



Mimi Stillman, Artistic Director

Claude Debussy Centennial Festival

II: Between the Notes



Tuesday, April 24, 2018 at 7:00pm
Trinity Center for Urban Life
22nd and Spruce Streets, Philadelphia

Dolce Suono Ensemble Presents
Claude Debussy Centennial Festival: Between the Notes

Mimi Stillman, flute
Amy Oshiro-Morales, violin
Kerri Ryan, viola
Gabriel Cabezas, cello
Bridget Kibbey, harp

Rhapsodie for Flute, Harp, and String Trio	Andrea Clearfield (1960)
Stillman, Kibbey, Oshiro-Morales, Ryan, Cabezas	
Sonata for Violin and Cello	Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
Allegro	
Très vif	
Oshiro-Morales, Cabezas	
Soekia's Dance for Flute, Viola, and Harp [<i>world premiere</i>]	Thomas Whitman (1960)
Stillman, Ryan, Kibbey	
Intermission	
Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp	Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Pastorale	
Interlude: Tempo di minuetto	
Final: Allegro moderato ma risoluto	
Stillman, Ryan, Kibbey	
Chant de Linos for Flute, Violin, Viola, Cello, and Harp	André Jolivet (1905-1974)
Stillman, Oshiro-Morales, Ryan, Cabezas, Kibbey	

About the Program

We thank our generous Artist Sponsors for this concert: Dr. Joel and Mrs. Roberta Porter – Bridget Kibbey, and Dr. Robert Wallner – Mimi Stillman. We are grateful to our project supporters including the William Penn Foundation, Yamaha Corporation of America, and Musical Fund Society of Philadelphia.

Notes by Mimi Stillman

This evening we present the conclusion of Dolce Suono Ensemble's Claude Debussy Centennial Festival celebrating the towering legacy of the French composer 100 years after his death in 1918. On March 26, 2018, we opened the festival with the concert "Pleasure is the Law" featuring solo, chamber, and vocal works by Debussy in context with music by Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Delibes, D'Indy, and a world premiere by Jan Krzywicki. This program, "Between the Notes," brings together Debussy's masterwork *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp* with music by composers deeply influenced by him from his world and ours – Maurice Ravel, André Jolivet, Andrea Clearfield, and the world premiere of a new work by Thomas Whitman. In these works, the four composers all reflect, explicitly or implicitly, on Debussy's music. I am delighted that Thomas Whitman chose in his piece to imagine Debussy's encounter with Javanese music at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889, as it relates to some of my own research. I wrote my Masters thesis in history at the University of Pennsylvania on the influence of Asian music on Claude Debussy.

It is impossible to imagine music in the past century without Debussy, for his own works of genius and for the way in which he pioneered new, groundbreaking paths in music. At the dawn of the 20th century, composers including Debussy, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky turned away from tradition in ways that would forever alter the course of Western music, leading to an unprecedented variety of musical styles in the 20th century. I have always been struck by how many of today's composers, when asked who their musical influences are, cite Debussy. He rebelled against the tradition he considered ossified as taught at the Paris Conservatory, seeking to overturn some of the strictures of what is known as the common practice and functional harmony. He sought to obscure a clear sense of key by using modes other than major and minor, and emphasized timbre and innovative instrumental colors, presenting new sounds that often polarized his peers and audiences.

We title this evening's program "Between the Notes" after a quote from Debussy in which he describes music as what takes place "entre les notes." These words are resonant in our conception of his music in several ways – in thinking about how we connect the notes in Debussy's long phrases and arabesques, musical lines inspired by the winding lines of art nouveau; about the special seamless legato and transitions among the instruments we strive for in playing his music; and in the silences and timing between elements. Debussy was one of the many French artists drawn to Japanese art in the latter part of the 19th century, when the opening of Japan to the West led to the collection of Japanese arts and crafts in Europe. The French vogue for Japanese art was known as *japonisme*. Ukiyo-e prints in particular captured the imagination of Debussy, who selected Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* as the cover image for the publication of *La mer*. Debussy scholar Edward Lockspeiser drew a parallel between Debussy's interest in Japanese prints, which featured blank space in a way European art did not, and his meticulous presentation of his own autograph scores with wide margins and pristine blank spaces. Going beyond the visual into the auditory, Debussy is known for creating a sense of openness or spaciousness in his music itself, imbuing silence with profound meaning in some of his more sparse compositions. Thus the idea of "Between the Notes," like Debussy's music itself, is open to myriad interpretations and nuances.

