

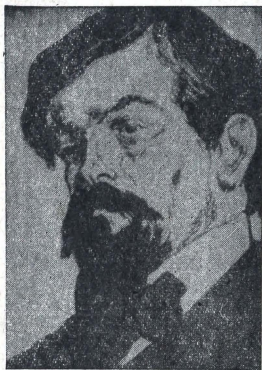
MUSIC APPRECIATION SECTION

GREAT COMPOSERS OF MUSIC

SECOND SERIES

By BERT PAUL OSBON *

XI. DEBUSSY



DEBUSSY
Modernistic Composer

OF ALL composers, the music of Claude Debussy (de-bu-se) is the most difficult to write about, and it is more difficult yet to listen to and understand his compositions. However, the few facts regarding his life are quickly told.

Debussy was born in France in 1862. He went to school in the French town in which he was born, and grew up with the intention of entering the navy. So as a boy he was not a musical prodigy. A musical aunt guided him to the Conservatory of Music in Paris, but he was too impatient of technical drill, and too

original to excel there either as a pianist or composer.

Nevertheless, upon graduation in 1884, he wrote a cantata called *The Prodigal Son* which brought him fame and which won a prize in the music school at Rome, so to Rome he went for further study. He was oppressed and unhappy and unable to work in the grandeur of Rome. He returned to Paris after one year's absence, which was all he could stand.

He was sensitive and high-strung, and was very unhappy. Ugly people and crying children disturbed him, although he adored his own child whom he called Chou-Chou. To her he dedicated his piano suite called *The Children's Corner* with its charming *Golliwog's Cake-walk* and the *Doll's Serenade*. He has made thousands happy with his delightful *Children's Corner* which you should hear; in addition to *Golliwog's Cake-walk* and *Doll's Serenade*, there is *Jimbo's Lullaby* (which refers to an elephant), *The Snow Is Dancing* and *The Little Shepherd*.

Debussy wrote another composition which has become very well known. It is called *The Afternoon of a Faun*. A poet wrote a poem about a faun which is one of a class of rural Italian deities represented as of human shape, with pointed ears, small horns, and sometimes a goat's tail, or as half goat and half man. Debussy called his *Afternoon of a Faun* a prelude, but rather by reference to the poem which he followed, instead of following

* Formerly in the Department of Music Education, New York University, New York City, U.S.A.

the form of a musical prelude. It is a very fascinating piece of music with an exotic, languorous atmosphere that no other composer has achieved.

We may consider this composer as the most poetic and original of present music writers, with striking cantatas and symphonic poems. He also wrote a few operas, besides smaller works.

Such modern composers as Tschai-kowsky (see THE YOUNG CITIZEN for July, 1941) and Debussy have literally created tonal coloring of the symphony orchestra of which Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven did not dream. The melodies of Wagner and Debussy are more exciting than the simpler patterns of Haydn, Mozart, and Schubert. But it is worth remembering that each kind of music was thoroughly satisfying to the public in its day.

There is realism as well as beauty in other orchestral works of Debussy such as *The Sea*, and two nocturnes called *Clouds* and *Fetes* which have been played in Manila by the Manila Symphony Orchestra. In the program notes of the concert given on September 9, 1941 by the Manila Symphony Orchestra, a critic has this to say regarding Debussy's composition *Clouds* (*Nuages*): "In this lovely impressionistic fragment, Debussy does not attempt to point a picture of clouds moving through the sea of heaven, but rather to evoke such a mood as might come upon one who gazes upon the slow and solemn passage of the clouds dissolving into a grey vagueness tinged with white."

And of the composition *Fetes*, these notes are printed: "*Fetes* is an unforgettable example of the quality in music that accomplishes meaning and suggestions quite beyond words. The music seems to come from the shadowy distance.

Swiftly dancing figures, whirling in complete abandon, crowd and jostle on the scene, lost in the joy of sensuous movement. Swiftly they disappear, and the scene fades."

