

DEBUSSY
STRAVINSKY
NEWMAN

ANDREW VON OEYEN, PIANO



DE 3454

0 13491 34542 0

Andrew von Oeyen, piano

Claude Debussy (1862-1918): Preludes, Book I

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 1. Danseuses de Delphes (The dancers of Delphi) | (2:49) |
| 2. Voiles (sails/veils) | (3:45) |
| 3. Le vent dans la plaine (The wind on the plain) | (1:56) |
| 4. Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir
(Sounds and perfumes swirl in the evening air) | (3:44) |
| 5. Les collines d'Anacapri (The hills of Anacapri) | (3:08) |
| 6. Des pas sur la neige (Footprints in the snow) | (3:41) |
| 7. Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest (What the west wind saw) | (3:17) |
| 8. La fille aux cheveux de lin (The girl with the flaxen hair) | (2:36) |
| 9. La sérénade interrompue (The interrupted Serenade) | (2:37) |
| 10. La cathédrale engloutie (The sunken cathedral) | (6:09) |
| 11. La danse de Puck (Dance of Puck) | (2:40) |
| 12. Minstrels | (2:25) |
| 13. L'isle joyeuse (Isle of Joy) | (5:52) |

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971): Petrushka: Three Movements for Piano

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 14. Danse Russe (Russian dance) | (2:32) |
| 15. Chez Petrouchka (Petrushka's Room) | (4:36) |
| 16. La semaine grasse (The Shrovetide Fair) | (8:43) |
| 17. Piano Rag music | (3:02) |

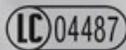
David Newman (b. 1954):

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 18. Prelude (world premiere recording) | (2:39) |
| 19. Antipodal Rag | (4:57) |

Total Playing Time: 71:11



DE 3454



Delos Productions, Inc.,

P.O. Box 343, Sonoma, CA 95476-9998

(800) 364-0645 • (707) 996-3844

contactus@delosmusic.com

www.delosmusic.com



Claude Debussy (1862-1918): Preludes, Book I

1. Danseuses de Delphes (*The dancers of Delphi*) (2:49)
2. Voiles (*sails/veils*) (3:45)
3. Le vent dans la plaine (*The wind on the plain*) (1:56)
4. Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir
(*Sounds and perfumes swirl in the evening air*) (3:44)
5. Les collines d'Anacapri (*The hills of Anacapri*) (3:08)
6. Des pas sur la neige (*Footprints in the snow*) (3:41)
7. Ce qu'à vu le vent d'ouest (*What the west wind saw*) (3:17)
8. La fille aux cheveux de lin (*The girl with the flaxen hair*) (2:36)
9. La sérénade interrompue (*The interrupted Serenade*) (2:37)
10. La cathédrale engloutie (*The sunken cathedral*) (6:09)
11. La danse de Puck (*Dance of Puck*) (2:40)
12. Minstrels (2:25)

13. **L'isle joyeuse (Isle of Joy)** (5:52)

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971): Petrushka: Three Movements for Piano

14. Danse Russe (*Russian dance*) (2:32)
15. Chez Petrouchka (*Petrushka's Room*) (4:36)
16. La semaine grasse (*The Shrovetide Fair*) (8:43)

17. **Piano Rag music** (3:02)

David Newman (b. 1954):

18. Prelude (world premiere recording) (2:39)
19. Antipodal Rag (4:57)

Total Playing Time: 71:11

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

“Andrew von Oeyen (is), in my opinion the best pianist of his generation.”

Thus wrote distinguished composer David Newman, who created this album’s final two selections specifically for Andrew. We at Delos thus take particular pride in releasing Andrew’s second album – following his spectacular and critically acclaimed survey for us of piano music by Franz Liszt in 2011, the bicentennial year of the composer’s birth. In the notes to that release, the historical role of Liszt as “the first impressionist” was emphasized. How fitting, therefore, that Andrew’s current recording is devoted largely to keyboard masterpieces by Claude Debussy (1862-1918): the first and greatest of the French impressionists. Continuing Andrew’s penchant for anniversaries, 2013 marks the centennial year of Debussy’s 24 *Preludes*



Debussy and Stravinsky

(composed between 1909 and 1913) – of which the first book of twelve is offered here.

As his *Preludes, Book I* are discussed below, bear in mind that the composer rarely described the sonic “pictures” he was trying to “paint” beyond the word(s) of each piece’s title.

“**Danseuses de Delphes**” (The Dancers of Delphi) evokes mystic-toned scenes of languorously dancing maidens at the site of the Temple of Apollo in the ancient Greek city of Delphi, home to the legendary Oracle of Delphi. The music breathes a gently quaint and exotic air of antiquity. Many of the harmonic and structural devices that Debussy employed in the pieces that follow are first heard here: elements of modal, chromatic and diatonic harmonies – as well as quasi-orchestral textures and isolated chords surrounding the slow and sensual melody.