Claude Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp*

Debussy's *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp* is a masterpiece of the chamber music repertoire. It comes from Debussy's late period, and along with the violin and cello sonatas, is part of a cycle of six sonatas the composer left unfinished at his death. He wrote it in the summer of 1915 while staying at Pourville on the Channel coast, in a burst of creative activity following a period of depression about the outbreak of World War I. He wrote to his friend Robert Godet of the *Sonata*, revealing his frame of mind at the time: "*It is frightfully mournful and I don't know whether one should laugh or cry – perhaps both.*" In his reply, Godet referenced the neoclassicism of the composer's style at the time: "How modern it is and yet how aptly does it evoke the music of the past!" At the time, Debussy was interested in the French Baroque masters Rameau and Couperin, evoking their style while arguing that French composers should turn to their own heritage rather than German music for inspiration. In the *Sonata*, Debussy marries the neoclassical rigor of his late style with the exquisite palette of timbres characteristic of his music. It is a vehicle for flute, viola, and harp to display their range of tone colors, individually and in ever-changing, innovative combinations. With utmost economy of forces, Debussy evokes a grand and nuanced universe of sound.

In the Pastorale, Debussy presents an opening theme marked *mélancoliquement* which provides material for the movement and is referenced later. The mood shifts throughout the movement, encompassing cool detachment, romanticism, and jaunty playfulness in the *Vif et joyeux* section. At the beginning of the Interlude, the motif in the flute, which takes place over a sustained viola, establishes a connection with the French Baroque with its minuet meter and clear structure over four measures. At the same time, the prominence of the melodic tritone interval, just as in the flute solo at the opening of his *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, is characteristic of Debussy's desire to obscure a clear sense of major or minor key. The finale is a fast movement tempered by Debussy's marking of "risoluto", with a sense of restrained intensity that bursts out at climactic moments.

Maurice Ravel, *Sonata for Violin and Cello*

Maurice Ravel composed his *Sonata for Violin and Cello* between 1920 and 1922, when the entire work was published by Durand, who was also the publisher of Debussy. He wrote the first movement for the *Tombeau de Debussy*, a collection of works written in memory of Debussy after his death in 1918. At the time, Ravel was suffering the lingering effects of his World War I service and grieving for his mother. He chose the unusual combination of violin and cello only, with no piano, as part of his interest in counterpoint and the economy of means. This concept of "dépouillement," literally, stripping away, was interesting to Ravel as well as Debussy, Stravinsky, and Satie. Ravel writes that in this piece "the music is stripped down to the bone. The allure of harmony is rejected and increasingly there is a return of emphasis on melody." Ravel and Debussy shared a focus on counterpoint. As Debussy wrote of his admiration for the Vietnamese opera at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889, it is "harmony formed out of melodies." The *Sonata* is a cyclical work, an approach to form in which themes recur throughout the different movements. Ravel used cyclical form in his string quartet and piano trio, as did Debussy in some of his works including his string quartet. César Franck's cyclical approach informed younger composers such as Debussy, Ravel, and D'Indy.

This evening we present the first two movements, Allegro and Très vif. The work opens with a melody in the violin that establishes the alternating major and minor third motif that recurs throughout the piece in different guises. At its entrance, the cello melody is characteristic of Ravel's lyricism and its modal quality is akin to this aspect of the music of Debussy, Fauré, and Franck. The Très vif is virtuosic in its writing for violin and cello and in the precise ensemble playing required of the duo. The two instruments pass lines seamlessly between them over rapid changes of meter and key. With just the two string instruments Ravel

creates great sonic variety through use of range, bowed and plucked techniques, harmonics, and other timbral features.

