LSO St Luke's CHANBER E () So St Luke's CHANBER () So St CH

KIRILL GERSTEIN AND FRIENDS DEBUSSY AND KOMITAS

Thursday 30 May 2024 1–2.05pm Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

Claude Debussy Six épigraphes antiques
Claude Debussy Page d'album pièce pour l'œuvre du Vêtement du blessé
Berceuse héroïque
Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon
Élégie
Komitas 'Manushaki of Vagharshapat', 'Yerangi of Yerevan' and 'Unabi of Shushi' from Armenian Dances for Solo Piano
Claude Debussy Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons;
La Flûte de Pan, La Chevelure & Le Tombeau des naïades from 'Chansons de Bilitis'
Komitas 'Antouni' & 'Chinar es' from Armenian Songs

Kirill Gerstein piano Katia Skanavi piano Ruzan Mantashyan soprano

Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

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The Crypt bar is open from one hour before concerts and during the interval (where applicable). Please note, card payments only. Only cold drinks are permitted inside the Jerwood Hall.

PROGRAMME NOTE WRITER

Wendy Thompson studied at the Royal College of Music, before taking an MMus in musicology at King's College, London. In addition to writing about music she is Executive Director of Classic Arts Productions, a major supplier of independent programmes to BBC Radio.

In accordance with the requirements of Islington Council, persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any gangway.

The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are strictly forbidden without formal consent from LSO St Luke's.

Please make sure that digital watch alarms and mobile phones are switched off during the performance.

Six épigraphes antiques Claude Debussy



1 Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été

- (To invoke Pan, god of the summer wind)
 2 Pour un tombeau sans nom (For a nameless tomb)
- **3 Pour que la nuit soit propice** (For an auspicious night)
- 4 **Pour la danseuse aux crotales** (For the dancer with antique cymbals)
- 5 **Pour l'égyptienne** (For the Egyptian woman)
- 6 **Pour remercier la pluie au matin** (To give thanks for morning rain)

Claude Debussy (1862–1918), whose audacious experiments with structure and sonority encouraged Western music, as the composer Pierre Boulez later put it, 'to beat with a new pulse', spent the last decade of his life struggling with ill-health, financial worries, and marital turbulence, capped by the cataclysm of the war. In mid-December 1915 he underwent an operation for advanced colorectal cancer. He died in March 1918, as German guns pounded Paris. The set of *Six épigraphes antiques* began life around 1900 as accompaniments, originally scored for two flutes, two harps and celesta, to recitations with *tableaux vivants* of twelve spoof Ancient Greek prose poems written by Debussy's close friend Pierre Louÿs under the title *Chansons de Bilitis*. After just one private performance in 1901, the score was abandoned until the summer of 1914, when Debussy decided to resurrect six of the pieces for piano duet. He finished them at the end of July, just as France prepared for war.

Selection of Piano Pieces

Claude Debussy



- 1 Page d'album pièce pour l'œuvre du Vêtement du blessé (Albumleaf for the work of Clothing the Wounded)
- 2 Berceuse héroïque (Heroic Lullaby)
- 3 Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon (Evenings lit up by glowing coals)
- 4 Élégie (Elegy)

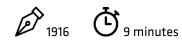
On the outbreak of hostilities, both Debussy and his singer wife Emma joined charitable organizations to raise money for the French war effort. *Albumleaf*, composed for a charity concert held on 24 April 1915 in aid of 'Clothing the Wounded', was dedicated to Emma, who helped to organise the event.

Although Debussy virtually stopped composing during the early years of the war (saying that the sound of the piano had become hateful to him), he was so appalled by the German invasion of Belgium that in the autumn of 1914 he agreed to contribute an item to *King Albert's Book* – a musical, literary and pictorial collection sponsored by *The Daily Telegraph* as a 'tribute of admiration to Belgium'. *Heroic lullaby*, which he said was solely designed to honour 'so much patient suffering', sounds less like a cradle song than a sombre march, peppered with the distant sounds of warfare. The central section is based on the Belgian national anthem, *La brabançonne*.

By the bitterly cold winter of 1916–17, Parisians were themselves enduring desperate shortages of food and fuel. Debussy's last piano piece, rediscovered only in 2001, was a gift to his coal merchant, Monsieur Tronquin, who conjured up a little winter cheer for the Debussy family. *Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon* (Evenings lit up by glowing coals) takes its title from a line in a Baudelaire poem, *Le balcon*, which Debussy had set in *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*. It also briefly quotes *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir*, the fourth piece in Debussy's collection of *24 Préludes*.

