EASTMAN OPERA THEATRE

IMPRESSIONS DE PELLÉAS

January 29 – 31, 2026 | 7:30 PM
February 1, 2026 | 2:30 PM
Opera Studio A804



Eastman School of Music

IMPRESSIONS DE PELLÉAS

MUSIC BY **CLAUDE DEBUSSY** &
MARIUS CONSTANT
LIBRETTO BY **CLAUDE DEBUSSY**

ADAPTED FROM THE PLAY BY ***MAURICE MAETERLINCK***

WILSON SOUTHERLAND, MUSIC DIRECTOR
PAT DIAMOND, STAGE DIRECTOR
ANDREW CHEN, PIANO

First performance: *Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, Paris, November 13, 1992*

Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishing Inc., Sole Agent in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico for Durand S.A. Editions Musicales, publisher and copyright owner.

ARTISTIC TEAM

Artistic Director
Timothy Long

Scenic Design	*Costume Design*	*Lighting Design*
Mark Houser	Nicole LaClair	Nic Minetor
Diction Coach		*Props Design*
Brock Tjosvold		Mary Reiser

CAST

Thursday, January 29, 7:30PM **Friday, January 30, 7:30PM**
Saturday, January 31, 7:30PM **Sunday, February 1, 2:30PM**

Caleb Meyerhoff	**Pelléas**	Caleb Meyerhoff
Abigail Liebegott	**Mélisande**	Nichole Waligóra
Ashton Rapp	**Golaud**	Jack Leslie
Jordan Oney	**Arkel**	Jordan Oney
Caitlyn Babcock	**Geneviève**	Yiran Alicia Guan
Chloe Rose Bloom	**Yniold**	Sarah Cao

Wilson Southerland, piano
Andrew Chen, piano

COVERS
Owen Connolly for **Pelléas**
Naomi Chad for **Mélisande**
Max Foreman for **Arkel**
Caroline Smith for **Geneviève**
Evie Afflerbach for **Yniold**

Duration: 100'

ABOUT

Marius Constant, who had an intimate knowledge of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, published *Impressions de Pelléas* in 1992, an abridged version [100 minutes instead of 150] for six singers and two pianists. In an intense flow of music, [Constant] telescopes the five acts with great finesse, removing a few scenes and making a fair number of cuts and a few minimal adjustments to the musical material. (Outhere Music)

"Impressions of Pelléas… in search of Claude Debussy"
(excerpt) by Jan Michiels as translated by Peter Lockwood:

Gallons of ink have been used to describe this masterpiece since the first performance of Debussy's only completed opera in 1902. Indeed, in Debussy's own words, "the beauty of a work of art will always be a mystery, in that one can never exactly verify why it is as it is."

Words, however, will possibly suffice to describe the play that inspired Debussy's work: Maurice Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* was first performed in 1892 and was one of the Symbolist works that he himself described as a "theatre of the soul." Maeterlinck sought the truth that lies behind what the sense can grasp and depicted human forebodings and mysterious forces of nature with a background of legend or myth; *Pelléas et Mélisande* is set in the kingdom of Allemonde. These forces of nature – including life and death – are suggested in his text by such symbolic images as a wood or a fountain. In *Pelléas et Mélisande* Maeterlinck sought to express the essence of humanity through an exploration of the nature of the eternal triangle.

Prince Golaud of Allemonde finds a mysterious young woman, Mélisande, lost in a wood. He brings her to the castle of king Arkel, his grandfather, and marries her. Mélisande also meets Golaud's mother, Geneviève, but is gradually attracted more and more to Pelléas, Golaud's younger half-brother. Golaud is ravaged by jealousy and obsessively seeks to find out exactly what there is between Pelléas and Mélisande, even forcing his own son Yniold to spy on them. Pelléas finally decides to leave the castle and Allemonde, but meets Mélisande for one last time, when they confess their love for each other. Golaud is eavesdropping and rushes in; he kills Pelléas. Mélisande herself dies soon after, as Golaud begs her for the truth till the bitter end.

Debussy was fascinated by the subject immediately after the play's premiere; this seems completely natural, once we remember his comments on music and nature:

"Music is a mysterious series of mathematical calculations whose elements are used to their fullest extent. It is responsible for the play of curves that describe the changing winds; nothing is more musical than a sunset. For anyone who knows how to see with emotion, this is the finest lesson about growth that is written in Nature's book – although musicians do not read it often enough. […]. Music begins at the point where words lose their power of expression; it is composed to express the inexpressible. I would like it to seem to emerge from shadows and to return to them at odd moments, and that it should always be quiet and discreet."

The characters in *Pelléas et Mélisande* indeed appear as mysterious shadows, as they are intangible, almost ghostly individuals: the mysterious and shy Mélisande – "*ne me touches pas*" ["don't touch me"] are her first words – as well as the naïve and passionate Pelléas, the resigned Geneviève, the wise Arkel, and poor Yniold. Golaud alone is more or less tangibly human, driven as he is by an almost hysterical jealousy.

Olivier Messiaen summed this up well: "*Pelléas* is the greatest masterpiece of French music […] thanks to the depths of human feeling that are released in the work and to the fact that, for the first time, the workings of the human subconscious are deployed in the music." Debussy indeed remained a passionate defender of *le génie français* ['the French genius'] throughout his life, rejecting every type of foreign (principally German or Italian) influence: "even so, one can regret that French music has too long followed paths that have perfidiously led it away from clarity of expression, from precision and from conciseness in form." *Pelléas et Mélisande* was indeed criticised at its premiere because of this clarity of expression: Debussy follows the natural prosody of the text closely in his opera, avoiding duets so as not to hinder the comprehension of the text and the naturalness of the action.