The whole-tone scale predominates in “**Voiles**” (Sails *or* veils), framing

passages of pentatonic and chromatic harmonics. Debussy leaves the listener guessing as to which of the title definitions (if either) he favors. Some have “seen” in the music the billowing of a ship’s or sailboat’s sails as a gentle wind fills them and then fades away, with a steady B-flat pedal tone functioning throughout as the boat’s ever-solid “anchor.” Another often-cited impression is of vague, but alluring feminine forms partially hidden by gauzy veils that also obscure their demurely flirtatious glances.

Unlike the preceding piece, there’s no ambiguity as to the musical imagery of “**Le vent dans la plaine**” (The wind on the plain). It’s not hard for the listener to inhabit the vast expanses of Debussy’s windswept plain, whether light, skittering breezes or blustery gusts prevail. But you should know that it serves as a companion work of sorts to *Voiles*, different though the impressions may be. Reversing that piece’s harmonic patterns, this one sandwiches a whole-tone central

section between pentatonic outer episodes.

“Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir” (Sounds and perfumes swirl in the evening air) is definitely the most languorous of the Book I preludes. This lush and lovely “nocturne” features haunting melodies within rich harmonic tapestries, evoking the sultry atmosphere of a soft and quiet summer night suffused with subtle sounds and sweet, aimlessly wafting scents. The two prevailing themes are first heard separately, but appear later cunningly interwoven, to magical effect.

The energetic and dancelike **“Les collines d’Anacapri”** (The hills of Anacapri) is named for the spectacularly scenic higher-elevation region of the island of Capri in the Bay of Naples; Debussy visited there often. We first hear the tolling of bells as if from afar, interspersed by sprightly outbursts before a manic, tarantella-like theme in Neapolitan style bursts forth. This gives way to an



agreeable folk-like tune from the piano's lower registers and the central section's sensual melody. The opening "bells" then reappear to usher in a reprise of the original dance, finishing the piece with a sense of giddy excitement.

In stark contrast, "**Des pas sur la neige**" (Footprints in the snow) presents what is surely the bleakest and most depressive soundscape of all the preludes. We enter a chill and desolate world with the opening ostinato's slow footsteps trudging through deep snow. This prelude's genius is apparent in the adroit layering of melodic elements both above and below the relentlessly plodding ostinato, building into a feeling of sadly searing intensity. A brief major-key interlude near the end seems poised to bring momentary respite – but the wintry aura soon returns to stifle all hope as a sequence of descending bass notes and contrasting upper-register melodic elements end the piece with a particularly keen sense of empty desolation.

In "**Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest**" (What the West Wind saw) – the most virtuosic of the Book I preludes – swirling, quietly ominous figurations soon erupt into a hard-driving depiction of prevailing winds as they blow a destructive storm onshore from the sea. The listener's senses are quickly overwhelmed by mounting winds and swells that cascade landward with burgeoning violence; you can almost "see" the explosive plumes of watery spume as huge waves break against the rocky shoreline.

Perhaps Debussy's most beloved and frequently heard individual prelude is "**La fille aux cheveux de lin**" (The girl with the flaxen hair). Sweetly soothing and deliciously lyrical, this comparatively uncomplicated music depicts a young girl caught up in a personal reverie as she sings of her dreams. The composer's gentle impressionistic wizardry here lies in his use of a pentatonic scale for the melody, while harmonizing its notes with diatonic chords.

Debussy loved a good musical joke, and one of his wittiest and best is “**La sérénade interrompue**” (The interrupted serenade). It tells the story of a young Spanish Romeo who is repeatedly thwarted in his attempts to serenade a lovely señorita with his guitar. The serenade begins as the piano recalls both the strumming and plucked notes of a guitar – only to be interrupted by the slamming of a window just as his “song” gets going properly. After several further interruptions, our suitor realizes that he is getting nowhere and slinks away. Listen for how effectively Debussy “orchestrates” the music, with fluid legato lines layered over the guitar effects – all the while maintaining the piece’s steadfast Spanish character.

Another prelude that’s often performed separately is “**La cathédrale engloutie**,” (The sunken cathedral), inspired by the legend of the cathedral at Ys: the mythical city that is said to have been sunk off the coast of Brittany during the dark ages as

God’s punishment for the sins of its inhabitants. This eerie masterpiece is an impressionistic tour-de-force – employing both pentatonic and modal scales, ghostly bell-tones, echoes of plainchant, and seismic low-C pedal points. The music unfolds in a huge arch as the structure emerges from the subdued depths into full above-water sonic glory before slowly sinking again beneath the waves. The piece’s blend of a “submerged” feel and its aura of vast internal spaces is unique in all of music.

