

Presents a Faculty Recital:

Craig Sheppard, *piano*

Claude Debussy:

“Reflections in the Water”

*In celebration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)*

7:30 PM
April 16, 2013
Meany Theater

PROGRAM

Estampes (1903)
Pagodes (*Pagodas*)
La Soirée dans Grenade (*The Evening in Granada*)
Jardins sous la pluie (*Gardens in the rain*)

Images, Book I (1905)
Reflets dans l'eau (*Reflections in the water*)
Hommage à Rameau (*Homage to Rameau*)
Mouvements

Images, Book II (1907)
Cloches à travers les feuilles (*Bells through the leaves*)
Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut
(*And the moon sets on the temple that was*)
Poissons d'or (*Goldfish*)

INTERMISSION

Douze Études (***Twelve Études***) (1915)

Book I

Pour les cinq doigts (*For the five fingers*)
Pour les tierces (*For double thirds*)
Pour les quartes (*For fourths*)
Pour les sixtes (*For sixths*)
Pour les octaves (*For octaves*)
Pour les huit doigts (*For eight fingers*)

Book II

Pour les degrés chromatiques (*For chromatic intervals*)
Pour les agréments (*For ornaments*)
Pour les notes répétées (*For repeated notes*)
Pour les sonorités opposées (*For contrasting sonorities*)
Pour les arpèges composés (*For complex arpeggios*)
Pour les accords (*For chords*)

Reflections in the Water

Claude Debussy was born in St. Germain-en-Laye, just outside Paris, in August of 1862. During the siege of the French capital by Prussian armies in 1870, he was taken by his mother to live with a relative in the south of France, where he had his first significant piano lessons. At the age of 10, he was accepted into the Paris Conservatoire, where he distinguished himself not only on the piano, but also in theory and composition. At age 22, he won the coveted *Prix de Rome*, a stipend for four years' study at the *Villa Medici* in Rome. Debussy's time in the Eternal City was clouded by his longing for a woman with whom he'd begun a relationship in Paris, the wife of his benefactor, Henri Vasnier, and he returned home within two years - not, however, before having met Franz Liszt three times and hearing him perform in concert. One piece we know that Debussy heard from the master's fingers was *Au bord d'une source*, a work depicting a burbling spring in its myriad transformations. Amongst other things, Debussy had a lifelong fascination with water, showing up on this evening's program in the form of *Jardins sous la pluie* (*Gardens in the rain*), *Reflets dans l'eau* (*Reflections in the Water*), and *Poissons d'or* (*Goldfish*). Such instincts were clearly nurtured by these early encounters with Liszt.

Several other factors were seminal in Debussy's growth. One was his attachment to the *Symbolist* movement in poetry, following the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*) by Baudelaire in 1857. The symbolists favored the world of the imagination over that of reality, their movement sparked by the works of Edgar Allen Poe (in particular, it is said that *The Fall of the House of Usher* was one of Debussy's favorites). Debussy was also attracted to the abstract in art, and the great seascapes of Turner were a particular favorite. He developed a passion for the Japanese woodblock prints of Hokusai and Hiroshige, owning a number of these in his later years. An event that greatly influenced the entire Parisian artistic establishment was the World's Fair (Exposition Universelle) of 1889, during which the iconic Eiffel Tower was erected (it is hard for us to imagine today that most Parisians viewed this monument as an eyesore, and many wanted it dismantled following the exposition!). At the Javanese pavilion, Debussy made the acquaintance of *gamelan* music for the first time. The *gamelan orchestra*, with its exotic rhythms and instruments (including bamboo flutes and gongs of all sorts), its use of the *pentatonic* and *whole tone scales*, and in particular the series of overtones created by the gongs, gave enormous impetus to Debussy's future compositional output.

Debussy was no Mozart or Schubert. He developed slowly, carving out a unique compositional path that influenced profoundly everything that happened subsequently in twentieth century music. Frequent stases of unresolved harmonies, a simplicity of line and detail, an impressionistic haze along with a clarity of vision (the two are not mutually exclusive) became hallmarks of his style. The works we are hearing this evening, performed chronologically, all come from the period of Debussy's artistic maturity, between the ages of 41 and 53.

