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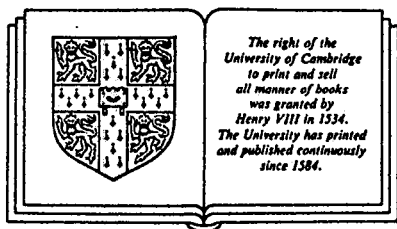
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To Ian Kemp

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Preface

Debussy's writings are too well sprinkled with pungent remarks about analysis to be of comfort to anyone contemplating analysis of his music. 'Grownups ... still try to explain things, dismantle them and quite heartlessly kill all their mystery', he complained in 1901, in his very first piece of published musical criticism. But his attitude was not so simple. 'The need to understand – so rare among artists – was innate in Rameau. Was it not to satisfy that need that he wrote his *Traité de l'harmonie ...?*', we find him writing some years later. The contrast suggests he had strong feelings about what was useful and what was futile in musical analysis, as well as a constant sensitivity towards whatever in music defies words. If this book takes the analytic plunge, then, it is with the belief that an understanding of some of the mechanisms Debussy used for organizing and conveying his inspirations – consciously or not – should only enhance our awareness of the real mystery that lies inviolable behind the inner strength of his musical ideas.

Since the analyses here are intricate, and trace some strict logic, it is as well to say straight away that they constitute no attempt to contradict the well-documented view of Debussy as a thoroughly instinctive artist, a communicator of the elusive momentary intuition. But if logic is visible in the score, it is there whether the composer was conscious of it or not; if he was conscious of it, the fact does no injury to the potency of his instinct. The more original and mysterious the intuition, the more precise new techniques have to be found to communicate it successfully. Jules Laforgue, one of Debussy's literary idols and another thoroughly intuitive artist, took up the cudgels for this argument in his *Notes d'esthétiques*, countering Ernest Renan's contention that knowledge and science weaken instinct. 'That is to misunderstand the word *instinct*', Laforgue argues back; 'In art there will always be, as there always was, instinct and reflection, inspirational or divining instinct and knowledge or science.' In fact the question of this duality was at the heart of the artistic circles in which Debussy moved in his formative years, and is discussed thoroughly in Chapter 11 below, as it gives added impetus to the preceding analyses.

To accompany the analyses, four of Debussy's works are reproduced here in their entirety as Appendix 3: the song 'Spleen' (from the *Ariettes oubliées*), and the piano pieces 'Clair de lune' (from the *Suite bergamasque*), *L'isle joyeuse*, and 'Reflets dans l'eau' (from the first series of *Images*). For the main analysis, though – of *La mer* – this is impracticable, and the reader will have to obtain a score to

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follow the analysis properly. The same applies to the other works studied more briefly in Chapters 3 and 11 and in Appendix 2; all of them are easily obtainable. The opportunity has been taken of presenting the four pieces in Appendix 3 in corrected editions.

All references to literary sources in the text are identified by author and title or date of publication, plus page number if apt; the sources can then be identified in full from the Bibliography. This method helps to avoid a jungle of notes.

Preparation of the book has been enormously helped by the use of computer to store and edit the text; for invaluable help in this, and for many perceptive comments, I am indebted to Andrew Uttley. In 1973 the Centre de Documentation Claude Debussy opened at Debussy's natal town of St Germain-en-Laye, and I was fortunate to be able to work there throughout 1976. To its former *animatrice* Mrs Margaret G. Cobb I am grateful for information and encouragement which have continued in large measure since her retirement from the Centre Debussy in 1976. Professor Ian Kemp supervised this work's initial preparation as a doctoral thesis (Howat 1979); for his encouragement and guidance I owe a large debt of gratitude, and to him the book is dedicated with affection.

This whole venture was made possible by a research grant from the Scottish Education Department, followed by a Research Fellowship from Jesus College, Cambridge; to them I express thanks. Many other friends and colleagues have contributed ideas, critical comments and useful information; I beg forgiveness for not filling pages with all their names. Special thanks are due, though, to Roger Nichols and Dr Robert Orledge, who gave of their time to read and discuss the work in progress, supplying much helpful advice and information. I am also grateful to Mme I. Gouin for the opportunity to work on Debussy material in the library of her late brother François Lang, at the Abbaye de Royaumont, France; and to Mrs Louise Varèse for allowing me to study Debussy's annotated printed copy of *La mer*. Debussy's stepdaughter Mme G. de Tinan (the former Dolly Bardac) kindly allowed me to examine Debussy manuscripts and proofs in her possession, and reminisced fascinatingly about her childhood years in the Debussy household. ('Il était très secret', though, was the only information she could furnish on how Debussy worked.) Rosemary Dooley and Eric Van Tassel, of Cambridge University Press, have my gratitude for their encouragement and patient help in bringing the book *au point*. In addition to those acknowledged specifically in the following chapters, others who have been of particular help include the firm of Durand et Cie; Dr John Gage; Dr Douglass Green; Richard Langham Smith; M. François Lesure; M. Jean-Michel Nectoux; Dr Marie Rolf; Professor Julian Rushton; Mrs Eileen Uttley; and the staffs of the Pendlebury, Rowe, History of Art and University Libraries, Cambridge, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin, and the Sibley Music Library of the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester.

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Chapter 3 and Appendix 2 below contain some material previously published in Howat (1977), included here by kind permission of the editors of *Music & Letters*. Music examples 1, 4, 6, 7, 27 and 28 are reproduced by kind permission of Durand S.A., Editions Musicales, and Société des Editions Jobert, Paris.

Roy Howat
Cambridge, 1981

Note: In this book, where pitches are named in a specific octave, the following code is used (c' = middle C; each octave is deemed to begin on C and rise to B): C–B c–b c'–b' c''–b'' c'''–b'''.