Finally *Élégie*, marked 'slow, sorrowfully', was composed as Debussy recuperated from cancer surgery. It was published in a charity collection honouring the role played by women in time of war.

Excerpts from Armenian Dances for Solo Piano Komitas



- 1 Manushaki of Vagharshapat
- 2 Yerangi of Yerevan
- 3 Unabi of Shushi

The Armenian composer, choirmaster and musicologist Soghomon Soghomonian, known as Komitas (1869 – 1935) was an ordained Apostolic priest who spent his working life researching, transcribing and publishing Armenian folk music, and is regarded as the founder of the Armenian national musical tradition. His work was much admired by Debussy, who met him in Paris in 1906.

In 1910 Komitas moved to Constantinople, hoping to bring appreciation of Armenian music to a wider audience, but as the Ottoman Empire began to implode during World War I, he fell victim to the mass expulsion and murder of Armenians in preparation for a new, ethno-nationalist regime. He was arrested in 1915 and deported to Central Anatolia. Influential friends intervened to save his life, but the horrors he had witnessed provoked a severe mental breakdown, and he spent the last sixteen years of his life in psychiatric institutions. These three dances for piano come from a cycle of Seven Folk Dances, which Komitas composed and performed in Paris in 1916. Each dance is linked with its place of origin, and recreates the sound of ethnic Armenian folk instruments.

Selection of songs

Claude Debussy

1897-1915 **(**) 12 minutes

Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus 1 de maisons (The homeless children's Christmas carol)

Chansons de Bilitis (Songs of Bilitis)

- La flûte de Pan (Pan's flute) 1
- 2 La chevelure (The tresses of hair)
- 3 Le tombeau des naïades (The tomb of the Water Nymphs)

As a devoted father, Debussy must have empathised keenly with the suffering of children during the Great War. On the eve of his colostomy operation, he composed this bitter little Christmas carol. in which the children of countries invaded by Germany demand vengeance for the destruction of their homes, schools and churches, saying they don't want toys for Christmas, just bread and victory. The piece was premiered on 9 April 1916 at the Sorbonne in Paris, at a benefit concert for victims of the Armenian genocide. The programme also included Komitas's Antouni, a song which Debussy is said to have admired.

The texts of these three songs, composed in 1897, were taken from Pierre Louÿs's volume of prose poems allegedly written by a companion of the lesbian poet Sappho and discovered on an ancient Greek tomb wall, but actually written by Louÿs himself. Debussy was initially concerned about the frank eroticism of the texts, especially the second, but found his musical language of the period, with its use of modal scales, perfectly suited to this sensuous dream of antiquity. He often programmed the Chansons de Bilitis in his wartime charity concerts: perhaps the icy atmosphere of the third song, mourning the deaths of satyrs and nymphs amid the harsh winter cold, reflected the privations of his fellow citizens.

Song Texts & Translations

Claude Debussy Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons

Nous n'avons plus de maisons! Les ennemis ont tout pris. jusqu'à notre petit lit! Ils ont brûlé l'école et notre maître aussi. Ils ont brûlé l'église et monsieur Jésus Christ! Et le vieux pauvre qui n'a pas pu s'en aller!

Nous n'avons plus de maisons! Les ennemis ont tout pris, jusqu'à notre petit lit! Bien sûr ! papa est à la querre, pauvre maman est morte avant d'avoir vu tout ca. Qu'est-ce que l'on va faire? Noël ! petit Noël ! n'allez pas chez eux, n'allez plus jamais chez eux, punissez-les!

Vengez les enfants de France! Les petits Belges, les petits Serbes, et les petits Polonais aussi! Si nous en oublions, pardonnez-nous. Noël ! Noël ! surtout, pas de joujoux, tâchez de nous redonner le pain quotidien.

Nous n'avons plus de maisons! Les ennemis ont tout pris, jusqu'à notre petit lit! Ils ont brûlé l'école et notre maître aussi. Ils ont brûlé l'église et monsieur lésus-Christ! They've burned the church and Mister Jesus Et le vieux pauvre qui n'a pas pu s'en aller! Noël ! écoutez-nous, nous n'avons plus de petits sabots:

mais donnez la victoire aux enfants de France!

A Carol for Homeless Children

We've no houses any more! The enemy have taken everything, even our little beds! They've burned the school and our teacher too. They've burned the church and Mister Jesus! And the poor old man who couldn't escape!

