

The finale, *Golliwog's Cake Walk*, was described by Ernest Hutcheson as 'a merry romp before bedtime'. Debussy emphasized the 'strong, sharp rhythm' with a contrasting free middle episode. At the point marked *avec une grande émotion* (with great emotion), he advised the player not to be afraid of exaggerating this aspect.

*La plus que lente* (The more than slow), a waltz composed in 1910, was first performed in Paris in 1911 by Madame Delage-Prat. Marked *Lent (molto rubato con morbidezza)* (Slow, with much rubato and soft sweetness), the work is to be played with a flexible tempo. The waltz is characterised by a simple theme running like a single thread throughout. A middle episode changes key to allow the theme to be seen in different colours and harmonic patterns. The guitar arrangement makes effective use of high harmonics and gives the composition an emotionally reflective atmosphere which surely Debussy would have appreciated.

The concept of 'arabesque' was first used during the Moorish conquest of Spain to describe ornamented friezes in architecture and painting as in the Alhambra Palace,

Granada. The term was first employed for piano pieces by Stephen Heller (1818–1838) for his *Op. 49* and by Schumann (1810–1856) in his *Op. 18*. However, Debussy's *Deux arabesques* (composed 1888–91) have been acclaimed as archetypal examples of the arabesque style in which decorative effects are predominant. Among the earliest of Debussy's piano compositions, they were described by Edward Lockspeiser as 'graceful reproductions of the ballet style of Delibes' with 'perhaps a hint of Schumann's *Phantasiestücke*'.

The first *Arabesque* is very idiomatic for two guitars with its plaintive melody and intricate arpeggios woven round the theme. A middle section, marked *Tempo rubato (un peu moins vite)* (Tempo rubato, a little less quick) provides a thoughtful interlude before the recapitulation of the opening material. The second of these, marked *Allegretto scherzando*, and *très léger* (very light), uses a delicate filigree of rapid triplets with a contrasting middle episode of great charm.

Graham Wade

#### ChromaDuo Tracy Anne Smith and Rob MacDonald

A dedicated voice in the contemporary music world, ChromaDuo is vigorously developing and presenting some of today's most evocative, lyrical, and exhilarating music. ChromaDuo has commissioned and given premières of works from the incomparable Parisian Roland Dyens, irreverent British powerhouse Stephen Goss, polyrhythmic mystic Dusan Bogdanovic, and emerging major American talent Christopher William Pierce. Alongside these creations, their unique concert programmes feature stand-out works from the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The scores of select dedications to ChromaDuo as well as many of their arrangements can be found in the ChromaDuo Collection at *Productions d'Oz*.



Photo: John Armato



# RAVEL • DEBUSSY Music for Two Guitars

ChromaDuo



Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) • Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Music for Two Guitars

RAVEL		RAVEL	
1 Alborada del gracioso (1905)	7:37	Valses nobles et sentimentales (1911)	16:47
(arr. Stephen Goss)		9 I. Modéré très franc	1:36
DEBUSSY		10 II. Assez lent – avec une expression intense	2:30
Children’s Corner (1908)	16:46	11 III. Modéré	1:37
2 I. Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum	2:44	12 IV. Assez animé	1:28
3 II. Jimbo’s Lullaby	2:50	13 V. Presque lent – dans un sentiment intime	1:32
4 III. Serenade of the Doll	2:41	14 VI. Vif	0:48
5 IV. The Snow is Dancing	2:40	15 VII. Moins vif	2:56
6 V. The Little Shepherd	2:20	16 VIII. Épilogue – Lent	4:19
7 VI. Golliwog’s Cakewalk	3:26	DEBUSSY	
8 Clair de lune (1890)	5:00	17 La plus que lente (Valse) (1910)	5:03
		Deux arabesques (1888–91)	9:15
		18 No. 1: Andantino con moto	4:51
		19 No. 2: Allegretto scherzando	4:23

