

Next on

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

Saturday, August 4th, 2012, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918). *Danse (Tarantelle styrienne)* (1891, 1903). David Allen Wehr, piano. Connoisseur Soc 4219, Tr 4, 5:21

Debussy. *Danse, orch. Ravel* (1923). Philharmonia Orchestra, Geoffrey Simon. Cala 1024, Tr 9, 5:01

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). *Shéhérazade* (1903). Anne Sofie von Otter, mezzo-soprano, Cleveland Orchestra, Pierre Boulez. DG 2121, Tr 1-3, 17:16

Ravel. *Introduction and Allegro* (1905). Rachel Masters, harp, Christopher King, clarinet, Ulster Orchestra, Yan Pascal Tortelier. Chandos 8972, Tr 7, 11:12

Debussy. *Sarabande*, from *Pour le piano* (1901). Larissa Dedova, piano. Centaur 3094, Disk 4, Tr 6, 4:21

Debussy. *Sarabande*, orch. Ravel (1923). Ulster Orchestra, Yan Pascal Tortelier. Chandos 9129, Tr 2, 4:29



This time, he'd show them. The Paris Conservatoire accepted Ravel as a piano student at age 16, and even though he won a piano competition, more than anything he wanted to compose. But the Conservatoire was a hard place. He never won the fugue prize, never won the composition prize, never won anything for writing music and they sent him packing. Twice. He studied with the great Gabriel Fauré, in school and out, but he just couldn't make any headway with the ruling musical authorities.

If it wasn't clunky parallelisms in his counterpoint, it was unresolved chords in his harmony, but whatever the reason, four times he tried for the ultimate prize in composition, the Prix de Rome, and four times he was refused.

Ravel tried again one last time in 1905 at age 30, his last year of eligibility. His career was beginning to take off, and critics were noticing his exotic and meticulous music, which included a string quartet, entrancing piano works such as *Menuet antique*, *Jeux d'Eau*, and *Pavane for a dead princess*, and the languid *Shéhérazade*, his settings of the avant-garde and orientalist poetry of Tristan Klingsor.

Public success or not, as the judging started on the 1905 Rome Prize, the bad news hit quickly. Ravel didn't even make it out of the first round. But this time the critics spoke out, even those who didn't warm to his music. All of the finalists, it turned out, were students of one of the judges. The Director of the Conservatoire, Theodore Dubois, resigned. If Ravel could get any satisfaction from this, his fifth failure, it was that heads rolled from *L'affaire Ravel*, as it became to be called. And Fauré became the new Director of the Conservatoire.

Ravel kept working, finishing the *Introduction and Allegro* that same year. Soon, he would be a leading composer of France, along with his friend Claude Debussy. After Debussy's death in 1918, Ravel was the torchbearer for French music to the world, an irony not lost on him, given the ill-will between him and French cultural officialdom. The old guard still didn't trust him. He refused to accept the Legion of Honor, offered to him in 1920. The new generation considered him old-fashioned, and followed Erik Satie (nine years older than Ravel!).

He is in the top echelon of composers, and no one sounds anything like him. As an orchestrator he is peerless. Listening to his transcriptions of Debussy's piano music alongside the originals illuminates the art of orchestration. Far from mere arranging, in Ravel's hands it is transformative. Listen to magic as he picks out new colors, unearths rhythms, and creates a garden of surprises.

Debussy's music by way of Ravel is also bittersweet, as even they had a tenuous relationship. Critics used to enjoy setting them in opposition, and their friendship suffered because of it. But Ravel's love of Debussy's music is made manifest in these orchestrations, written five years after Debussy's death. When Ravel himself died in 1937, he was still an outsider. But he showed them; he finally showed them. And now, he shows us.

Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), former 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](#).