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François Médicis and Steven Huebner, eds., *Debussy's Resonance*. Eastman Studies in Music vol. 150. Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2018. xiv + 625 pp. Notes, illustrations, music examples, and contributor biographies. \$125.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781580465250.

Review by Simon Trezise, Trinity College Dublin.

2012 was an important year in Debussy scholarship. It is often true that anniversaries of composers' births and deaths are of limited consequence to the patient graft of scholars and scholarly editions. One doubts that Beethoven's impression on the academic canon will have been greatly affected by 2020's observance of 250 years since his birth. Record companies and other commercial concerns may benefit more, in turn benefiting the community at large with more recordings and suchlike. However, the Montreal conference that was held to mark Debussy's 150 years, may, with hindsight, be viewed in a different light, as confirmed by the significant publication of some of the papers given there, albeit often in a considerably revised form. To create a pleasing chronological frame, the book's publication coincided with the centenary of Debussy's death, which saw a remarkable volume of recordings from Warner Classics that almost completely realized the collection's title: *Claude Debussy: The Complete Works*.

If we backtrack a little to the state of Debussy research around 1990, as François de Médicis and Steven Huebner do in their excellent introduction to *Debussy's Resonance*, we find a volume much prized in Debussy scholarship, *Claude Debussy: A Guide to Research*, in which James Briscoe identifies 910 secondary sources. This volume has not been renewed or revised; but in the intervening years, the editors of the current volume find "no fewer than 2,271 entries" in *RILM* (Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale), which brings Debussy into contention with Bartók and Stravinsky, though some way off Wagner (7,870) and Beethoven (6,675) (p. 1). Since Briscoe's publication, we have had the publication of the complete letters, edited by François Lesure and Denis Herlin, the ramifications of which have still to be fully assimilated.[1] With considerable progress being made in the *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy*, 2012 offered a suitable moment to take stock of the burgeoning wealth of Debussy scholarship and, of course, to contribute more. This is where *Debussy's Resonance* seems to have very considerable value, for it is more than just another collection of essays in the manner of the nevertheless still important first *Debussy Studies* volume, for example.[2] (Another is in the pipeline). Such is the ambition of the new volume, one may reasonably see it as a new gathering point for Debussy scholarship.

In their introduction, the editors provide a concise but thorough synopsis of the main areas in which academic work on Debussy is progressing. These are reflected in the five parts of *Debussy's Resonance*: 1. Historiographical and Editorial Issues, 2. Style and Genre, 3. History and

Hermeneutics, 4. Theoretical Issues, and 5. Performance and Reception. In the process they tackle age-old and almost too familiar questions, such as whether Debussy might be more aligned with Impressionism or Symbolism. The editors list some of the most important contributors to this discussion, most of which emphasize Debussy's affinities with Symbolism, and then lead us to the radical rethinking of how Debussy responded to the poetry he set or that inspired him (see below). This introduction is already a valuable entry point into the rich landscape of Debussy scholarship, but it is further amplified by the collection's first chapter, "Debussy Fifty Years Later: Has the Barrel Run Dry?" by Richard Langham Smith. He deals historiographically with changing emphases in Debussy scholarship. Most striking, perhaps, is that although he ranges over the whole gamut of Debussy studies, he opens with some reflections on performance. This would have been inconceivable in the centenary year of the composer's birth, when performance had little bearing on scholarship, except for the advances being made in so-called authenticity; yet, here, we have a preliminary discussion of changing styles of performance style set against the background of the reevaluation of Debussy's own recordings and those of musicians of his time who had been influenced or coached by him. One must attribute the arrival of performance in music scholarship, especially the valuation of recordings, to the influence of CHARM (the AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music), Nicholas Cook's *Beyond the Score* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), and much else. Thanks to the broadening of opportunities for performers to examine their approach to Debussy, including the first performances using gut strings and other instrumental changes reflecting the age in which Debussy lived, we have "new advances in Debussy interpretation" with "increased variety in realizations of the composer's sound ideals" (p. 23).

Performance issues are explored in part five of *Debussy's Resonance*. Jocelyn Ho considers the evidence of Debussy's Welte-Mignon piano rolls. Contrary to some later views, which held Debussy to be strict in matters of interpretation, she demonstrates how much Debussy reflected the freedoms of his time in his approach to rubato, dislocation of the hands, and so on. One might wish she had engaged more with previous scholarship, not least with Langham Smith's opening chapter in Briscoe's edited collection *Debussy in Performance*,^[3] which covers some of the same ground. Neither does one expect to see Madame Mauté de Fleurville cited as a pupil of Chopin. All we know is that she might have been.^[4] Nevertheless, there is much new documentation of Debussy's performance practice, plus a defense of the piano rolls as a partly reliable witness. In the following chapter Caroline Rae rehabilitates an almost forgotten pianist, Marius-François Gaillard, whose prewar recordings of a large part of Debussy's piano music are now available, after years of neglect, on compact disc.

