

## 9/9/99 The Texts

### Chansons Madécasses

#### I. Nahandove

*Nahandove, ô belle Nahandove! L'oiseau nocturne a commencé ses cris, la pleine lune brille sur ma tête, et la rosée naissante humecte mes cheveux. Voici l'heure; qui peut t'arrêter, Nahandove, ô belle Nahandove!*

*Le lit de feuilles est préparée de fleurs et d'herbes odoriférant; il est digne de tes charmes, Nahandove, ô belle Nahandove!*

*Elle vient. J'ai reconnu la respiration précipité que donne une marche rapide; j'entends le froissement de la pagne qui l'enveloppe; c'est elle, c'est Nahandove, la belle Nahandove!*

*Ô reprends haleine, ma jeune amie; repose-toi sur mes genoux. Que ton regard est enchanteur! Que le mouvement de ton sein est vif et délicieux sous la main qui le presse! Tu souris, Nahandove, ô belle Nahandove!*

*Tes baisers pénètrent jusqu'à l'âme; tes caresses brûlent tous mes sens: arrête, ou je vais mourir. Meurt-on de volupté, Nahandove, ô belle Nahandove!*

*Le plaisir passe comme un éclair: Ta douce haleine s'affaiblit, tes yeux humides se referment, ta tête se penche mollement, et tes transports s'éignent dans la languer. Jamais tu ne fût si belle, Nahandove, ô belle Nahandove!*

*Tu pars, et je vais languir dans les regrets et les désirs. Je languirai jusqu'au soir. Tu reviendras ce soir, Nahandove, ô belle Nahandove!*

#### II. Méfiez-vous des blancs

*Aoua! Aoua! Méfiez-vous des blancs, habitants du rivage. Du temps de nos pères, des blancs descendirent dans cette île. On leur dit: Voilà des terres, que vos femmes les cultivent; soyez justes, soyez bons, et devenez nos frères.*

*Les blancs promirent, et cependant ils faisoient des retranchemens. Un fort menaçant s'éleva; le tonnerre fut renfermé dans des bouches d'airain; leur prêtres voulurent nous donner un Dieu que nous ne connaissons pas; ils parlèrent enfin d'obéissance et d'esclavage. Plutôt la mort! Le carnage fut long et terrible; mais malgré la foudre qu'ils vomissoient et qui ecrasait des armées entières, ils furent tous exterminés. Aoua! Aoua! Méfiez-vous des blancs, habitants du rivage.*

*Nous avons vu de nouveaux tyrans, plus forts et plus nombreux, planter leur pavillon sur le rivage. Le ciel a combattu pour nous. Il a fait tomber sur eux les pluies, les tempêtes et les vents empoisonnés. Ils ne sont plus, et nous vivons, et nous vivons libre. Aoua! Aoua! Méfiez-vous des blancs, habitants du rivage.*

#### III. Il est doux de se coucher

*Il est doux de se coucher, durant la chaleur, sous un arbre touffu, et d'attendre que le vent du soir amène la fraîcheur.*

*Femmes, approchez. Tandis que je me repose ici sous un arbre touffu, occupez mon oreille par vos accens prolongés. Répétez la chanson de la jeune fille, lorsque ses doigts tressent la natte, or lorsqu'assise auprès du riz, elle chasse les oiseaux avides.*

*Le chant plaît à mon âme. La danse est pour moi presque aussi douce qu'un baiser. Que vos pas soient lents; qu'ils imitent les attitudes du plaisir et l'abandon de la volupté.*

*Le vent du soir se lève; la lune commence à briller au travers des arbres de la montagne. Allez, et préparez le repas.*

*Evariste-Désiré de Forges, Vicomte de Parny (1753-1814)*

### Chansons Madécasses

#### I. Nahandove

Nahandove O beautiful Nahandove! the night bird has begun its song, the full moon bathes my head and the earliest dew moistens my hair. This is the hour; who can stop you, Nahandove, O beautiful Nahandove!

The leafy bed is ready; I have strewn it with flowers and scented herbs; it is worthy of your charms, Nahandove, O beautiful Nahandove!

