

March 2004

TILSON THOMAS LEADS SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY IN PREMIERE OF HOLLOWAY/DEBUSSY *EN BLANC ET NOIR*

Thursday, March 11, marks the world premiere of an orchestration by **Robin Holloway** of **Claude Debussy's** *En blanc et noir*. Michael Tilson Thomas leads the San Francisco Symphony at Davies Symphony Hall; the program is repeated on March 12 and 13. *En blanc et noir* will be performed by the San Francisco Symphony on tour in Kansas City (3/16), Cleveland (3/18), New York (3/23 at Carnegie Hall), Philadelphia (3/24), and Newark (3/26).

loyal and persuasive
advocates

The San Francisco Symphony has consistently championed Holloway's music. In addition to commissioning *En blanc et noir*, the ensemble has commissioned and premiered Holloway's *Clarissa Sequence* (1998), and given the American premieres of his *Viola Concerto* and *Third Concerto for Orchestra*.

En blanc et noir, originally composed for piano duo in 1915, is a product of Debussy's late period, marked by an austere beauty that stands in contrast to the lushness of better-known, earlier works such as *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, *La Mer*, and the *Nocturnes*. In orchestrating *En blanc et noir*, Holloway hopes to bring this seldom performed three-movement work to a wider audience.

black and white,
in color

As program annotator Michael Steinberg points out, Holloway is acutely aware of the irony of coloring a work whose title specifically calls attention to the black-and-whiteness of the piano keyboard. Early in 1916, Debussy wrote to his friend Robert Godet: "These pieces draw their color, their emotion, simply from the piano, like the 'grays' of Velasquez, if I may so suggest?" Holloway conceives of his orchestration as an "opening out" of the music's physical resonance, almost as though this were the freeing of a piece that has yearned to be an orchestral work all along. The orchestration is not, Holloway stresses, "*à la manière de Debussy*" — for one thing, there is no orchestral piece by Debussy in his late style to serve as model — "but it has to be a homage and in the spirit of Debussy."