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## Debussy and the theatre

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Debussy in June 1913 between the composition of *Jeux* and *La boîte à joujoux*. Charcoal drawing by Ivan Thièle (Tretiakov Museum, Moscow)

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ROBERT ORLEDGE

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## Preface

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As its title suggests, the present study aims to give as full and varied a picture of Debussy's theatrical experiences as possible; it examines Debussy both as an uncompromising composer for the stage, trying to create works of the highest calibre which would survive the harshest treatment in rehearsal, performance and revival, and as a man of the theatre, responding to the multifarious characters and situations of its evanescent yet compulsive world. The story of this love–hate relationship is told, as far as it can be, in the composer's own words or from contemporary documents. Accounts of Debussy reacting to events in the theatre thus take precedence over such things as critical reviews of *Pelléas et Mélisande* or the popularity and frequency of its global revivals, because these relate to Debussy only at second-hand. Detailed formal analyses and complex manuscript studies make tedious reading and are indulged in only where they are of particular dramatic relevance. Much is made of what has been called Debussy's 'compulsive inachievement' (Holloway, p. 233), and reasons and excuses are assembled gradually chapter by chapter as to why he contemplated so many theatrical projects yet completed so few (and it should be remembered that in his view no two dramatic works were even remotely comparable). Finally, the reasons are separated from the excuses in Part V, which also attempts to place Debussy in a wider theatrical perspective.

*Pelléas et Mélisande*, as the turning-point in Debussy's career, naturally receives a substantial chapter; the climate in which it was created and Debussy's contemporary attitudes are explored in detail. Works are considered chronologically by genre, except in Chapter 6 where it is profitable to discuss Debussy's relationship with Diaghilev as a whole before dealing with *Jeux*, the only new ballet composed for the Russian company. Thus *Masques et bergamasques* is included here and not in Chapter 12, together with the *Prélude, interlude et paraphrase finale pour l'après-midi d'un faune*, which belongs generically in Chapter 11. The incomplete or unstarted projects are divided before and after the composition of *Pelléas* between Chapters 2 and 12, and

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xii Preface

*As you like it*, which stretches from 1886 to 1917 in various formats – characteristically without a note of surviving music – is classed with the latter. The collaborations with René Peter and Gabriel Mourey are discussed as groups in Chapter 11.

Whilst much of the information and many of the extracts in this book can be found elsewhere, they have never before been collated in a single source. As the material has taken almost a decade to assemble and organise, it is hoped that the end result will make at least some worthwhile contribution to Debussy scholarship, even though it may reasonably be argued that a large proportion of it deals with the incomplete, the ephemeral or the non-existent. Summarised plots have been included for all important works except *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and for better or worse I have made my own English translation of almost all the original documents used. No discography is included because Margaret Cobb's excellent catalogue (1975) is available for records up to 1950. After that date it is best to consult current catalogues and select through personal preference, though one will be bound to lament the unavailability of the superb *Pelléas* recordings by Inghelbrecht and Désormière. For a fuller pictorial documentation I should like to draw readers' attention to François Lesure's *Iconographie musicale*, where Plates 58–85 comprehensively evoke the world of *Pelléas et Mélisande* and Plates 139–55 recreate at least some of the magic that once was the legendary Ballets Russes. I make no excuses for not contributing yet another life and works for the brimming bookshelves of Debussyophiles, and none for assuming a certain degree of specialist knowledge in my potential readers. Whilst only five per cent of French men and women had even *heard* of Debussy in a poll conducted by the magazine *Diapason* in 1979, I like to think that the percentage may be somewhat higher in England. Perhaps the present volume will even result in some conversions: I certainly hope so.

Robert Orledge  
Liverpool, March 1981

## Acknowledgments

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I have received so much generous assistance from so many sources on both sides of the Atlantic during the preparation of this book that I hardly know where to begin my thanks. Indeed, one of the most impressive things about almost all the Debussy scholars whom it has been my privilege to know is the way they put their cause above personal motives in the unselfish spirit of research; I can only hope that this book meets with their approval and helps in part to repay my debt of gratitude to them. In England I think particularly of Dr Roy Howat, Dr Roger Nichols and Mr Richard Langham Smith; in France of MM. Jean-Michel Nectoux and François Lesure; and in America of Mrs Margaret G. Cobb, who has perhaps done more than anyone to further *le cas Debussy* in her own quiet way, and who kindly allowed me access to and permission to quote from her collection of autograph material.