She comes. I recognized the rapid breathing of one who hurries; I hear the rustling of the cloth wrapped around her loins; it is she! it is Nahandove, the beautiful Nahandove!

Oh, catch your breath, my young love, rest on my lap. How bewitching your gaze, how live and deliciously your breast stirs under the hand that presses it! You smile, Nahandove, O beautiful Nahandove!

Your kisses penetrate my heart; your caresses light my senses afire: enough! or I shall die! Can one die of voluptuous pleasure, Nahandove, O beautiful Nahandove?

Pleasure passes like a lightning bolt. Now your sweet panting grows gentler, your brimming eyes close, your head droops in weariness, and our rapture gives way to languor; yet never have you been so beautiful, Nahandove, O beautiful Nahandove!

You depart, and I shall languish alone in longing and desire, until nightfall. You will return at nightfall, Nahandove, O beautiful Nahandove!

#### II. Beware The White Man

Aoua! Aoua! beware the white man, riverbank dwellers! In our fathers' time, white men set foot on this island. They were told "here is land, let your women work it, be just, be good, make yourselves our brothers."

The white men promised and even so were making trenches. A menacing fort arose, with thunder concealed in bronze mouths. Their priests tried to give us a god we do not know; they ended by speaking of submission and slavery. We'd sooner die! The bloodbath was long and terrible, yet for all the lightning bolts they spewed out, slaying army after army, they themselves were exterminated. Aoua! Aoua! Beware the white man!

We then saw new tyrants, even stronger and more numerous, setting up tents on our shores. The heavens took up our battle. It unleashed on them rains, tempests and poisonous winds. They are gone and we, we live free. Aoua! Aoua! beware the white man, riverbank dwellers!

#### III. It is good

It is good to lie down in the heat of the day under a leafy tree, and to wait thus till the evening wind brings a cooling breath.

Women, come to me. While I take my rest under this leafy tree, delight my ear with your soothing voices. Sing again the song of the young girl while she braids her hair or, seated by the rice patch, chases off the greedy birds.

This singing is pleasing to my soul. For me their dancing is almost as sweet as a kiss. Move slowly; let your steps mime the poses of pleasure and the surrender to voluptuous bliss.

The evening wind arises, the moon begins to glimmer through the trees on the mountain side. Go now, prepare the meal.

Translation by Robert Erich Wolf/John Ranck

**9/9/99**  
**The Notes**



Debussy was born in St. Germain-en-Laye, France, a town just west of Paris on August 22, 1862 and died in Paris on March 25, 1918. He studied at the Paris Conservatory from 1872, when he was ten years old, to 1884. His composition teachers were Ernest Guiraud and others. He won the Rome Prize and studied there from 1885-1887. Wagner was an important early influence. An introduction to Javanese music at a concert in Paris in 1889, however, and his acquaintance with the French Symbolist poet, Mallarmé prompted him to explore new scales and structures in his composition.

Debussy's first important orchestral work, *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune* (1892-94), begun when he was 30 years old, was inspired by Mallarmé's poem, *L'Après-midi d'un faune*. This work established the style of impressionist music and initiated Debussy's most productive period, which lasted nearly 20 years.

Debussy was central to the development of an Impressionistic style. In general, his music moved away from the chromaticism characteristic of the post-Romantic era towards a new 20th century musical style. This new style defied traditional tonal expectations and introduced new means of constructing a musical composition. Debussy's style was one of the most important influences on 20th-century music. As a student he refused to submit to the rules of traditional musical theory. Later he stated "There is no theory. You have only to listen. Pleasure is the law."

The first two pieces on tonight's program are good examples of that dictum. *Syrinx* was composed in 1913 as incidental music to a Gabriel Mourey's play *Psyché*. Initially titled *La flûte de Pan*, *Syrinx* was the first piece for solo flute written since C.P.E. Bach's solo sonata of 1763, and the first solo work written for the modern, Boehm-mechanism. In it, Debussy writes what can seem like a stream-of-consciousness style: he avoids "repetitions and exaggerated artificialness" he considered inherent in traditional sonata forms and gives us a poignant, moving piece of music.

*Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* gives another example of the free attitude Debussy adopted toward traditional compositional form and harmony. Beginning with the solo flute entrance, the piece continues to explore new compositional territory using unusual harmonies and scales. In this transcription, the flute and harps alternate using the principle melodic and harmonic material of the piece.

*At the end of his life, Debussy returned to the chamber music idiom from which he had been long absent. His intention was a set of six sonatas for various instrumental combinations. The first one, written in 1915, was the Cello Sonata. He only completed two others - the Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, also 1915, and the Violin Sonata of 1917.*

*Debussy initially called his cello sonata "Pierrot fâché avec la lune" (Pierrot angry with the moon). Though he later discarded the title, he did infuse the piece with a mood of whimsy and melancholy. The cello writing is full of special effects such as pizzicato, glissando, lefthand pizzicato, sul ponticello and harmonics -both natural and artificial, all producing a kaleidoscopic palette of colors. Jan Pfeiffer*



Maurice Ravel was born in Ciboure, southwest France, near the Spanish border on March 7, 1875 and died in Paris, on December 28, 1937. Ravel studied at the Paris Conservatory from 1899, when he was fourteen years old until 1905. Although he entered the Rome Prize competition several times, he was never awarded it. His most influential teacher was the French composer Gabriel Fauré.

Because of Ravel's sensitive use of instrumental colors, his harmonies, the mood, and extramusical associations of much of his music, he is often associated with Debussy. Unlike Debussy, however, he was strongly attracted to abstract, logical musical structures. His predilection for traditional musical structures is evident in his later chamber works such as the Sonata for Violin and Cello (1922). His last work for piano, the *Pavane pour une infante defunte* shows his gift for evoking past eras.

Ravel was also a master colorist - evoking strong effects with a minimum of instrumentation, as is evident in the *Chansons*. This piece uses as its text poems by Evariste-Désiré de Parry, which first appeared in 1787. While quite evocative, they are most likely not drawn from first-hand experience: Parry is known never to have been in Madagascar. Ravel was always drawn to exotic subjects and when Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge commissioned a cycle of songs set to poems of Ravel's choice but with the suggestion of accompanying instruments, he rose to the challenge. Ravel wrote that these songs "are a sort of quartet, in which the voice has the role of leading instrument," and that they "introduce a new dramatic — even erotic — element, stemming from the subject matter of Parry's songs." The two outer songs are expressively erotic in character; the middle song is more dramatic as it describes the arrival of white men to an unnamed island, and the subsequent events leading to their destruction.

*Ravel dedicated the Sonata for Violin and Cello to the memory of Debussy. It first appeared in a short form, entitled Le Tombeau de Claude Debussy, on December 1, 1920 in a supplement to the Revue Musicale (along with contributions by Dukas, Roussel, Goossens, Bartol, Schmitt, Falla and Satie). Ravel decided to expand upon this first attempt and during a two year period (April 1920 - February 1922) he composed the sonata in its present form.*

*The Sonata is loosely modeled after a classical sonata form. There are four movements : Allegro - the violin provides an ostinato for the cello melody; Très vif - which is a scherzo; Lent - which the cello begins with a modal theme; and the finale, Vif avec entrain - which has a folk-dance like character.*

*The work was not an immediate success. The violinist Helene Jourdan-Mrhangé wondered why Ravel "had the flute played by the cello and the tambourin played by the violin." Critics found fault with Ravel's "affectations": dissonances and his use of bitonality (A major-B minor). Ravel felt that this sonata marked a turn in compositional direction toward an emphasis on melodic line and polyphony rather than the harmonic opulence that had characterized his work. The opening Allegro contains clear melodies and the final movement - Vif avec entrain - ends with four-part polyphony played by the two instruments. This polyphonic section begins with a theme based upon descending intervals in sevenths, first heard as a countertheme in the first movement. In the finale, however, it is clearly played with emphasis. Ann Miklich*

