

FREDERIC CHIU

Classical Smackdown Program 1 *Sergei Prokofiev vs. Claude Debussy*

Round 1

Debussy
(1862-1918)

Suite Bergamasque (1890-1905)
Prelude
Menuet
Clair de Lune
Passepied

Prokofiev
(1891-1953)

Three Pieces from *Romeo and Juliet* (1935)
The Montagues and the Capulets
Friar Laurence
Public Merrymaking (arr. Frederic Chiu)

Round 2

Prokofiev

Sonata No. 3 in A minor, Opus 28 (1917)

Debussy

L'isle joyeuse (1904)

intermission

Round 3

Prokofiev

Sarcasm #1 (1912)
Two Fugitive Visions (1915-17)
Diabolic Suggestions (1908)

Debussy

Cloches à travers les feuilles (Bells through the leaves) from
Images (1907)
Jardins sous la pluie (Gardens in the rain) from *Estampes* (1903)

Round 4

Debussy

Rêverie (1890)

Prokofiev

Toccata (1912)

Notes on the Program written by the Artist

Tonight, vying for your attention, and your vote, are two of my absolutely favorite composers – Claude Debussy born in 1862 in France and Sergei Prokofiev born in 1891 in Ukraine. There could hardly be two composers from the turn of the 20th century who were more different than these two. This was a time when concert music really held high stakes – stirring people's spirits to love, patriotism and violence, more than any other medium. Faced with a choice between such contrasting styles, perhaps you'll be inspired to take a stand on behalf of your musical taste as well!

Round 1

One of Debussy's earliest works for piano, the **Suite Bergamasque** (1890, rev. 1905), reveals some of the elements found in much of this composer's work including his love of Renaissance style and forms, chords used for their color instead of their harmony and exploring infinite shades of tone and sound texture from *mp* (medium-quiet) to *ppp* (very quiet). An early Debussy "hit", the well-known "Clair de Lune" (Moonlight), is the third of the four pieces in the Suite. It is also the source of the title "Bergamasque" – taken from an early Verlaine poem that was Debussy's inspiration for this piece.

Prokofiev's **Romeo and Juliet** (1935) also contains some of this composer's most recognizable music familiar from various movies, commercials and television show soundtracks. Originally written for the ballet, Prokofiev extracted and arranged 10 pieces to create a piano solo suite. Prokofiev was himself a brilliant pianist, and often wrote his orchestral works first in a piano score that was then the basis for orchestration. There are, however, many scenes that Prokofiev left out which work very well in his piano score, including "Public Merrymaking."

Round 2

Prokofiev's **Third Sonata** (1907-1917) is a work derived "from Old Notebooks", as Prokofiev himself described it. Among the most blatantly virtuosic of Prokofiev's piano works, it is clear the composer, also a fine pianist, derived great pleasure from repeated notes, mirror-image motion between the two hands, and generally the necessity of speedy playing for its effects. Written in one movement, roughly patterned on the classic sonata form, the work is less concerned with originality as it is with being impressive – and it succeeds marvelously at that goal!

Among the most impressive of the few large-scale works that Debussy wrote for the piano is the **l'Isle joyeuse** (1904). Debussy began experimenting with non-western scales in the early 1900's. This virtuosic work makes frequent use of whole tone scales, chords based on augmented intervals, and the Lydian mode, all of which create a general feeling of oriental fantasy. The general forward motion in this piece is rather rare in Debussy's output, which generally relies more on hesitation and silence.

Round 3

Prokofiev's original piano music covers a wide spectrum; expressively, they range from the gentlest, hypnotic melodies to raw, sarcastic screeches. His work includes pieces for children, as well as works of incredibly difficulty and intensity. He uses humor as much as lyricism, looking back nostalgically to the late Romantic aesthetic as well as forward to the ironies of modernity. This diversity is well-demonstrated through short character pieces including the aptly named **Sarcasms** (1912) and **Visions fugitives** (Fugitive Visions)(1915-17), as well as the **Diabolic Suggestions**.

Debussy's pianistic style was much more narrow, but not less detailed. While the label "Impressionism" is freely used to describe his music (as well as music by Ravel and other French composers of that period), Debussy chafed at this word, preferring to describe his approach as "realism". He felt that he was truly painting (he called a number of pieces **Images** (1904-07) and **Estampes** ("Prints" - 1903) with music; the cloudy, deeply pedaled wash of sounds is what comes readily to mind, but it is only a small part of the Debussy's painter palette, which also includes intricate counterpoint, a dry pointillistic approach to the piano, and a subtle use of silence.

