

Thursday, January 11, 2019, Feast

Teachers - **Lunch is at 1130.** Please make sure that your class has eaten lunch, packed up, and done chores before noon. Make sure that the students know their groups (A, B, C, or D) so everyone can use the restrooms in plenty of time. We will do composer study and citizenship first.

Composer Study — Claude Debussy

Harvest Playlist -

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2RIujh_zAEO2txl4cFW66rCY-fsuhvL

Earlier Lessons - Our new composer Claude Debussy and Claude Monet have the same first name is Claude, were born and raised in France in the mid 1800s, and died in the early 1900s. Debussy was twenty years younger than Monet. Like the artist Monet, Debussy was breaking from rigid rules and shaping his music into an experience lacking in pattern. One of his most famous piano compositions “Clair de lune” — French for moonlight — is based on a French poem. It is the third movement (part) of a four-part composition called the *Suite bergamasque*.

Claude Debussy did not have an easy childhood. His parents lived in poverty in Paris. During the Siege of 1870, his mother took the children to live with an aunt to be away from the city. They lived near the Mediterranean Sea and days spent at the beach left an impression on him. His aunt paid for the seven-year-old boy to take piano lessons. His father picked the wrong side in the battle and spent a year in prison. Claude continued his lessons and his teachers saw his talent. The Paris Conservatory, where only the best musicians studied, was admitted Debussy at the age of ten. He studied piano, Sol-fa, composition, harmony, organ, and music history and theory. Some teachers liked him and wrote glowing comments about him while others thought he was sketchy. He studied there through his late twenties.

When he was only twenty-two years old, Claude won France’s most prestigious music award even though he broke all kinds of musical rules. The prize included an extended stay at the French Academy in Rome, Italy where only France’s top students in art, architecture, and music were allowed to study. What did he think of Italy? The French academy smothered his creative freedom. He thought the people boring, the food bad, and the rooms abominable. He found no delight in Italian opera which was all the rage and found 300-year-old church music by Palestrina more appealing. He was depressed most of the time during his two-year stay in Rome and he could not compose and music. The atmosphere depressed him so

much that he could not compose. What irked him the most was the strict rules of music! Not long after he returned to Paris, Debussy wrote his “Two Arabesques.”

Debussy loved the sea but he was inland when he first began writing “La mer.” He drew from childhood memories. Debussy started writing the piece in 1903 and did drive to a couple of locations by the sea on the English Channel during the two years he worked on “La mer.” He was not in the best of health and his wife did not have the same love for his music as he did. While she loved him and his friends liked her, Debussy was annoyed that they did not discuss the things that mattered to him. These challenges were rippling through his marriage and threatening to tear it apart. Their letters to one another while he traveled were short and not at all sweet.

This Week’s Lesson - Today we are going to listen to one of Debussy’s twenty-four piano preludes. A prelude is a short piece of music. Usually, it introduces a much longer composition, but not always. Some composers wrote a whole series of preludes that never introduced anything. Debussy wrote twelve of them for his first book in less than three months and he wrote twelve more for his second book in only five months. He died just five years after publishing the final prelude.

The eighth prelude from Book I is called “The Girl with the Flaxen Hair” and, like “Clair de lune” (moonlight), a French poem inspired Debussy. The piece is only 39 measures long and takes less than three minutes to play. This prelude is unusually simple for Debussy, perhaps, because he wanted to convey the image of a simple maiden with blond hair, strolling through the Scottish countryside.

The piece is so simple that musicians have created arrangements for a wide variety of instruments, making it one of Debussy’s most recorded pieces. In fact, within a few months of Book I being published, a close friend of Debussy made a transcription for violin and piano. The song remains popular with audiences due to its memorable tune and mellow accompaniment and still gets a lot of air time.

Here are a few lines from the poem. As you hear them read, think about what the mood, tempo (timing), and volume (soft or loud) should be.

On the lucerne midst flowers in bloom,
Who sings praises to morning?
It is the girl with golden hair,
The beauty with lips of cherry.
For, love, in clear summer sunlight,
Has soared with the lark and sung now.

Then the melody forgets and hangs onto one note for dear life and takes a few, long, steps and then a few short steps and a few long steps. Suddenly, it remembers the original hilly melody and restarts at the 27 second mark in the first video.

The melody is ready to walk up a long, high hill so it takes a deep breath, walks up the hill, and then, at the top (the 42 second mark) sees an even longer, higher hill. The melody is so excited to run to the top of that hill that it gets a little louder and hits a very high note (the 53 second mark) that hurts its ears so it starts running down the hill to get away. But it hears a soft echo of some of those high notes.

Fortunately that high note was not the loudest one. The melody goes up a lower hill and is so happy for the lower notes that it gets louder and louder which is called a crescendo. When it reaches the top of the hill, the melody is loud and strong (1 minute 10 seconds). The melody feels weak and gets softer and softer as decrescendos down the hill. It rambles around a bit as if it were lost and suddenly the melody remembers the original line and softly sings it one more time (1 minute 36 seconds). It wanders a bit more and ends on a high, soft note and you wonder if it as gotten lost again.

A Glossary of Musical Terms

mood: feeling of music (happy or sad or ...)

dynamics: change

crescendo (getting louder) or *decrescendo (getting softer)*

articulation: how a note is played or sung

sibilance (hissssing sssssoundssssss)

staccato (ve-ry-cho-ppy)

legato (*smoothly connected together*)

tempo: the timing of a piece

fast (**allegro**) or slow (**andante**)

ritardando (a dramatic sloooooowdooooooown at the end of a piece)

rubato (sometimes slightly **allegro** and sometimes slightly **andante**)

technique: the arrangement of notes

arpeggio (a broken chord in which each note is played separately)

chord (a group of harmonic notes that are played at the same time)

triplet (3 notes played in the place of 1 note)

form: the structure of a musical composition

fanzasia (an instrumental that has a free form with no strict rules)

libretto (a script of words sung/spoken by actors and song lyrics)

opera (theater in which everything is sung)

prelude (usually an introductory piece to a longer composition)

rondo (an instrumental that has a strict pattern and usually has a fast tempo)

sacred music (music to encourage a prayerful spirit and thoughts about God)

voice: the pitch and range of particular voice

soprano (highest voice, usually women or young boys)

alto (high voice, usually women or young boys)

tenor (low voice, usually men and occasionally women)

bass (lowest voice, usually just men)

Citizenship —

Primary - Primary classes will be reading from *Parables from Nature* by Margaret Gatty <https://www.amblesideonline.org/ParablesParaphrase.shtml#unknown>.

Primary A is finishing “The Law of Authority and Obedience” this week while Primary B is starting “The Unknown Land.” They will read at their own pace and how much is read per week depends upon two things: how much time is left before everyone leaves and the length of the class’s attention span. Ten minutes is plenty.

For “The Unknown Land,” ask the children what they know about birds and migration. This story explores faith and our final home, the land that is unknown to us in our earthly life, through the perspective of young birds trying to understand what their parents have taught them about the unknown land.

Then read a short section, no more than a page because it is best to leave them wanting more. Then have the class narrate when they remember and have them share what they think will happen next week.

Elementary - This week they are continuing Chapter XI, which tells the rest of the story of concerning the brothers of Oedipus. <http://www.mainlesson.com/display.php?>

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Middle/High School - Cicero!