A fascinating side of Debussy scholarship is the changing content of what constitutes the Debussy canon. Not only have new works come to light, but incomplete works have also been put into effective realizations for performance, and previously neglected early works have been rehabilitated. This makes the steady but understandably slow progress of the *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy* even more fascinating; and as Roy Howat demonstrates, an early instance of the growing importance of performance studies in music has led to changing editorial practice, including the incorporation of four unpublished chords in the prelude "Danseuses de Delphes," which are "unambiguously present on Debussy's 1912 recording" and which "fill gaps in the musical texture" (p. 42). Howat's chapter nicely summarizes the current status of the edition. In this same section, Denis Herlin considers little-known manuscripts, which complement the celebrated Vasnier manuscript, shedding light on a friendship that eluded Lesure and Rolf in the critical biography—that with Henry Kunkelmann. It is well known that many youthful *mélodies*

were dedicated to Marie Vasnier, but it is less well known that nine bore a dedication to Kunkelmann, a student at the Conservatoire in the 1880s. Herlin carefully evaluates chronological matters and textual insights offered by these important manuscripts. His work has a thoroughness and depth that will illuminate comparable studies of Debussy's early years. That the critical biography has its limits is inevitable, and it is unlikely that a new biography of similar scope will be attempted, so such additions to the story of Debussy's early years in the form of this early friendship as explored by Herlin are invaluable. In addition, David Grayson, in chapter four, explores a song from the *Recueil Vasnier*, "Paysage sentimental," examining the revisions it underwent and shedding light on Debussy's personal and creative life.

Debussy's songs also figure prominently in an important contribution from David J. Code. Arguing that attention has tended to focus on individual songs, he makes a pitch for considering eight song triptychs as more unified than has hitherto been allowed. In order to achieve this, when traditional analytical tools fail to provide a means, he appeals to the concept of the "painterly" and the play of imagination, sensibility, and interests in illuminating connections between individual songs. In seeking the painterly he considers the role of the triptych in art, especially the Japanese woodcuts so beloved of the composer. In the first book of *Fêtes Galantes*, for example, he discerns a subtle inflection from the composer's still simmering infatuation with *Tristan*. It is perhaps unfortunate that some of the musical evidence should be rather trivial, based upon detecting *Tristan* chromaticism that might occur in many contexts; but Code's approach to these multipart works is rich in promise for future research and offers one of this collection's many valuable orientations for our theoretical understanding of Debussy.

Just as valuable is François Médicis's unusual study of Alfred Bruneau and Debussy, in which he attempts to position the immortalized composer beside an almost forgotten contemporary with similar aims and a glowing reputation at the time. He makes the point that "for a young composer in the 1890s seeking to escape the temptations of Wagnerism, Bruneau's operas would have stood out on account of their success and originality" (p. 176). It is surprising that work of this nature is so rare, and once again *Debussy's Resonance* provides a rich suggestion for future work, outstandingly presented and, as with all the chapters requiring them, lavishly illustrated with music examples, mostly free from the copy-editing aberrations that so often accompany them in other publications.

Steven Huebner, in a related chapter, applies himself to the question of Massenet as an antipode to the ubiquitous Wagner. Was he really the poison (for Debussy) some have alleged? Whenever writers wish to dismiss and damn with faint praise the early music of Debussy, they refer to it as a product of Massenet's influence. Here is a provocative consideration of influence, charting changing perceptions of what were conservative and progressive forces in Debussy's growth as a composer.

Robert Orledge's contribution is a broad, fairly general consideration of Debussy's concept of orchestrating, which begins by noting that it was not taught at the Conservatoire, where Debussy studied for a decade. At a certain point, Orledge seems more concerned with his own efforts to bring unfinished works to life, which suggests that the focus of the chapter might have been reflected by a different title. But this is part of the fascination of this collection, for it charts all the main streams in Debussy scholarship and reception, including the evolving notion of what constitutes his oeuvre.

Two chapters probe deeply into oriental and Iberian strains in Debussy's music. The first, by Marie Rolf, explores early songs; and the second, by Michel Duchesneau, is concerned with Debussy and Japanese prints. Duchesneau speculates provocatively on what might have been the extent and, more importantly, the limit of Debussy's interest in Japanese art and music.

August Sheehy raises one of the areas where I believe a return to basics might be called for in Debussy studies. Throughout the technical discussions of the music, authors respond to Debussy's use of key signatures by asserting the presence of major and minor keys. No one would dispute that many of Debussy's works have conventional signatures, and many end with triads that seem to support a common-practice, tonal structure. But Debussy rarely uses dominant chords; his music lacks voice leading as it was understood by Schenker and other theorists; and the scales he prefers often have a modal character or belong to octatonic and other post-tonal practices. The work of Richard S. Parks in recognizing the atonal aspects of Debussy's music has failed to take root in Debussy studies. Sheehy's study of the piano prelude "Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir" argues for an embodied understanding, the body's own memory, of a faded, version memory of an actual waltz, citing examples by Schubert and Chopin. To create a sense of the waltz that might have been, he recomposes the opening bars of the prelude in 3/4 time in a regular A major. The opening of the prelude, he alleges, creates an underlying implication of the waltz and of the key, but considering that the opening is in 5/4, with a rhythm that does not sound very waltz-like, this is a stretch. Moreover, A major is present only in the triad of A: the harmonic system underpinning the key is absent throughout.

