

Saint-Saëns, Debussy, and Superseding German Musical Taste in the United States

Saint-Saëns, Debussy et la mise à l'écart des sensibilités allemandes en musique aux États-Unis

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Résumé de l'article

Dans une entrevue publiée dans l'édition du 21 octobre 1908 du *Boston Transcript*, Claude Debussy répond à une question concernant la vie musicale aux États-Unis. Il déclare : « La caractéristique distinctive d'un pays comme [les États-Unis] est qu'il s'imprègne de toutes les sources [...] il est moins tourné vers l'Allemagne que les pays qui n'écoutent que peu ou pas d'autre musique, que ce soit par chauvinisme ou par antipathie ». Cet article examine les rôles de Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) et de Debussy (1862-1918) dans l'évolution des goûts musicaux américains vers le modernisme. Saint-Saëns a dirigé le New York Symphony en 1906, avec au programme son poème symphonique *Le rouet d'Omphale*, en plus de jouer *Africa*, *Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre* avec la même formation. Il s'est ensuite produit à Chicago et à San Francisco, et les critiques pouvaient déjà témoigner de sensibilités artistiques nouvelles, modernes. Frederick Stock, grand défenseur de la musique française, dirige *Le prélude à « L'après-midi d'un faune »* à Chicago en décembre 1908. Les aspects symbolistes de cette nouvelle musique n'échappent pas au public et aux critiques ; Paul Rosenfeld écrit : « Nous devrions nous tourner vers la France pour trouver le dernier évangile [du nouvel avancement musical] [...] Claude Debussy s'est défait des chaînes des conventions anciennes, et pourrions-nous dire qu'il a atteint de nouvelles dimensions musicales ? » Au même moment, la première de *Pelléas et Mélisande* à New York a marqué au vif la nouvelle écoute. Bien sûr, les sensibilités antigermaniques d'après 1910, résultats de la Première Guerre mondiale, ont facilité un changement d'esthétique durant l'âge d'or aux États-Unis, mais la nouvelle musique française elle-même avait pavé la voie depuis le début des années 1900. En 1923, Carl Van Vechten écrit dans son ouvrage *Music after the Great War* : « L'invention musicale des deux dernières décennies ne vient pas de l'Allemagne. Elle vient de la France ».

Saint-Saëns, Debussy, and Superseding German Musical Taste in the United States¹

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In an interview published in the *Boston Transcript* of 21 October 1908, Debussy had been asked to comment on American musical life. He remarked,

The distinction of a country like [the United States] is that it imbibes from all sources, and in that way will arrive more quickly than if it struggled into a foreign voice and then groped out of it into its own personality and individual strength—in short, it is less German bound than are the countries who hear little or no other music through chauvinism or antipathies (Bauer 1908).²

In this article, I argue that, for United States critics and audiences, the new hearing of French modernism superseded that of the late 19th-century American Gilded Age, grounded in German Romanticism. This short review examines the roles of Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) and Claude Debussy (1862-1918) in driving such a modernist evolution. Three cities led the way; Boston, New York, and Chicago, although other U.S. cities played a part. I argue that Saint-Saëns led the way for accepting new French Music, and that in turn Debussy's music promoted modernist hearing in the U.S. further than any other, including German new music. However, both French composers challenged and soon superseded the "German Romantic habit," ultimately surpassing Strauss as the leading modernist. Scholars have discussed the critical reception of the new piano music but not the impact of *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902) or the symphonic works, especially *Le prélude à "L'après-midi d'un faune"* (1894). Significantly, from the Boston critic Philip Hale and his hearing "dreams of the soul [...] 'sleep-chasings'" (1902)³ and other reception after 1902, commentators did not press an impressionist interpretation unduly but instead sought to understand the symbolist intent of Debussy.

