
Inside Chamber Music Lecture

Inventing Modernism

Claude Debussy: *Languorous Ecstasy*

with Bruce Adolphe, Resident Lecturer

Wednesday, October 15, 2008 at 6:30 PM
Daniel and Joanna S. Rose Studio

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918) | Quartet in G minor for Strings, Op. 10 (1893)

Escher String Quartet (Adam Barnett-Hart, Wu Jie, violins;
Pierre Lapointe, viola; Andrew Janss, cello)

Music from today's lecture can be heard in concert on Wednesday, October 22 at The New York Society for Ethical Culture. The next Inside Chamber Music lecture, *Leos Janáček: A Chord is Alive*, is on Wednesday, October 29.

Meet the Artists

Lecturer **Bruce Adolphe** is a well-known composer, the author of several books on music, an innovative educator, and a versatile performer. He has taught at The Juilliard School, New York University, and Yale, and is a frequent guest lecturer at schools and concert series throughout the United States. His weekly radio program, *Piano Puzzlers*, in its fourth year as a part of American Public Radio's *Performance Today*, is now heard in over 200 cities, and he has appeared on Live From Lincoln Center telecasts and on New York's Metro Arts for PBS. At the Chamber Music Society since 1992, Mr. Adolphe is the resident lecturer of *Inside Chamber Music*, director of the family program *Meet the Music!*, and host of the New Music in the Rose concert series. As a composer, he has held residencies across the country, most recently at the Brain and Creativity Institute in Los Angeles, and fulfilled commissions from many leading organizations and artists, from Itzhak Perlman and the Brentano String Quartet to the Metropolitan Opera Guild and The Washington National Opera. For many years an annotator for SONY Classical Records and a featured speaker at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, he has also written three books on music — *The Mind's Ear: Exercises for Improving the Musical Imagination*, *What to Listen for in the World*, and *Of Mozart, Parrots and Cherry Blossoms in the Wind: A Composer Explores Mysteries of the Musical Mind*. With Julian Fifer, he co-founded PollyRhythm Productions and The Learning Maestros, both devoted to the creation of interdisciplinary, arts-focused educational repertory and materials in a wide range of media. (The company is named after Mr. Adolphe's opera- and jazz-singing parrot, Polly Rhythm.)

The **Escher String Quartet** has received acclaim for its individual sound, inspired artistic decisions, and unique cohesiveness. The quartet has performed at prestigious venues and festivals across the United States, including Lincoln Center, the 92nd Street Y, and Symphony Space in New York, Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the Ravinia and Caramoor Festivals, Music@Menlo, and La Jolla SummerFest. The quartet has collaborated with such eminent artists as Lawrence Dutton, Leon Fleisher, Lynn Harrell, Jeffrey Kahane, Joseph Kalichstein, Anne-Marie McDermott, David Shifrin, and Pinchas Zukerman. The Escher has also joined guitar luminary Pepe Romero for a New Year's Eve performance at the 92nd Street Y, pianist Wu Han at the Greenwich Library Concert Series, and pop-folk singer-songwriter Luke Temple at the nightclubs Tonic and Union Hall. Within months of its inception in 2005, the ensemble was invited by both Pinchas Zukerman and Itzhak Perlman to be the quartet-in-residence at each artist's summer festival. The following winter, the Escher Quartet made its Washington, DC debut representing the Manhattan School of Music for the Kennedy Center's Conservatory Project. The group also served as Caramoor's 2007-08 Ernst Stiefel String Quartet-in-Residence and Visiting Artist-in-Residence at Stony Brook University in a unique relationship with the world-renowned Emerson String Quartet. A member of Chamber Music Society Two, the quartet recently recorded Amy Beach's Piano Quintet with Anne-Marie McDermott on the CMS Studio Recordings label. The Escher Quartet takes its name from Dutch graphic artist M.C. Escher; the quartet members were inspired by Escher's method of interplay between individual components working together to form a whole.

Debussy

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with Bruce Adolphe

Whole Tone Scales (there are only two transpositions): Some Pentatonic Scales:

The image shows four musical staves. The first two staves represent whole tone scales: one starting on C (C, D, E, F#, G, A, B) and one starting on Bb (Bb, C, D, Eb, F, G). The last two staves represent pentatonic scales: one starting on C (C, D, E, G, A) and one starting on Bb (Bb, C, D, F, G).

