

## Robert Cassidy performs complete Debussy Piano *Préludes* (June 2)

by Jeremy Reynolds



On Tuesday, June 2 pianist Robert Cassidy presented a recital of all twenty-four Debussy *Préludes* at the First Unitarian Church of Cleveland with accomplished technique and a delightfully weighty — if somewhat uniform — sense of style.

A founding member of the Cleveland-based Almeda Trio, Cassidy joined the faculty of Cleveland State University in 2008 and taught in the collaborative piano and chamber music departments until 2014, when he began teaching at the Music

Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California.

The pianist opened his concert with confidence, voicing each chord of *Danseuses de Delphes* (Dancers of Delphi) with care and purpose — although he displayed an over-reliance on the pedal that persisted throughout the evening. For the heavier, more somber preludes, such as *Des pas sur la neige* (Footsteps in the Snow) or the famous *La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune* (The Terrace of Moonlit Audiences), Cassidy's strong sense of gravitas complemented the music well.

Taking full advantage of the rich acoustics of the sanctuary, Cassidy approached the famous *La cathédrale engloutie* (The Sunken Cathedral) with reverence. The music harkens back to the ancient Breton myth of a cathedral that rises from the sea on fair mornings. Cassidy melded each chord into the next with graceful fluidity. He balanced each line nicely, even at the extremities of the piano's range. Theatrically raising his arms between each of the Debussy's climactic bell-tolls, Cassidy displayed a rare flamboyance that flattered the haunting majesty of the piece.

The pervasive impressionism of Debussy's twenty-four *Préludes* provides a strong sense of continuity among the short pieces, but performers must beware that similarity doesn't

blur into homogeneity. In the lighter pieces — *Minstrels* (Book One), *Ondine* (Scherzando) and *Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses* (Fairies are exquisite dancers, Book Two), for example — Cassidy played with the same hefty touch as in the others, belying the preludes' ephemeral qualities. His *La puerta del Vino* needed more of the rhythmic spice of the habanera.

On the other hand, Cassidy's rendition of the gossamer *Voiles* (Sails, winds) evoked a wonderful aura of mystery, and he approached the ubiquitous *La fille aux cheveux de lin* (The girl with the flaxen hair) with inspiring pathos. More attention to the subtle differences within Debussy's music could have seasoned each of these musical gems with more individual spice.

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