As mentioned before, three U.S. cities led the way before 1918: Boston with a distinctive edge, New York, and Chicago. Saint Saëns and Debussy each composed three

works that were predominant in forming American hearing: the Third Symphony (1886) and the tone poems *Phaëton* (1873) and *La danse macabre* (1874) for Saint-Saëns, and Debussy's *Faun*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and *La mer* (1905) were, although the *Faun* was central early on and *Pelléas* redoubled the modernist charge after 1908.

Three stages of the early critical reception may be noted. At first, ambivalence among critics predominated. However, if reports are to be trusted, audiences appeared mostly positive from the beginning. In the first stage from about 1902, critics had a perception of Debussy as either a wonder or a wrecker, which slowly evolved towards that of a carefully controlled, symbolist composer. Significantly, although American listeners did not hear Saint-Saëns as a pathbreaking modernist, they understood him as the first to challenge "the Germans on their own turf." In a second phase of critical reception, from about 1908 and especially upon the first hearing of Mary Garden singing *Mélisande* in New York (19 February 1908 at the Manhattan Opera House),⁴ most held Debussy among modernist leaders, alongside Strauss following the 1909 premiere of Garden's *Salome* (28 January 1909 at the Manhattan Opera House). However, Americans wearied of the post-Romantic German diet by about 1910, when one can see a third phase of reception. By 1913 and although the U.S. was not fighting the Great War militarily—she would join only in 1917 but sent war and civilian materiel from the outset—, strong political sentiment in the United States helped drive musical taste quite far, finally completing the turn against German culture and against Richard Strauss as a perceived modernist leader.

Saint-Saëns's reception in the US

The music of Saint-Saëns, although not receiving abundant exposure, had been heard in the United States at least from

¹ Warm thanks to Chloé Huvet for her invaluable help with the references. It is to be noted that passages of this article are taken from Briscoe 2011.

² The original interview was published in *Harper's Weekly* on 29 August 1908, then republished in different journals, including the *Boston Transcript*.

³ Hale borrowed the expression "sleep-chasings" from Walt Whitman.

⁴ The performance in New York featured the cast from the premiere at the Opéra-Comique in Paris, in which Garden participated.

1887 onwards. Theodore Thomas, the itinerant German conductor turned permanent *éminence grise* at Chicago, premiered the *Organ Symphony* in New York (19 February 1887 at the Metropolitan Opera House) within a year of its London premiere and its Paris second hearing. The German-born Thomas was renowned for promoting Wagner to Americans, and he came to epitomize America's Gilded Age by his German musical biases. Only very occasionally did Theodore Thomas perform French music, although Chicagoans heard works by Massenet and d'Indy on single occasions; however German, Thomas relented and invited d'Indy to guest conduct his music in the early 1890s.

Saint-Saëns planned to visit the United States as an honored guest at the 1893 Chicago World Exposition as performer and conductor, but the trip did not develop. After 13 years and under the aegis of the highly progressive and German-born Frederick Stock, Saint-Saëns came to the United States in November 1906. Arriving in Boston indisposed with a respiratory illness and too sick to perform, Saint-Saëns continued his American tour to New York, playing solo piano in his *Africa*, *Fantaisie pour piano avec accompagnement d'orchestre* in a concert that also featured *Le rouet d'Omphale*.⁵

Saint-Saëns proceeded to Chicago soon after, and the foremost newspapers marked the appearance of "one of the foremost musicians, not only in France, but of the whole world," (Gunn 1906a). The new, young conductor Frederick Stock featured Saint-Saëns as performer-composer of the Second Concerto in G minor, and the papers lauded the distinguished composer, readily forgiving his occasional mistakes in the twilight of his pianism. On 9 November 1906, the *Examiner* scrutinized the performance and paralleled the elegance of Saint-Saëns to that of Frederick Stock, the conductor who as we shall see later aided in the transformation of American hearing in favor of modernist French music (*Chicago Examiner* 1906). While the critics recognized the superiority of Saint-Saëns as a composer of highest technical accomplishment, they also noted that his modernity came in an aesthetic of subtlety and charm, of French control and elegance. *The Inter Ocean*, distinguished for its musical judgements, acknowledged that he was

the only modern master who [...] has achieved success in all the great types of musical form and the first Frenchman to have successfully competed with German composers on their own ground, that is, in the domain of symphonic and chamber music (Gunn 1906b).