Round 4

Debussy's beautiful jewel, **Rêverie** (1890), was actually judged "no good" by Debussy himself many years after its composition. Nevertheless it is one of the first examples of what some would consider the "impressionist" style of piano writing, where harmonies are used simply for the sensual colors.

Prokofiev's **Toccata** (1912), when considered in the context of the various styles of writing that were being explored at the time, must have been even more jaw-dropping than when heard today. Prokofiev took the piano back to its roots as a percussion instrument (a series of hammers hitting tightly wound metal strings) and let loose all of his 20th century dynamism.

Short bio:

FREDERIC CHIU

PIANO

Constantly innovating in his audience-building approach to programming, this season Frederic Chiu is presenting "Classical Smackdown", a multi-year series where composers face off in head-to-head comparisons, with the audience voting for their preferred composer. The Smackdown this season is between Debussy and Prokofiev. Results are being tracked at ClassicalSmackdown.com.

A frequent guest artist at concert venues in Europe, South America, and throughout the United States, Frederic Chiu is devoted to enhancing the live concert experience for diverse audiences. Chiu has created many innovative programs, often showcasing transcriptions and rarely-programmed repertoire. Also a skilled collaborator, he has performed with many friends in Classical music such as Joshua Bell, Pierre Amoyal, Gary Hoffman, the St Lawrence String Quartet; as well as with artists in other genres including the jazz pianist Bob James, writer/storyteller David Gonzalez, actor Brian Bedford, and the clown Buffo.

Frederic Chiu has released over 20 CDs, many available on the *harmonia mundi usa* label, including the complete piano works of Prokofiev, as well as works of Chopin, Liszt, Ravel, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Rossini and Grieg. His most recent recordings include the Beethoven/Liszt *Symphony No. 5*, and the solo piano version of Saint-Saens' *Carnival of the Animals* with David Gonzalez as the narrator of verse penned with today's young audiences in mind. In addition, he is a frequent presence on popular radio shows such as *St. Paul Sunday Morning*, *Performance Today*, and *WNYC's Greene Space*.

Through his Deeper Piano Studies – a philosophic and holistic training program – Chiu brings together advanced concert pianists, promising students, high-level amateurs and piano teachers from around the world for workshops that develop a Body/Mind/Heart approach to piano-playing and music-making. He has taught at the Juilliard School, Indiana University's Jacob School of Music, the Manhattan School of Music, the New England Conservatory and the Banff Centre, among others.

Frederic Chiu's website, www.FredericChiu.com, contains up-to-date information about his upcoming concerts and DPS workshops, as well as links to recordings and videos.

BALLOT

Frederic Chiu's Classical Smackdown Prokofiev vs. Debussy

Choose your winner:

	Debussy	Prokofiev
ROUND 1 Debussy – <i>Suite Bergamasque</i> <i>Prelude</i> <i>Menuet</i> <i>Clair de Lune</i> <i>Passepied</i> Prokofiev – <i>3 Pieces from Romeo and Juliet</i> <i>The Montagues and the Capulets</i> <i>Friar Laurence</i> <i>Public Merrymaking (Arr. Chiu)</i>		
ROUND 2 Prokofiev – <i>Sonata #3 in A Major, Opus 28</i> Debussy – <i>L'Isle Joyeuse</i>		
ROUND 3 Prokofiev – <i>Sarcasm</i> <i>2 Fugitives Visions</i> <i>Diabolic Suggestions</i> Debussy – <i>Cloches à travers les feuilles</i> <i>Jardins sous la pluie</i>		
ROUND 4 Debussy – <i>Rêverie</i> Prokofiev – <i>Toccata Opus 11</i>		
OVERALL CHOICE		

For results, go to **www.ClassicalSmackdown.com** or **www.FredericChiu.com**

If you want to receive the results as soon as they are tallied, please provide an email or cell phone number for an SMS text. (Note: Emails will be added to the Frederic Chiu mailing list for announcements of future concerts. You may opt out of this by replying "remove".)

Gender: _____ Age: _____ Have you ever played piano: ☐Y ☐N

Contact: _____

Comments:
