

Claude DEBUSSY

CENTENARY EDITION 2018

IV LES SONS ET LES
PARFUMS TOURNENT
DANS L'AIR DU SOIR

P R E L U D E S b o o k 1



Piano Practical Editions

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Musical Health Warning : please be aware that these editions are definitely not urtext and should be consulted together with a traditional version. They have been devised purely to help solve musical and technical problems at the piano.

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Ray Alston : contact@pianopracticaleditions.com

Claude DEBUSSY 1862 - 1918

IV LES SONS ET LES PARFUMS TOURNENT DANS L'AIR DU SOIR

PRELUDES BOOK I

"I believe more and more that music in its essence is not a thing that can be poured into a rigorous and traditional mould. It is made of colours and rhythmical beats. Music is a mysterious mathematical process whose elements partake of infinity, capturing mysterious relations between nature and the imagination". — Claude Debussy

The strong influence of French piano music is surely identified with Chopin and Debussy who share a unique position as masters of an exceptional instrument; through an extensive affinity with the sustaining pedal they each created a personal language conceived to communicate their work with the greatest authenticity.

So much of Debussy's work is inspired by the written word and this prelude ("sounds and scents fill the evening air"), possibly my favourite, takes its title from Baudelaire's pantoum* poem "Evening harmony". The music truly evokes and reflects the sensuous text which talks of a melancholic waltz** and languorous elation, a repeated line along with another describing a quivering emotive violin and a grieving heart.

First published in 1857, with themes relating to decadence and eroticism, *Les fleurs du mal* (the flowers of evil) became fundamental to the symbolist and

modernist movements, for which the author and publisher were prosecuted — "an insult to public decency"!

Indeed, this particular work is an outstanding example of the erotic, an inspired vision which Debussy has made his own: "It is necessary to abandon yourself completely, and let the music do as it will. All people come to music to seek oblivion".

During the course of this centenary year *Piano Practical Editions* has become a creative and critical working publication, although in this particular piece apart from modifications to the general layout there are just a few fingering, hand disposition and sostenuto pedal suggestions.

Here is an apt quotation by the composer : "Absence of fingering is an excellent exercise, negating musicians' perverse desire to completely dismiss the composer's (and editor's), and thereby vindicating words of eternal wisdom: 'If you want something done well, do it yourself'". Let us seek our own fingering!

Harmonie du soir

*Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir ;
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir ;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige !*

*Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir ;
Le violon frémit comme un coeur qu'on afflige ;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige !
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir.*

*Le violon frémit comme un coeur qu'on afflige,
Un coeur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir !
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir ;
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.*

*Un coeur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige !
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige...
Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor !*

Charles Baudelaire

* A type of oriental poem with a set pattern of repetitive lines.

** The choice of waltz is significant, as at that time the waltz was considered very provocative with unusual physical proximity on the dance floor.

Modéré [♩ = 84]
(harmonieux et souple)

IV

5 *pp*

3 *pp* *m.d.*

m.s.

6

en animant un peu

9

p *expressif*

Sost. Ped

p

..*..

13 *mf*

p

p

en retenant

- - - - - // *a tempo*
égal et doux

17 *pp* en dehors

2

2

Serrez un peu - - - - - // retenu - - - // *a tempo*

21 *p*

1

2

3

5 *pp*

24 *pp*

pp

plus lent

en animant

26 *pp*

pp

p

5

Cédez - - - -

28 *mf* 3 5 *pp*

Sost. Ped. ..**..

serrez - - - - //

30 *mf* 4 *m.d.* 3

rubato //

serrez - - - - //

33 *rubato* *m.d.*

34 *p* 2 1 2 1 2 5

la basse un peu appuyée et soutenue

serrez - - - -

rubato

37

p

mf

Cédez //

tranquille et flottant

40

pp

4 5 2 1 2 3

1 3 1

43

p

5

2

a tempo

44

pp

en retenant

45

3 *pp*

3

léger

6

47

plus retenu

comme une lointaine sonnerie de cors

49

pp

5

m.d.

m.s.

3

8^{vb}

encore plus lointain et plus retenu

51

pp

3

pp

8^{vb}

8^{vb}

8^{vb}

(... "Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir")

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Appendix

Comments, afterthoughts & vocabulary

Duration: 3'45

- In the first book of Preludes, the composer indicated metronome speeds in brackets, and once wrote: "as a rose which might only last for one morning, a metronome speed might only work for one bar." Might this explain why there are no metronome speeds in the second book?
- **9-12** sostenuto pedal editorial suggestion
- **29** sostenuto pedal editorial suggestion
- **30** 2nd beat RH C octave the ties are missing in the original — probably an oversight
- **34-36** bass melody reminiscent of *La fille aux cheveux de lin* (another reference to a sensual poem)
- **38-39** there are confusing tenor dotted crotchets in the original
- **44** LH 4th beat and **45** 3rd beat — be careful to differentiate between the E# and E \flat . Several recordings contain a misreading of the first particularly irresistible chord.
- **50 & 52** playing the acciaccaturas with the right hand makes it easier to synchronise these horn-like chords

harmonieux et souple	<i>harmonious and flexible</i>
en animant un peu	<i>a little more animated</i>
en retenant	<i>holding back</i>
égal et doux	<i>even and gentle</i>
serrez un peu	<i>accelerate a little</i>
cédez	<i>slow down</i>
la basse un peu appuyée et soutenue	<i>emphasise and sustain the bass a little</i>
tranquille et flottant	<i>calm and floating</i>
comme une lointaine sonnerie de cors	<i>like distant hunting horns</i>
encore plus lointain et plus retenu	<i>even more distant and ever slowing down</i>