We must credit Saint-Saëns for untying the German Gordian knot around American hearing. No raging modernist, which the critics recognized early on, he must be

acknowledge for the solid, unshaken foundation and respect for French music he issued in.

Debussy's reception in the US

The evolution of hearing Claude Debussy as a modernist, one breaking ground stylistically, and as a symbolist, one paving the way toward new meanings, was quite rapid from 1902 to 1918. For American critics and audiences, this hearing superseded that of the late 19th-century Gilded Age, grounded in German Romanticism. Americans by 1918 agreed that Debussy was central in driving a new way of hearing (Briscoe 2011; Kahan 2013). The American Civil War occurred fewer than forty years before Debussy's introduction, and only at war's end did an American concert music tradition begin. Around 1870, the Boston School of composers, including Amy Beach and Horatio Parker, had begun to establish German taste as the norm (Davis 1989, 88-89; Chybowski 2008, 202-215), but America had scarcely the time to put down deep roots in teutonic Romanticism before the dawn of modernism, as Debussy himself observed.

However, many critics were sanctimoniously repulsed, although they grudgingly recognized that Debussy was forging a new path. Also hearing the 1904 concert of the *Faun* that had turned Philip Hale in Boston toward the new, modernist way of hearing, Louis C. Elson in the *Boston Daily Advertiser* wrote, "The *Faun* is a strong example of modern ugliness [...]. All these erratic and erotic spasms but indicate that our music is going through a transition state" (Elson 1904, cited in Slonimsky 1990 [1965], 92). In fact, *The Musical Courier* had dispatched an 1895 report from Paris to New York that,

M. Claude Debussy is unknown so far as the great public is concerned. *A Faun's Afternoon* was certainly fin-de-siècle enough as a title. As a wit remarked, the next would no doubt be *The Five O'Clock of a Nymph!* The work is a curious fantasia, full of unprecise harmonies and fleeting phrases (Thomas 1895).

Whereas Debussy visited London eight times, he never came to the US despite firm commitments to the Metropolitan Opera in a letter of 5 July 1908, promising a premiere of the two proposed Poe operas (Debussy 2005 [1908], 1100-1101). However, he did not complete the works on the texts by Edgar Allan Poe.

On 10 March 1902 Philip Hale heard Debussy's string quartet played by the Kneisel Quartet in Boston, and he was stunned: "[It is] a hallucination characterized by leaping rhythms, violent shocks of harmony which recall the

⁵ Concert given on 4 November 1906, with the New York Symphony Orchestra conducted by Walter Damrosch (Ratner 2002, 394).

chromaticism of oriental tunes, and a curious assemblage of sonorities, some charming, some irritating...” (cited in Boyd 1985, 163-164). The next month the *Faun* was heard in Boston, on 1 April 1902, eight years after its Paris premiere and a few days before the *Pelléas* premiere in Paris. The performance was given by the Boston Orchestral Club, conducted by Georges Longy,⁶ and represents the first of a major orchestral composition by Debussy in the United States (Mandel 1989, 35; Briscoe 1999). Philip Hale, soon to become Debussy’s foremost advocate, turned on a dime. A brilliant and progressive critic, Hale appears to have allowed the quartet to ripen internally, and he probably read quickly what progressive French critics were saying. Now in April 1902, Hale sympathized with modernist idioms and symbolist values:

The prelude was inspired by Stéphane Mallarmé’s poem of the *Faun* [...] All his visions are dreams of the soul. The music is exquisite for suggestive vagueness [...] cerebral rather than bodily, [there are] delicate shades of color that melt and fade into each other [...] “sleep chasings,” to borrow the happy phrase of Walt Whitman (Hale 1902).

