

## Gerald Carpenter: Santa Barbara Music Club to Honor Debussy

Saturday's free concert in the Faulkner Gallery will celebrate the composer's 150th birthday

By Gerald Carpenter, Noozhawk Contributing Writer | Published on 01.13.2012

In honor of composer Claude Debussy's 150th birthday, the Santa Barbara Music Club will devote its next free concert — at 3 p.m. Saturday in the Faulkner Gallery at the Santa Barbara Central Library, 40 E. Anapamu St. — exclusively to his works.

We will hear performances of his *Petite Suite for Piano Four Hands* by pianists Donna Massello-Chiacos and Lynne Garrett, his *Proses lyriques* by soprano Carol Ann Manzi and pianist Betty Oberacker, four selections from his *Préludes for Solo Piano, Book I* by pianist Robert Else, and his *Sonate in G-Minor for Violin and Piano* by violinist Nicole McKenzie and pianist Betty Oberacker.



Claude-Achille Debussy (1862-1918)—our oldest contemporary.

As has become increasingly clear with each passing decade, a composer's "modernism" is judged almost exclusively on his harmony; rarely, if ever, on his innovations in form.

As the brilliant Constant Lambert put it, a composer's chances of clicking with the public are much greater if the novel relationships in his music are horizontal rather than vertical. Even the smallest change in vertical — or harmonic — relations will disturb the comfort of the average music lover, and the greater the change the longer the delay in acceptance.

So, considered in this light, I think it is reasonable to suggest that Debussy is the earliest composer that we still hear as "modern." The other composers born in the 1860s — including Gustav Mahler, Isaac Albéniz, Ferruccio Busoni, Edward MacDowell, Enrique Granados and Richard Strauss — now evoke a distinct historical era, punctuated by a solid period. They are "Late Romantics."

Debussy, in many ways as romantic as any of them, remains open-ended, a work in progress. I think his use of whole tone scales has a lot to do with it, and the languid, unassertive mood of much of his most popular music. Only when the modern era has definitely and definitively come to an end will Debussy achieve full "classic" status, no longer speaking to us directly, as a contemporary, but as a voice from the past.

— Gerald Carpenter covers the arts as a Noozhawk contributor.