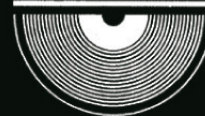


Debussy que J' Aime

STERLING



BRENDA LUCAS OGDON - PIANO



Debussy que J' Aime

IMAGES Book One

- | | | |
|----|--------------------|-------|
| 1. | Reflets dans l'eau | 6'14" |
| 2. | Hommage à Rameau | 7'45" |

IMAGES Book Two

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 3. | Cloches à travers les feuilles | 5'46" |
| 4. | La plus que lente | 5'14" |
| 5. | Rêverie | 5'12" |
| 6. | Clair de lune - Suite Bergamasque | 5'14" |

Préludes pour piano, Book 1

- | | | |
|-----|--|-------|
| 7. | Preludes No. 1 - Danseuses de Delphes | 5'12" |
| 8. | Preludes No. 2 - Voiles | 4'25" |
| 9. | Preludes No. 3 - Le vent dans la plaine | 3'08" |
| 10. | Preludes No. 4 - Le sons et les parfums | 4'18" |
| 11. | Preludes No. 5 - Les collines d'Anacapri | 4'13" |
| 12. | Preludes No. 6 - Des pas sur la neige | 4'16" |
| 13. | Preludes No. 7 - Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest | 5'30" |
| 14. | Preludes No. 8 - La fille aux cheveux de lin | 2'59" |
| 15. | Preludes No. 10 - La cathédrale engloutie | 6'50" |

Disc running time

74'17"

Programme Notes

Unlike his contemporary, Ravel (1875-1937, a selection of whose piano music Brenda Ogdon recorded in 2021; *Ravel que j'aime*, Sterling Records CDA1855), who was at best a mediocre player, Claude Debussy (1862-1918) was highly capable and could have made a career as a pianist had he been minded to, and not seduced by the siren song of composition. He entered the Paris Conservatoire aged just ten as a piano student, joining the class of Antoine François Marmontel (1816-98). As a student, Debussy—named ‘Achille Claude’ at birth, christened ‘Claude-Achille’ in 1864, and known variously by either forename until he settled on just ‘Claude’ in the mid-1890s—was employed as a pianist, including as accompanist for Marie-Blanche Vasnier’s singing classes (1880-4), and in the household of Tchaikovsky’s patroness, Nadezhda von Meck (1880-2).

After winning the 1884 Prix de Rome competition, Debussy travelled to Italy, met Liszt, whose music and bearing made a considerable impression, adding to his determination to follow his own path, which had already brought him into conflict with his teachers at the Conservatoire. Back in Paris, he fell in with the refined, unconventional Erik Satie (1866-1925). By this time (1890), Debussy had composed the meditative ***Rêverie*** [track 5] one of his first pieces to make a wider impact. It may have been drafted in the early 1880s—Debussy later contended he had written it in a hurry—but was only published (by Choudens) in 1891. Whatever the date, many typical Debussyan traits were already present: restraint, the music mostly gentle and quiet—though more fervent in the central section—beautifully laid out for the instrument, and evocative. Yet in 1904 Debussy disowned it, stating it was “of no consequence and ... no

good.” Composers are not always the best judges of their music.

Debussy probably began the composition of the *Suite bergamasque* in 1890, though its completion is unclear; set to be published (by Choudens again) in 1891, it was not printed, and the manuscript was lost. Fromont issued it in a revised form only in 1905. Of the four movements, all have been eclipsed by the third, ***Clair de lune*** (‘Moonlight’; the 1890 title was *Promenade sentimentale*) [track 6], arguably Debussy’s most popular individual invention and one of the most recognisable pieces of music ever penned. Marked *Andante très expressif*, this gentle tone poem in D flat major takes its title from a poem by Paul Verlaine (1844-96), which Debussy had twice set as a song previously. Following an A—B—A design, the calm opening music returns at the close framing a livelier central section which briefly shifts to E major. The rippling textures in the left hand throughout the piece may suggest a soft breeze on a moonlit lake.

None of the other works in this programme endured such prolonged or uncertain geneses. *Images, Book 1* (1901-3, though likely refined prior to publication in 1905) opens with ***Reflets dans l’eau*** (‘Reflections in the water’) [track 1]. This shares the same key—D flat major—and sense of calm as *Clair de lune*, however, there is a more pronounced sense of motion, achieved by its rapidly flowing arpeggios, counterpointed by gentle staccato notes creating the effect of constantly running water while the reflection remains largely undisturbed. One of Debussy’s subtlest, most exquisite creations, the reflections might also be of the moon.

