against it; the anchor holds steady for the entire duration of the prelude. These two layers of sound continue while a melody is added between them using the lower-middle range of the piano which projects sonorously through the accompanying figures. The melody is initially tentative, the first three notes hesitating before the entire phrase is allowed to continue; these first three notes will be developed and used as a unifying motif throughout the prelude. Debussy



Debussy and Stravinsky

alternatively offered that the title may suggest “mysterious veils enveloping palpitating feminine forms, hiding eyes which fan desire by their devious glances.”

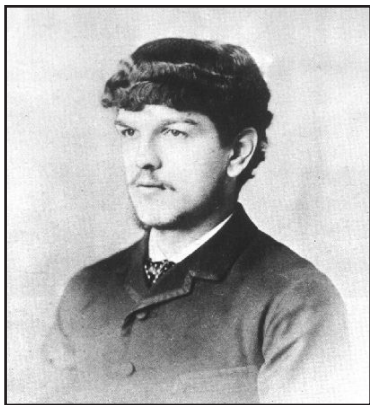
III. *Le vent dans la plaine* (The wind on the plain). This prelude requires very little descriptive analysis, however it is important to note that it serves as a companion piece to the preceding *Voiles*. In an exact reverse of roles, this prelude begins and ends by using a pentatonic scale and features the whole-tone scale in the middle. It is easy to imagine the great expanse of the plain and the tall grass dancing about while breezes of varying strengths blows over them.

IV. *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir* (Sounds and perfumes swirl in the evening air). Inspired by the poem “Harmonie du Soir” from *Fleurs du Mal* by Charles Baudelaire, Debussy creates a rich harmonic realm and a haunting melody which evokes thoughts of the perfumes of the night. There are two thematic entities which are initially presented individually but which will later be alternated and superimposed over one other. The first melodic line is carefully contoured over a slightly disfigured waltz, this is the material which will help to form much of the music to come. Immediately following is a series of chromatic four-note chords in the lower-middle range of the piano which comprises the opposing thematic content, played over an A pedal it reminds us of the tonality of the opening chords. The prelude ends with a short coda and features new material marked ‘like a distant horn call’ which reaffirms the home key of A Major and calls us out of our fragrant daydream.

V. *Les collines d'Anacapri* (The hills of Anacapri). It is in this dance-like

piece that Debussy first succumbs to a great release of energy and excitement in the collected preludes. One does not need to conjure up visions of the setting for this prelude, as simple geographic information about the small city will allow the listener to paint a sufficient picture: founded as a Greek colony in c.400 B.C., Anacapri is located 1,600 feet up on one of the many hills on the island of Capri. Surrounded by the Bay of Naples, the cliffs of the five-and-a-half square mile island overlook the remarkably blue sea and are world famous for their beauty. After the sound of distant ringing bells, Debussy embraces the style of a tarantella, the national dance, which is first distant as if it were brought in on the gentle breeze. As the dancers close in we are presented with the full Neapolitan-style melody as well as a contrasting episode in minor. When a second charming folk-like theme is introduced in the middle section of the prelude, the tarantella is temporarily forgotten in favor of a sonorous melody in the tenor voice which, ultimately, will be interrupted by the sounds of distant bells that signal the return of the initial dance leading to a brilliant ending.

VI. *Des pas sur la neige* (Footprints in the snow). In what may be the most desolate landscape in Debussy's collected preludes, *Des pas sur la neige* is a cold, bleak, and infinitely lonely world. The opening ostinato depicts slow and heavy footsteps, first placed on the crusty surface and then sinking into the deep snow, making traveling a very slow endeavor. When the melody enters it is with a sense of weariness and doubt, loss and distress, the interval of a falling minor third representing a tired sigh. The beauty of this prelude comes in the layered 'orchestral' writing that includes the sorrowful melody, the stark parallel harmonies, and the trudging footprints of the ostinato which, for the most part, remain in the same register of the instrument; this allows the melody (and various counter-melodies that evolve from it) to



