

LONG BEACH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Impressions of the Sea

JOANN FALLETTA, CONDUCTOR

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THE HEBRIDES OVERTURE, OP. 26, "FINGAL'S CAVE"

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

(Born in Hamburg, February 3, 1809; died in Leipzig, November 4, 1847)

Mendelssohn began his *Hebrides Overture* in 1829 when, during his trip to Scotland, he was inspired by the view toward the Hebrides Islands. In a letter to his family on August 7 he wrote: "In order to make you understand how extraordinarily the Hebrides affected me, the following came to mind there." Attached was a carefully worked out sketch of the opening of the Overture, even containing details of orchestration and dynamics. Though it has often been assumed that the sight of Fingal's Cave, a spectacular cavern on the tiny island of Staffa, was the inspiration for the opening bars, it seems Mendelssohn did not visit Fingal's Cave until August 8. It is clear, nevertheless, that Mendelssohn began to associate the work more and more with the Romantic notions conjured up by Fingal's Cave; the opening bars remained almost unchanged through all his subsequent revisions.

The amount of time and ink the usually facile composer spent on this Overture gives an indication of the importance he attributed to it. Among the numerous sketches, four complete versions with distinct titles exist: *The Hebrides Overture* (1829), *Overture to the Solitary Island (Die einsame Insel)* (1830), *The Isle of Fingal* (1832), and *Fingal's Cave (Fingalsböhle)* (1835). His revision process was directed primarily toward achieving more balance between his contrapuntal exercises and extramusical considerations. Mendelssohn wrote to his sister Fanny on January 21, 1832, that "the movement tastes more of counterpoint than of train oil, sea gulls, and salted cod—it should be just the other way around." The revision process also shows Mendelssohn unifying and integrating parts of the whole and reworking sections of the coda considerably. Yet the basic structure of the sonata form was never altered.

The initial sketch already shows Mendelssohn's concern with deriving all of his materials from the opening triadic figure in the violas and cellos. His use of a tri-

In addition to Debussy's own experiences with the ocean, he had recently been impressed by Turner's sea pictures, and must have been acquainted with Edgar Allen Poe's vivid descriptions of the sea, since he later based operatic scenes upon Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher*. Debussy was also influenced by seascapes of Ando Hiroshige and Katsushika Hokusai; the latter's print *The Hollow of the Wave off Kanagawa* was reproduced on the cover of the first publication of *La mer*.

The composer worked on what he called a trilogy of "symphonic sketches" for two years, and completed the score in 1905. *La mer* was first performed by Camille Chevillard conducting at the Concerts Lamoreaux on October 15 that year. Though the work gained popularity during the composer's lifetime, the first performance was received poorly; Debussy later mentioned to Stravinsky that "the violinists flagged the tips of their bows with handkerchiefs at the rehearsals, as a sign of ridicule and protest."

The first movement introduces several motives, some of which recur throughout the work, such as the final brass chorale in D-flat major. Debussy's novel orchestrational ideas are ever present: one passage features horns and four-part divisi cellos in a combination unique at the time; another polyphonic passage contains seven independent rhythmic lines in three simultaneous dynamic schemes. The second movement features themes constructed from whole-tone scales, a favorite device of the composer. The lighter orchestration and quick tempos have led some to liken the middle movement to a scherzo, though the music does not follow the traditional form. The last movement contains some of the most dramatic passages of the work, swelling to a conclusion that recalls the climax of the first movement.

La Mer is not program music in the sense of literal depiction, but rather an abstract sound-picture representing the essence of what the sea meant to Debussy. Nevertheless, Erik Satie could not resist a facetious remark to the composer referring to the title of the first movement ("From dawn to midday at sea"),

THE SEA: SUITE FOR ORCHESTRA
FRANK BRIDGE

(Born in Brighton, England, February 26, 1879; died in Eastbourne, January 10, 1941)

Frank Bridge's early violin lessons with his father led to violin and viola studies at the Royal College of Music, where he also studied composition with Sir Charles Stanford. He played viola with the Joachim String Quartet from 1906 until 1915, later joining the English String Quartet. At the same time, he began to make a name for himself as a conductor and as a composer of chamber and orchestral music. His greatest recognition came about later through the efforts of his only composition student, Benjamin Britten. Much of his music, however, remains neglected.

