

11-1-2016

Guest Recital: Boris Berman, piano- Claude Debussy: 24 Preludes

Boris Berman

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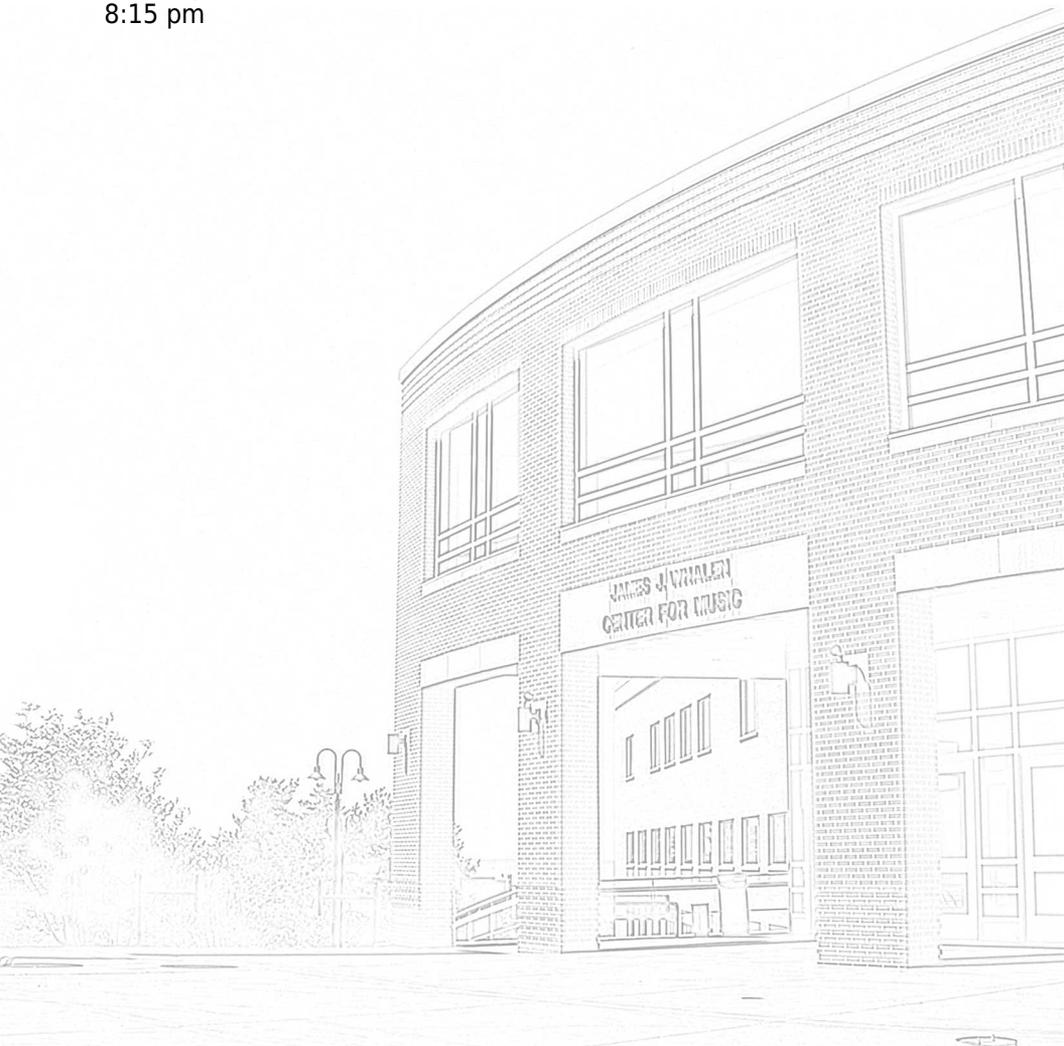
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Guest Recital
Boris Berman, piano

Claude Debussy: 24 Préludes

Ford Hall
Tuesday, November 1st, 2016
8:15 pm



ITHACA COLLEGE

School of Music

Program

Claude Debussy - Preludes

Premier Livre (First Book; 1909-1910)

1. *Danseuses de Delphes* (Dancers of Delphi): Lent et grave

Inspired by the top of a Greek pillar found in the Louvre on which three dancing Bacchantes are sculptured.

2. *Voiles* (Veils or sails): Modéré

Possibly inspired by the shimmering long silk veils of Loie Fuller, the American dancer who was famous in Paris at the turn of the century and well known to Debussy.

3. *Le vent dans la plaine* (The Wind in the Plain): Animé

The title is a line by the eighteenth-century French poet Charles-Simon Favart; it is quoted as an epigraph to Paul Verlaine's poem "*C'est l'extase langoureuse*", set to music by Debussy in 1887.

4. *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir* (The sounds and fragrances swirl through the evening air): Modéré

This is line 3 of Charles Baudelaire's poem "*Harmonie du soir*", set by Debussy in 1887.

5. *Les collines d'Anacapri* (The Hills of Anacapri): Très modéré

The reference is to the village on the island of Capri in the Bay of Naples. According to some accounts, a wine bottle label served as an inspiration.

6. *Des pas sur la neige* (Footsteps in the Snow): Triste et lent

The source of this title has not been traced. Performance indications in the score direct the pianist to create a sound picture of a "sad and icy landscape" and to play the expressive melody close to the end of the Prelude "as a tender and sad regret".