Hommage à Rameau [track 2] is a wistful sarabande closer to the manner of *Suite bergamasque*, possibly inspired by a performance Debussy reviewed

in 1903 of Rameau's opera *Castor et Pollux* (1737) in Paris. Its sedate discourse contains neither quote from nor allusion to Rameau's music. The final piece of *Book 1* is *Mouvement* (not featured here), a gentle perpetuum mobile in C, but Brenda Ogdon plays instead the first item from *Book 2* (1907), ***Cloches à travers les feuilles*** ('Bells through the leaves') [track 3]. Two *forte* chords in the central section aside, the dynamics in this delicate study are *pianissimo* or *piano* throughout, and it is composed using a whole-tone scale (i.e. without using semitonal steps) rooted on B, giving the music an ethereal quality, although its central section is in E major. The church bells of Rahon—a village in the Jura region where the composer's friend, musicologist, and fellow Rameau enthusiast Louis Laloy (1874-1944) lived—provided inspiration, the rippling textures suggesting the church steeple viewed through leaves gently waving in the breeze.

Debussy specified, in early editions of the *Préludes, Book 1* (1909-10) [tracks 7-15], that the descriptive titles be placed at the *end* of each piece to allow pianists to experience each unhampered by its name. Most early interpreters, Debussy included, usually played selections from each book, rather than the full set, allowing flexibility for each performer. Brenda Ogdon here performs nine—in their published sequence—omitting only the ninth, *Le sérénade interrompue*, and the final pair, *La danse de Puck* and *Minstrels*. The first is ***Danseuses de Delph*** ('Dancers at Delphi'), a sarabande Debussy composed after seeing a reproduction of the then recently discovered (1894) fourth century BCE sculpture from Ancient Greece of the same name, depicting three girls dancing atop an acanthus column. The three contemplative sections echo the three figures and their fluid motion, caught in stone. ***Voiles***, whose title

can be translated as either ‘Sails’ or ‘Veils’ (Debussy’s widow confirmed in 1924 that ‘Sails’ was correct), again uses the whole-tone scale, as well as the pentatonic. In a modified ternary (A—B—A) form, the central episode is the liveliest. The more animated ***Le vent dans la plaine*** derives its form from a line of poetry, *Le vent dans la plaine suspend son haleine*, “the wind in the plain holds its breath”, and the music does just that as it blows and subsides, only to suddenly burst out again.

In ***Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir*** (“The sounds and fragrances swirl through the evening air”), Debussy took a line by Baudelaire to cultivate a languorous atmosphere, full of the scent of evening, though its swirl is slow, indeed. By contrast, ***Les collines d’Anacapri*** (“The hills of Anacapri”) is more capricious, at least in its outer sections. Here Debussy’s imagination flew back to Italy, and the Isle of Capri which he visited several times. This lively toccata in B major quotes two popular ditties, one a suggestive love song. After the sultry heat of Italy, winter is evoked in the sixth prelude, ***Des pas sur la neige*** (‘Footsteps in the snow’), the music’s slow tread suggesting trudging through a snowdrift, the quietude reminiscent of the dampening effect lying snow has on sound. ***Ce qu’a vu le vent d’ouest*** (‘What the West Wind has seen’), is different again, one of the most eruptive pieces that Debussy ever wrote, its insistent, turbulent fury placing it expressively somewhere between the *Allegro barbaros* of Alkan and Bartók. No greater contrast could be found with the next prelude, one of the composer’s most famous pieces, ***La fille aux cheveux de lin*** (“The girl with the flaxen hair”), the title taken from a poem by Leconte de Lisle. Debussy paints a delicate portrait of his subject, who may be Marie-Blanche Vasnier,

the singer whose classes he accompanied in the 1880s and with whom he had had an affair. This may account for the prevailing atmosphere of nostalgia, as of a fond memory, and the unusual simplicity of the harmonic language. The tenth prelude, *La cathédrale engloutie* (“The sunken cathedral”), is a powerful tone picture, its imposing grandeur inspired by the Breton legend of the Cathedral of Ys which sank beneath the waves as a consequence of the local people’s venality. It was said the bells could be heard tolling in the depths, a musical image Debussy evoked in this longest of the set.

La plus que lente (1910) [track 4] was composed just after the *Préludes*’ publication. Although conceived as a piano piece, it was first performed in the New Carlton Hotel in Paris in an arrangement for strings by the *faux*-gypsy violinist Léoni, whose playing had—allegedly—in part inspired it and to whom Debussy gave the manuscript. (Debussy made his own arrangement in 1912 for a small ensemble of flute, clarinet, cimbalom, piano, and strings.) The title translates as “the more than slow”, and while the prevailing mood is one of melancholy, it is a parody of the French valse lente, the popularity of which irked Debussy immensely. The tempo marking, *Molto rubato con morbidezza*, mandates a supple and variable tempo, with softness and delicacy not unlike the subtle flesh tones in Renaissance art. Consequently, durations of this marvellous waltz-fantasy vary widely: Artur Schnabel typically took just four minutes, most lie between four-and-a-half minutes (Daniel Barenboim) to around five (Brenda Ogdon, as here); others can run closer to six minutes. The end result is, parody or no, a slow waltz that outshone its competition.