Hale in the Boston of 1902 cannot or will not analyze Debussy’s style, although he recognizes its profound new beauties:

The tremulous, indecisive tonalities [...] reckless tonalities [...] the beautiful quality of successive combinations of timbres [...] [These] vaporous afternoon moods [...] these make the Euloge a thing apart. I know of no such ravishing measures as those that bring the end. And the individuality of this music! (*ibid.*).⁷

The second performance of the *Faun*, also not a part of the official symphony series, occurred in February 1904. In the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, the conservative Louis C. Elson found that

The *Faun* is a strong example of modern ugliness. [He] must have had a terrible afternoon, for the poor beast brayed on muted horns and whinneyed on flutes, and avoided all traces of soothing melody, until the audience began to share his sorrows.... The work gives as much dissonance as any of the most modern artworks of Music. All these erratic and erotic spasms but indicate that our music is going through a transition state. When will the melodist of the future arrive? (Elson 1904, cited in Slonimsky 1990 [1965], 92)

As Elson would never have imagined, he had witnessed, in Pierre Boulez’s terms, “the awakening of modern music”

(1968 [1966], 344-345) for American listeners ten years later than in 1894 Paris.

The role of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in promoting Debussy’s music

The Boston Symphony stands without dispute as the forerunner for Debussy’s orchestral music in the Western hemisphere. Up to Debussy’s death in 1918, the BSO performed his music relentlessly, and to be sure performances continued in the 1920s and thereafter. Astonishingly, the *Faun* was performed 43 times between 1904 and 1917 (scheduled in all seasons except three, 1907-1908, 1909-1910 and 1910-1911); the complete *Nocturnes* 4 times (11 and 12 December 1908, 26 and 27 April 1912); “Nuages” and “Fête” 5 times (4, 5 and 9 December 1905, 5 and 6 April 1918), for a total of 9 times performing *Nocturnes* or excerpts; *La mer* 16 times between 1907 and 1917; and 21 times for *Images for Orchestra* between 1910 and 1918 (the complete work was played two times, “Iberia” 14 times and “Rondes de printemps” 5 times) (Boston Symphony Orchestra 2014). Altogether, the Boston Symphony scheduled 131 hearings of Debussy’s foremost works in the 16 seasons that this study considers, almost exclusively by German conductors. Boston—proper, Edwardian, anglo-dominated Boston—had become simply a Debussy city by 1918 and the composer’s death.

The reception of Debussy in New York

A significant reception of Debussy’s orchestral music in New York followed only after the *Pelléas* explosion of 1908, and, notwithstanding the symbolist meaning grasped in *Pelléas*, New York received the orchestral music less comprehensibly. Mahler had been spurned by Debussy in Paris when his Second Symphony was performed earlier on 17 April 1910, when Debussy walked out of the performance (de la Grange 1984 [1973], 686).

Recitals figured in the affirmation of Debussy’s reception around 1908 and thereafter, the *Pelléas* years in the US. Less can be found regarding the reception of Debussy’s piano music and songs, understandably, since archives rarely exist for solo recitals. But critical notices confirm that recitalists such as George Copeland, E Robert Schmitz, Rudolph Ganz, and Olga Samaroff impressed critics and audiences importantly by Debussy’s modernism (Banowetz 1982, 42-46; Briscoe 1999; Duchêne-Thégarid and Fanjul 2013, 289-290).

⁶ However, it wasn’t until the end of December 1904 that Wilhem Gericke conducted the first official performance of the *Faun* by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, on 30 December 1904 (Mandel 1989, 35).

⁷ For more information on Hale, see Briscoe 2011, 227-229; and Kahan 2013, 451-453.