Debussy in 1895

appear above and below the ostinato. The intensity builds gradually until two-thirds of the way into the piece the ostinato is temporarily abandoned and a new melodic phrase, accompanied by parallel first-inversion chords and marked with the words, 'Like a tender and sad regret,' begins to rise. The harmonies begin to slowly emerge from the cold, culminating in a series of major triads; but this is ultimately quickly brushed aside by the sudden chill of the snowy landscape. The final phrase is one of extreme solitude as the staccato bass notes descend into the depths of the piano and the final chord rings from the instrument's extreme opposite registers, leaving a feeling of emptiness.

VII. *Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest* (What the West Wind has seen). All of Debussy's subtlety disappears in this violent representation of the West Wind bringing a destructive storm from the sea. This is the first prelude in the collection that is truly virtuosic in nature, a relentless barrage of notes that begins quietly as the storm approaches but grows steadily as the piece progresses. Effects include tremolos in the low range of the piano as well as aggressive chords suggesting a collision as the winds and water reach the seashore.

VIII. *La fille aux cheveux de lin* (The girl with the flaxen hair). One of the

most frequently excerpted preludes, *La fille aux cheveux de lin* is a return to the simple harmonies found in earlier works of Debussy. Inspired by the poem of the same title by Leconte de Lisle from the collection “Poèmes Antiques: Chansons Ecossoises,” it is calm and lyrical, a stark contrast to mighty winds of the previous prelude. The image is that of a young girl simply and softly singing of her daydreams, the opening motif reminiscent of the famous spinning wheel of the Gretchen tradition of the romantic period recalling Schubert’s similar characterization of the young girl. The harmony presents an interesting combination of Impressionist techniques: the melody is pentatonic, however it is harmonized with diatonic chords. This very cleverly masks the oriental flavor of the pentatonic scale and, when combined with modal cadences, gives the prelude a folk-song like presence. Despite the prelude’s popularity and frequent performance, it always manages to remain satisfying and fresh.

IX. *La sérénade interrompue* (The interrupted serenade). This highly programmatic and charming prelude is the story of a young Spanish guitarist and his constantly interrupted attempts to serenade a beautiful maiden, which ultimately produces a truly humorous effect. After briefly tuning and testing his instrument he begins his serenade; the strumming and plucking of his guitar (the two main techniques of the instrument) are both simulated on the piano. Just as a singing melody begins, a window is suddenly slammed shut startling the guitarist and forcing him to begin again. The serenade, incomplete at it’s first entrance, is one of the wonderful moments where Debussy applies his masterful ‘orchestration’ skills to the piano: the beautiful legato melody projects above the strummed accompaniment; but we must also note the counterpoint created by the moving inner notes of the accompanying figures. After a brief cadenza, improvisatory in style, the serenade (and it’s

interruptions) continue causing our heroes anger to rise. In the end he has lost the attention of the maiden and abandons his song to retreat into the distance, but not before one final gesture of despair ... or is it possibly a stinging expletive?

X. *La Cathédrale engloutie* (The engulfed cathedral or The sunken cathedral). The cathedral in question is that of the Cathedral of Ys, which according to legend sank off the coast of Brittany in the fourth or fifth century as punishment for the impiety of the inhabitants, however each day at sunrise the cathedral would rise to be displayed as a warning to others. Widely performed, this prelude is one of Debussy's most mystic piano works and therefore remind us of the mysticism found in the Celtic heritage of France. Overflowing with Impressionist techniques, this prelude can serve as an example of the use of modal scales, pentatonic scales, planing chords, bell-tones, and pedal-points as well as 'virtuoso' pedaling including a judicious use of the middle pedal to sustain specific notes or chords. *La Cathédrale engloutie* opens quietly, the sound of submerged bells stifled by the depths of the sea; as the cathedral begins to rise, we hear the full chiming bells, a sustained plainchant, and a booming organ pedal-point. After a full display of its glory, the cathedral begins its descent and we hear the sound of waves overlapping the giant arches just before they are submerged. The sunken bells ring out once again (as they did at the preludes opening) before their ghostly sound gently succumbs to the deep water's silence.