Tracks 2–19 arranged for two guitars by Tracy Anne Smith and Rob MacDonald

Impressionism in music was a powerful contemporary movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and Claude Debussy (1862–1918) and Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) were its greatest advocates. Their compositions are sensuous and immediate, using vivid titles and an inventive vocabulary to create a world of imagination and spontaneity. Feelings and experiences are evoked, whether watching moonlight, savouring the environment of the dance, or contemplation of a child’s toys and what they signify to the young. From their art new concepts arose of the emotive power of music as communicated through a range of devices such as the use of oriental pentatonic scales, the whole tone scale, sequences of unresolved discords, consecutive perfect intervals, and the abandonment of traditional development within movements.

Debussy entered the Paris conservatoire at the age of ten where it seemed he was destined to become a concert pianist. But he soon concentrated on composition, winning various prestigious awards including the Grand Prix de Rome (1884). Ultimately Debussy’s immense output included five operas, ballets, incidental music and dramatic works, orchestral pieces, choral and chamber compositions, songs, and many solo piano masterpieces.

The composer’s creative ambitions were totally opposed to the academic precepts of the time and his style evolved into a complex impressionistic art. Nicolas Slonimsky commented that despite the composer’s reservations about being labelled as an impressionist, ‘like Monet in painting and Mallarmé in poetry, Debussy created a style peculiarly sensitive to musical mezzatint from a palette of half-lit, delicate colours’.

Ravel, the son of a Swiss engineer and a mother of Basque origin, entered the Paris conservatoire at the age of fourteen to study piano and harmony. In 1897 he joined the composition class of Gabriel Fauré and two years later wrote *Pavane pour une infante défunte* which interprets the old courtly world through contemporary harmonies. Ravel went on to write some of the most expressive piano repertoire of the twentieth century as well as operas, ballet music, orchestral and choral works, and songs with piano.

Guitarists have been attracted by Debussy ever since

the early twentieth century. In Segovia’s autobiography he mentioned how as a young man one of his favourite pieces for guitar was Debussy’s *Second Arabesque*. Almost sixty years later, Segovia returned to Debussy with a recording of *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin*. In the 1960s the Presti-Lagoya Duo recorded *Clair de lune* setting a precedent of great significance.

In 1969 Julian Bream’s arrangements of *Two Preludes (La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin* and *Minstrels)*, were published. In an editorial introduction Bream commented: “The timbre of the guitar is sympathetic to the delicacy of [Debussy’s] expression and to many subtle gradations of dynamics and tone colour which are so compellingly effective in these works.” Ten years later, after Bream joined forces to play guitar duo with John Williams, Debussy’s *Rêverie*, *Golliwog’s Cake Walk*, and *Clair de lune* became part of their concert repertoire.

Ravel’s richly textured music may seem less amenable to guitar arrangement but a precedent was set with Bream’s playing of *Pavane pour une infante défunte* at his 1960 Wigmore Hall recital. In the early 1990s Bream revived the *Pavane* for his recitals and paired it with the brilliantly whimsical *Valse à la manière de Borodine*.

This album by ChromaDuo is the first to present an entire programme of music by Debussy and Ravel arranged for guitar duo. With two guitars, as opposed to solo guitar, it is possible to expand the canvas bringing in whole suites, complex harmonies, and the range of sonorities implicit in the music.

Ravel’s *Alborada del gracioso* (Jester’s Aubade) (1905) was originally one of a set of five pieces for piano entitled *Miroirs*. The term *alborada* (morning song or aubade), is qualified by *del Gracioso* which means ‘of the jester’ as frequently depicted in Spanish comedy. The virtuosic piano work contains many evocatively Spanish touches such as reminiscences of strummed guitars, snatches of ornamented melody, and intricate rhythmic episodes. Roger Nichols, an authority on the composer, commented that Ravel ‘turns the keyboard instrument into a huge guitar’. Thus it seems appropriate to return the work to plucked strings.