In America too I should like to thank the staff of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, and especially J. Rigbie Turner. Also Elaine Dunlap and the staff at the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Both libraries have sent me and allowed me to consult and quote from unpublished material in their collections. I should also like to thank for assistance of various kinds Mr James J. Fuld; Professor David Grayson; Dr Ralph Locke; Dr Marie Rolf; Dr William Weber; Professor Arthur Wenk; and the staff of the following libraries: the New England Conservatory of Music, Boston; the Music Division of the Library of Congress, Washington DC; the Houghton Library of Harvard University; the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in the New York Public Library; and the Los Angeles Public Library and County Law Library.

In France I should like to thank the publishing house of Durand et Cie and especially M. Guy Kaufmann and Mme Odette Vidal for making me so welcome when I consulted letters, contracts and manuscripts from the Durand archives on numerous occasions. I am also grateful for permission to quote from unpublished material in these archives and from published music by Debussy. For similar access to unpublished material in France, I should like

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xiv Acknowledgments

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In England I should like to thank Dr Patrick Buckland; Mr H. Montgomery Hyde; Mr Michael Kettle; Mrs Doris Langley Moore; Mr Joseph Winter; and Mr Alexander Schouvaloff and the staff of the Victoria and Albert Theatre Museum for assistance with my Maud Allan problems. Also Mr Hugh Cobbe and the staffs of the British Library Music Department and the Sydney Jones Library of Liverpool University for help of various kinds; Dr Michael Talbot for help with German translation; Mr James Stammers and the Liverpool University Central Photographic Service for help with illustrations; Mr Brian Merrikin Hill for bringing the Saint-Pol-Roux project *La dame à la faux* to my attention and for providing me with much relevant information on the subject; and Dr Michael de Cossart for invaluable advice and encouragement during the various stages of this book's preparation. I should also like to express my gratitude to Professor Hugh Macdonald and my hard-working editors Clare Davies-Jones, Rosemary Dooley and Rosemary Roberts who were responsible for my original Debussyan dreams becoming the reality of the present monograph.

Lastly, I owe an enormous debt to the University of Liverpool for granting me a sabbatical year in 1980-1 to write this book and for financial assistance from the Research and Senate Staff Travelling Expenses Funds with my research in France and America. Without this practical help and, of course, the constant support and very necessary encouragement of my head of department, Professor Basil Smallman, *Debussy and the theatre* might never have seen the light of day.

## Abbreviations

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### General abbreviations

Cie	Compagnie
cond.	conducted by
Dos.	Dossier
facs.	facsimile
f., ff.	folio, folios
incl.	includes, including
M.	Monsieur
MS, MSS	manuscript, manuscripts
OS	orchestral score
prem.	première
R, red.	(piano) reduction
repr.	reprinted
Rés.	Reserve collection ( <i>F-Pn</i> , <i>F-Po</i> )
rev.	revised
VS	vocal score

Other general abbreviations (including those for instrument names), used largely in the Appendix, are listed on pp. 303-4.

### Bibliographical abbreviations

<i>AMw</i>	<i>Archiv für Musikwissenschaft</i>
<i>CMc</i>	<i>Current musicology</i>
<i>FAM</i>	<i>Fontes artis musicae</i>
<i>Mf</i>	<i>Die Musikforschung</i>
<i>ML</i>	<i>Music and letters</i>
<i>MQ</i>	<i>The musical quarterly</i>
<i>MR</i>	<i>The music review</i>
<i>MT</i>	<i>The musical times</i>
<i>NZfM</i>	<i>Neue Zeitschrift für Musik</i>
<i>RBM</i>	<i>Revue belge de musicologie</i>
<i>RdM</i>	<i>Revue de musicologie</i>
<i>ReB</i>	<i>La revue blanche</i>
<i>ReM</i>	<i>La revue musicale</i> (1920–)
<i>SMz</i>	<i>Schweizerische Musikzeitung/Revue musicale suisse</i>

xvi Abbreviations

**Library sigla**

**CH:** Switzerland

- B* Basle, private collection  
*Gbodmer* Coligny-Geneva, Dr Martin Bodmer, private collection