XI. *La danse de Puck* (Dance of Puck). A characterization of the famous mischief-maker whom Shakespeare immortalized in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," this prelude is a light and gleeful exploration of a fantasy world. A 'joyous nomad of the night,' Puck was responsible for administering the love

elixir in Shakespeare's play which resulted in the ridiculous mix-up among all the characters; however, he also has a long history in Swedish and Danish legends where he was responsible for many good deeds and whimsical mishaps. Due to the influence of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," one may be tempted to compare *La danse de Puck* to the Mendelssohn orchestral work that shares the same inspiration. Both works are scherzos in nature, but beyond this no comparison is possible as Debussy's prelude has a deeper meaning and lighter touch than its romantic-era counterpart. Essentially in sonata form, the prelude begins with a signature of three flats with a strong suggestion of F as center which gives the playful opening motif a Dorian feel; Debussy will also use the chromatic scale and bitonal harmonies to assist various transitions and developments. It is also important to note the extremely detailed articulations in the opening thematic material (the dotted rhythms) where Debussy carefully indicates slurred groupings of two with the second note played staccato lending a capriciously teasing sentiment. Throughout the prelude we witness the nimble elf's adventures as he dances and slides, trips and falls, causing minor mayhem and eventually vanishing in a puff of smoke.

XII. Minstrels (Minstrels). To close the preludes of Book One, Debussy delivers a surprising and humorous gem that is a tribute to the performing minstrel groups which started to appear in Europe around 1900. Originating around 1828, minstrel shows were put on by household servants on American plantations but would evolve multiple act entertainments performed at fairs or on the boardwalk including elegant dances, horn solos, the singing of ballads, the telling of jokes, and other forms of comedy. The music of the minstrels included many contemporary jazz elements such as ragtime and blues, rhythms which were incorporated into the music of quite a few fascinated European composers. This prelude cleverly captures the frenzy of

the quick-change minstrel acts and their rhythmic excitement, opening with a banjo-like theme supported by uncharacteristically blatant dominant to tonic pedals in G Major. We also hear a brief sentimental song and a recurrent drum theme before the prelude comes to a satisfying close with a hymn-like plagal cadence.

Preludes, Book Two (1912-1913)



I. *Brouillards* (Mists). Opening the preludes of Book Two is another brilliant musical description of a seemingly simple weather condition (or the more expansive canvas that is nature itself), *Brouillards* is a continuation of a set of pieces Debussy began in Book One with *Le vent dans la plaine*, *Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest*, and to a lesser extent, *Des pas sur la neige*, it also brings to fruition the earlier fragments of bitonal harmony which Debussy only briefly employed in previous preludes. The opening subject could be termed 'visually bitonal,' as the left hand (which has the melodic figure comprised of parallel triads) plays on the white keys and the right hand (providing accompanying wisps) plays on the black keys; when combined with use of the sostenuto pedal this creates the gentle blur that is the image of gray mist Debussy is trying to evoke. The second subject, played as octaves in each hand and in extreme opposite registers of the piano (a spacing of four octaves between the hands) creates an empty expanse in the middle of the keyboard that gives a sense of the thick fog that rests across the landscape. When the even flow of notes combine with the single-note melodies that emerge from within a texture is

created which recalls the mature piano works of Ravel, presenting the performer with wonderful opportunities to add 'orchestral' color to the different layers of sound.

II. *Feuilles mortes* (Dead leaves). It is questionable as to whether or not this prelude can be said to depict dead leaves; Debussy tell us the key to this prelude saying, "from the fall of the golden leaves that invest the splendid obsequies of the trees." One can imagine an autumnal scene and the changing colors of the leaves as Debussy explores a rich and changing harmonic palate, the tonal center always shifting leaving the listener in a perpetual state of suspense. This prelude is in a broad ABA form and is full of orchestral colors, with many voices carefully balanced across the keyboard.



