

Learning Bank

Claude Achille Debussy (1862–1918) is regarded as one of the greatest French composers. As the 20th century was just beginning, Debussy was a leading figure of musical Impressionism. Like Claude Monet in painting and Stéphane Mallarmé in poetry, Debussy introduced a new style of composition. With Impressionism, artists did not try to paint clear, specific images, but instead gave vague hints at their subject matter. There was often a blending of soft colors, lending viewers a sense of comfort. Music had a very similar quality. Debussy broke all the rules when it came to building chords and developing harmony. His style also contributed to vague outlines of melody and rhythm, thus creating very colorful tones and timbres. His works did not tell a story like many compositions written in the 1800s, but rather evoked scenes and images.



Debussy began his musical training as a child. Although his father had hoped young Claude would engage in a Naval career, he developed an interest and talent for music. At age 11, he departed his hometown of Saint Germain-en-Laye, France and went to Paris to enroll in the Paris Conservatory. Once there, he immersed himself in piano and composition. His personal goal was to compose music that would please his own ears. Although his unconventional approach to composition bewildered his teachers, Debussy won many prizes for his works. At the age of 22, he won Grand Prix de Rome, a coveted competition for composers.

Throughout his life, Debussy encountered many personal challenges. He was a complicated and reserved man and had very few close friends. He was considered to have an all-enveloping ego. Debussy was married twice and had one daughter, however she died at the age of 14. During the last years of his life, he battled cancer, and it was during a bombardment of Paris (World War I) that he lost his life.

His remarkable list of compositions includes music for piano, orchestra, opera, and vocal solo. *Girl With the Flaxen Hair* (*La Fille aux cheveux de lin*) is a solo piano work and is part of *Préludes, Book 1*. Published in 1910, it was one of his last collections written for student and amateur pianists. This work is one small example of his unique artistic genius.

What else happened during Debussy's life?

1863 Four-wheel roller skates were invented by James Plimpton.

1865 The American Civil War ended.

1869 The U.S. Transcontinental Railroad joining the Central Pacific Railroad with the Union Pacific Railroad was completed at Promontory, Utah.

1873 Tennis was invented by Major Walter Clopton Wingfield, a British army officer.

1877 Designed by Thomas Edison and built by his mechanic John Kruesi, the first phonograph was created.

1889 The Eiffel Tower was built for the (1889) Paris World Exhibition.

1892–1894

Debussy composed one of his most famous orchestral works, "*Prélude a l'après-midi d'un faune.*"

1896 John Philip Sousa composed the march, "Stars and Stripes Forever!"

1900 Eastman Kodak's Brownie camera cost \$1.00.

1903 Henry Ford founded the Ford Motor Company

1907 The book, "Anne of Green Gables," by Canadian author Lucy Laud Montgomery, was published.

1914–1918

World War I took hold of nearly the entire world, involving 28 countries.

1916 The fortune cookie was invented by George Jung, a Los Angeles, California noodle maker.

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NOTE: This Learning Bank is provided on all student parts.

Girl With the Flaxen Hair

Full Conductor Score
Approx. time – 2:10

Claude Debussy
Arranged by Deborah Baker Monday

Very sweet and expressive (♩ = 60)

1 *con sord.*

Violins 1 *p*

Violins 2 *con sord.*

Viola *con sord.*

Cello *con sord.*

String Bass *con sord.*

Piano (for rehearsal only) *p*

Very sweet and expressive

G D

5

Vlins. 1

Vlins. 2

Vla. L1 2

Cello x2 4

Str. Bass 4 -1 4 1

Pno. D A

8

8

H3

9 10 11 12

Vlns. 1
Vlns. 2
Vla.
Cello
Str. Bass
Pno.

H3 4 3 V V V

-4 1

13 14 15 16

Vlns. 1
Vlns. 2
Vla.
Cello
Str. Bass
Pno.

1 3 1 3 2 1 2

4 senza sord. V

mf mf mf mf mf

23 24 25 26

Vlns. 1 *p* *mp*

Vlns. 2 *p* *mp*

Vla. *p* *mp*

Cello *unis.* *p* *mp*

Str. Bass *p* *mp*

Pno. *p* *mp*

27 28 29 30

Vlns. 1 *p con sord. (one by one)* (v)

Vlns. 2 *p* (v)

Vla. *non div.* *p* (v)

Cello *p* (v)

Str. Bass *p*

Pno. *p*

31 32 33 34

Vlins. 1 *tutti con sord.* *p con sord.*

Vlins. 2 *p con sord.*

Vla. *pizz. arco con sord.* *p* H3

Cello *(gently) pizz. arco con sord.* *p*

Str. Bass *(gently)* *p*

Pno. *p*

35 36 37 38 39

Vlins. 1 *rit.* *pp*

Vlins. 2 *rit.* *pp*

Vla. *rit.* *pp* *div.*

Cello *rit.* *pp* *div.*

Str. Bass *div.* *pp* *V*

Pno. *rit.* *pp* *ppp*