Estampes (Prints) offers three nationalistic impressions, inspired perhaps in part by his acquisition of the above-mentioned Japanese woodblock prints. *Pagodes (Pagodas)* alternates between Western diatonic (major-minor) and Eastern *pentatonic* scales. Having visited a Javanese pagoda at the 1889 World Exhibition, Debussy writes a work of enormous imaginative flair. Even more unusual is *La soirée dans Grenade (The evening in Granada)*, with its *habañera* rhythm and its *saeta* melody (a *saeta* is a religious work, sung *a cappella* during Holy Week in southern Andalusian Spain, and heavily influenced by *flamenco*). Ironically, the only time Debussy ever set foot in Spain was to attend a bullfight just over the border in the northwest city of San Sebastian, and there is no indication that he even spent the night there before returning to France. Yet, in *La soirée dans Grenade*, he is able to evoke the haunting and mesmerizing sounds of a sultry Andalusian evening, something which aroused the deepest admiration in the greatest of Spanish composers, Manuel de Falla. *Jardins sous la pluie (Gardens in the Rain)* is based on a melody known to all French children, *Nous n'irons plus au bois (We won't go any longer to the woods)*. Debussy uses this melody to depict a rapid, but gentle rain. Transformed dramatically into a thunderstorm, the droplets fall from the branches in anticipation of the final bursts of radiant sunlight.

Reflets dans l'eau (Reflections in the water) from **Images, Book I**, must owe a sense of gratitude to the works of Debussy's contemporary Monet, even though Debussy makes but one oblique mention of him in his voluminous (over 2,200 pages!) correspondence (think of the great series of *Namphéas/Water Lily* paintings that Monet made over a thirty year period at his home in Giverny – Debussy must have seen some of these). *Hommage à Rameau (Homage to Rameau)* brings us back to an earlier era, with its modal harmonies, its elegant simplicity of line and its *sarabande* rhythm. *Mouvements (Movements)*, as the title implies, is a blur of incessant ostinato writing, with humorous references to the *Dies irae*.

In **Images, Book II**, *Cloches à travers les feuilles* (*Bells through the leaves*) provides a kaleidoscope of influences – overlapping whole tone scales that give a feeling of both calm and motion at the same time, allied to *gamelan* gongs and exotic instrumentation. *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut* (*And the moon sets on the temple that was*) inhabits a world where time and space are suspended. *Poissons d'or* (*Goldfish*), a work of great virtuosity, was inspired by a Japanese lacquer painting on wood that Debussy owned, in which two enormous and energetic goldfish are offset by a black background. One detects early influences of jazz here, and a certain humor in the way the fish interact with each other.

The **Douze Études (Twelve Études)**, dedicated to Chopin, were composed in 1915 when Debussy was still at the height of his creative powers, albeit enfeebled by the colon cancer that was to claim his life three years hence. In their audacity, their didacticism, they are considered among the masterpieces of all twentieth century piano writing. In a brief written introduction, Debussy warns all pianists who wish to play these works to follow the advice of the ‘old keyboardists’: ‘Let’s find our own fingerings!’ The humor involved in these instructions carries over frequently into the works themselves. *Pour les cinq doigts* (*For the five fingers*) is a sophisticated parody of a bored student repeating a Czerny five-finger exercise, the student suddenly taking off in a flight of fantasy and delight in the rhythm of a *gigue*. *Pour les tierces* (*For double thirds*) is a study in watery sonority, with amazing harmonic twists and turns. *Pour les quartes* (*For fourths*) is a marvel of ‘disconcerting sonorities’ (Debussy in a letter to his publisher, Jacques Durand), modeled on the interval that became a building block of Debussy’s later compositions. *Pour les sixtes* (*For sixths*) relies solely on the interval of the sixth, both major and minor, for all harmonic progressions. It is also a study in *legato*. For me, the closing chords also resemble the gongs of Big Ben in London. As Debussy was known to love the city, this is not such a far-fetched idea! *Pour les octaves* (*For octaves*) is an exuberant waltz, with shades of late nineteenth century *angst* and a tempo marking of *joyeux et emporté* (*joyous and with abandon*). In *Pour les huit doigts* (*For eight fingers*), Debussy counsels against using the thumbs, as they would render the piece ‘too acrobatic’. In fact, it is easier to play good portions of the piece using the remaining eight fingers, a couple of notable sections aside. *Pour les degrés chromatiques* (*For chromatic intervals*) seems like a natural successor to the compositional techniques used in *pour les huit doigts*, the scurrying of the hands accompanying a melodic structure both humorous and mysterious. *Pour les agréments* (*For ornaments*) is in the form of a very slow *barcarolle* (or *boat song*). It was the last of

the études to be written. Once again, we are presented with a wonderful wash, a broad palette, of artistic color, cascading parallel triads creating a whole new sound world. *Pour les notes répétées* (For repeated notes) shows affinities with another of Debussy's creations, *The snow is dancing*, from the *Children's Corner* suite. It is a delicate and humorous dialogue between two very strong and different personalities! *Pour les sonorités opposées* (For contrasting sonorities) evokes a shimmering palate, the middle section recalling perhaps a distant memory. There is also a momentary allusion to the *Dies irae*. *Pour les arpèges composés* (For complex arpeggios) was for many years the most frequently performed of the entire set. Marked *lusingando* (coaxing, caressing, alluring), its gentle outer sections encircle moments that remind one of the *Folies Bergères* heard in *Minstrels*, the twelfth of the preludes. It has been suggested by the eminent British musicologist and pianist, Paul Roberts, that the last of the études, *Pour les accords* (For chords), might have been influenced by early Bartok. Surely, the quick succession of chords going in opposite directions could be what Debussy meant when he wrote to his publisher, Durand, in August of 1915: 'Another étude [I've written here] breaks up the left hand into a sort of Swedish gymnastic!' Undoubtedly, he meant both hands, which jump around in similar fashion. The middle section is slow and very seductive – one of the most beautiful, and delicate, things Debussy ever wrote.

