

The Cambridge Companion to Debussy

Often considered the father of twentieth-century music, Debussy was a visionary whose influence is still felt. This book offers a wide-ranging series of essays on Debussy the man, the musician and composer. It contains new insights into his character, his relationship to his Parisian environment and his musical works across all genres, with challenging views on the roles of nature and eroticism in his life and music. His music is considered through the characteristic themes of expression, sonority, rhythm, tonality and form, with closing chapters considering the performance of his music and our view of Debussy today as a major force in Western culture. This wide-ranging view of Debussy is written by a team of specialists for students and informed music lovers.

Simon Trezise is a Lecturer in Music at Trinity College, Dublin. He is the author of *Debussy: La mer* in the series Cambridge Music Handbooks and has written on French music and on Schoenberg.

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The Cambridge Companion to
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EDITED BY
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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477, Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Minion 10.75/14 pt *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [T_B]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

The Cambridge companion to Debussy / edited by Simon Trezise.

p. cm. – (Cambridge companions to music)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 65243 X (hardback) – ISBN 0 521 65478 5 (paperback)

I. Debussy, Claude, 1862–1918. – Criticism and interpretation. I. Trezise, Simon. II. Series.

ML410.D28 C26 2002

780'.92 – dc21 2001043703

ISBN 0 521 65243 X hardback

ISBN 0 521 65478 5 paperback

In memoriam François Lesure, 1923–2001

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Roger Nichols read music at the University of Oxford and subsequently lectured at various universities before becoming a freelance writer and broadcaster in 1981. He has published widely on French music of the last 200 years, including *Ravel* (Dent, 1977), *Ravel Remembered* (Faber, 1987), *Debussy Remembered* and *A Life of Debussy*.

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Caroline Potter is a Senior Lecturer in Music at Kingston University. A graduate in both French and music, she is the author of *Henri Dutilleux* (Ashgate, 1997). Current projects include a volume on French music since Berlioz, jointly edited with Richard Langham Smith, and a book on Nadia and Lili Boulanger.

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Arnold Whittall is Professor Emeritus of Music Theory and Analysis at King's College London. He has written extensively on the technical and historical nature of music since Wagner. His large-scale *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century* was published in 1999, and he has recently been working on a series of substantial articles on twentieth-century composers from Debussy to Birtwistle and beyond.

Acknowledgements

The work of Edward Lockspeiser and François Lesure continues to set the tone and standards for Debussy scholarship. The Debussy world is growing at a fast and furious rate, greatly aided, and not a little excited, by the continuing production of the *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy*, now under the fastidious editorship of Denis Herlin. Working on Debussy remains a pleasure, not just because the music is intoxicating, but because Debussy scholars are so supportive of each other. Now that I have had the enjoyable experience of meeting young, up-and-coming scholars recruited for the companion, things seem unlikely to change. Thanks are due to all the contributors for their good will and input.

Thanks are also due to Jonathan Dunsby, David Grayson, Roy Howat, Richard Langham Smith and Robert Orledge for advice on contributors and subject areas, and to John Flood-Paddock and Tamsin Simmill for their advice on translations (most translations in this volume not accredited to English-language sources are the work of contributors). Penny Souster at Cambridge University Press has been patient and immensely supportive of the whole project. Top Type Music Bureau (Dublin) did a marvellous job on the production of many of the music examples, as did Richard S. Parks on the music examples in chapter 11. I should also like to acknowledge financial and other support I have received from Trinity College, Dublin, including the Taylor Bequest.

Chronology of Debussy's life and works

Various excellent chronologies are available. I have drawn on several here, including Briscoe, *Claude Debussy: a Guide to Research* (my main source); Goubault, *Claude Debussy*; Lesure and Nichols, *Debussy Letters*; Gerald Abraham, *100 Years of Music* (London: Duckworth, 4/1974). Below completed and premiered works by Debussy in the third column I have added a handful of important contemporary works in the years of their first performance. Debussy's works are given by their completion dates unless indicated otherwise by (P), which indicates that the year given is of the first performance; for some of the most important works I have given both dates (works in collections such as the orchestral *Images* were composed over often quite extended periods, but only the date of the collection's completion is given). The best introduction to Debussy's life is Nichols, *The Life of Debussy*, which includes critical discussion of much of his music. An attractive critical apparatus for Debussy's life and works (in French), albeit slightly out of date now, is Goubault, *Claude Debussy*, which includes short analyses of all his main works, a detailed chronology, and a dictionary of terms (including a list of incomplete and abandoned works and other useful information).

