

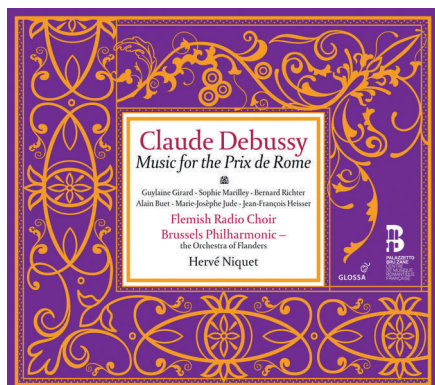
GCD 922206

New release information

November 2009

Claude Debussy

Music for the Prix de Rome



Claude Debussy Music for the Prix de Rome

Guylaine Girard, soprano
Sophie Marilley, mezzo-soprano
Bernard Richter, tenor
Alain Buet, baritone

Marie-Josèphe Jude, piano
Jean-François Heisser, piano

Flemish Radio Choir
Brussels Philharmonic
Hervé Niquet, conductor

Glossa GCD 922206
2 CDs – digipak

Programme

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

CD I (48:17)

Le Gladiateur (1883)
Invocation (1883)
La Damselle élue (1888)

CD II (53:52)

Printemps (1887)
Le Printemps (1884)
Salut Printemps (1882)
L'Enfant prodigue (1884)

Production details

Recorded in Heverlee (Jezuïetenkerk) and Brussels (La Monnaie) in June and July 2009
Engineered by Manuel Mohino
Produced by Manuel Mohino and Hervé Niquet
Executive producer: Carlos Céster

Design: Valentín Iglesias
Booklet essays: A. Dratwicki, D. Herlin
English Français Deutsch Español



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NOTES (ENG)

Claude Debussy presented himself as a candidate for the Prix de Rome on three separate occasions during the 1880s, the most innovative decade in the history of that competition; a time when success entitled the victors (at the French government's expense) to spend several years at the Villa Medici in Rome. Between 1880 and 1890 the French state was successfully encouraging the development of original artistic personalities, breaking with the persistent accusations of "academicism" that had been levelled against it. Names of prize winners from this time include Bruneau, Pierné, Debussy, Dukas, Leroux and Charpentier. Presented on this two CD set is a group of little known compositions by Debussy, dating from between 1882 and 1888: *Le Gladiateur* and the first versions of *L'Enfant prodigue* (of which only the 1906 reorchestration is occasionally performed) and *Printemps* – a highly individual piece (scored for choir and piano, four hands) later turned into a symphonic suite. A version for piano and voice of *La Damselle élue* (which was the only one overseen by Debussy himself) and the choruses written for the competitions of 1882, 1883 and 1884 complete this survey of hitherto unknown works by Debussy.

This release represents the first issue in a new collection from Glossa centred on music associated with the Prix de Rome. This is being prepared in collaboration with the recently formed Palazzetto Bru Zane - Centre de Musique Romantique Française and with Hervé Niquet, who here is conducting two of Europe's foremost ensembles: the Flemish Radio Choir and the Brussels Philharmonic.

NOTAS (ESP)

Claude Debussy presentó su candidatura al Prix de Rome (Premio de Roma) en tres ocasiones durante la década de los 1880, la más innovadora en la historia de este concurso, que permitía a los ganadores pasar varios años en la Villa Medici en Roma, con gastos sufragados por el gobierno francés. Entre 1880 y 1890, el estado galo apoyó activamente el desarrollo de personalidades artísticas de gran originalidad, contestando así a las persistentes acusaciones de «academicismo». Los nombres de los ganadores durante estos años incluyen a Bruneau, Pierné, Debussy, Dukas, Leroux y Charpentier. En este disco doble, presentamos un grupo de composiciones muy poco conocidas de Debussy, todas ellas datadas entre 1882 y 1888. Además de la cantata *Le Gladiateur* y las primeras versiones de *L'Enfant prodigue* (de la que sólo se acostumbra a tocar, de vez en cuando, la reorquestación de 1906) y de *Printemps* (una pieza para coro y piano a cuatro manos que después se convertiría en suite sinfónica), podemos escuchar una versión para piano y voz de *La Damselle élue* (la única supervisada por el propio Debussy) y las obras corales compuestas para los concursos de 1882, 1883 y 1884.

Esta es la primera entrega de una nueva colección de Glossa en torno al Prix de Rome, preparada en colaboración con el recientemente creado Centre de Musique Romantique Française y con Hervé Niquet, gran especialista no sólo del Barroco francés sino de toda la música francesa en general, que dirige a dos de los más prestigiosos conjuntos europeos: el Flemish Radio Choir y la Brussels Philharmonic.