"In fact, what I wished was that the action would never cease, that it would be continuous, uninterrupted. I wished to avoid parasitical musical phrases. An audience member, on listening to a work, is accustomed to feeling two very different types of emotion: the emotion created by the

music and the emotion created by the character. He will generally experience these successively. I have endeavoured to blend these two emotions in perfect synchronicity. The melodic line, if I may say so, is almost anti-lyrical. A melody is powerless to translate the soul's — or life's — essential mobility. It is essentially best suited to a song, in which it can convey a fixed emotion."

Debussy was therefore not able to sketch out one overmastering emotion – his inner life was too rich for this: "I live in an imaginary world […]. I experience an intense joy in digging into the depths of myself and, if something original should spring from me, it could only occur in this manner."

Pelléas et Mélisande made Debussy famous overnight, although he never sought to recreate a similar success: in 1908 he wrote "I am currently interested in condensed forms of opera […]. I am busy composing two new operas, both drawn from short stories by Edgar Allan Poe." He was unfortunately never to complete *La chute de la maison d'Usher* and *Le diable dans le beffroi*. He wrote to the director of [the opera house] La Monnaie in Brussels in 1907, stating "I confess that the five acts of *Pelléas* might have gained by being recast into only three acts."

Marius Constant, who was intimately familiar with Debussy's music and was also Olivier Messiaen's successor in the Académie des Beaux-Arts, went one step further, writing a *Pelléas et Mélisande Symphonie* in 1983. This work lasted just under 30 minutes and was an ingenious compilation of Debussy's orchestral interludes from the opera. He followed this in 1992 with his *Impressions de Pelléas*, a shortened version of the opera lasting 95 minutes instead of 150 minutes, for six singers and two pianists. Constant compressed the five acts into a single intense stream of music with great finesse: he omitted several scenes, made a great number of smaller cuts and a few minimal displacements of musical material. He suggested the following as a stage setting: "A salon at the turn of the century […]. It is the Proustian image of the celebrated photograph that shows Debussy at the piano, surrounded by his friends." Debussy had indeed regularly played excerpts from *Pelléas* to his friends as he composed it. In this chamber version of the opera, both listener and performer are involuntarily drawn back to the origins and the essence of Debussy's masterpiece: a *musique de l'âme* [the music of the soul] in which we can all

recognise our own Mélisande, Pelléas, Arkel, Geneviève, Yniold, and Golaud.

Constant's version ends with Arkel's words "*Mais la tristesse, Golaud... Mais la tristesse de tout ce que l'on voit...*" ["*But sadness, Golaud…But the sadness of everything we see*…"] This same wise king had already said of Mélisande "*Et c'est toi maintenant, qui vas ouvrir la porte de l'ère nouvelle que j'entrevois...*" ["*And it is you now who will open the door to the new era that I foresee*…"] These are the horizons that Debussy explored. He saw things that nobody else had ever seen, he heard sounds that nobody else had ever heard.

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director of Production
Pat Diamond

Technical Director
Mark Houser

Production Stage Manager
Josh Lau

Assistant Stage Managers
Mariana Iguavita*
Amy Krutsch
Jingning Lin
Christine Sheng

Properties
Mary Reiser

Carpenters
Robert DiCandia
Jose Maisonet
Steven Woznick

Scenic Artist/Painter
Shelbie Colombo

Assistant Scenic Painter
Katherine Duprey

Costume Shop Supervisor
Megan Lancy

Costume Construction
Leah Camilleri
Naomi Chad*
Claudette Hercules
Andrea McGaugh
Jessamyn Slon
Elizabeth Wager
Emma Wilansky*

Makeup Design
Caroline Smith*

Electrician
Brodie McPherson

Light Board Programmer & Operator
Katherine Duprey

Wardrobe Run Crew
Shelbie Colombo
Claudette Hercules
Megan Lancy
Andrea McGaugh
Jessamyn Slon
Elizabeth Wager

Rehearsal Pianists
(Graduate Assistants for Opera)
Haniel Anugerah
Bolai Cao
Andrew Chen
Xi Huang
Chaeeun Lee

*denotes student production assistants

This production is made possible in part by the generous support of the Friends of Eastman Opera, who also supported the residency of French baritone François Le Roux to coach our students with his knowledge and expertise of the opera of which his performances have been acclaimed.

UPCOMING EASTMAN OPERA THEATRE EVENTS

Tickets for all opera performances can be purchased at EastmanTheatre.org

EASTMAN OPERA THEATRE

Twenty-Four or, The Cure for Love

February 5 – 8, 2026
Annex 804

Conceived and Arranged by Tony Boutté
Original Scenario and English dialogue by Tony Boutté & Chas Rader-Shieber

*Sparks & Wiry Cries presents: song*SLAM Eastman

Saturday, February 7, 2026 at 4:00 PM
Sproull Atrium at Miller Center

Friends of Eastman Opera Voice Competition

Friday, February 20, 2026 at 7:30 PM
Kilbourn Hall
*This event does not require tickets

EASTMAN OPERA THEATRE

Die Fledermaus

April 9 – 12, 2026
Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre

Music by Johann Strauss II
Libretto by Karl Haffner and Richard Genée

We acknowledge with respect the Seneca Nation, known as the "Great Hill People" and "Keepers of the Western Door" of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. We take this opportunity to thank the people whose ancestral lands the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester currently occupies in Rochester, New York.



For the most up to date information on Eastman concerts and events, scan this code to visit our online calendar.

University of Rochester
Eastman School of Music