



FROM THE SEA

Audience Guide

Jean SIBELIUS: *The Oceansides*
Garth NEUSTADTER: *Seaborne*
Claude DEBUSSEY: *La Mer*

THE OCEANIDES

By Jean Sibelius

TIMELINE

| YEAR | EVENT |
|-----------------|--|
| 1913 August | Sibelius receives a \$1,000 commission from American patrons, Carl and Ellen Stoecke I |
| 1913 Winter | Sibelius composes three-movement orchestral suite in E-flat Major |
| 1914 January | Attempts to work on piece in Berlin with no success |
| 1914 April 3rd | Changes title of piece from <i>Rondeau der Wellen</i> to <i>Aallottaret</i> |
| 1914 April 20th | Stoeckel's expand commission to include trip to Connecticut to conduct premiere, Honorary Doctorate from Yale University and additional \$1,200 in fees |
| 1914 April 20th | Essentially starting over from scratch, Sibelius revisits the piece again despite the manuscript already being sent to Norfolk Connecticut. |
| 1914 April 29th | Renames tone poem back to original title <i>Rondeau der Wellen</i> |
| 1914 May | Renames piece <i>Aallottaret</i> |
| 1914 May | Sibelius aboard the steamship SS Kaiser Wilhelm II revising final version while crossing Atlantic Ocean |
| 1914 June | Sibelius continues to make last-minute changes during rehearsals with orchestra |
| 1914 June 4th | Premiered at Norfolk Music Festival |
| 1915 June | *1914 May version was sent to publisher Breitkopf and Härtel with Finnish title <i>Aallottaret</i> with translations: {German} <i>Die Okeaniden</i> , {English} <i>The Oceanides</i> |
| 1915 | Breitkopf and Härtel publishes pieces as Op, 73 with a dedication the New England patrons Mr. and Mrs. Carl Stoeckel |

Fast Facts

- Finnish title of *The Oceanides*: *Aallottaret*
- English translation of *Aallottaret*: Nymphs of the Waves
- The piece is a single-movement tone poem
- What is a tone poem? A tone poem is an orchestral piece, usually in a single continuous section that illustrates or evokes the content of a poem, short story, novel, painting, landscape, or other (non-musical) source.
- This piece was premiered in the United States of America in Norfolk, Connecticut
- Other famous tone poems: *Pictures at an Exhibition*- Mussorgsky/Maurice Ravel; *Don Quixote* Strauss

Background

The piece was commissioned by New England patrons of the arts Carl Stoeckel (1858–1925), and his wife, Ellen Stoeckel née Battell (1851–1939) upon recommendation by a Yale University Professor. The piece was not to exceed 15 minutes and was to be premiered on the Stoeckel's estate for the 1914 Norfolk Music festival in Connecticut.

More about the Piece

There are two main subjects in the tone poem *The Oceanides*. Playful nymphs and the vast ocean are the two main ideas found throughout the piece. The work can be split into three general sections. The tone poem starts with the calm ocean, followed by a brooding storm, and ending in a great show of mother nature's force in a climatic crash of waves being swallowed by the overall calm yet overwhelming depth of the ocean.

The Oceanides can be arguably be described as an impressionistic tone poem

"Isn't it just like me to rework the tone poem- at the moment I am ablaze with it."- Sibelius

Though composers and specifically Sibelius were well known for revising many of their compositions, this particular piece underwent a significant number of revisions. As noted in the timelines, you'll find the piece experienced constant revisions while maintaining the original orchestration.

Listening: Audio cues for A and B section thematic material * times approximate

00'00

Strings create fairytale atmosphere

Flutes can be heard in the beginning, imitating the lively and playful nymphs marking the A section

2'10

Solo oboe and clarinet enter as harp solo glissandi presents the majestic ocean marking the B section

LISTENING CHALLENGE

See if you can identify the 2nd and 3rd reiteration of the A and B section.

Guide: A-B-A-B-(Coda*slight detour)-B-A

SEABORNE

By Garth Neustadter



Garth Neustadter

Background

The piece is designed to be the sister piece to another composition written by Steve Reich. Steve Reich's Sextet was declared iconic largely to his use of percussion instruments in new ways.

Words from the composer: Steve Reich's Sextet

"Percussion instruments mostly produce sounds of relatively short duration. In this piece I was interested in overcoming that limitation. The use of the bowed vibraphone, not merely as a passing effect, but as a basic instrumental voice in the second movement, was one means of getting long continuous sounds not possible with piano. The mallet instruments (marimba, vibraphone etc) are basically instruments of high and middle register without a low range. To overcome this limit the bass drum was used doubling the piano or synthesizer played in their lower register, particularly in the second, third and fourth movements."

— Steve Reich

Words from the composer: Garth Neustadter *Seaborne*

"This work explores our perception and perspectives of water from aerial, surface, and underwater vantage points. Water possesses an inherent motion and rhythm, and I am interested in reflecting the tension between the potential and kinetic energies we observe, as well as our perception of time. Musically, my language attempts to find a balance between gestures that feel almost primal or ancient juxtaposed against more modern and familiar textures. Often, motifs are introduced in simple ensemble unisons, gradually developing and evolving in ways that might emulate a communal improvisatory experience. Overall, I attempt to create a strong synergy and synesthesia with the photography, in that our perception of color and light is strongly reflected in the music throughout."

— Garth NEUSTADTER, composer

"... Although the surface layer of water is thinner than a hair, the way in which it interacts with light and the forces of wind and currents make it the most dynamic and ever-changing natural phenomenon. I have always been fascinated with this singular simplicity of substance acting under constant redefinition. Sound, like a wave through water, is a burst of energy traveling in a medium. The only difference is that one is in the ocean and the other a concert hall, destined for our interpretation. This piece draws parallels between what the audience hears and sees, combining to become an emotional experience that goes far beyond the music or visuals on their own."

— Garth NEUSTADTER, composer

Fast Facts

- The composer of this piece was born in 1986
- This thirty minute work for six percussionists and video projection
- The percussive sounds are designed to function as a soundscape backdrop to the projected visual celebration of endangered oceans
- This is the world premiere of the work as a piece for orchestra and percussion

LA MER

By Claude Debussy

Fast Facts

- *La mer* translated in English means “The Sea”
- Debussy spent his childhood summers on the French Riviera in the city of Cannes which supplied him with vivid memories of the sea
- When composing *La mer*, Debussy later described his childhood memories being “worth more than reality”
- Debussy rarely ventured in water and wrote the piece in the mountains.
- The strongest influences and impressions of seascapes were from literature and paintings rather than actual experiences

| YEAR | EVENT |
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| 1903 | Debussy started on <i>La mer</i> |
| 1903 September 12th | Proposes title “Calm Sea around the Sanguinary Islands” borrowed from a short story by Camille Mauclair published in the 1890s |
| 1905 March | Debussy completed <i>La mer</i> |
| 1905 | Debussy arranges the piece for piano four hands |
| 1905 October 15th | Premiered in Paris |
| 1909 | Second published edition of Debussy’s revisions is released |

Debussy’s *La mer* score displayed a cover with an image from Japanese artist Kokusai’s infamous work *The Hollow of the Wave off Kanagawa*. The standard tone poem contains subject matter written on the concept of physical objects. The subject matter of color, texture and nuance explored in Debussy’s *La mer* is unique because it is based on the concept of perception. Like the other two pieces on this program *La mer* is split into three sections marked by long and vivid titles. Though highly celebrated today, the piece was not well received in its premiere as it did not match the expectation of audience members and critics’ anticipations of the musical embodiment of the sea.