

PRÉLUDES and INTERLUDES

In 2007, the artist Brian Dunce painted a performance installation of large canvases inspired by Debussy's *Préludes, Premier Livre* (1910) to accompany piano recitals given by Graham Caskie. Stephen Goss' *Interludes* (2008), commissioned to be interspersed with the Debussy *Préludes* in performance, complement and contrast with both Brian Dunce's paintings and Debussy's music.

Rather than being designed to stand shoulder to shoulder with Debussy's timeless masterpieces, the paintings and interludes are intended to act more like footnotes or asides, whose function is to pay fleeting homage.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Stephen Goss (b.1964)

PRÉLUDES, PREMIER LIVRE (1910)
INTERLUDES (2008)

- 1 *The Gust of Wind*
- 2 Danseuses de Delphes
- 3 Voiles
- 4 Le vent dans la plaine
- 5 Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir
- 6 *I am that merry wanderer of the night*
- 7 *Colloque Sentimental*
- 8 Les collines d'Anacapri
- 9 *Breaking the silence of the seas*
- 10 *Le Mezzetin*
- 11 Des pas sur la neige
- 12 Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest
- 13 La fille aux cheveux de lin
- 14 *Scented Waltz*
- 15 *The Hatter*
- 16 *Nocturne in Blue and Silver*
- 17 La sérénade interrompue
- 18 *The Frozen Lake (Nederland, Colorado)*
- 19 La danse de Puck
- 20 Minstrels
- 21 La cathédrale engloutie

Duration

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|------------|--------|
| PRELUDES | 45'30" |
| INTERLUDES | 31'00" |

INTERLUDES (2008) for solo piano

Brian Dunce's paintings unveil some of the sources that lie embedded in Debussy's *Préludes* and offer additional references of their own. My *Interludes* draw on many of these references: highlighting some, hinting at others.

The first interlude, *The Gust of Wind*, tempers Debussy's *Le vent dans la plaine* and *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest* with the gentle summer breeze of Renoir's *The Gust of Wind* (a painting referenced in Brian's *La fille aux cheveux de lin* painting). *I am that merry wanderer of the night* is the title of the Arthur Rackham illustration that Debussy used as a source for *La danse de Puck*.

The two Spanish-flavoured interludes, *Colloque Sentimental* and *Le Mezzetin* relate to Brian's *La sérénade interrompue* canvas, which in turn, is based on Watteau's painting *Le Mezzetin*. Watteau was a master of tragic irony – the pathetic guitar player in this painting is faintly absurd in his richly coloured *Commedia dell'Arte* costume, yet we are left in no doubt that the hopelessness of his love (symbolized by the cold stone statue facing away from him) has the intense pain of the loss of life itself. The musical material for the *Colloque Sentimental* interlude comes from Debussy's *La Puerto del Vino* (from *Préludes, Deuxième Livre*) and my *Le Mezzetin* interlude makes subtle references to Bizet's *Carmen*.

In his book *Images, the Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, Paul Roberts conjectures that *La fille aux cheveux de lin* might have been at least part-inspired by Wordsworth's *The Solitary Reaper*. "Debussy, whose identification with exotic, faraway scenes is manifested throughout the *Préludes*, would have found Wordsworth's evocation of the girl's solitary song, 'Breaking the silence of the seas / Among the farthest Hebrides' deeply satisfying". *The Solitary Reaper* is a drastically stylised poem. Wordsworth simplifies it by omitting particularities. The girl is seen only in the bold outline of essential gesture. In the interlude *Breaking the silence of the seas*, I took Wordsworth's poem as a starting point and also borrowed and adapted material from the *Pastorale* movement of Debussy's *Sonata for flute, viola and harp* to recreate the pastoral atmosphere of Brian's *La fille aux cheveux de lin* painting.

The next three interludes form a triptych. Baudelaire's pantoun *Harmonie du Soir* was the source for Debussy's mysterious prelude *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir*. Debussy's music suggests the faded, half-grasped memory of a popular waltz, which comes and goes throughout the piece. In *Scented Waltz*, I wanted to reassemble Debussy's elusive dance and place it firmly in the foreground. *The Hatter* brings *Minstrels* forward to the time of Miles Davis – who is pictured in Brian's *Minstrels* canvas. *Nocturne in Blue and Silver* alludes to Debussy's *Voiles* prelude, but also extends the Miles Davis connection with a veiled reference to Bill Evans' *Blue in Green* from Davis' *Kind of Blue* album.

Frozen Lake (Nederland, Colorado) draws on the musical material and desolate atmosphere of Debussy's *Des pas sur la neige* to portray the bleak emptiness and solitude of the Rocky Mountains.