

Comment

Premier livre de Préludes

I. Danseuses de Delphes

As the *Danseuses* depict Ancient Greece, I decided to open the Préludes with a rather uncommon instrumentation. While the audience may expect a full orchestra, only Flutes play the melody, accompanied by two harps bringing out the harmonics.

II. Voiles

As the title of this Prélude reads "Sails", it seemed appropriate to arrange it for woodwinds. That way, they stand for the wind blowing the sails as well as the canvas itself.

III. Le Vent dans la Plaine

Béroff sees this Prélude between the soft breeze of *Voiles* and the storm of *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Æust*. Thus, the strings should play glimmering, while the chords in the middle part must be strong like sudden squalls.

IV. „Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir“

This Prélude follows the impression of Beaudelaire's poem, thus being the most obvious programmatic piece of the Préludes. It evokes an evening at Montmartre: street musicians playing, for their own at first, later in a loose duet, until the scene closes with the faint bells of Sacre-Cœur.

V. Les collines d'Anacapri

While the *Danseuses de Delphes* were a picture of Ancient Greece and „*Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir*“ a scene in Paris, *Les collines d'anacapri* are set up in Italy. Make sure the Celesta and their answering instruments play a bit *dolce*, like a greeting.

The accords in m.8-10 lead to the cheerful theme, in which the solo Violin represents the „lyrisches Ich“ overwhelmed by the landscapes' beauty. The folk song in m.32 may be played a bit burly, the *Modéré* of m.50 dragging.

VI. Des pas sur la neige

As Béroff states, the Prélude tells of a dying being in a forsaken world. Thus I reduced the instruments and made a solo Cello play the part of that being. The Flute takes on the more optimistic parts, which of course cannot last. The flageolets at the end should underline the moment of death, so do not play them too loud or shrill. A pause before the next Prélude may be appropriate.

VII. Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Æust

The storm begins quietly and faint. The listener sees it coming in fear, the Celli and Basses grumbling, the gusts come nearer, till in m.21 hell breaks loose. Though the storm calms down a bit, the solo Oboe does not trust the peace. In m.33 and 34 the Violins should play every note non-legato and very sharp.

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VIII. La fille aux cheveux de lin

This Prélude allows for a performance on stage, especially with the following one. The Guitar and the Oboe are meant to represent the lovers in this scene. The other instruments are reduced to a small background band.

IX. La Sérénade interrompue

Now a rival arrives at the stage. The two confront each other in battle, until the beloved one disappears.

X. La Cathédrale engloutie

According to Breton lore, this cathedral raises from a lake at dawn. The church bell sounds underwater, the woodwinds give the impression of the sun's first rays. The strings represent the waters, calm at first, then more and more turbulent as the cathedral rises. Then the Organ tells of its majestic architecture, before the waves return to consume it. In the end, the woodwinds send sunrays over the water, calmed again.

XI. La danse de Puck

Puck plays the Violin as he dances over the stage. The woodwinds represent his nature, floating and free like the wind. The English Horn plays Oberon's call, forcing Puck to leave as sudden as he came.

XII. Minstrels

Béroff reads this Prélude as a ironic commentary on early jazz and ragtime bands. So I decided to take on the idea and set it up for a ragtime band. Be sure to play the Prélude ironic but not like childish comedy. Think of it as the prequel to „General Lavine“.

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Deuxième livre de Préludes

I. Brouillards

To preserve the fleetingness of this „Mist“ the Harps play the glissandi. The other instruments shall not interfere, but provide silent harmonics to the scene.

II. Feuilles mortes

The „Dead leaves“ are at the same time a still life. While still melancholic like *Des pas sur la neige*, the optimistic Flute wins with the last c major note.

III. La Puerta de Vino

Written as a Habanera, I decided to use a slightly changed *orquestra típica* for this Prélude. The accented rhythm is crucial for the piece, and do not exaggerate the more passionate parts.

IV. Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses

This Prélude is to be played filigrane as the spider's web on which the fairy's dance takes place. Even the accords must be played without any gravity.

V. Bruyères

The solo Flute is the main character of this Prélude; the strings just accompany it in the background. So even the Violin solo is a mere picture of the landscape where a shepherd plays a melody for himself.

VI. „General lavine“ (eccentric)

Where the *Mintrels* were slightly ironic, here the orchestra must be comedic. The fanfares and the accords in m.31-34 and m.90-93 are to be played overly serious. The rhythm of the Tuba solos should remind of the burly folk song in *Les collines d'Anacapri*.

VII. La Terrasse des audiance du claire de lune

As Béroff asks, play the chromatic scales with precision. The m.16-24, however, should be more flowing, before the Celesta returns to the strict rhythm.

VIII. Ondine

Being a water nymph, this Prélude is to be played flowing. On the other hand, the staccatos must remain accented. Emphasize on the contrast between Ondine and the poor lost soul under her spell.

IX. Samuel Pickwick, Esq. P.P.M.P.C.

As if Debussy had not done enough, this Prélude begins with a citation of „H.M.S. Pinafore“. The brass is to be played pompous, but after m.29 there is no room for that. M.47-49 remind of a jig, but even this joyful theme cannot camouflage the defeat.

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X. Canope

As this Prélude depicts (according to Béroff) a procession in the Egyptian city of Canope, the whole piece is to be played dignified and a bit cold. Though the Harp plays two glissandi, the following accords must be played with the same dignity as the brass.

XI. Les tierces alternées

This Prélude seems to be the only one concentrating on playing technique. Following that thought, but maintaining a bit of program music as well, I decided the woodwinds to play the role of a young pianist, while the strings replace the piano.

One can see the pianist hesitating to perform a necessary task, stopping in the middle of work and unenthusiastic plucking a single key. Then again, he continues to play and gets himself into the piece. In the end, a short sigh escapes him.

XII. Feux d'artifice

A worthy Finale for the Préludes, these fireworks expand over a variety of orchestral possibilities. Béroff sees it as a true atonal piece, so I picked up that thought and set it as a modern piece. This includes the snare passages, especially m.81 when the Violins play pizz. in addition to the snare. The *Marseillaise* at the end can be played from a side room.

Source

Debussy, Claude: Préludes. Edited from the autograph and first edition by Michael Stegemann/ Fingering and notes on interpretation by Michel Béroff, Wiener Urtext Edition, Wien 1985/1990, Third Edition