© GUY RICKARDS 2024

Brenda Lucas Ogdon

Brenda graduated with Honours from the Royal Northern College of Music in 1957, having previously won the Gold Medal from the ABRSM in 1949 aged 13 years for the highest Distinction marks in any practical Grade 7 throughout the UK and Eire.

John Ogdon was a student at the Royal Northern College at the same time as Brenda and they were married in 1960.

Brenda embarked on a solo piano career, making her first appearance with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra at the age of 21 and giving solo recitals for the BBC from the Manchester Studio. She also gave a solo recital at the Wigmore Hall during the early 60s.

John and Brenda performed as a two-piano partnership and were invited to play at several major festivals, such as Edinburgh (1962/63) Cheltenham, Aldeburgh in the UK and Sintra in Portugal to name but a few.

Brenda has appeared with the following orchestras: in the UK - the London Symphony, BBC Scottish Symphony, Royal Philharmonic, Birmingham Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, London Philharmonic. In the U.S.A, - Minnesota, Dartmouth College, Houston Symphony. In Australia - all of the principal orchestras.

In 1985 Brenda and John toured in the Soviet Union, giving duo recitals in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev.

In 1993, Brenda founded the John Ogdon Foundation - a Charity dedicated to the preservation of John's memory and musicianship.

In 1996 Brenda gave recitals in Hong Kong and broadcast on film for RTHK. Further appearances in the U.S.A. include solo recitals in Dallas, Texas, Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Indiana University and more recently in 2003, at Colby College in Maine.

In 1997 Brenda appeared on the South Bank at a Gala Concert for John Ogdon's 60th Birthday and at another Gala in the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 1999 with three other international pianists.

Records are available by John Ogdon and Brenda Lucas on Warner Classics; Universal Music; a CD of John Ogdon Compositions performed by Brenda was issued by the John Ogdon Foundation in 2005.

Brenda has recently released a solo record of J.S. Bach's Book 2 of The Well Tempered Clavier through Sterling Records in November 2018.

Further details are at www.brendalucasogdon.com.

A Selection of Brenda's reviews

"always technically adept and fluent" - Evening Standard

"a reading of insight and devoted understanding" - Birmingham Post

"Throughout she played with elegance, a sure technical command and the full involvement and fluidity of movement of arms and upper body - she brings a unique Personality - she elicited tones of exquisite beauty from the Steinway Model DPiano." - Ellesworth American 2003

"Ogdon and Lucas make a fine musical Duo, with brilliant techniques and a sure unanimous grasp of rhythmic energy and sweeping eloquent phrasing. Warmly recommended Rachmaniov." - Manchester Evening News 1989

Producer - Annabel Connellan
Engineer - Ben Connellan
Booklet notes - Guy Rickards
Booklet design - AliCat Design
Photograph - Joanna Hudson Photography, Cambridge



West Road Concert Hall, University of Cambridge December 2023.
Piano technician Iain Kilpatrick. Piano Steinway Model D.
Assistant to Brenda Lucas Ogdon, Annabel Ogdon.

Debussy que J'Aime

BRENDA LUCAS OGDON - PIANO

IMAGES Book One

- | | | |
|----|--------------------|-------|
| 1. | Reflets dans l'eau | 6'14" |
| 2. | Hommage à Rameau | 7'45" |

IMAGES Book Two

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 3. | Cloches à travers les feuilles | 5'46" |
| 4. | La plus que lente | 5'14" |
| 5. | Rêverie | 5'12" |
| 6. | Clair de lune - Suite Bergamasque | 5'14" |

Préludes pour piano, Book 1

- | | | |
|-----|--|-------|
| 7. | Preludes No. 1 - Danseuses de Delphes | 5'12" |
| 8. | Preludes No. 2 - Voiles | 4'25" |
| 9. | Preludes No. 3 - Le vent dans la plaine | 3'08" |
| 10. | Preludes No. 4 - Le sons et les parfums | 4'18" |
| 11. | Preludes No. 5 - Les collines d'Anacapri | 4'13" |
| 12. | Preludes No. 6 - Des pas sur la neige | 4'16" |
| 13. | Preludes No. 7 - Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest | 5'30" |
| 14. | Preludes No. 8 - La fille aux cheveux de lin | 2'59" |
| 15. | Preludes No. 10 - La cathédrale engloutie | 6'50" |

Disc running time **74'17"**

CDA 1877



Jubilee
1924-1974-2024