Debussy in 1909

III. *La Puerta del Vino* (Wine Gate). Inspired after receiving a postcard from De Falla, Debussy began the second musical depiction of Spanish life in his preludes, the first being *La sérénade interrompue*. The gateway in question is one of many in the Alhambra Palace in Granada, built around 1231-1273 which, after the invasion by Arabic tribes, would be occupied by Moorish

princes. This prelude is a charming depiction of life outside the palace, where the people enjoyed drinking wine, flamenco singing, and the dance rhythm of the habanera which is the constant driving force in this prelude. This ostinato continues on the tonic pedal of D-flat for the first half of the prelude, although the harmony above varies and includes the use of the Moorish or Arabic scale.

IV. *Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses* (The fairies are exquisite dancers). The opening figures of this prelude immediately set the listener's imagination on thoughts of small mystic creatures inhabiting the stage, possibly a sylvan landscape at twilight; the delicate and sprightly 'flying theme' sets the tone of playfulness that embodies this entire work. Debussy then alternates between these brisk dance measures and opposing lyrical passages all of which are light and beautiful, never heavy-handed. This provides a unique challenge for the performer who must possess great control over the keyboard to produce the rapid and effervescent sounds of the 'flying theme,' a singing tone for the middle sections, and exceptional technique to play the many notated or abbreviated trills fluidly.

V. *Bruyères* (Moors). This pastoral prelude finds us in the moors of the Scottish highlands, its nostalgic melody having a hint of loneliness. The opening phrases (as well as some later portions of the prelude) are composed of a pentatonic collection; however they are followed by several improvisatory scalar passages and very straightforward diatonic harmony in A-flat Major. Both in structure and harmony this prelude is easy for the listener to assimilate, and its folk song-like aura recalls *La fille aux cheveux de lin* from Book One.

VI. “*Général Lavine*” – *excentric* (“General Lavine,” *eccentric*). This prelude is a musical characterization of entertainer Edward Lavine, and Debussy’s choice of harmonic and melodic materials lends both humor and sentimentality, charm and refinement; due to its playful and comic nature, comparisons with the Book One finale, *Minstrels*, are inevitable. Journalist Alfred Frankenstein of the San Francisco Chronicle wrote about Lavine on March 11, 1945:

“Whenever you look at a campaign ribbon on a soldier’s chest you are, in all probability, inspecting the handiwork of the only human being, living or dead, of whom Claude Debussy composed a musical portrait. Today Edward Lavine ... calmly manufactures most of the ‘service bars’ that are used in the Army, but when Debussy wrote about him he was one of the most celebrated figures in international vaudeville. He was a comic juggler, half tramp and half warrior, but more tramp than warrior, and he was billed as ‘General Ed Lavine, the Man Who Soldiered All His Life.’ ... Lavine is a tall man, and his ‘uniform’ was calculated to make him look taller—one of the New York reviewers said he seemed to be at least nine feet high.”

VII. *La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune* (The terrace for moonlight audiences). The image of moonlight has always been a frequent source of inspiration for composers and painters, however attempting to provide a descriptive analysis of this prelude would prove futile; not only is the origin of the esoteric title a subject of controversy (the most plausible setting being an Emperor’s palace in India), but attempting to address the work’s philosoph-

ical meanings would only lead to more questions than answers. It is sufficient to say that this may be the most perfect example of Debussy's inspiration perhaps being less important than the listener's own imaginative interpretation.

VIII. *Ondine* (**Undine**). The Ondines are water nymphs from Scandinavian mythology that resided in crystal palaces at the bottom of deep rivers or lakes. They sang and danced, but according to legend also had the habit of luring fishermen away to their beautiful palaces where 'days would pass in oblivious bliss and timeless forgetfulness.' It is no surprise that Debussy would be captivated by such folklore, and this prelude joins *La danse de Puck* and *Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses* as musical examples of his mystic fascination. Most of the musical materials in this prelude cleverly depicts the water and its ripples as well as the nymphs splashing and playing on the water's surface.