Lawrence Gilman, a New York freelance critic, championed Debussy in important ways. The music had intrigued Gilman early on, and he traveled in 1902 to the *Pelléas* premiere in Paris. Gilman showed a close study of the score in his monograph *Pelléas et Mélisande: A Guide to the Opera*, which was published by Schirmer in New York (1907a). In 1908 he followed with an extended essay on the same work, titled “A Perfect Music-Drama,” in *Aspects of Modern Opera* (144-125). Gilman passionately defends the symbolist message and epoch-making idiom of the work. Gilman even today remains a serious source when we seek to understand the leitmotiv’s meaning in *Pelléas*, which he explored quite so early.

The young impresario Oscar Hammerstein produced *Pelléas* at the Manhattan Opera on 19 February 1908. The performance and critical reception helped anchor Debussy permanently in the American musical consciousness. *Pelléas* had been heard only three times before, in Paris, Brussels, and Frankfurt, and London would follow New York on 21 May 1909, at the Royal Opera House (Holde, Kenyon and Walsh 1993, 248). Hammerstein, with much aplomb, assembled virtually all the original cast including the beloved Mary Garden.⁸

The New York critics of 1908 were mixed in their reception of the *Pelléas* they had just heard, and those of the older school could not appreciate the understated vocality and pathbreaking harmonic idiom. Henry Krehbiel, writing in the *Tribune*, wrote that “No one should be afraid to say that nine-tenths of the music is a dreary monotone because of the absence of musical thought” (cited in Horowitz 1994, 285). Henderson in the *Sun* grasped that, “all the time it is the play that gives life and force to the music.” But he snips,

The music contributes little to the play except that extraordinary fluidity of atmosphere which is its chief trait and which provides such a singularly appropriate background to the two limp, anemic victims of this stained glass tragedy (Henderson 1908).

The *New York Times* review was by Richard Aldrich, otherwise a rather conservative chief music critic for the *Times* from 1902-1923. Aldrich gloried in Debussy’s innovations for 2300 words in a piece that is a masterpiece for all Debussy reception:

There was a very large audience present—an audience of an altogether unusual intellectual quality and musical discrimination—that listened to the work with intense interest and absorption. [...] Debussy in this music is as original as it is given any creative artist to be in an

art that is built upon the achievements of those who have gone before. It is comparable with no other music but his own. It is easier to say that, but for Wagner and César Franck, the score could not exist as it is, but that is scarcely more than to say that Debussy came after [them]. [...] It is an artistic phenomenon that, as far as may be said, begins with this composer. Whether it will end with him is something for the future to discover. (Aldrich 1908, 7)

It is to be noted that Mary Garden’s performance had a great impact on the reception of *Pelléas*, although I cannot discuss the subject within the scope of this article.

Both Hale and “Hell to Pay” Parker⁹ traveled from Boston to New York for the 1908 premiere, arguably the single most important event at the beginning of American modern hearing. Expectedly, Philip Hale, the Debussy champion, found *Pelléas* “The most elusive of all music” in the *Boston Herald* but also remarked on its “symbolic import” and its “strange, new wonderland of music [...] This lyric drama is lonely and incomparable, there is no predecessor, no forerunner” (Hale 1908a). Wholly absorbed by the work, in three days Hale again wrote at length in the *Boston Herald*, foretelling its future insightfully: “*Pelléas et Mélisande* will suffer in two ways, from the invincible ignorance of philistines and from the hysteria of faddists” (Hale 1908b). When the opera was performed again in New York in 1909, the *Musical Leader* wrote, “The very large audience seemed powerless to move and filed out of the house as if it had seen the soul depart. It was as terrible as it was masterful and overpowering” (cited in Briscoe 2011, 246).

Writing in the *Boston Transcript* following the Boston performance the next year, H.T. Parker noted that virtually every seat was taken from the cheapest to the most luxurious. “The mood of the audience [...] recalled that of the devotees that fill the Opéra-Comique when Debussy’s music drama is presented there” (Parker 1909). Were American audiences aping Parisian Pelléastres? I should say not so, because they could not have known much if anything about that phenomenon—I find no reports in the American press about the positive movement in Paris in any but the most oblique terms. I suggest that Americans, perhaps fresh but at least fresh listeners, simply responded naturally and without pre-supposition. Parker continues his adulation of *Pelléas* as pure music drama and concludes that, for this modernist work of symbolist intent,

Each hearer of *Pelléas et Mélisande* listens to it for himself. Some there are for whom this idiom...baffles.

