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DEBUSSY

PRÉLUDE
à l'après midi d'un faune
for Orchestra



Eulenburg

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

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à l'après-midi d'un faune
for Orchestra

Edited by/Herausgegeben von/Édition de
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CONTENTS

Preface	III
Vorwort	VII
Préface	XIII
Textual Notes	XVIII
<i>L'Après-midi d'un faune</i>	
Églogue par Stéphane Mallarmé	XXII
Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune	1

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PREFACE

Not only is the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* the first masterpiece by the young Achille-Claude Debussy, but it may also be considered one of the most – if not the most – important starting points of modern music, anticipating some characteristic and colourful instrumental touches that he himself would employ in his later works.¹

By 1890, Debussy and many other Parisian artists were delighted by Stéphane Mallarmé's quest for an Ideal, in which extreme refinement of language and blank verse lead to a diffuse syntactical order. In the latter, words transcend their literal meaning to become themselves genuine musical sounds. Mallarmé's eclogue *L'Après-midi d'un faune* – which in its first draft, *Monologue d'un faune*, dates from 1865 – was completed and published in 1876. Debussy probably became acquainted with the poem after his return to Paris from the Italian capital in March 1887, where he had spent almost two years after having won the coveted Prix de Rome in June 1884 with his cantata *L'Enfant prodigue*.

As has recently been established, the two artists met for the first time in the fall of 1890 through A.-Ferdinand Hérold, grandson of Louis-Joseph-Ferdinand Hérold, composer of the successful opéra-comique, *Le Pré aux clercs* (1832). By that time, Mallarmé was looking for a composer able to write some incidental music for a production of his *Après-midi d'un faune* at the Théâtre des arts. The premiere was to take place on 27 February 1891, but was postponed for unknown reasons, and eventually cancelled. Debussy, however, did not give up the project, carried on the work on his own, and undertook a triptyque for

orchestra entitled *Prélude, Interlude et Paraphrase finale sur L'Après-midi d'un faune*.² However, being busy with the completion of his string quartet (premiere December 1893) and the composition of his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, he finally changed his mind and reduced the planned triptyque to its initial *Prélude*. The score was finalized during the summer of 1894, and on 23 October of that year Debussy signed a receipt for 200 francs from the publisher Georges Hartmann, assigning him all the rights for the full score and the 2-piano reduction. Hartmann, of Bavarian origin, patronized most of the young French composers of the time (including Bizet, Saint-Saëns, Lalo, Franck and more particularly Massenet), but got entangled in financial setbacks which forced him to sell his company in 1891 with the interdiction of another publishing house. However, he quickly resumed his business thanks to an authorized agent, Eugène Fromont.³ The printed score was dedicated to Debussy's lifelong friend Raymond Bonheur, whom he had met at the Conservatoire de Paris in 1878. The publisher Jobert bought both the plates and the autograph MS in 1922.

The *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* was first performed in the Salle d'Harcourt on Saturday 22 December 1894, by the Société Nationale de Musique. According to Pierre Louÿs, the orchestra conducted

² François Lesure, *Claude Debussy. Biographie critique* (Klincksieck: Paris, 1994), pp115–16 and 130

³ Lesure, *Claude Debussy*, p155. Debussy's signed receipt from Hartmann is reproduced in Jean Barraqué, *Debussy* (Seuil: Paris, 1962), p93. The 2-piano reduction did not receive full attention from the composer, and its first edition contains several unclear details; see *Œuvres pour deux pianos*, ed. Noël Lee, in: *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy*, series I, vol. 8 (Durand-Costallat: Paris, 1986), pXVII.

¹ See Pierre Boulez, *Notes of an Apprenticeship*, trans Herbert Weinstock (Knopf: New York, 1968), p345

IV

by Gustave Doret did not play satisfactorily: 'the horns stank, and the rest were hardly better', he wrote to the composer the following day.⁴ Nonetheless, the piece was encored and repeated on Sunday 23rd. After these two performances, Mallarmé sent a letter-card to Debussy, acknowledging that the score went 'further, indeed, into the nostalgia and the light, with finesse, with languour, with richness'.⁵ However, according to a letter Debussy sent to Georges Jean-Aubryon dated 25 March 1910, Mallarmé had become enthusiastic about the score as soon as he heard it played on the piano: 'I was not expecting anything like this! The music prolongs the emotion of my poem and evokes the scenery more vividly than colour could'.⁶ The work was performed again on 13 October 1895 at the Concerts Colonne. Three days earlier, on the 10th, Debussy had written to the journalist Willy (Henri Gauthier-Villars), who was to review the concert, his wittiest testimony about the score:

The Prelude to 'L'après-midi d'un faune', cher Monsieur, might it be the leftovers of the dream at the bottom of the faun's flute? Put more simply, it is a general impression of the poem, because to follow it more closely, the music would be panting along like a cabhorse running against a thoroughbred in the Grand Prix. It's also a rebuff to that analytical spirit which encumbers our finest minds, so it shows no respect for key, preferring a mode that seeks to encompass all the nuances, as can be quite logically demonstrated. Still, it

follows the ascending shape of the poem – there is all the marvellous scene-painting of the text with the added human element brought to it by 32 violinists who have got up too early in the morning! The ending is a prolongation of the last line: 'Farewell the pair of you, I'll see just the shadow you have become.'⁷

Since then, the *Prélude* spread all over the world, sometimes conducted by the composer himself. On 29 May 1912, Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* produced a famous and controversial choreography, in which Vaslav Nijinsky danced the Faun in the well-known spotted costume designed by Léon Bakst.⁸ The performance, however, which took place at the Théâtre du Châtelet, did not meet with the expected success. Debussy's refined music jarring too much with Diaghilev's dionysiac approach to the piece. The Russian company nonetheless commissioned the composer to write a new score, *Jeux*.

If Mallarmé's eclogue is rather forgotten today, the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* remains without any doubt Debussy's most popular work – it has since been transcribed several times for various instrumental combinations⁹ – and a work which eventually inspired many other composers such as Jacques Ibert, whose suite, *Éscales* (1922), particularly in its first movement,

⁷ Debussy, *Correspondance 1884–1918*, pp113–114

⁸ See the photography in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed Stanley Sadie (Macmillan: London, 1980), vol.5, p209

⁹ In addition to Debussy's own transcription for 2 pianos published by Fromont, see: *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. Transcription pour piano à quatre mains par Maurice Ravel (Fromont: Paris, 1910); Transcription pour piano seul par Léonard Borwick (Fromont: Paris, 1914); Transcription pour flûte et piano par Gustave Samazeuilh (Jobert: Paris, 1925); Transcription pour orgue par Alexandre Cellier (Jobert: Paris, 1925).

⁴ Edward Lockspeiser, 'Pierre Louÿs, Neuf lettres à Debussy (1894–1898)', *Revue de musicologie* 48 (1962), p62 (letter dated 23 December 1894)

⁵ Quoted from Lesure, *Claude Debussy*, p158

⁶ Claude Debussy, *Correspondance 1884–1918*, ed. François Lesure (Hermann Éditeurs des sciences et des arts: Paris, 1993), p265

recalls the delicate and colourful atmosphere of the *Prélude*.

Sources

The history of the score is well-documented thanks to the surviving sources supervised by the composer himself:

AFD No title in original

Six numbered folios inscribed *recta* only

Autograph of the final draft ('particell') with instrumental directions: property of the Robert Owen Lehman Foundation, and now deposited at the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. The Foundation financed the publication, in 1963, of a facsimile edition of this source, with an introduction by Roland-Manuel.¹⁰

Inscription:

fol.1r top right-hand corner, in Debussy's hand: 'à ma chère et tres bonne petite Gaby/la sûre affection de/son dévoué/Claude Debussy/Octobre 1899.'

fol.1r top left-hand corner, in Dupont's hand: 'Offert à M^f A.Cortot/par M^{me} G.Lhéry'.

Instrumental directions in red ink (and occasionally in pencil), bar numbers and other details in green pencil.

Debussy dedicated this draft to Gaby (Gabrielle Dupont, his mis-

tress from 1890 to 1898) in October 1899, the same month that he married Rosalie Texier. Gabrielle Dupont (Madame Lhéry) subsequently presented the score to the pianist and collector Alfred Cortot.

AUT Original title (dedication in green pencil): '– à Raymond Bonheur –/Prélude "à l'après midi d'un Faune"/Claude Debussy/92'.

Extent: 26 + 2pp of blank staves

Location: *F-Pn* Grande Réserve Ms.17.685

Autograph MS of the complete score from which the Fromont print was engraved. (This AUT formerly belonged to Madame Jobert-Georges.)

Inscription, p26: 'Septembre 1894'

Barlines and rehearsal numbers in green pencil; tempo indications in blue ink.