IX. *Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C.* (**H**omage to S. Pickwick, Esq., P.P.M.P.C.). This witty prelude is a tribute to Charles Dickens and his book, *The Pickwick Papers*, in which we are given a musical glance into the moods, activities, and laughable adventures of Samuel Pickwick. After opening with a forceful and mocking quotation of 'God Save the Queen,' Debussy presents several abrupt but comical contrasts in musical style. Employing the full range of the instrument as well as its vast dynamic potential, Debussy introduces a soft dotted rhythm in the center of the keyboard, the melody and harmony surrounding it. This figure grows, rising up the keys and culminating in two sets of large crashing chords, the sequences of which reverse in the second booming phrase. After this first climax we return to the charming dotted motif which begins to rise again, seemingly heading for the same climax. However, its *molto crescendo* is abruptly cut off and we instead have a fragment of the opening theme recapitulated before an unaccompanied jig-

tune appears in the distance. Is this our hero whistling as he trots off, or is his exit marked by a pompous statement in the closing measures?

X. *Canope* (Canopic jar). These jars received their name from the ancient Egyptian city of Canopus. As was a common practice in death rituals of ancient Egyptian culture, four such urns would contain the principal digestive organs of the deceased and were buried with the mummy. Debussy does not attempt to describe the funeral urns themselves in this prelude, but is more concerned with the thoughts and feelings that are inspired by the objects. The musical materials of the opening melody are very simple, but it is such simplicity, the shaping of the phrases, and the abrupt tonal shift in the third phrase, that the preludes imbedded beauty is found. There are two more musical ideas which will help form the piece: a short triplet chromatic motif which is always centered on C-sharp and a contrasting improvisatory figure on A which is used to bring the work to a close.

XI. *Les tierces alternées* (Alternating thirds). This is the single prelude in the set of twenty-four that has no programmatic material attached to it, nor does it require the listener's imagination to conjure up some alternative mystic realm in which to temporarily reside. Instead, *Les tierces alternées* is a technical showpiece, as the title suggests, comprised entirely of thirds in each hand and opening slowly before the first barrage of perpetual motion virtuosity. It is perhaps more appropriate to consider this a prelude to the twelve *Études* which Debussy would compose two years later in 1915.

XII. *Feux d'artifice* (Fireworks). The journey on which Debussy has taken his listeners during the first twenty-three preludes has encompassed a full range of emotions and experiences and has developed new sounds and tech-

niques for expressing them. In the final prelude he will let loose a brilliant, technical showpiece that is a celebration of life and independence. In the complete preludes, *Feux d'artifice* serves as the largest climactic moment, which is appropriate as the most splendid display at any fireworks show is always saved until the very end. It is important to note that this is not only the conclusion of the preludes but, along with *Les tierces alternées*, serves to foreshadow Debussy's *Études*. The setting for these fireworks is Bastille Day (July 14th), the French Independence Day, and while one can picture the variety of colorful pyrotechnics in the evening sky the pianist is busy creating them all over the keyboard with brutally fast scales, series of repeated notes, giant chords, and no less than six glissandos including a double glissando (after the final explosions that occur across the entire range of the piano) where the left hand slides down the white notes while the right hand simultaneously careens down the black ones. The excitement concludes with a short, quiet coda in which we hear a distant strain of the 'Marseillaise' bidding us adieu.

Notes ©2003 by Christopher Weiss

Ralph Votapek Biography



Ralph Votapek was born in Milwaukee in 1939 and began his musical studies in Milwaukee's Wisconsin Conservatory at the age of nine. He studied at Northwestern University with Guy Mombaerts where he earned his Bachelor's Degree and subsequently attended both the Manhattan and the Juilliard Schools of Music. Although his principal teachers were Rosina Lhevinne and Robert Goldsand, he also studied with Nadia Reisenberg and Rudolf Serkin. In 1959, he won the Naumburg Award which offered him a New York debut at Town Hall. Mr. Votapek skyrocketed to world prominence when he won the Gold Medal at the first Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 1962. The prize brought with it a cash award of \$10,000, headlines around the world, a Carnegie Hall debut recital, a contract with famed impresario Sol Hurok, and an RCA Victor recording contract.