⁸ As a note on Hammerstein’s acumen, he built the Manhattan Opera House in 1906, providing so much competition for the Metropolitan that it bought him out in 1910.

⁹ Refers to Henry Taylor Parker (1967-1934), a major American critic who worked for the *Boston Evening Transcript*. He was known by the acronyms “Hell to Pay” and “Hard to Please” because of his incisive columns signed “H.T.P.” (Grant 1998, 96).

We who listen have our esthetic right to inquire whether that speech justifies itself—and it surely does...There is no more to be said except by narrow pedantry, deaf prejudice, and ancient formula (Parker 1909).

The critics of the Brown Decades, or the Gilded Age, had enshrined Wagner, and they were a bit confused when modernism ran against the past. Strauss, Debussy's chief modernist rival, was greatly popular and perhaps scandalous as represented by Mary Garden's temptress with the severed head, making her a sensation when she sang *Salome* in 1909 in New York, the year after *Pelléas*.

Debussy in Chicago

If Debussy and Strauss had joined hands as operatic modernists, in symphonic music the future would shift toward Debussy. Chicago had consolidated Debussy as an orchestral modernist and symbolist about 1908 but started well before. Despite its heavy German presence—its symphony rehearsed in German until the Great War—Chicago grasped Debussy virtually alongside Boston and New York (Briscoe 2011; Kahan 2013, 453-460).

By November 1906, the Chicago conductor Frederick Stock had prepared for the shock of the new, when he performed the *Faun* with the Chicago Symphony. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* wrote, “[The work] is a tone-picture similar to those hazy, mysterious, symbolic creatures... which France's painters confide to canvas. It probably is art—it may be great art—but a single survey of it is not sufficient to determine this point” (1906, 10). The progressive *Inter Ocean* found the *Faun*, “easily the most interesting which the concert offered [...] but it is not music that one enjoys. The applause was scant [...]. One cannot enjoy what we do not understand. [...] [The *Faun* is] a totally new musical idiom, [...]. But it is wonderful music for all that” (Gunn 1906c, 6).

Frederick Stock programmed the *Faun* ceaselessly, again in February 1907, December 1908, and many times shortly thereafter. It was not unusual to observe early orchestras in the U.S. repeat new works after brief intervals, but clearly Stock was hell-bent for his audience to “get” Debussy. Of the second performance in February 1907, less than a year after the first hearing, the *Tribune* wrote, “Upon a second hearing the beauty of [the *Faun*] becomes more and more evident. It is curious that dissonances should become attractive as the ear is accustomed to hearing them” (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1907a). Stock paralleled Boston, therefore, in hearings at least yearly.

In spring 1908 the new-guard critic Maurice Rosenfeld began writing for the *Chicago Examiner*. When Frederick Stock performed the *Faun* for the third time in three years,

Rosenfeld wrote: “We should look to France for the latest gospel [of the new musical advancement]” (1908). And Rosenfeld continues,

To Claude Debussy belongs the first place as a composer whose theories are radical and whose harmonies are novel...He has thrown all tradition aside.... [He] has broken through the limitation of the old, and shall we say he has found new musical dimensions? (Rosenfeld 1908).