We've no houses any more! The enemy have taken everything, even our little beds! Of course! Daddy's at the war, poor mother died before seeing all this. What are we to do? Noël. little Noël. don't visit them. don't visit them ever again, punish them!

Avenge the children of France! The little Belgians, the little Serbs, and also the little Poles! If we've forgotten any, forgive us. Noël! Noël! And above all, no toys, try to give us back our daily bread.

We've no houses any more! The enemy have taken everything, even our little beds! They've burned the school and our teacher too. and the poor old man who couldn't escape! Noël! Hear us, we no longer have our little clogs:

but give victory to the children of France!

Claude Debussy La Flûte de Pan

Pour le jour des Hyacinthies, il m'a donné une syrinx faite de roseaux bien taillés, unis avec la blanche cire qui est douce à mes lèvres comme le miel.

II m'apprend à jouer, assise sur ses genoux; mais je suis un peu tremblante. Il en joue après moi, si doucement que je l'entends à peine.

Nous n'avons rien à nous dire, tant nous sommes près l'un de l'autre; mais nos chansons veulent se répondre, et tour à tour nos bouches s'unissent sur la flûte.

ll est tard,

voici le chant des grenouilles vertes qui commence avec la nuit. Ma mère ne croira jamais que je suis restée si longtemps à chercher ma ceinture perdue.

La Chevelure

Il m'a dit: 'Cette nuit, j'ai rêvé. J'avais ta chevelure autour de mon cou. J'avais tes cheveux comme un collier noir autour de ma nuque et sur ma poitrine.

Je les caressais, et c'étaient les miens; et nous étions liés pour toujours ainsi, par la même chevelure, la bouche sur a bouche,

ainsi que deux lauriers n'ont souvent qu'une racine.

The Flute of Pan

For Hyacinthus day he gave me a syrinx made of carefully cut reeds, bonded with white wax which tastes sweet to my lips like honey.

He teaches me to play, as I sit on his lap; but I am a little fearful. He plays it after me, so gently that I scarcely hear him.

We have nothing to say, so close are we one to another, but our songs try to answer each other, and our mouths join in turn on the flute.

It is late, here is the song of the green frogs that begins with the night. My mother will never believe I stayed out so long to look for my lost sash.

The Tresses of Hair

He said to me: 'Last night I dreamed. I had your tresses around my neck. I had your hair like a black necklace all round my nape and over my breast.

I caressed it and it was mine; and we were united thus for ever by the same tresses, mouth on mouth, just as two laurels often share one root. Et peu à peu, il m'a semblé, tant nos membres étaient confondus, que je devenais toi-même, ou que tu entrais en moi comme mon songe.

Quand il eut achevé, il mit doucement ses mains sur mes épaules, et il me regarda d'un regard si tendre, que je baissai les yeux avec un frisson.

Le Tombeau des naïades

Le long du bois couvert de givre, je marchais mes cheveux devant ma bouche se fleurissaient de petits glaçons, et mes sandales étaient lourdes de neige fangeuse et tassée.

Il me dit: 'Que cherches-tu ?' 'Je suis la trace du satyre. Ses petits pas fourchus alternent comme des trous dans un manteau blanc.' Il me dit: 'Les satyres sont morts.

Les satyres et les nymphes aussi. Depuis trente ans il n'a pas fait un hiver aussi terrible. La trace que tu vois est celle d'un bouc. Mais restons ici, où est leur tombeau.'

Et avec le fer de sa houe il cassa la glace

de la source où jadis riaient les naïades. Il prenait de grands morceaux froids, et les soulevant vers le ciel pâle, il regardait au travers. And gradually it seemed to me, so intertwined were our limbs, that I was becoming you, or you were entering into me like a dream.'

When he had finished, he gently set his hands on my shoulders and gazed at me so tenderly that I lowered my eyes with a shiver

The Tomb of the Water Nymphs

Along the frost-bound wood I walked; my hair across my mouth, blossomed with tiny icicles, and my sandals were heavy with muddy, packed snow.

He said to me: 'What do you seek?' 'I follow the satyr's track. His little cloven hoof-marks alternate like holes in a white cloak.' He said to me: 'The satyrs are dead.

The satyrs and the nymphs too. For thirty years there has not been so harsh a winter. he tracks you see are those of a goat.

But let us stay here, where their tomb is.'

And with the iron head of his hoe he broke the ice

of the spring, where the naiads used to laugh. He picked up some huge cold fragments, and, raising them to the pale sky, gazed through them.