HARMONIES:

This section illustrates four types of chords and their relationship to the whole tone scale. The top staff shows the chords: Major (C major), Dominant 7th (F7), Dominant 9th (F9), and "Half Diminished" (Bb7b9). The bottom staff shows the whole tone scale (C, D, E, F#, G, A, B) with annotations: "Augmented" with an arrow pointing to the F# note, and "whole tones" below the scale. Explanatory text includes: "May be heard as whole-tones plus one note out of collection" for the Dominant 9th; "One 1/2 step away from diminished 7th" for the Half Diminished chord; and "One 1/2 step (up or down) away from whole-tones" and "One 1/2 step away from minor 7th chord (could also move the Bb up to B-natural)" for the Dominant 7th chord.

See bars 145 to 147 in Movement I

This section is titled "Parallel Harmony:" and shows five dominant 7th chords rising chromatically in the left hand. The right hand features a melodic line with various intervals: "11th (dissonant)", "minor 9th", "major 9th", "appoggiatura", and "major 9th etc.". The bottom staff shows a bass line with triplets of eighth notes, numbered 1 through 5. A note at the end of the bass line is annotated: "Ah! This chord resolves the F, G, and E-flat".

If the opening were in G Minor:

Actual opening bars:

This section compares two versions of the opening. The left side, starting at bar 13, shows the opening in G minor. The right side shows the actual opening bars. Annotations include: "half-diminished" pointing to a chord in the actual opening; and "French 6th (whole-tone collection) because of F#" pointing to a chord in the actual opening.

THEMATIC TRANSFORMATION WITHIN MOVEMENT I

Opening
17 Intervals: Bars 13 -14 Bars 63 - 64

Detailed description: This block shows two musical phrases. The first phrase, labeled 'Opening', consists of two measures (bars 13-14) in 4/4 time. It features a sequence of notes with a triplet of eighth notes. The second phrase, labeled 'Bars 63 - 64', is a similar sequence of notes with a triplet of eighth notes, showing a transformation of the opening intervallic structure.

23 Bars 88 -89 Bars 92-93 Bars 97-98 (En animant, Reh. No. 3)

Interval augmented Interval diminished Whole Tone Scale for entire phrase

Detailed description: This block shows three musical phrases. The first (bars 88-89) has a triplet of eighth notes with an 'Interval augmented' annotation. The second (bars 92-93) has a triplet of eighth notes with an 'Interval diminished' annotation. The third (bars 97-98) is a whole tone scale. The text 'Whole Tone Scale for entire phrase' spans across these three phrases.

29 Pentatonic Scale at the end:
From Bar 193 to end etc. to end of Movement I

Opening intervals of tune generate Pentatonic Scale

Detailed description: This block shows a single musical phrase, a pentatonic scale, starting from bar 193 and continuing to the end of the movement. A bracket under the first few notes is labeled 'Opening intervals of tune generate Pentatonic Scale'.

THEMATIC TRANSFORMATION BETWEEN MOVEMENTS

31 Movement I Movement II opening (compare to Movement I, bar 153)

Detailed description: This block compares the opening of Movement I (bars 31-32) with the opening of Movement II (bars 153-154). Both phrases feature a triplet of eighth notes, illustrating thematic transformation between movements.

39 Later, Movement II From Movement III Theme Same, transposed to show same notes as Movement I

Detailed description: This block shows a later instance of the Movement II theme (bars 39-40). It is annotated as 'From Movement III Theme' and 'Same, transposed to show same notes as Movement I', indicating a thematic link.

45 Movement IV (En animant peu a peu) Compare to second phrase of tune in opening Movement II

Same, transposed to show relationship to opening of Movement II

Detailed description: This block shows the beginning of Movement IV (bars 45-46). It is annotated as 'Compare to second phrase of tune in opening Movement II' and 'Same, transposed to show relationship to opening of Movement II', highlighting the thematic connection.

48 Movement IV (Très mouvementé et avec passion) Here it is uncompressed, revealing the same intervals once again

Compare to Movement I, Bar 93 shown above

Detailed description: This block shows a more expressive version of Movement IV (bars 48-49). It is annotated as 'Here it is uncompressed, revealing the same intervals once again' and 'Compare to Movement I, Bar 93 shown above', showing how the original intervallic structure is revealed.

52 Violin I plays decompressed version of tune, showing the fixation intervals At the very end, a pure statement!

Detailed description: This block shows the final part of the piece (bars 52-54). It is annotated as 'Violin I plays decompressed version of tune, showing the fixation intervals' and 'At the very end, a pure statement!', featuring a clear presentation of the triplet intervals.