PED Original title (p1): 'Prélude/à/ l'après-midi d'un faune/CLAUDE DEBUSSY'.

Extent: 31pp

Location: *US-R* Sibley Music Rare Books, M3.3.D28

Inscriptions:

p1, top right-hand corner: 'Epreuve corrigée/[engraver's signature:] L.Parent/26 juillet 95'; bottom right-hand corner: '[Debussy's monogram]/Mercredi 3 Juillet 95'.

p31, printer's name added in pencil: 'Dupré'.

Proofs of the Fromont edition corrected and dated by Debussy 3 July 1895, now deposited at the Sibley Music Library, Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester (New York).

¹⁰ Claude Debussy, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (The Robert Owen Lehman Foundation: Washington; Lahure: Paris, 1963). Max Pommer described this source and used it as the basis of his edition of the work; see Max Pommer, ed, Claude Debussy, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune/Vorspiel zum Nachmittag eines Faun* (Edition Peters: Leipzig, [1970]).

VI

OED Claude Debussy, 'À Raymond BONHEUR/Prélude/À/"l'après-midi d'un faune"'.
Paris: Eugène Fromont, s.d.

Extent: 31pp

Original edition of 1895¹¹

Plate number: E.1091F.

RDC Claude Debussy, 'À Raymond BONHEUR/Prélude/À/"l'après-midi d'un faune"'.
Paris: Eugène Fromont, s.d.

Extent: 31pp

Location: Collection François Lang, Abbaye de Royaumont, Réserve 7¹²

Debussy's own copy of OED with additions and corrections in red (occasionally in black) ink, and in blue (occasionally in black) pencil.

Inscription, title-page: 'Claude Debussy/64 [crossed out and corrected to '80' in blue pencil] avenue du Bois de Boulogne/Paris'¹³

RDC was obviously in practical use: Debussy's corrections were originally entered in pencil, and eventually erased and rewritten in red ink. Thus, RDC is very likely the copy Debussy used when he conducted the work all over Europe between February 1908 and April 1913.

¹¹ Numerous copies are extant. The title-page of the copy deposited at the Music Department of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Rés. Vma 321) is inscribed thus in Debussy's hand: 'à Raoul Pugno./ en souvenir bien affectueux/de/Claude Debussy./ Oct. 95'. From this annotation, it can be ascertained that the print was available by October 1895.

¹² A description of the volume is available in: *Collection musicale François Lang. Catalogue établi par Denis Herlin* (Klincksieck: Paris, 1993), p59 (no. 200). Vincent d'Indy's copy of OED is also preserved in this collection (no. 201).

¹³ Debussy moved to this apartment with Emma Bardac in the autumn of 1904, and stayed there for the rest of his life. Emma sold RDC to François Lang on 1 December 1933.

RDC is the basis (copy-text) of the present edition.

Editorial Method

It is well-known that Debussy was rather careless in writing down the details of his music and in correcting proofs: accidentals, dynamics, slurs, etc., are occasionally conflicting in similar passages, or even simply forgotten.¹⁴ The directions 'div.' and 'unis', in particular, indicating the division within the respective string desks are extremely confused, even contradictory, in all sources. They are faithfully reproduced here, the realization of the ambiguous places being left to the performer. Moreover, he often revised his scores, and more particularly details of their instrumentation, upon hearing them performed.¹⁵ The present score faithfully reproduces all the revisions Debussy inserted in ink and blue pencil into his own performing copy of the Fromont edition (RDC). OED's misprints and omissions that evaded the composer's detection on the proofs (PED) have been corrected here in accordance with the autograph MS (AUT) and the autograph final draft (AFD), and are documented in the Textual Notes below. Editorial additions are placed in square brackets without further comment. Missing ties and slurs have been restored and are indicated by broken ligatures. Bar numbers are editorial.

Jean-Paul C. Montagnier

¹⁴ The famous *b* played by the first bassoon on the down-beat of b91 of the *Prélude* is a case in point: the engraver, Parent, had it right in the proofs, but Debussy erroneously changed it to an *a-sharp* in PED (p26). There can be no serious doubt that *b* is the correct note: it appears thus in AUT, and the down-beat of b91 is clearly identical to that of b90 where the third horn and cellos play *b*.

¹⁵ For instance the delicate punctuation of harp 1 in b73, the four staccato semiquavers of viola 2 in b93, and various dynamic changes were likely added after the first performance of the *Prélude*.