NOTES (FRA)

Claude Debussy fut candidat à trois reprises au prix de Rome pendant la décennie la plus novatrice de ce concours qui permettait aux vainqueurs de passer plusieurs années à la Villa Médicis, à Rome, aux frais du gouvernement français. Entre 1880 et 1890, en effet, l'État encouragea les personnalités artistiques originales, rompant avec les accusations récurrentes d'« académisme ». Les lauréats auront ainsi pour noms Bruneau, Pierné, Debussy, Dukas, Leroux, Charpentier... Le programme proposé dans ce double disque forme un ensemble d'inédits composés entre 1882 et 1888, en particulier *Le Gladiateur* et les premières versions de *L'Enfant prodigue* (dont seule la réorchestration de 1906 est parfois rejouée) et de *Printemps*, pièce originale pour chœur et piano à quatre mains transformée plus tard en suite symphonique. Une version pour piano et voix de *La Damselle élue* (la seule supervisée par Debussy) et les chœurs des concours de 1882, 1883 et 1884 complètent ce panorama d'œuvres jusqu'alors inconnues de Debussy.

Voici le premier volume d'une nouvelle collection de Glossa dédiée au Prix de Rome, préparée en collaboration avec le Palazzetto Bru Zane - Centre de Musique Romantique Française, récemment créé, et avec Hervé Niquet, grand spécialiste non seulement du baroque français mais encore de toute la musique française ; ce chef dirige ici deux prestigieux ensembles européens, le Flemish Radio Choir et la Brussels Philharmonic.

NOTIZEN (DEU)

Während der 1880er Jahre bewarb sich Claude Debussy drei Mal um den Prix de Rome. Diese Zeit war das innovativste Jahrzehnt in der Geschichte des Wettbewerbs, und die Preisträger, die siegreich aus ihm hervorgingen, durften (auf Kosten der französischen Regierung) mehrere Jahre in der Villa Medici in Rom verbringen. Zwischen 1880 und 1890 versuchte Frankreich mit Erfolg, die Weiterentwicklung besonders kreativer Künstlerpersönlichkeiten zu fördern. Zu den Preisträgern aus dieser Periode gehören Bruneau, Pierné, Debussy, Dukas, Leroux und Charpentier. Auf dieser Doppel-CD werden einige kaum bekannte Werke Debussys vorgestellt, die zwischen 1882 und 1888 entstanden sind. *Le Gladiateur* und die ersten beiden Fassungen von *L'Enfant prodigue* (ein Werk, dessen Reorchestrierung von 1906 gelegentlich aufgeführt wird) sowie *Printemps* – ein höchst individuelles Werk für Chor und Klavier zu vier Händen – wurden später in einer sinfonischen Suite weiterverwendet. Eine Fassung von *La Damselle élue* für Klavier und Gesangsstimme (die als einzige von Debussy selbst überprüft wurde) und die Chorsätze, die für die Wettbewerbe in den Jahren 1882, 1883 und 1884 entstanden, vervollständigen diese Übersicht bislang unbekannter Werke aus der Feder Debussys.

Diese Neuerscheinung bildet den Auftakt zu einer neuen Glossa-Serie, die sich mit Musik befasst, die mit dem Prix de Rome in Zusammenhang steht. Diese Reihe wird in Zusammenarbeit mit dem vor kurzem gegründeten Centre de Musique Romantique Française und mit Hervé Niquet vorbereitet, der auf der hier vorliegenden Aufnahme zwei erstarrige europäische Ensembles leitet: den Flemish Radio Choir und das Brussels Philharmonic.



An interview with Hervé Niquet

What is your attitude to the new Centre de Musique Romantique Française and it being based in Venice?

Being able to work – do research and create editions – on music from the period 1790-1930 realizes for me a dream that I had when I was younger. After all, French music consists of all French music, not just the Baroque and individual later composers. In Venice I have a team of researchers who have the same working habits as their counterparts in Baroque music. And why shouldn't the CMRF be based in Venice? There we have a great patron in Nicole Bru who offered us the money to save French Romantic music and a place to work in. French Romantic music is so important that whether it is Venice, Paris or Canada that is suggested as the location for the study of it, we must do it. And do remember, also, that one of the most important figures in the recent interpretation of Hector Berlioz' music is not exactly French: Colin Davis!

The first release in your new collection focuses on the music of Claude Debussy written in connection with the Prix de Rome. What was the importance of this competition in Debussy's day?

It was very important. All the important composers entered for the competition, even if it meant moving away from Paris and France and living in the Villa Medici in Rome. At this time fashions and tastes were very quick-moving. However important Paris was, Rome gave the composers a sense of identity and they were able to meet many other people there with a completely different frame of mind than that found in the French capital. Composers produced many great works in Rome – they were obliged to compose all sorts of music: masses, symphonies, quartets, cantatas, choruses – and it was a very good exercise to do this. At the end of their lives, many of them reflected very positively on their time in Rome and the lessons learnt there.

Was Debussy himself happy with the scores that he wrote for the Prix de Rome, even if, clearly, the judges were not always appreciative of what he had composed?