André Jolivet, *Chant de Linos for Flute, Violin, Viola, Cello, and Harp*

André Jolivet wrote *Chant de Linos* in its original version for flute and piano as a Morceau de Concours, or competition piece, for the Paris Conservatory in 1944. His trajectory as a composer reflects the influence of Debussy and Ravel, and later Schoenberg, Bartok, and Berg. He studied with Varèse, a major modernist composer. Jolivet was a co-founder of La jeune France with Olivier Messiaen and other composers who rejected the influence of Stravinsky's neoclassicism on French music, while seeking to create a distinctively French style with spiritual elements. Jolivet was director of the Comédie-Française (1945-59), in which capacity he wrote music for plays by Molière, Racine, Shakespeare, and others. His interest in magic and primitive religion increased after he served in World War II, turning to mythological and spiritual themes in his music as well as Asian and African music as part of his opposition to neoclassicism.

Chant de Linos embodies Jolivet's interest in ancient cultures and rituals. In Greek mythology, Linus was the music teacher of Orpheus and Hercules. Jolivet's description of the work on the score states "The Chant de Linos was, in ancient Greece, a type of threnody; a funeral lament interspersed with cries and dancing." Jolivet made the version for flute, strings, and harp after the flute and piano version, and utilized the range of sonorities and timbres to great effect. The piece's exotic quality comes from the modal scales Jolivet employs throughout. The piece opens with a series of flute cadenzas coming out of intense repeated chords in the rest of the ensemble. A sultry section in 5/4 with hazy harmonies and subtly shifting rhythms gives way to an explosive buildup to the first dance section in an intensely driven 7/8 meter. Every member of the ensemble is engaged in virtuosic acrobatics. Earlier themes return in different modulations before the return of the fast dance music as the piece hurtles toward a rousing close.

Andrea Clearfield, *Rhapsodie for Flute, String Trio, and Harp*

Rhapsodie was commissioned by Wally Loeb for Mimi Stillman and Dolce Suono Ensemble. The world premiere was given by Dolce Suono Ensemble on May 9, 2009 at First Unitarian Church in Philadelphia. Ms. Stillman had suggested that the piece have a relationship to French music. Since I favored composers Debussy, Ravel, and Fauré in my early years as a pianist, I was delighted to write with this parameter in mind. The work was initially inspired by the melodic ornamentation in Claude Debussy's music, evocative harmonies of Ravel and the mingling colors and free atmosphere of Monet's waterlily series and late paintings. The piece is a 'rhapsody' in its true sense: organic in form with many musical materials woven together, rapidly shifting, often suggesting an improvisation. It departs from the traditional rhapsody in that the main theme, heard first in the flute, becomes the basis for variation throughout the piece. Some of the work is informed by my synesthesia (seeing colors related to musical pitches and vice versa). I wish to thank the artist colonies Yaddo, Ucross and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts for providing time and space to create this work. – *Andrea Clearfield*

Thomas Whitman, *Soekia's Dance for Flute, Viola, and Harp*

This composition attempts to imagine an early moment of cross-cultural exchange: the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition. It was there that Claude Debussy, Camille Saint-Saëns, and many other Europeans first encountered the traditional Indonesian percussion orchestra known as Gamelan. The performing artists included not only musicians but also a troupe of young dancers from the princely court of Surakarta, Java. The protagonist of the composition is one of those Javanese dancers, Soekia. At the beginning, she steadies herself in quiet prayer before the performance. This is followed by the dance itself. But the dance music is repeatedly interrupted by agitated interjections, fragments of music that sound foreign, perhaps even threatening, to Soekia. Eventually, she summons a return of her prayer, finding in it a means to reassert

control. The work ends with a slower, desolate version of the dance melody, only partly able to regain its nobility.

My portrait of Soekia is indebted to Annegret Fauser's fascinating study, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair*. I also wish to thank Mimi Stillman and Dolce Suono Ensemble for giving me the opportunity to tell this story. – *Thomas Whitman*



Javanese dancers at the Exposition universelle in Paris, 1889. Soekia is on the far right.

Photo: Alamy.com

The Artists

Bridget Kibbey, harp

Solo and chamber artist; performs regularly with Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Knights Chamber Orchestra, and Camerata Pacifica, and at festivals including Bravo!Vail, Spoleto, and Santa Fe; recorded with Dawn Upshaw and Plácido Domingo for SONY Records and Deutsche Grammophon; solo appearances on NPR's Performance Today, New York's WQXR and Q2 Radio, WNYC's Soundcheck; curator of Bach keyboard works project and concerto consortium commissions; teaches at Bard College, Juilliard School Pre-College, Curtis Summerfest, Temple University.

