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## Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Encore presentations of the entire *Discoveries* series every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. on WRTI-HD2

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Saturday, July 2nd, 2011, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

**Claude Debussy** (1862-1918). [Symphony in B minor](#) (1880), orch. Tony Finno 1998. Orchestre National de Lyon, Jun Märkl. Naxos 8.572583. Tr 14-16. 11:15

**Claude Debussy**. [Fantaisie for Piano and Orchestra](#) (1889/90). Aldo Ciccolini, piano, Orchestre de l'ORTF, Jean Martinon. EMI 75526. CD 4, Tr 1-3. 24:54

**Claude Debussy**. [Six Épigrapbes antiques](#) (1914), orch. Ernest Ansermet 1935. L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Ansermet. Decca 4758140. CD 4, Tr 13-18. 15:11



Maybe it's not fair, but we're going to play two works by Debussy that he never wanted us to hear. And we'll listen to one piece in a form he never heard.

When Claude Debussy was 18 and teaching piano to the children of Nadezhda von Meck (Tchaikovsky's famed patroness), he wrote the first movement of a symphony--oh yes, a symphony by Debussy--which he sketched out for piano duet. But he made no more progress on it, and later told people that he didn't like symphonies. The manuscript was quickly forgotten.

It resurfaced after his death, however, and this delightful orchestration of it reveals an energetic young composer working in the Romantic heritage of Massenet and Franck. It's fun to think that the composer of this traditional piece would, in a few years, turn the musical world on its head with daring impressionistic harmonies.

While he was still finding the musical language that would be identifiably his, he wrote the *Fantaisie for Piano and Orchestra*. Then, during rehearsals for the premiere, he snatched the parts from the orchestra stands, forbidding it ever to be played. While we don't entirely know the reason for his vehemence, he was dissatisfied with the orchestration, and wanted to make the piano more clearly heard above the other instruments. This is something all composers of concerto-like pieces face, regardless of the solo instrument.

Others postulate that the *Fantaisie* came about because Debussy heard Javanese gamelan music at the 1889 Paris Exposition. Perhaps he thought that the new work didn't fully exploit the exotic sounds? Well, this is what makes music history fun... what a different piece might it have been had he drawn inspiration from another exhibition at the fair: the Wild West Show with Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley? In any case, Debussy went on to other things, and his ban was finally overcome with the premiere of the *Fantaisie* in 1919. Of course, he had been dead for a year and a half.

These early works aside, Debussy is known as the leading composer of "impressionism." *Six Épigrapbes antiques* is a good example. Partly based on songs from 1900, they were written for piano four-hands (as was the Symphony) in 1914, Ernest Ansermet orchestrating them two decades later.

Impressionism in painting can refer to the small, meticulous brush strokes that evoke a mood, if not the photographic detail, of a scene. In music, the grand statement of the symphonic tradition is eschewed for nuanced colors, with chords moving in unexpected (the theorists say "non-functional") ways. The music appears to float, rather than point the way to a destination and move toward it. All such descriptions are, at most, only partly useful, and Debussy himself didn't care for the term "impressionism."

Maybe it isn't fair.

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Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, at the Parkway Central Library of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).