'Antouni' & 'Chinar es' from Armenian Songs Komitas



- 1 Antouni (Homeless)
- 2 Chinar es (You are a plane tree)

Komitas, like Béla Bartók, was an ethnomusicologist passionate about his heritage. Both composers built their works from folk traditions, reflecting a deep expressivity and attention to detail. Komitas's songs, with their carefully chosen folk texts, reveal his profound understanding of love, lament, and cultural identity. This duality in his music, looking both to the past and the future, showcases his unique contribution to Armenian and world music.

These two Armenian songs on traditional texts couple the lament of a displaced young person amid the terrible destruction of warfare, with a love song typical of the type of piece Komitas composed in less traumatic times.

Song Texts & Translations

Komitas Antouni

Սիրտըս նման է էն փըլած տըներ, Կոտրեր գերաններ, խախտեր է սըներ. Բուն պիտի դընեն մեջ վայրի հավքեր. Երթամ` ձի թալեմ էն ելման գետեր. Ըլնիմ ձկներու ձագերացըն կեր։

Ա՜յ, տո լա՜ճ տընավեր։

Սև ծով մ՛եմ տեսե, սիպտակն Էր բոլոր. Ալին կըզարներ, չԷր խառնի հիրոր.

Eu ո՞րն E տեսե մեկ ծովն երկթավոր, Անտունի սիրտն E պըղտոր ո մոլոր։

Ա՜խ, իսկի մի՜ լնիբ սըրտիկ սևավոր։

Ա՜յ, տո լա՜ճ տընավեր

Komitas Chinar es

Չիևար ես, կեռաևա՜լ մի, Յա՜ր, յա՜ր, յա՜ր, Մեր դըռևեն հեռաևա՜լ մի։ Յա՜ր, յա՜ր, յա՜ր. Յա՜ր, ևա ևա՜յ, ևա՜յ, ևա՜յ, ևա՜յ, ևա՜յ, Նա՜յ ևա՜յ, ևա՜յ ևա՜յ, ևա՜յ։

Homeless

My heart is like shattered houses, pillars broken, timbers asunder. Wild birds will nest in these ruins. I want to go to the river, throw myself in and become fodder for the young fish.

Ah, poor homeless lad!

I've seen a black sea coated in white, the waves were beating yet unable to mingle:

who has ever seen a two-faced sea? The homeless person's heart is troubled and lost.

Oh, my heart, may you never be draped in black.

Ah, poor homeless lad!

You are a plane tree

You are a plane tree, do not bend, my darling, darling, darling. Don't stray far from home, my darling, darling, darling. Darling, na nay, nay, nay, nay, nay, Nay, nay, nay, nay, nay.

Kirill Gerstein piano



© Marco Borggreve

Pianist Kirill Gerstein's repertoire ranges from Johann Sebastian Bach to Thomas Adès. Born in the former Soviet Union. Gerstein is an American citizen based in Berlin. His career is similarly international, with worldwide performances ranging from concerts with the Chicago and Boston Orchestras, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Royal Concertgebouw, Vienna and Berlin Philharmonics, London Symphony Orchestra and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (BRSO) to recitals in London, Berlin, Vienna, Paris and New York. Gerstein is also in demand for the breadth of his musical influences which. in recent seasons, has led to residencies with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (BRSO), London's Wigmore Hall, the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence and the London Symphony Orchestra.

Gerstein's most recent release on Myrios Classics was a double album of music by Claude Debussy and Komitas. He first collaborated with the label in 2010 and through the partnership has been able to realise many projects. Deutsche Grammophon's 2020 release of the world premiere performance of Adès' Concerto for Piano and Orchestra. written for Gerstein, with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, won a 2020 Gramophone Award and was nominated for three Grammy Awards. He released his Rachmaninoff 150 recording in 2023 as a tribute to the mark the composer's 150th year, featuring his performance of the Second Piano Concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic and Kirill Petrenko, recorded live on Berlin's Waldbühne stage.

Gerstein was born in Voronezh in Russia in 1979. He studied jazz and classical piano at the Berklee College of Music in Boston (their youngest student), completed his undergraduate and graduate degrees in classical piano with Solomon Mikowsky at New York's Manhattan School of Music and went on to further studies with Dmitri Bashkirov in Madrid and Ferenc Rados in Budapest. Gerstein is the sixth recipient of the prestigious Gilmore Artist Award, First Prize winner at the tenth Arthur Rubinstein Competition and an Avery Fisher Career Grant holder.