“**La danse de Puck**” (Dance of Puck) gives witty and whimsical musical life to the mischievous sprite of Shakespeare’s play, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The music – structured in sonata form – unfolds in a merry romp. It has a generally modal feel to it, though bitonal and chromatic harmonies are also heard as Puck flits and flutters through his fairytale surroundings. Listen for the playfully teasing effect that Debussy achieves by means of the precise figurations in

the opening passages – like his syncopated rhythms and his two-note slurs with the staccato second note.

“**Minstrels**” (Minstrels) – another example of Debussy’s penchant for humor in music – was inspired by minstrel shows: a popular form of public entertainment in 19th-century America that began to appear in Europe around the turn of the century. They consisted of stylized African-American song-and-dance routines, spirituals and instrumental pieces as well as comedy sketches, all done in blackface. The music consisted of jazz forms of the day, like ragtime and blues. After opening with what sounds like a banjo shuffle-tune, the piece takes on the varied melodic flavors, rhythmic vitality and quick-change excitement of the typical minstrel show – complete with snippets of a sentimental song and recurrent drumbeats.

Debussy wrote *L’isle joyeuse*, a meaty and virtuosic stand-alone composition, in 1904. In June of that year, af-

ter five years of marriage, he left his wife for the singer Emma Bardac, and spent the summer with her on the Isle of Jersey off the Normandy coast – where he wrote the piece. While it’s only natural to think that the sheer excitement of being with a new lover could have been the sole inspiration for this impassioned music, the Isle of Jersey was but one of two “Islands of Joy” that Debussy apparently had in mind (or in heart). 18th-century French painter Antoine Watteau’s painting, *L’Embarquement pour Cythère*, portrays a group of revelers as they depart for the island of Aphrodite, the ancient Greek goddess of physical love – and it’s not hard to imagine that Debussy also sought to express the travelers’ excited sense of erotic anticipation.

After a series of trills, the piece’s main motif appears – a fast and festively dancelike outpouring in rondo form that’s almost orchestral in effect, overflowing with triplets and syncopated rhythms, to ecstatically exu

berant effect. The music soon calms down into a 3/8 meter episode that suggests the boat's rocking – but the sense of eager expectancy (and the tempo) increase as the island comes into view as the music hurtles headlong to an exciting finish.

Trois mouvements de Petrouchka (*Petrushka*: Three Movements for Piano) has its roots in the second of Igor Stravinsky's (1882-1971) three full-fledged ballet scores that were written at the behest of his mentor, the impresario Sergei Diaghilev. After the immense success of his first ballet, *The Firebird*, Stravinsky had intended to compose another ballet next, *The Rite of Spring* – but Diaghilev instead urged him to transform a non-theatrical orchestral piece he had written about a mischievous puppet brought to magical life into his next ballet. Stravinsky completed the score in May 1911, naming it *Petrushka, a Burlesque in Four Scenes* – after the stock “Punch-and-Judy”-style puppet character that was a fix-

ture in pre-Lenten Russian carnivals.

The solo piano spinoff appeared ten years later, written specifically for (and dedicated to) his friend, the virtuoso Arthur Rubinstein. Stravinsky carefully re-composed the music so as to make it highly “pianistic” in nature, and thus appealing to a brilliant pianist (he always insisted that it was *not* a transcription). While he drew the musical materials directly from the orchestral original, he sought to transform everything into a keyboard tour-de-force that would challenge the finest players. Being an excellent pianist himself, he succeeded wildly well, and this music continues to challenge top pianists to this day. In all three movements, you'll hear breakneck tempos, huge jumps, speedy runs, profuse glissandos and frequent tremolos; also intricate polyrhythms and bitonal harmonies – like the famous “Petrushka” chord (simultaneous C major and F# major triads) that one hears whenever the title character appears (a “Leitmotif”

of sorts). Much of the music is based on Russian folk-tunes. It's interesting to note that Rubinstein – though he performed this music often and (by all accounts) spectacularly well – never recorded it.

The first movement, the manic “Danse Russe” (Russian dance), comes from the conclusion of the ballet's first scene, in which Petrushka and the other main characters appear for the first time and dance together. “Chez Petrouchka” (Petrushka's room) encompasses the entire second scene, delivering mostly a musical portrait of the title character, to typically “floppy,” puppet-like effect. The final movement, “La Semain Grasse,” (Shrovetide fair), spans almost the entire fourth scene, where – after a series of colorful introductory dances – Petrushka is murdered by his rival, but returns as a ghost.