Katherine Bergeron and Julian Johnson both have much to tell us about Symbolism and Debussy's response to it. With so much excellent writing on the songs, it is already clear that this collection will help us to understand Debussy's response to the many symbolist poems he chose. Bergeron attempts to find meaning in *Pelléas*. It is a quest that has foxed many writers of note; but in accepting that real communication does not and cannot take place in this opera, she uncovers what seems to be a deeper truth, "which lies always on that *other* side, not hunted down in spoken words but heard in hidden repercussions" (pp. 364-365, italics original). Given the complexities of meaning in Mallarmé's poetry, and the frequent thinness of verbal substance, it is not surprising that one might detect a friction between the setting and the original. Johnson discusses the *Trois poèmes de Mallarmé*, finding, for example, in "Soupir," contradictions of the poetic idea. He writes: "Preoccupied with thin air and cultivating the edges of silence, Debussy's Mallarmé songs offer intriguing examples of the capacity of music 'to say nothing'" (p. 376).

In part 4 of *Debussy's Resonance*, we find more on Debussy's pedagogic background, with a stimulating account of "Debussy's Contrapuntal Games" by Matthew Brown. His discussion ranges from obvious surface counterpoint to the more embedded style of the later works, not least "Rondes de printemps" of the orchestral *Images*. Useful but surely contentious in light of Debussy's evident rejection of major-minor tonality is Mark DeVoto's extremely wide-ranging study of Debussy's "Motivic Harmony and Choice of Keys." Most controversial is DeVoto's statement that "the key signature always symbolized a diatonic scale whose tonic is never in doubt" (p. 421). One suspects a whole generation of work on tonality has been disregarded in this sweeping statement, which careful analysis of the supposed diatonic scales would quickly refute. One must surely hope that a more nuanced approach to Debussy's tonal and atonal music might eventually emerge. There is certainly a more carefully inflected approach, which exquisitely complements DeVoto's, in Boyd Pomeroy's study of Debussy's G#/Ab complex. Within a variety of tonal contexts, several works of Debussy land for long periods on G# or Ab, perhaps for a

central section or for a cumulative drive towards closure. It is indeed curious that the pitch should have drawn similar responses from music composed around 1890 to the Indian summer of 1915. Pomeroy uses voice-leading graphs in the Schenker style, but his language sometimes recognizes modal orientation. Even so, is it useful to describe the Violin Sonata as a G minor work? Does this not distort the subtleties of Debussy's tonal language? Perhaps in this regard *Debussy's Resonance* clarifies the current state of thinking on Debussy's harmony and makes the need for a reassessment of the language used rather urgent.

Mark McFarland's study of *Jeux*, working from the stage directions, unlike many writers who treat *Jeux* as absolute music, explores Leitharmony connected with the three characters. This breaks down into three types, namely octatonic, chromatic, and diatonic—one for each character in the Russian tradition of Rimsky-Korsakov and Stravinsky. Some of the theoretical concepts, especially chromatic aggregation, seem imperfectly defined, and it is not clear why the very broad notion of implication-realization is evoked; but McFarland tentatively maps out a fascinating path for future work on *Jeux* and associated works, especially *Khamma*.

In addition to the work on the piano rolls and Gaillard, part 5, "Performance and Reception," ends with a wonderful contribution from Barbara L Kelly in which she explores Debussy's changing reputation in the years shortly after his death. Taking as her starting point Henry Prunières's angry refusal, in a letter to the composer's widow Emma Debussy, to correct the clumsy grammar and style of Debussy's early letters to M. Vasnier, Kelly explores the manner in which writers attempted to color Debussy's early reception. The work is limited in scope, but rich in implications for understanding that a composer's reputation is not an accidental outcome of uncontrolled forces. It can, to some extent, be decided by editors with an agenda.

Students of Debussy now have *Debussy's Resonance* as a wide-ranging, extremely well-documented gateway to their research. It cannot replicate the function of Briscoe's *Guide*, but it provides a critical frame for all the main areas of Debussy scholarship by many of the most significant Debussy scholars of our day. It will also be noticed that 2019 saw the publication of Marie Rolf's translation and revision of Lesure's biography of Debussy, for the first time providing comprehensive references for the information in the main text. The two volumes complement each other and are an impressive testimony to the robust health of Debussy scholarship.

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NOTES

[1] Claude Debussy, *Correspondance: 1872-1918*, ed. François Lesure and Denis Herlin (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

[2] Richard Langham Smith, ed., *Debussy Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[3] Richard Langham Smith, “Debussy on Performance: Sound and Unsound Ideals”, in James R. Briscoe, ed., *Debussy in Performance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 3-27.

[4] See François Lesure, *Claude Debussy: A Critical Biography*, trans. and rev. Marie Rolf (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2019), pp. 9ff.

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