Year	Life	Works
1862	Born at Saint-Germain-en-Laye near Paris, 22 August.	Berlioz, <i>Béatrice et Bénédict</i>
1867	Family settles in Paris.	Gounod, <i>Roméo et Juliette</i>
1872	Enters Paris Conservatoire.	
1875	Receives first certificate of merit in piano at Conservatoire.	Bizet, <i>Carmen</i>
1877	Enters harmony class of Emile Durand.	
1878	No prizes.	
1879	First known and dated compositions.	<i>Ballade à la lune; Madrid, princesse des Espagnes</i>
1880	Becomes pianist in Mme von Meck's entourage (she was Tchaikovsky's patron). Meets Mme Vasnier with whom he has an affair (the Vasniers became the chief benefactors of Debussy's youth).	Piano Trio in G
1881	In Russia with von Meck. Composes several songs for Mme Vasnier.	Symphony in B minor

Year	Life	Works
1882	Attends premiere of Lalo's <i>Namouna</i> and is ejected for his excessive enthusiasm. Meets Gounod. First public appearance as composer accompanying his song <i>Les roses</i> . First published work (<i>Nuits d'étoiles</i>).	<i>Mandoline</i> Wagner, <i>Parsifal</i>
1883	Comes second in Prix de Rome.	<i>Le gladiateur</i>
1884	Wins Prix de Rome on 28 June.	<i>L'enfant prodigue</i>
1885	Leaves for Villa Medici in Rome. Hears Liszt play. Hears Palestrina and Lassus at church of Santa Maria dell'Anima.	Brahms, Fourth Symphony; Franck, <i>Variations symphoniques</i>
1886	Takes leave from Rome to be in Paris.	<i>Diane au bois</i> (fragments only) Saint-Saëns, 'Organ' Symphony (No. 3)
1887	Returns to Paris for good. At premiere <i>Printemps</i> is accused of 'vague Impressionism'.	<i>Printemps</i> (for chorus and orchestra) Verdi, <i>Otello</i>
1888	First Bayreuth visit (<i>Meistersinger</i> and <i>Parsifal</i>). Publishes songs.	<i>La damoiselle élue</i>
1889	Second Bayreuth visit (<i>Tristan</i>). Famous conversations with Guiraud. Universal Exhibition in Paris at which Debussy hears Javanese gamelan music and Musorgsky.	<i>Petite suite</i> for piano duet Franck, Symphony Strauss, <i>Don Juan</i>
1890	Publishes <i>Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire</i> . Starts opera <i>Rodrigue et Chimène</i> . Breaks with Académie.	<i>Fantaisie</i> for piano and orchestra; <i>Suite bergamasque</i> (early version); Mazurka
1891	Asks Maeterlinck for permission to set <i>Princesse Maleine</i> to music (is refused).	<i>Trois melodies de Paul Verlaine</i> ; <i>Fêtes galantes</i> , series 1
1892	Meets Gabrielle (Gaby) Dupont with whom he lives until 1899. Works on <i>Trois scènes au crépuscule</i> .	Nocturne for piano
1893	Abandons <i>Rodrigue</i> and starts work on <i>Pelléas et Mélisande</i> . Hears <i>Die Walküre</i> and plays in four-handed <i>Rheingold</i> and <i>Walküre</i> excerpts.	String Quartet; <i>La damoiselle élue</i> (P)
1894	Gets engaged to singer Thérèse Roger, but returns to Gaby. First	<i>Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune</i>

Year	Life	Works
	performance of <i>Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune</i> . Plays Act I of <i>Parsifal</i> at private gathering. First all-Debussy concert (Brussels).	
1895	Completes first version of <i>Pelléas</i> .	
1896	Works on abortive theatrical projects.	
1897	Gaby attempts suicide.	
1898	Ravel's 'Habanera' makes great impression on him. Meets Rosalie (Lilly) Texier. In debt.	<i>Chansons de Bilitis</i>
1899	Marries Lilly.	<i>Nocturnes</i>
1900	Debussy named the 'Verlaine of music' by <i>L'écho de Paris</i> .	'Nuages' and 'Fêtes' (P) Puccini, <i>Tosca</i>
1901	Monsieur Croche (Debussy's critical alter ego) begins his brief existence.	<i>Pour le piano; Nocturnes</i> complete (P)
1902	Falls out with Maeterlinck over casting of <i>Mélibande</i> . Premiere of <i>Pelléas</i> . Debussy first visits London. Begins work on Poe operatic projects.	<i>Pelléas et Mélisande</i> (P)
1903	Writes music criticism for <i>Gil blas</i> and <i>Mercure de France</i> . Reviews <i>Ring</i> in London. Meets Emma Bardac. Begins <i>La mer</i> . Receives Légion d'Honneur.	<i>Estampes</i>
1904	Leaves Lilly for Emma. Makes his only gramophone recordings.	<i>Fêtes galantes</i> , series 2; <i>Deux danses; L'isle joyeuse</i> Ravel, String Quartet
1905	Emma and Debussy both get divorced. Daughter 'Chouchou' (Claude-Emma) born. Signs exclusive contract with publisher Durand. Finally moves to 80 Avenue du Bois de Bologne (where he remains).	Piano <i>Images</i> , series 1; <i>La mer</i> Strauss, <i>Salome</i>
1906	Critic Pierre Lalo writes that 'The religion of Debussyism has replaced the religion of Wagnerism.'	
1907	Emma is disinherited in her uncle's will. Debussy worries about his	Piano <i>Images</i> , series 2