Stravinsky – one of many composers who were influenced by American jazz – wrote his *Piano Rag Music* in 1919, by which time jazz had gained

quite a European following, especially in Paris. This one was also written for Arthur Rubinstein. The piece is a prime example of the cubist influence in music – in that the composer fragments the harmonic and rhythmic elements of ragtime, then restructures them so as to achieve sort of a three-dimensional “collage” effect in music, much as the original cubists (like Picasso) did with images. He further added shifting accents to the already syncopated rhythms, as well as a bitonal approach to harmony. While the essential format, musical characteristics and spirit of the ragtime genre remain readily apparent, Stravinsky transformed it all into something much more complex, abstract and stylized than, say, Scott Joplin's original piano rags. Still, listeners will find the music's ready wit as well as its almost improvisatory, start-and-stop nature to be fascinating and fun.

While Academy Award-nominated composer David Newman (b. 1954)

has built his reputation primarily on the 100-plus films he has scored, he has also attracted considerable notice for his concert works. As mentioned above, both of his piano pieces offered here were written for Andrew, who premiered “**Antipodal Rag**” at the Ravinia Festival in 2001; “**Prelude**” is heard here in its world premiere recording.

“Prelude,” as explained by the composer, was written as a short introductory companion piece to the more substantial “Antipodal Rag.” Newman actually had the moods and qualities of French piano composers in mind when he wrote it: tunesmiths like Debussy and (particularly) Poulenc – whose senses of Gallic whimsy and emotional contrast are especially palpable. The piece alternates between moments of brusque dissonance, flights of fantasy and pensively lyrical reflection – with upward-turning, seemingly questioning phrases that are emphatically answered with “Antipodal Rag.”

The word “antipodal” is defined as “diametrically opposite – entirely opposed.” The composer sought here to illustrate the contrasting nature of the classic piano rag’s (or “stride piano,” as he prefers to call it) components. In his own words, “The left hand, with all its jumps and leaps, acts like a rhythm section, (low bass, higher snare) while the right hand, in an almost completely independent way, plays the melody, rhythm, variations, etc. It has an antipodal sense to it; a physical, dancelike motion – as if the two hands are almost dancing with each other. Two hands are independent and opposed, yet there is an intoxicating sense of chaotic fun.” The title is further characterized by the piece’s contrasting ABA structure, with contrary motion explored in all three sections ... even the lyrical central episode.

—Lindsay Koob

BIOGRAPHY

Andrew von Oeyen has already established himself as one of the most accomplished and captivating pianists of his generation. Since his debut at age 16 with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Esa-Pekka Salonen, he has performed to critical acclaim in recital and orchestral appearances around the world. Born in the U.S. in 1979, Andrew von Oeyen began his piano studies at age 5 and made his first solo orchestral appearance at age 10. He is a graduate of Columbia University and The Juilliard School; his principal teachers/mentors include Herbert Stessin, Jerome Lowenthal, Alfred Brendel and Leon Fleisher. He won the prestigious Gilmore Young Artist Award in 1999 and also took First Prize in the Leni Fe Bland Foundation National Piano Competition in 2001. Mr. von Oeyen lives in New York and Paris.

Von Oeyen commands an extensive and diverse repertoire, to include the major concertos of the keyboard literature – which he has performed with such ensembles as the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the San Francisco Symphony, among many others. As both soloist and conductor, he has led various concertos and orchestral works at the Spoleto Festival USA. On July 4, 2009, von Oeyen performed at the U.S. Capitol with the National Symphony in “A Capitol Fourth,” reaching millions worldwide in the multi-award winning PBS live telecast.

Andrew has appeared in recital at the world’s most prestigious venues: Wigmore Hall and Barbican Hall in London, Lincoln Center in New York, the Kennedy Center in Wash

ington, Boston's Symphony Hall, Zürich's Tonhalle, and Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow, to name but a few. A consummate chamber musician, he also appeared in recital with violinist Sarah Chang throughout Europe, North America and Asia – leading to a recording for EMI. He has also released an award-winning album of Liszt's works on the Delos label.

In recent seasons, von Oeyen has appeared at the festivals of Aspen, Ravinia, Saratoga, Spoleto, Schuber-

tiade, Festival del Sole, Grant Park, Grand Teton, Mainly Mozart, Bellingham and Gilmore. He maintains an incredibly busy schedule of international orchestral concert and recital appearances, to include frequent touring engagements.

For a more detailed bio, engagement calendar and other information, see Andrew's website:

www.vonoeyen.com

CREDITS

Executive producer: Carol Rosenberger

Producer/editor: Chris Alder

Recording engineer: Wolf-Dieter Karwatky

Mixing: Wolf-Dieter Karwatky

Mastering: Wolf-Dieter Karwatky/Matthew Snyder

Piano tuner: Gerd Finkenstein

Recording: Beethovensaal Hannover, August 2011

© 2013 Delos Productions, Inc., P.O. Box 343 Sonoma, CA 95476-9998

(707) 996-3844 • Fax (707) 320-0600 • (800) 364-0645

contactus@delosmusic.com • www.delosmusic.com

Made in USA