Beyond the impact of its stylistic modernism, the *Faun* in Chicago likewise was recognized for its symbolist conception. The *Chicago Tribune* had written just two years before about the first Chicago *Faun*, “It is in a musical idiom new and strange[...] It interests and appeals without this being exactly definable” (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1906). But affecting a foyer conversation after the 1908 performance, the *Tribune* confected a foyer conversation between listeners, “It's a strange music... or is it music at all? ... It should not be listened to as usual music is listened to, for it is merely a starter of dreams—a conjuror up of fancies” (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1907b). And then the unnamed *Tribune* reviewer reclaims his own voice, grasping symbolist intent: “But far from Orchestra Hall, far from muddy, drizzly Chicago, Debussy's magic tone web carried at least one listener” (*ibid.*).

Debussy in music magazines

Six music magazines may be signaled because they joined the newspapers by impressing Debussy's image upon the American public. In June 1902 the *Musical World*, edited by Philip Hale in Boston, carried a translation from the Revue de Paris concerning the April 30 premiere of *Pelléas* in Paris, thereby preparing the early reception in the U.S. The journal *Musician* did its concentrated best to promote Debussy's music. In 1906 the *Musician* published an article titled “Some Maeterlinck Music” (Gilman 1907b, 132-144), the first of many articles that rank Lawrence Gilman as the leading American critic in *Pelléas* reception. Gilman continued his defense of the “new way of evolving and combining tones” (Gilman 1907a), and again D.B. Hill weighed in with “Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, an Inquiry” in 1908. Hill argues that the music is “never uncertain, never experimental, never merely striving after effect.” Rather, it is “a genuine invention of a new manner of musical speech” (Hill 1908).

Conclusion

The progression of modernist hearing accelerated as the War years came. Philip H. Goepf wrote a massive series of essays in three volumes titled *Great Works of Music* (1897-1913).

The decline of Germanophilia from Goepf's 1897 series to that of 1913 is striking. "In [Strauss's] quick flight of themes, how are we to catch the subtle meaning? The interrelation seems as close as we care to look, until we are in danger of seeing no woods for the trees" (Goepf 1913, 264). An elegant and discreet writer, Goepf cannot camouflage his true feelings toward Strauss the great German modernist, and he came to reflect the fast-accelerating American taste. To Strauss's remark concerning *Till Eulenspiegel* that he had given critics a hard nut to crack, Goepf responds, "We may not care to crack that kind of nut. It is really not good eating. Rather must we be satisfied with the pure beauty of the fruit, without a further hidden kernel" (*ibid.*, 262). Nor is Goepf much kinder to Bruckner, hearing a "dull brooding" (*ibid.*, 223) that fails to inspire and themes "almost too heavily laden with fine details" (*ibid.*, 227), and finally stating that "Bruckner had little to say" (*ibid.*, 243). Goepf is however kinder to Mahler, and his presence as a conductor in New York and his innovations during the season 1910-1911, including Debussy, might have won Goepf over to Mahler's brand of progress.

In 1911 Karl Muck drew a telling critique of the *Nocturnes* from the notorious "Hell to Pay" Parker written in in the *Boston Transcript*, issued on 12 January 1905 (cited in Johnson 1950, 44). Not only does Parker show progressive acceptance, but he also ranks Debussy in 1911 in advance of his chief modern rival, Richard Strauss. Parker's comment represents the seismic shift in taste that America in general is experiencing around 1910. It is singularly important that the new French music itself turned the tide away from Germany, and not engagement in the Great War. Parker wrote,

The miracle of Debussy [...] is evanescent vision made musical image [...]. Light, not haze, is the glamour of "Fêtes" [...]. The sheer sensuous magnificence of Strauss's Don Juan [...] flamed out of the music. [But] an overlaid piece is Strauss's tone poem. Strauss crowded into it more stuff of the imagination than the music will bear. He lacks Debussy's sense of selection (cited in Briscoe 2011, 249).

Carl Van Vechten, writing in 1915 in "Music after the Great War", "With the single exception [of Schoenberg, whose music came here 10 years after Debussy's], it is not from the German countries that the musical invention of the past two decades has come. It is from France" (Van Vechten 2010 [1915], 26).

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¹⁰ [Editor's note : The exact reference for some newspaper articles were untraceable.]

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