Mimi Stillman, flute

"A consummate and charismatic performer" (The New York Times); Founding Artistic Director, Dolce Suono Ensemble; Yamaha Performing Artist, author on music and history, recording artist; Soloist with The Philadelphia Orchestra, Bach Collegium Stuttgart, Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, Chamber Orchestra of Indianapolis, solo and chamber artist at Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center, La Jolla Chamber Music Festival, Verbier Festival; BM, Curtis Institute of Music, MA and PhD (abd) in history, University of Pennsylvania; Faculty, Temple University, Curtis Summerfest, Music for All National Festival.

Amy Oshiro-Morales, violin

The Philadelphia Orchestra, second section; Former assistant concertmaster of the Saint Louis Symphony, Colorado Symphony, and Grant Park Orchestra; Guest musician, New York Philharmonic; Soloist with Saint

Louis Symphony, Napa Valley Symphony, Minnesota Sinfonia; Performer and teacher, Cactus Pear and Grand Teton Summer Festivals, National Orchestral Institute; Studies at Oberlin Conservatory, graduate of the Juilliard School.

Kerri Ryan, viola

Assistant principal viola of The Philadelphia Orchestra; Former assistant principal viola of the Minnesota Orchestra and associate concertmaster of the Charleston Symphony; She and husband William Polk, founding members of the Minneapolis Quartet; Young Artist Program, Cleveland Institute of Music, BM, Curtis Institute of Music; Faculty, Temple University.

Gabriel Cabezas, cello

“An intense player who connects to music naturally, without artifice.” (The Oregonian); soloist with orchestras of Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, New York, Los Angeles; Chamber musician, member of yMusic sextet with collaborations with Ben Folds, tours with Musicians from Marlboro; Co-founder of Duende, new music and dance collective; Involvement with the Sphinx Organization, Chicago’s Citizen Musician movement; BM, Curtis Institute of Music.

DOLCE SUONO ENSEMBLE has been thrilling audiences and invigorating the music world since its founding by flutist and Artistic Director Mimi Stillman in 2005. Hailed as **“an adventurous ensemble”** (The New York Times) and **“One of the most dynamic groups in the US!”** (The Huffington Post), the ensemble presents critically acclaimed chamber music concerts on its home series in Philadelphia, performs on tour, commissions important new works, makes recordings, and engages in community and educational engagement partnerships.

Dolce Suono Ensemble presents dynamic and innovative programs of Baroque to new repertoire with historian Mimi Stillman’s curatorial vision setting the music in its broadest cultural context. Some of its artistically and intellectually powerful projects include the celebrated Mahler 100 / Schoenberg 60, Debussy in Our Midst: A Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of Claude Debussy, A Place and a Name: Remembering the Holocaust, Dolce Suono Ensemble Goes to the Opera, Women Pioneers of American Music, and Música en tus Manos (Music in Your Hands), our engagement initiative with the Latino Community. **“All programs should have this much to say and say it so well.”** (The Philadelphia Inquirer)

Dolce Suono Ensemble has performed at venues including Merkin Hall, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Southern Exposure New Music Series (SC), Brooklyn’s Roulette, University of Pennsylvania, Brandywine River Museum, University of Virginia, Symphony Space, Great Hall Series (MA), Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, University of North Carolina/Chapel Hill, Bard College, Eastman School of Music, Virginia Tech, Kingston Chamber Music Festival, Princeton University, Brandeis University, and Cornell University. The ensemble enjoys a partnership with the Washington National Opera Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program at the invitation of Plácido Domingo.

Dolce Suono Ensemble has contributed major new works to the chamber music repertoire through commissioning, giving 53 world premieres in 13 seasons. The ensemble’s recordings *Freedom*, music for flute, piano, and the human spirit, and *Odyssey: 11 American Premieres*, both featuring Mimi Stillman, flute and Charles Abramovic, piano, (Innova Recordings), have been critically acclaimed. Its newly released album *American Canvas* features the Dolce Suono Trio with soprano Lucy Shelton in premiere recordings by Jennifer Higdon, Shulamit Ran, Zhou Tian, and Andrea Clearfield. Dolce Suono Ensemble concerts and recordings are broadcast internationally. **“The three were flawlessly in sync – even their trills!”** (The Philadelphia Inquirer) www.dolcesuono.com

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