In his piano music of a serious nature Debussy includes many picturesque titles, such as *The Girl with the Flaxen Hair*, *Goldfish*, *Gardens in the Rain*, *The Submerged Cathedral*, *Moonlight*, *Reflections in the Water*, *Evening in Granada*, etc.

It is Debussy who has given real individuality to French piano music, and his novel effects of tonal coloring, suggesting gray, cloudlike backgrounds and blurred outlines, represent something unique in music, thus far defying imitation by any other composer. He is primarily a composer of program music, and most of his pieces have descriptive titles such as those given above.

Debussy uses many dissonances in his compositions, but his music is now accepted as well written, and his original genius is unquestioned. In some compositions he uses the whole-tone scale. The modern whole-tone scale, as its name im-

(Please turn to page 408.)

THIRTY FEET! HOW MANY DO YOU KNOW?

HOW MANY of the animal's feet shown in the picture on the next page can you name? Try first, then check with the following list. In the first row from left to right they are: horse, elephant, eagle, newt, ostrich, camel; second row: chimpanzee, tiger, duck, shrew, lizard, beetle; third row: sloth, bear, locust, flamingo, platypus, crab; fourth row: peccary, spider, giraffe, frog, armadillo, ox; fifth row: kangaroo, tortoise, squirrel, iguana, mouse, gecko.

THE OLD CLOCK

(Continued from page 394)

thought, as he made his way across the *sala*, "and I can do it."

Crash! There was a dreadful noise. He had pushed over the tall, old clock in the dark. Uncle Juan's door opened quickly, and he came hurrying with a flashlight in his hand.

"Why, Isidro, what's the matter?"

"Oh, Uncle Juan, I just meant—" he began. "I wanted it to—"

"If you will help me," said Uncle Juan, "perhaps together we can lift it up."

There was not much damage done. The works of the old clock were unhurt, but the back of the case was broken right away. It lay splintered from the fall, and there among the splinters was something else—a long, thick envelope with red seals! The color went from Uncle Juan's face as he lifted it up.

"What's this? Why, *it's the lost paper!*" he gasped.

Just at that minute the pendulum started again. It swung to and fro, and there was a whirring sound. And then, in the half-darkness, the song of the clock began once more: "I knew—I I knew—I knew!"

DEBUSSY

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plies, goes up and down in steps of a whole tone, without any of the half-tone intervals found in the diatonic scales. This explains some of the peculiar chords which he uses.

He never crowds his music with tone color, but he has made music express poetic feeling in the most delicate and unusual fashion. One simply feels the effect of his music as one does sunlight, or a calm beautiful afternoon.

Musicians have been keenly interested in Debussy's use of the old Greek scales and in his orchestral combinations. But to the listener, the point of interest is in the effect of the music.

Claude Debussy is the real founder of modern music. His highly original methods of harmonizing and creating tonal colors has revolutionized the whole musical art. His orchestral compositions speak a new and different language, and his piano pieces are unique. He wrote his songs in such a manner as no other composer has ever equaled. Everything is vague, ethereal, without a definite rhythm or melody. Such is the music of Claude Debussy.

MOUNTING BUTTERFLIES

(Continued from page 400)

board lengthwise, and fastened in tiny notches at each end of the board, as shown in the lowest picture.

To keep the body straight, pins should be stuck into the groove of the board underneath the lower end of the body to support it. The feelers (antennae) and legs of the butterfly should be carefully arranged, and, if necessary, may be kept in position by pins stuck into the board slantingwise and pressing upon the feelers and the legs.

The specimens should be laid aside in a shady, dry place, free from dust and secure from the attacks of ants, mice, or cockroaches. Small specimens will dry quickly, but the larger ones may take several weeks.

To know whether a specimen is ready for placing in the collecting cabinet, touch the abdomen with a needle, and if the skin is dry and immovable, the drying is completed.

In the cabinet the specimens may be damaged by mice, ants or cockroaches, or they may mould. The filing cabinet should be kept dry and insect proof. A little naphthaline or a few moth balls may be placed in the cabinet.