Since 1962, Mr. Votapek has maintained a versatile and remarkable performance and recording career. Following the Van Cliburn Competition, Votapek scored a tremendous success in London with the



Ralph Votapek

Philharmonia Orchestra and was hailed for his performances across the United States. In 1966, he made his first tour of South America where he has performed in countless venues including Buenos Aires' famous Colon Theatre. Mr. Votapek has a special commitment to South America and has toured there every other year for the past three decades. In August 1997, the Buenos Aires Herald said, "Votapek, now in his fifties, keeps his characteristic boyishness; handsome, dynamic and ingratiating, he communicates easily. Artistically he is as consistent as they come; a rock-solid technique, a catholicity of taste that knows no bounds, and beautifully varied and interesting programs. You'll never be disappointed in a Votapek recital." In 2001 he made his nineteenth concert tour of South America.

He has appeared with virtually all major American orchestras and has been partnered by such legendary conductors as Rafael Kubelik, William Steinberg, Joseph Krips, Erich Leinsdorf and Arthur Fiedler. He has been guest soloist sixteen times with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and has also appeared frequently with the orchestras of Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Boston, Saint Louis, Houston, Dallas, Louisville, San Antonio and Memphis.

Equally at home in Chamber music, Mr. Votapek has performed with the Juilliard, Fine Arts, New World and Chester String Quartets. The PBS television network and other educational stations draw frequently on Mr. Votapek's video series of over forty recitals broadcast throughout the U.S.

Mr. Votapek continues to hold the title of Artist-in-Residence at Michigan State University where he has taught for thirty years.

Ralph Votapek has two additional CDs available on the Ivory Classics label; 20th Century Masterpieces (CD-70804) and Granados' 'Goyescas' and Falla (CD-72007).

CREDITS

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RALPH VOTAPEK ~ *Debussy 24 Préludes*

	Préludes, Book I (1909-1910)	37:13
1	I. Danseuses de Delphes (Lent et grave)	2:59
2	II. Voiles (Modéré)	3:09
3	III. Le vent dans la plaine (Animé)	2:07
4	IV. Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir (Modéré)	3:10
5	V. Les collines d'Anacapri (Très modéré)	2:57
6	VI. Des pas sur la neige (Triste et lent)	3:47
7	VII. Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest (Animé et tumultueux)	3:23
8	VIII. La fille aux cheveux de lin (Très calme et doucement expressif)	2:29
9	IX. La sérénade interrompue (Modérément animé)	2:28
10	X. La cathédrale engloutie (Profondément calme)	5:54
11	XI. La danse de Puck (Capricieux et léger)	2:40
12	XII. Minstrels (Modéré)	2:10
	Préludes, Book II (1912-1913)	36:04
13	I. Brouillards (Modéré)	2:38
14	II. Feuilles mortes (Lent et mélancolique)	2:55
15	III. La Puerta del Vino (Mouvement de Habanera)	3:19
16	IV. Les Fées sont d'exquises danseuses (Rapide et léger)	2:56
17	V. Bruyères (Calme)	2:42
18	VI. Général Lavine — eccentric (Dans le style et le mouvement d'un Cakewalk)	2:28
19	VII. La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune (Lent)	3:59
20	VIII. Ondine (Scherzando)	3:08
21	IX. Hommage à Samuel Pickwick, Esq., P.P.M.P.C. (Grave)	2:25
22	X. Canope (Très calme et doucement triste)	2:53
23	XI. Les tierces alternées (Modérément animé)	2:31
24	XII. Feux d'artifice (Modérément animé)	4:10

Total Time 75:35