Year	Life	Works
	flagging inspiration. Meets André Caplet.	
1908	Marries Emma. First biography of Debussy, by Louise Liebich. Contract with Metropolitan opera for Poe operas <i>La chute de la maison Usher</i> and <i>Le diable dans le beffroi</i> .	<i>Children's corner</i> ; <i>Rapsodie</i> for saxophone; <i>Trois chansons de Charles Orléans</i>
1909	Still working on Poe operas and other theatrical projects. Louis Laloy's biography of Debussy published.	<i>Hommage à Haydn</i>
1910	Meets Mahler but leaves during performance of Second Symphony. Hears Stravinsky's <i>Firebird</i> .	<i>Préludes</i> , book 1; <i>La plus que lent</i> ; <i>Première rapsodie</i> ; <i>Trois ballades de François Villon</i>
1911	Again in debt and suicidal. Conducts in Turin with assistance of Vittorio Gui.	
1912	Around this time makes piano rolls. Reads through <i>Le sacre du printemps</i> at piano with Stravinsky. Nijinsky's choreography of <i>Prélude</i> provokes a scandal.	<i>Khamma</i> (orchestrated by Koechlin); <i>Images</i> (orchestra) Schoenberg, <i>Pierrot lunaire</i>
1913	Attends premiere of <i>Le sacre du printemps</i> Conducts in Russia. René Lenormand publishes his <i>Etude sur l'harmonie moderne</i> .	<i>Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé</i> ; <i>Printemps</i> , orchestrated Busser (P); <i>Images</i> for orchestra (P); <i>Jeux</i> ; <i>Préludes</i> , book 2
1914	Conducts in Rome, The Hague and Amsterdam.	<i>Six épigraphes antiques</i> Vaughan Williams, <i>London Symphony</i>
1915	Last bout of creative energy in summer. Edits Chopin for Durand. Rectal cancer diagnosed. Undergoes surgery in December.	<i>Etudes</i> ; Cello Sonata; Sonata for flute, viola and harp; <i>En blanc et noir</i> Ravel, Piano Trio Sibelius, Fifth Symphony
1916	Completes final revision of libretto for <i>La chute de la maison Usher</i> .	
1917	Last public appearance as a performer, in Violin Sonata. Hears premiere of Satie's <i>Parade</i> ballet. Edits solo violin sonatas of Bach for Durand.	Violin Sonata

Year	Life	Works
1918	Dies on 25 March in Paris to the sound of Germany's bombardment of Paris. 'It's unbelievable. I don't know how I stay alive, and I can't believe the awful truth.' (Chouchou's letter to her brother Raoul Bardac on her father's death, 8 April 1918, <i>Debussy Letters</i> , 336).	Holst, <i>The Planets</i>
1919	Chouchou dies on 16 July.	
1934	Emma dies.	

Note on the text

References to the most common Debussy texts are given in short-title form in the endnotes with the full reference in the Select Bibliography. In most instances these refer to the most recent edition of the publication. Full publication details are provided for more occasionally referenced sources on their first citation in each chapter. Mindful of the needs of readers of this volume, I have added a few volumes to the Select Bibliography that, for any number of reasons, receive little or no attention in the chapters but are, in my opinion, important for the study of Debussy.

References to musical texts vary according to author. Preference is generally given to the most commonly available source, so Dover scores of the orchestral works are often used (they are based on the original Durand editions). In order to make references as straightforward as possible, rehearsal figures and bar numbers are sometimes given together when available. Definitive texts for some of Debussy's works are available in the *Cœuvres complètes de Debussy* under the general editorship of Denis Herlin (the edition is a long way from completion). It is assumed that readers will have access to scores when reading chapters that deal in detail with the music.