*Clair de lune* (Moonlight), the most popular of Debussy’s pianistic masterpieces, is the third movement of *Suite*

*bergamasque*. Debussy composed the piece in 1890, inspired by Verlaine’s poem of the same title, published in 1869, which mentions *masques et bergamasques*:

*Votre âme est un paysage choisi  
Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques  
Jouant du luth et dansant et quasi  
Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques.*

(‘Your soul is an extraordinary landscape  
Where charming masks and bergamasques are found,  
Playing the lute and dancing, as if sad  
Under their capricious disguises.’)

Later in the poem Verlaine depicts ‘moonlight, calm, sad and beautiful’, which causes the birds to dream and ‘fountains to weep with passion’.

F. E. Kirby in his book *Music for Piano* describes Debussy’s *Clair de lune* as ‘the first true example of impressionist piano music’, in which a new world of sound is revealed. The transition from keyboard to two guitars possesses its own magical chemistry, for the guitar has the power to evoke the dreams of moonlight poetically in its own romantic voice.

*Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1911) are made up of seven waltzes and an impressionist epilogue during which the themes of the previous waltzes are heard again. Ravel wrote: “The title *Valses nobles et sentimentales* sufficiently indicates my intention of writing a cycle of waltzes after the example of Schubert. They were given their première at one of the concerts of the Société Musicale Indépendante where the composers are not named, in the midst of protests and catcalls. By a small majority the paternity of the waltzes was attributed to me. The seventh strikes me as the most characteristic.”

Franz Schubert, among his hundred waltzes for piano, composed two collections entitled respectively *34 Valses sentimentales* (Op. 50, D.779) (1823) and *12 Valses nobles* (Op. 77, D.969) (c. 1827). Ravel’s waltzes therefore comprise elements of the ‘sentimental’ and the ‘noble’, and these aspects are not difficult to recognise. The musical vocabulary is contemporary to the twentieth century but the

waltz idiom is timeless. Like Chopin’s waltzes, these movements are less a dance of the body than the spirit, uniting the intellect and the heart. The score is prefaced with a quote from Henri de Régnier: *le plaisir délicieux et toujours nouveau d’une occupation inutile* (‘the delightful and always fresh pleasure of a futile pastime’). Whether *inutile* refers to dancing or the composition itself can be left to the listener’s imagination.

Debussy’s *Children’s Corner* was dedicated to his five-year-old daughter Chouchou, with the words *A ma chère petite Chouchou, avec les tendres excuses de son Père pour ce qui va suivre* (To my dear little Chouchou, with tender apologies for what follows).

*Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum*, a parody of Clementi, represents a young pianist’s less than enthusiastic approach to the obligatory exercises. Debussy in conversation with the pianist Maurice Dumesnil (1884–1974) offered various suggestions about interpreting each movement. For *Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum* the composer advised the work should be played ‘with a little humour aimed at good old Clementi’, playing ‘faster and more brilliant towards the end’. *Jimbo’s Lullaby*, referring to the girl’s toy elephant, is to be performed *doux et un peu gauche* (sweet and a little clumsy). The scholar Léon Oleginni interpreted the work as the story of the stuffed elephant lulled to sleep with a fairy-tale.

On the dedication page Debussy wrote *Serenade for the doll*, but the text reads *Serenade of the Doll* (the French translation being *Sérénade à la poupée*). Thus the doll is being serenaded and not singing the serenade itself. Debussy’s comment, following the expression mark of *léger et gracieux* (light and graceful), was that this was to performed ‘with nothing of the passion of a Spanish serenader’.

*The Snow is Dancing* was described by the composer as ‘a mood picture as well as a tone poem’ and should be ‘*brumeux. triste, monotone*’ (misty, dreary, monotonous) and not too fast – not fast at all’. *The Little Shepherd* represents the shepherd’s improvisation on his flute and a dance motif, both aspects needing differentiation. Visions of mythical nymphs and naiads are evoked by the shepherd’s musical rapture.