

Thursday, February 7, 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](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.”

In 1894, he wrote a prelude which was not a true prelude since it was a stand-alone piece. “An Afternoon with a Faun” was inspired by a French poem about a faun sleeping in the woods who slowly wakes up, chases some nymphs, and falls back asleep. Nearly twenty years later, not long before Debussy, someone choreographed a ballet for the slow moving piece which features a flute — of course.

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.

Five years before his death Debussy wrote two books with twelve preludes each. It took him only a couple of months to compose all twenty-four songs. 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 Girl with the Flaxen Hair” was a hit and people started transcribing it from piano to other instruments right away. Like “Clair de lune,” it was based on a poem. “Footsteps in the Snow” was slow, soft, and sad while “Fireworks” was a wild ride with its glissandos. “Sunken Cathedral” had a deep, heavy sound to it and the crescendo matches the rise of the massive building while the decrescendo matches the fall. In “Dance of Puck,” fingers and hands leap across the keys and over one another and, at several points, one hand is playing over the other — one playing black keys and the other, the white keys.

This Week’s Lesson - Next week we have term finales. Today would be a great day for the class to recap what they know about Debussy and talk about their favorite pieces by him (in the recap listed above).

When you hear the word *nocturne*, what does it remind you of? If it sounds a bit like the word *nocturnal*, you would be correct. Nocturne also sounds about the Spanish word *noche* which means night. A nocturne is a piece of music meant to suggest a dreamy mood that suggests the night. Debussy sometimes drew inspiration from

poems but in this case he was inspired by a series of impressionist nighttime paintings by American James Whistler. He finished the work in 1899.

Debussy debuted the music two years later in Paris, of course. Even though some critics panned the music, many approved. One man joked that the critics were in despair because the nocturnes were so unpredictable there was nothing for them to analyze. Some people found the music to be mesmerizing to the heart and soul. Debussy's best friend from his days as a student at the Paris Conservatory said that Debussy "must from now on be regarded as having a unique and distinctive place among the musicians of his time."

He wrote three movements named Clouds, Festivals, and Sirens (i.e., mermaids). The first is exactly what you would imagine — quiet, floating clouds. The last has an air of stillness with a chorus of women singing wordless like mermaids. Today we are going to listen to the second movement. What would you expect from the title Festivals? (Happy, fast, excited.)

Play the first piece and, when finished, asked for what they heard. Ms. Tammy heard a swirling, whirling party with parades, marching bands, and fireworks. It's the mind of music that John Williams might lift for a Star Wars movie. Debussy put it well — a dazzling fantastic vision.

## **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*)

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)

glissando (when the notes slide up or down the scale)

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**)

form: the structure of a musical composition

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

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

nocturne (a piece of music that is dreamy suggesting the night)

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 <http://amblesideonline.org/ParablesParaphrase.shtml#training>. Primary A and B are reading “Training and Restraining” this week. 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.

Elementary - This week they are continuing Chapter XIV, which tells the beginning of the Trojan War. <http://www.gatewaytotheclassics.com/browse/display.php?author=guerber&book=greeks&story=muster>

Middle/High School - Cicero!