

**BENNINGTON COLLEGE
DEANE CARRIAGE BARN SERIES
PRESENTS:**

**Christopher Lewis
with
Mary Cleary,
Soprano**

**TUESDAY,
OCTOBER 15, 2013
8:00PM**

Préludes, Book II..... Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

- I. Brouillards
- II. Feuilles mortes
- III. La Puerta del Vino
- IV. "Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses"
- V. Bruyères
- VI. "General Lavine" – excentric –
- VII. La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune
- VIII. Ondine
- IX. Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C.
- X. Canope
- XI. Les tierce alternées
- XII. Feux d'artifice

INTERMISSION

Ballade No. 4 in F minor, Op. 54..... Frederic Chopin
(1810-1849)

Měsíčku na nebi hlubokémAntonín Dvořák
(Song to the Moon *from* RUSALKA) (1841-1904)

Sonetto 104 del Petrarca Franz Liszt
(1811-1886)

Polonaise No. 2 Franz Liszt

Program Notes

“Debussy isn’t very fond of the piano,” said his teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, “but he loves music.” This is an astonishing remark. I think it may rather be said that Debussy transcended the limitations of the instrument, using its sonorities, range and capacity for tone color as no composer had before. Each of these twelve pieces creates its own sonic world, evocative, full of emotion. “There is no theory. You merely have to listen. Pleasure is the law,” Debussy said. And yet his meticulously worked out conception and notation gives the lie to the impression this remark might convey. Schnabel said of Mozart’s music that it is “too easy for children and too difficult for adults.” It might be said of Debussy as well. The challenge of translating his often seemingly simple music and making it sound natural and self-evident requires tremendous thought and energy.

Debussy wrote titles to each of the preludes but put them at the end of each piece. I believe he intended the pieces to be evocative rather than programmatic:

Brouillards (“fog” or “mist,” depicted in the hazy sound and simultaneous use of black and white keys);

Feuilles mortes (“Dead Leaves” – Mme. Debussy said her husband wrote the piece after an autumn walk); *La Puerta del Vino* (inspired by a postcard of the Moorish “Gate of Wine” in Granada, Spain);

Les fées sont d’exquises danseuses (“Fairies are exquisite dancers,” inspired by an illustration of Arthur Rackham to J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*);

Bruyères (according to Mme. Debussy an “evocation of the simple flowers” of heather);

“*General Lavine*” – *excentric* – (the American clown Ed Lavine who appeared in Marigny Theater in Paris. He was billed as “the man who has soldiered all his life” and his act included juggling on a tightrope and playing the piano with his toes);

La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune (inspired by a newspaper item about the coronation of King George V as Emperor of India);

Ondine (the water nymph from a novel by Fouqué, and perhaps written in answer to Ravel’s piece of the same name);

Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C. (from Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*; and a bit of fun added with “God Save the King”. The suffix stands for “Perpetual President-Member Pickwick Club”);

Canope (inspired by the canopic jar tops of Egyptian funerary urns, two of which stood on Debussy’s mantelpiece);

Les tierce alternées (“alternating thirds” – the interval of a third, alternating from hand to hand throughout the piece);

Feux d’artifice (“Fireworks,” probable inspired by the annual Bastille Day celebration, given the quotation from *La Marseillaise* at the end).

Chopin himself was the first to use the term “ballade” to refer to a piano composition, appropriating the name from the literary ballad. He appears to have been most taken with the lyric and dramatic possibilities of the term, and his four ballades fuse melodic writing with intensely dramatic, explosive gestures. Liszt, Grieg, Fauré, and Brahms also composed works for solo piano that they too called ballades. Because of the literary association and the dramatic character of the music, people tend to search for extra-musical inspiration for the pieces, believing the music must be an attempt to capture actual events in sound, but in a parallel with the Debussy Preludes Chopin discouraged this kind of speculation and asked that the music be taken on its own terms rather than as a representation of something else. Many regard this Ballade, composed in 1842, as Chopin’s finest creation.

The **Dvořák** aria is from his opera “*Rusalka*,” whose libretto is based on the same “*Ondine*” tale as Debussy’s prelude. *Rusalka*, a water nymph, has fallen in love with a human Prince whom she has seen swimming in the lake. *Rusalka* asks the moon to tell the man she loves that she waits for him.

Liszt’s *Sonnetto* is his piano transcription of one of his own songs. This piano version is the third setting of the Petrarch text, which speaks of the torment and joy of love. This is programmatic music!

Liszt wrote two *Polonaises*. This one is marked “*Allegro pomposo con brio*,” has a “*Trio*” section marked “*patetico*” and a couple of passages marked “*con tutta la forza*.” Enough said!