**F:** France

- ASO* Asnières-sur-Oise, François Lang, private collection at the Abbaye de Royaumont (now the property of Mme Henry Göüin)  
*Pan* Paris, Archives Nationales  
*Pdavid* Paris, André David, private collection  
*Pdurand* Paris, Archives of Durand et Cie  
*Phoérée* Paris, Arthur Hoérée, private collection  
*Pjobert* Paris, Mme Jobert-Georges, private collection  
*Plifar* Paris, Serge Lifar, private collection  
*Pmeyer* Paris, André Meyer, private collection  
*Pn* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Département de la Musique  
*Po* Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Opéra  
*Ppincherle* Paris, Marc Pincherle, private collection  
*Ppolignac* Paris, Polignac family, private collection  
*Pprunières* Paris, Henry Prunières, private collection  
*Ptinan* Paris, Mme Gaston de Tinan, private collection

**GB:** Great Britain

- Lbm* London, British Library, Reference Division (formerly British Museum)  
*Lrussell* London, Sheridan Russell, private collection

**US:** United States of America

- AUS* Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin  
*Bc* Boston, New England Conservatory of Music  
*NH* New Haven, Yale University, School of Music Library  
*NYcobb* New York, Margaret G. Cobb, private collection  
*NYhorowitz* New York, Wanda Horowitz, private collection  
*NYpm* New York, Pierpont Morgan Library  
*R* University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, Sibley Music Library  
*STu* Stanford University, Division of Humanities and Social Sciences, Music Library  
*We* Washington DC, Library of Congress, Music Division

**Abbreviations for recurring sources**

- AND** Andrieux, G.: catalogue of sale (1 Dec 1933) at Hôtel Drouot, Paris, incl. the collection of Emma Debussy (MSS, pp. 34-9)  
**ANN** Tosi, Guy (ed.): *Debussy et d'Annunzio. Correspondance inédite* (Paris, Denoël, 1948)  
**BAR** Vallery-Radot, Pasteur (ed.): *Lettres de Claude Debussy à sa femme Emma* [formerly Bardac] (Paris, Flammarion, 1957)  
**CAP** Lockspeiser, Edward (ed.): *Lettres inédites à André Caplet (1908-1914)* (Monaco, Éditions du Rocher, 1957)  
**DUR** Durand, Jacques (ed.): *Lettres de Claude Debussy à son éditeur* (Paris, Durand, 1927)



## Abbreviations

xvii

- GOD Jean-Aubry, Georges (ed.): *Lettres à deux amis. Soixante-dix-huit lettres inédites à Robert Godet et Georges Jean-Aubry* (Paris, Librairie José Corti, 1942)
- LCat Lesure, François: *Catalogue de l'oeuvre de Claude Debussy* (Geneva, Éditions Minkoff, 1977)
- LCr Lesure, François (ed.): *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits. Édition complète de son oeuvre critique* (Paris, Gallimard, 1971)
- LL Lesure, François (ed.): *Claude Debussy: lettres 1884-1918* (Paris, Hermann, 1980)
- LO Lockspeiser, Edward: *Debussy: his life and mind*, 2 vols. (London, Cassell, 1962, 1965; repr. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979)
- LOU Borgeaud, Henri (ed.): *Correspondance de Claude Debussy et Pierre Louÿs (1893-1904)* (Paris, Librairie José Corti, 1945)
- LPm Lesure, François (ed.): *Esquisses de 'Pelléas et Mélisande' (1893-1895)*, facs. with introduction by François Lesure (Geneva, Éditions Minkoff, 1977)
- MES André-Messenger, Jean (ed.): *L'enfance de Pelléas. Lettres de Claude Debussy à André Messenger* (Paris, Dorbon-Ainé, 1938)
- PET Peter, René: *Claude Debussy* (Paris, Gallimard, 1952) [rev. and expanded edn (incl. letters) of *Claude Debussy. Vues prises de son intimité* (Paris, Gallimard, 1944)]
- POE Lockspeiser, Edward (ed.): *Debussy et Edgar Poe. Documents inédits* (Monaco, Éditions du Rocher, 1962)
- RLS Smith, Richard Langham (ed. and trans.): *Debussy on music* (London, Secker and Warburg, 1977) [based on *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, ed. François Lesure (LCr above), but with extra items by Debussy and additional introductions]
- SEG Joly-Segalen, Annie, and Schaeffner, André (eds.): *Segalen et Debussy* (Monaco, Éditions du Rocher, 1962)
- TOU Martineau, Henri (ed.): *Correspondance de Claude Debussy et Paul-Jean Toulet* (Paris, Le Divan, 1929)

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To Charles McFeeters

For a composer there is really only one route to follow to make a name for himself, and that is the theatre.

(Charles Gounod: *Mémoires d'un artiste*  
(Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1896), p. 175)