7. *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest* (What the West Wind has seen): Animé et tumultueux

Possibly inspired by the story by Hans Christian Andersen "The Garden of Paradise". Zephyr, the West Wind, "watched the mighty river fall from the rocks in clouds of spray and fly towards the clouds to meet the rainbow... [He] raised a storm that splintered the lofty trees to shavings."

8. *La fille aux cheveux de lin* (The Girl with the Flaxen Hair): Très calme et doucement expressif

The title is taken from the poem by Leconte de Lisle (set by Debussy around

1882), inspired by Robert Burns's "Lassie with the lint-white locks".

9. *La sérénade interrompue* (Interrupted Serenade): Modérément animé

The Spanish flavor of this Prelude is enhanced by allusions to *El Albaicin* from *Iberia* by Isaac Albeniz.

10. *La cathédrale engloutie* (The Engulfed Cathedral): Profondément calme

Inspired by the Celtic legend of submerged city of Ys off Brittany coast. On occasion, when the sea is transparent, out of the waves rises the cathedral of Ys, its bells tolling, its priests intoning; slowly to return again to the depth of the sea.

11. *La danse de Puck* (Puck's Dance): Capricieux et léger

Puck is the character in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which Debussy might know in the 1908 edition illustrated by Arthur Rackham.

12. *Minstrels*: Modéré

American clowns in blackface whom Debussy heard in the promenade of Eastbourne in the south of England in the summer of 1905.

Intermission

Deuxième Livre (Second Book; 1911-1913)

1. *Brouillards* (Mists): Modéré

The source of the title has not been traced. Some writers suggested connections between this Prelude and paintings by James Whistler or Joseph Turner, whom Debussy called "the finest creator of mystery in the whole art."

2. *Feuilles mortes* (Dead Leaves): Lent et mélancolique

This phrase has been used by many poets, including the titles of the books of poems by Georges Turpin and by one of Debussy's lifelong friends, Gabriel Mourey.

3. *La Puerta del Vino* (The Wine Gate): Mouvement de Habanera

Inspired by a postcard sent, supposedly, by Manuel de Falla, which depicted the old gate of the great Moorish palace of Alhambra in Granada.

4. *Les Fées sont d'exquises danseuses* ("Fairies are exquisite dancers"): Rapide et léger

The line is a quotation from *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* by J. M. Barrie, published with illustrations of Arthur Rackham.

5. *Bruyères* (Heather): Calme

The source of the title is unknown. It seems to serve as a “Scottish” counterpart in the Second Book to *La fille aux cheveux de lin* of the First Book.

6. *Général Lavine - eccentric: Dans le style et le mouvement d'un Cakewalk*

Edward Lavine was a famous American clown who performed at the Marigny Theater in Paris. He was part juggler, part clown, both tramp and soldier, dressed in a bizarre costume.

7. *La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune* (The Terrace of Moonlit Audiences): Lent

The title is taken from the article from a newspaper *Le Temps* by its correspondent in India René Puaux. Describing the 1912 coronation of George V he wrote about “the hall of victory, the hall of pleasure, the garden of the sultanas, the terrace for moonlit audiences”.

8. *Ondine* (Undine): Scherzando

Probably inspired by the book with the same title by Baron Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué; it was published with illustrations by Arthur Rackham.

9. *Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C.* (Homage to S. Pickwick Esq. G[eneral] C[hairman] M[ember] P[ickwick] C[lub]): Grave

A character from Charles Dickens’s *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*.

10. *Canope* (Canopic jar): Très calme et doucement triste

An Egyptian funerary urn, the lid of which Debussy kept on his work table.

11. *Les tierces alternées* (Alternating Thirds): Modérément animé

This only non-descriptive title among the Preludes anticipates Debussy’s next big work for the piano, Twelve Etudes

12. *Feux d'artifice* (Fireworks): Modérément animé

The quotation of *La Marseillaise* at the end of the piece suggests it to be a depiction of the celebration of The Bastille Day (July 14).

Sources:

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Thompson, Oscar. 1967. *Debussy: Man and Artist*. New York, New York: Dover

Boris Berman

Boris Berman is regularly performing in more than fifty countries on six continents. His highly acclaimed performances have included appearances with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Gewandhaus Orchestra, The Philharmonia (London), the Toronto Symphony, Israel Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, Houston Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, St. Petersburg Philharmonic, and the Royal Scottish Orchestra. A frequent performer on major recital series, he has also appeared in many important festivals.

Born in Moscow, he studied at Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory with the distinguished pianist Lev Oborin. In 1973, he left a flourishing career in the Soviet Union to immigrate to Israel where he quickly established himself as one of the most sought-after keyboard performers. Presently, he resides in New Haven, USA.

A teacher of international stature, Boris Berman heads the Piano Department of Yale School of Music and conducts master classes throughout the world. He has been named a Honorary Professor of Shanghai Conservatory and of the Danish Royal Conservatory in Copenhagen. He is frequently invited to join juries of various international competitions.

A Grammy nominee, Mr. Berman's recorded all solo piano works by Prokofiev and Schnittke, complete sonatas by Scriabin, works by Mozart, Weber, Schumann, Brahms, Franck, Shostakovich, Debussy, Stravinsky, Berio, Cage, and Joplin.

In 2000, the prestigious Yale University Press published Professor Berman's *Notes from the Pianist's Bench*. In this book, he explores issues of piano technique and music interpretation. The book has been translated to several languages. In 2008, Yale University Press has published Boris Berman's *Prokofiev's Piano Sonatas: A Guide for the Listener and the Performer*. Boris Berman has also been an editor of the new critical edition of Piano Sonatas by Prokofiev (Shanghai Music Publishing House).