Katia Skanavi piano



© Evgeny Evtyukhov **Of**

Pianist Katia Skanavi's combination of Greek-Russian cultural roots and Central European musical traditions results in music-making with a unique blend of spontaneity, intuition and erudition.

A Greek citizen born in the former Soviet Union, Skanavi is based in Moscow and Berlin. Equally active as a soloist and chamber music partner, she has appeared worldwide with conductors such as James Conlon, Sir Yehudi Menuhin and Jaap van Zweden. Skanavi collaborated with the major orchestras in Russia, and internationally with the DSO Berlin and Salzburg Camerata, as well as with the symphony orchestras of Cincinnati, San Francisco and Tokyo. She has presented recital programs in Amsterdam, London, Madrid, Vienna and New York. Skanavi's broad repertoire ranges from the Baroque era and across the Romantic age to collaborations with living composers. She has worked with Arvo Pärt, Alfred Schnittke and Jörg Widmann, receiving advice from the composers.

Her discography includes an all-Chopin recital on the Pro Piano label, selected by Gramophone magazine as their record of the month. Her most recent concerto recording with Brussels Philharmonic is Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody on a theme by Paganini and the First Piano Concerto. Preferring a concert atmosphere to the studio, many of Skanavi's live recitals have been released on the Lyrinx label garnering critical praise.

Interested in cross-genre collaborations, Skanavi has been involved in creating theater works combining poetry, music, video projections and dance. Her most recent production with actress Chulpan Khamatova and dancer Vladimir Varnava is part of the season repertoire at the legendary 'Sovremennik' drama theatre in Moscow.

She believes in the importance of pedagogy in a life of a concert musician and teaches piano and chamber music at international masterclasses and at the Moscow Conservatory.

Ruzan Mantashyan

soprano



© Anastasia Zuzmann

Armenian-born Ruzan Mantashyan studied piano from the age of seven at the Komitas Conservatoire in Yerevan. A few years later, she began voice lessons at the same institution with Valey Harutyunov. She honed her skills at Mirella Freni's Accademia di Belcanto in Modena, then under Hedwig Fassbender at the Frankfurt Conservatoire, graduating with a Master's Degree in 2014. She then joined the Atelier lyrique at the Opéra national de Paris, where she remained until 2016.

Mantashyan was a finalist in the Francisco Vinas International Singing Contest in Barcelona, and won the competition's Special Prize. She won the Toti dal Monte competition as Musetta (*La Bohème*) and performed this role in Treviso, Bolzano, Fermo and Ferrara. Her engagements have included roles such as Susanna (*Le Nozze di Figaro*) in Modena; Servilia (*La clemenza di Tito*) in Reggio Emilia; Echo (*Ariadne auf Naxos*) at the Konzerthaus Berlin (conducted by Ivan Fischer)at the Opéra de Paris Bastille and at the Glyndebourne Festival.

Mantashyan's recent roles have included: Natacha Rostova (*War and Peace*) in Geneva; Tatyana (*Eugene Onegin*) in Liège; Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*) in Zurich; Tatyana and Alice Ford (*Falstaff*) at the Komische Oper Berlin and Rachel (*La Juive*) at the Grand Théâtre de Genève.

Her recent and future engagements include: Tatyana in Hamburg, Donna Elvira in Glyndebourne, Donna Elvira in Zürich, Tatyana at the Komische Oper Berlin, Mimì at the Royal Opera House, London, and Tatyana at the Wiener Staatsoper.

FUTURE Côncerts

Friday 31 May 7pm

KIRILL GERSTEIN AND FRIENDS

Programme to include music by Joseph Haydn, György Ligeti, Ludwig van Beethoven and Thomas Adès.

Thomas Adès conductor Kirill Gerstein piano Katia Skanavi piano Joseph Havlat piano Katalin Karolyi mezzo-soprano LSO Musicians

Friday 12 July 1pm

SOLO PIANO: KIRILL GERSTEIN

Frédéric Chopin Polonaise-Fantasy Francis Poulenc Three Intermezzos Franz Liszt Polonaise No 2 in E major Robert Schumann Faschingsschwank aus Wien

Kirill Gerstein piano

Friday 6 September 1pm

NEW GENERATION ARTISTS

Programme to be announced.

Andrei Ioniță cello Alim Beisembayev piano

Friday 6 September 6pm

NEW GENERATION ARTISTS

Johann Sebastian Bach Cello Suite No 5 in C minor BWV 1011 Cello Suite No 3 in C major BWV 1009

Andrei loniță cello

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