Begun in 1910 and completed July 5, 1911, *The Sea*, exemplifies Bridge's early period, characterized by textural clarity and a logical succession of ideas stemming from traditional Germanic structural principles. The four movements suggest those of a typical symphony, with the scherzo placed second and the slow movement third. The euphonious harmonic language is typical of the composer's pre-War compositions, before his change toward a more adventurous albeit still tonal style. Though the work's architecture may be grounded in tradition, its poetic ideas and orchestral colors soar with the visual imagery of a tone poem. Bridge's own brief program note for the work focuses on the illustrative rather than structural aspects:

"Seascape: paints the sea on a summer morning. From high drifts is seen a great expanse of waters lying in the sunlight. Warm breezes play over the surface. Sea-foam: froths among the low-lying rocks and pools on the shore, playfully not stormy. Moonlight: a calm sea at night. The first moonbeams are struggling to pierce through dark clouds, which eventually pass over, leaving the sea shimmering in full moonlight. Storm: A raging storm. Wind, rain, and tempestuous seas, with the lulling of the storm an allusion to the first number is heard and which may be

Prelude from Book I, was first performed in its piano version by the composer himself at a concert of the Société Musicale Indépendante on May 25, 1910. It was arranged for orchestra by Henri Busser, who had conducted Debussy's opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* and who arranged several of Debussy's other piano pieces for orchestra with the composer's approval.

Debussy was fascinated not only by water as it occurred in nature, but by the Impressionist painters' treatment of water and its reflection. He composed several "water" pieces that reflect the spirit of these paintings—*En bateau* (1889), *Reflet dans l'eau* (1905), *Voiles* (1910), and *La cathédrale engloutie*. Debussy, however, disliked the term "Impressionism" as applied to his music because of its association with the blurring of images when his actual aim was to achieve the effect of reality through very precisely formulated musical elements.

La cathédrale engloutie, one of Debussy's most popular preludes, is based on a Breton legend concerning the Cathedral of Ys, which was submerged in the fourth or fifth century to punish its impious inhabitants. It was allowed to rise from the depths at sunrise, to be seen as a warning to others. One of Debussy's most explicit pieces of program music, it begins with the sound of submerged bells; their tolling increases in intensity as the cathedral rises. The use of parallel open chords suggests Gregorian chant in parallel organum style. The eighth-note motion shortly after the beginning suggests the lapping of the waves around the emerging cathedral and toward the end of the piece seems to suggest the gently rippling water over the cathedral after it has submerged. The piece closes with the "underwater" chimes of the opening.

—Jane Vial Jaffe

JOANN FALLETTA CONDUCTOR

Hailed by the *Los Angeles Times* as "one of the brightest stars of symphonic music in America," JoAnn Falletta has been music director of the Long Beach Symphony since 1989. She is winner of the prestigious Stokowski, Toscanini, and Bruno Walter awards and has gained national and international recognition for her extensive guest conducting engagements.

In addition to appearing with leading North American orchestras, she has guest conducted in Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, and Taiwan.

JoAnn Falletta received her doctorate in conducting from the Juilliard School in 1989. When she assumed the artistic helm of the Long Beach Symphony she became the first American-born woman to lead a regional orchestra. Her 1998 appointment as music director of the Buffalo (NY) Philharmonic Orchestra made her one of only two women in the history of American music to assume such a major music directorship. She is also music director of the Virginia Symphony.

She is the recipient of eight consecutive awards from ASCAP for creative programming and the American Symphony Orchestra League's prized John S. Edwards Award for programming. A champion of American music, Maestro Falletta has performed nearly 300 works by American composers, including sixty world premieres.

Her growing discography also includes recordings with the London Symphony Orchestra, the English Chamber Orchestra, the Women's Philharmonic, and the Virginia Symphony on Koch International, Newport Classics, and New Albion labels. Her recording of works by Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Clara Schumann, and Lili Boulanger received a "Best Classical Recording" award from the National Association of Independent Record Distributors and a "Most Creative Programming Award" from *Classic CD* magazine. Maestro Falletta also has released recordings featuring music by Poulenc, Ravel, Jerome Moross, Elinor Armer, Shulamit Ran, and John Luther Adams.



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Special thanks to: Mary E. Newkirk, Joseph Stone, Stephen Baron, and Renny Martini

Recorded June 7 and 8, 1998, at the Terrace Theater, Long Beach.

This recording is made possible by a generous grant from



Additional contributors: Jon and Margie Masterson; Patrick and Sonya Seaver;
Don Knabe, Supervisor, Fourth District, County of Los Angeles; SMG
Recorded to celebrate the opening of the Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific.



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