He never heard *Le Gladiateur* as the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris didn't play the piece (although he was able to hear *L'Enfant prodigue* there), and ten years later he had forgotten that he had written this piece when his publisher, Durand, proposed doing an edition. Perhaps Debussy was composing so much at this time! However, even if one might later forget having written such a piece I think that nonetheless for a composer every piece is important. With both *Le Gladiateur* and *L'Enfant prodigue* Debussy involved himself in some very hard work in the effort of producing a natural way of singing in French for the performers. At the time he believed that he was the first composer to try and invent a new musical language by carrying out this kind of mathematical and scientific form of vocal production in the French language; little did he know that Lully had done this some 300 years beforehand! In effect, the judges of the Prix de Rome (as opposed to

Debussy's teachers) essentially represented the taste of audiences and critics as they operate with live performances of music. Even if sometimes the jury at the competition managed to mix art with politics nonetheless the members embodied the conservative or modern responses typical of criticism. And when you are an artist it is normal that you have critics, be they good or bad.

What is your opinion of 19th-century French music in general?

I just love French music! Maybe my taste is poor, but when I hear the sacred music, for example, of composers such as Saint-Saëns, Delibes, Gounod I think that this music is great – it is sweet, heavy and creamy music. And think also of that fact that the churches of France when this music was originally performed were completely full. All the priests of the very important churches in Paris (as elsewhere) in those days chose the best composers to do the same thing as was happening in opera. Nowadays, the music heard in churches is so horrible with its guitars and stupid texts. And there are no people there! Music forms part of the "commerce" of the church: it is a shop with good music, with a good smell from the incense, nice robes and decor and paintings. For the next "Prix de Rome" release on Glossa we will be tackling pieces by Camille Saint-Saëns. He entered the competition many times but he never managed to win it. So, for instance we will be recording the *chœurs* with organ accompaniment composed by him from his time with the Prix de Rome.

From a slightly earlier period you have a *tragédie lyrique* such as Grétry's *Andromaque*, which for me is a very important piece [to be released by Glossa in Spring 2010]. Now Grétry had become famous for all the funny *opéras comiques* that he had composed (and it is very difficult to do comedy successfully: if you lose your audience for 20 seconds, you are finished) and *Andromaque* respects all the rules of the *tragédie lyrique* and with just four principals and the choir.

I am also a big fan of Jacques Offenbach's music. He was a genius and he liked to laugh. You can feel this in a work such as *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* [due to be directed by Niquet with Anne-Sofie von Otter in the Theater Basel in nine performances over December 2009 and January 2010 – the same production also visits the Theater an der Wien on January 8 and the Salle Pleyel in Paris on January 11]. Like Saint-Saëns' music for the church this theatrical piece acts as a caricature of society. Offenbach's intelligence allowed him to create a strong structure for the *opéra bouffe*, with fine melodies and good orchestration, and all the notes are important. The only shame for me with Offenbach is that he never composed *tragédies lyriques*, but like Debussy and Saint-Saëns, he represents a strong, typical element within French music, where the structure of the music is virtuosic with a lightness and deftness of touch.

For all of Hervé Niquet's credentials in the world of Baroque music (not least a substantial body of recorded work encompassing the music of Charpentier, Lully, Marais, Destouches, Desmarest from France as well as the recent release on DVD of Purcell's *King Arthur*), the conductor will tell you that as far as French music is concerned he sees no division between Lully and Satie. He did, after all, study with a pupil of Maurice Ravel and Marguerite Long and he spent formative educational years as a singer at the Opéra de Paris. For many years he has matched the work he carries out with his own Le Concert Spirituel with conducting modern orchestras in far more modern repertoire. And so, finding him at the helm of the Brussels Philharmonic recording Debussy for Glossa should come as no real surprise. Niquet has had a long involvement with the Centre de Musique Baroque in Versailles and now is extending that particular process of research which yields performances (and recordings) with the newly-created Centre de Musique Romantique Française based in the Palazzetto Bru Zane in Venice, with Nicole Bru as its patron. Nor does this new release represent a one-off exercise in approaching scores well-known to one and all. Instead *Claude Debussy: Music for the Prix de Rome* marks the outset of an important new collection, set to embrace an important body of works written by French composers associated with a competition, organized through the French state in its different manifestations all the way from 1803 through to 1968 – and where many of these compositions, however famous their composer became, remain forgotten today.

Some of the works recorded earlier this year for this first release bear titles which will resonate little with music lovers (*Le Gladiateur*, *Salut printemps*, *Invocation*), and even better-known pieces such as *La Damselle élue* and *L'Enfant prodigue* appear here in earlier and different scorings, closely linked with Debussy's efforts in the 1880s to win the prestigious Prix de Rome. The competition rules required a series of vocal compositions to be written with further *envois* demanded if the composer passed to the stage of being able to stay in the Villa Medici in Rome. In the accompanying booklet to Hervé Niquet's recording the fascinating essays of Alexandre Dratwicki and Denis Herlin examine the history of the Prix de Rome and Claude Debussy's part in it. Hervé Niquet was persuaded to tear himself away from all his investigations, conducting and recording activities and reflect on this new stage in his career – and on French Romantic music.

Mark Wiggins
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