[Program Notes © Craig Sheppard, 2013.]

Tonight's program is being recorded by the Seattle Symphony's Dmitriy Lipay for future release on Romeo Records. The program is also being video recorded by Dr. Fumio Ohuchi, Professor of Materials Science and Engineering here at the University of Washington.

The piano used is my own Hamburg Steinway D, #489770. It was built in 1984 and recently refurbished with a new set of hammers by Doug Wood.

Tonight's technician is my good friend, Susan Cady.

On Tuesday, October 15, 2013, I will be performing the Shostakovich *Piano Quintet in g minor, Opus 57*, with the Emerson String Quartet here in Meany Theater. The last performance in my *Mostly Brahms* series will take place here in Meany Theater on Tuesday, November 5, 2013. The program includes the *Scherzo, Opus 4*, by Brahms; the Schumann *Fantasy in C, Opus 17*; and the last two sets of Brahms *Klavierstücke, Opuses 118 and 119*.

Professor of Piano, CRAIG SHEPPARD, came to the University of Washington in September, 1993. Since that time, he has built a reputation as one of America's leading pedagogues, with former students teaching in major universities and conservatories around the world.

Performing has always played an important role in Sheppard's view of pedagogy. In the October, 2012, issue of *Gramophone* magazine, Donald Rosenberg writes about Sheppard's recently released CDs of the first two books of Franz Liszt's *Années de Pèlerinage* (performed in Meany Theater on the 200th anniversary of Liszt's birth in October, 2011): *Whether the music exults in lyricism or paints diabolical portraits, Sheppard has the pianistic gifts to convey the essence of Liszt's visions...the volcanic moments in Après une lecture du Dante are shaped with an exceptional blend of flair and tonal clarity. When Liszt steps back to gaze euphorically at a landscape, Sheppard lingers subtly on phrases even as he ensures that the integrity of the architecture is maintained. The performances are by turns absorbing and electrifying, with nary a hint of indulgence.*

In September, 2012, Sheppard undertook a two-week residency at the Conservatorium to the University of Melbourne in Australia, during which time he performed both the Liszt *Années* and the Debussy *Préludes*, in addition to holding seminars and giving numerous master classes and private teaching. In September, he also performed both recital programs in New Zealand, and taught at the Universities of Waikato (Hamilton) and Auckland. Previously, Sheppard had appeared at this summer's Methow Valley Chamber Music Festival and, in March 2012, at the Nehru Memorial Library in New Delhi, India, where he performed the Liszt *Années*. He also taught at the Delhi School of Music.

Craig Sheppard was born in November, 1947, and raised in Philadelphia. Following studies at the Curtis Institute with Eleanor Sokoloff and the Juilliard School with Sascha Gorodnitzki, Sheppard gave his New York début in January, 1972, at the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Eight months later, he won the Silver Medal at the Leeds International Pianoforte Competition in England, launching him on an international career that continues to the present. In 1973, he moved to London for twenty years, teaching at the Yehudi Menuhin School, Lancaster University, and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and giving master classes at both Oxford and Cambridge universities. In London, he continued private study with Ilona Kabos, Peter Feuchtwanger, and Sir Clifford Curzon.

Sheppard has performed with all the leading orchestras of Great Britain, as well as the Berlin Philharmonic and the orchestra of La Scala, Milan, on the European continent. In this country, he has performed with

the major orchestras of Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, San Francisco, Seattle, Dallas and Rochester, among others, with many of the leading conductors of the day, including Erich Leinsdorf, Sir Georg Solti, James Levine, Michael Tilson Thomas, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Lord Yehudi Menuhin, Aaron Copland, David Zinman and Sir Andrew Davis. Sheppard's commitment to chamber music is shown in his longstanding ties to the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, where he has collaborated with some of the biggest names of both past and present generations. Since 2002, Sheppard has traveled eleven times to the Far East to give master classes and perform in leading centers in China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore.

Sheppard and his colleague, Dr. Robin McCabe, are the directors of the highly successful *Seattle Piano Institute*, held every July at the School of Music for a group of select young piano students from around the world (<http://www.music.washington.edu/pianoinstitute/>).

More about Craig Sheppard can be found on his website: www.craigsheppard.net .

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