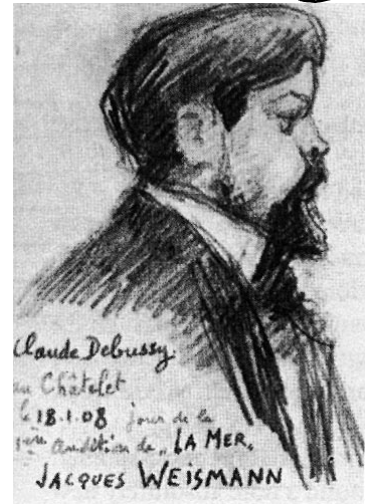


Claude Debussy

Life Dates: 1862-1918
Country of Origin: France
Musical Style: Impressionistic*



"Music is the expression of the movement of the waters, the play of curves described by changing breezes. He who feels what he sees will find no more beautiful example of development in all that book which, alas, musicians read but too little--the book of Nature."

Claude Debussy

Claude Debussy was born in 1862 in St.-Germain-en-Laye, France. His father had many different jobs including being a traveling salesman, printer's assistant, clerk, and later a revolutionary. His mother worked as a seamstress. They were a middle-class, *bourgeois* family. At the time, this was an unlikely background for a composer, but even so, Debussy proved to be an important figure in classical music.

Debussy took piano lessons as a young child and was admitted to the Paris Conservatory at the age of ten. He entered the school to study the piano, but after failing piano exams, he decided that he would study composition.

Debussy was a rebellious student and composer. He broke the rules of traditional harmony and form that were set in place by German composers such as Mozart and Beethoven, and continued by his contemporaries such as Richard Wagner. This shocked and angered his teachers who didn't understand what he was trying to do. In 1887 the World Exhibition came to Paris and he heard many new and exotic sounds. He tried to imitate these sounds by combining orchestral instruments in new ways. His personal philosophy about French music was that it only exists to make the listener feel good. Later on, he became known for translating the Impressionist style in art into musical composition.

Like his father, Debussy had many different jobs. In addition to being a composer, he was a music critic and piano teacher. He knew Tchaikovsky's patroness, Madame von Meck. He taught her children, and accompanied everyone in the household at the piano. Debussy died in Paris in 1918.

Questions from the reading: What did Debussy's parents do for a living?
Did Debussy begin school as a composer?
What kind of music influenced him?

Questions for research: Find France and Germany on a map.
Can you find the meaning of the word "bourgeois"?
Who are some Impressionist painters?
What is a patroness?

**Impressionism is a style within the era of the 20th Century.*

Lesson Plan for *Danse* by Claude Debussy

Standards: Music/Visual Arts Intermediate

Performance Indicators for Students:

- Evaluate the technique of orchestration used in music

Objective:

- Students will become familiar with the compositional technique of orchestration through active listening and discussion
- Students will recognize and respond to timbre differentiation

Listening Repertoire:

- *Danse* by Debussy, both piano and orchestral versions
- Recordings of other piano pieces that have been orchestrated (*Pictures at an Exhibition*, for example)

Prior Knowledge:

- Familiarity with the instruments of the orchestra

Vocabulary:

- *Orchestration*: writing a piece of music so that it can be played by specific instruments. Arrangement of music for performance by an orchestra.
- *Range*: how high and low an instrument can play

Procedures:

- Listen to the piano version of *Danse* by Claude Debussy. Have students take note of the range of both the melody and accompaniment.
- Now listen to the version orchestrated by Maurice Ravel. Have students respond to the following questions:
 1. What instrument does Ravel choose to play the melody at the beginning of the piece? (Answer: French horns)
 2. Why do you think he chose that instrument? (Answer: range, timbre, ability of the instrument to play the melody easily)
 3. Why do you think Ravel chose certain instruments for this piece? (Possible answers: to show the contrast in melodies, accompaniments and rhythms, because the range of instrument fits the range of the melody, to showcase the various timbres of the instruments)
 4. How does Ravel use percussion in this piece? (Answer: Percussion is used to “punctuate” or draw the listener’s attention to certain rhythmic and melodic figures.)
 5. Pretend you are an orchestrator. What information would you need to know about the different instruments?

Follow up:

- Listen to other pieces that were originally written for piano then orchestrated. Have students respond to the same questions.
- Take a familiar piece of music and have students suggest different ways to orchestrate it. Ask them to give their reasons for their choices.
- Have students create their own visual arts orchestration by using *Danse* as an example. Have each student create a black and white drawing. Trade drawings with a buddy and then “orchestrate” their partner’s picture by creating a color version using markers, crayons, or paints. Discuss class compositions and relate them to the piano and orchestral versions of *Danse*. (Ravel used the orchestra instruments to give different colors to Debussy’s piano version)

Lesson Plan for “Le matin d’un jour de fête” from *Images pour orchestre*, II. Iberia by Claude Debussy

Standards: Music/Visual Arts Intermediate

Performance Indicators for Students:

- Describe the music in terms related to basic elements such as rhythm, harmony, dynamics, timbre, form, style, etc. (Standard IIIb)
- Describe their understanding of particular pieces of music and how they relate to their surroundings (Standard IIIe)
- Identify from a performance or recording the titles and composers of well-known examples of classical concert music (Standard IVb)

Objective:

- Through listening students will become familiar with the piece *Le matin d’un jour de fête* (*The Morning of a Feast Day*) by Debussy.

Materials:

- Overhead transparency of listening map (pages 15-17 of this guide)
- Overhead projector

Listening Repertoire:

- “Le matin d’un jour de fête” from *Images pour orchestre*, II. Iberia by Debussy

Prior Knowledge:

- Familiarity with the instruments of the orchestra

Procedures:

1. Teach the students the following themes:

Theme 1

Theme 2

Let's go dance the fla-men-co. Let's go dance the fla-men-co. La la la la la la la la

La la la la la la la la la

2. Tell students that Debussy used castanets and tambourines to give this piece a Spanish feel.
3. Tell them that he sometimes combined instruments (such as the trombone and clarinet) to create a “new” instrumental timbre.
4. Guide students through the listening map (using overhead transparencies) while listening to the piece.

Indicators of success:

- The students will be able to recognize the piece of music when it is played.
- The students will be able to recognize the two main themes of the piece.
- The students will be able to hear the contrasting timbres used in the piece.

Follow up:

On a separate day, have students close their eyes and visualize what might be happening on the morning of a feast day in Spain while listening to the beginning of the piece (through 1:10). Have students journal independently, work in small groups or as a class to create a poem or story about what they imagine is happening. (Some ideas: a rooster crowing, church bells ringing, the smell of *jamón serrano* (country ham) and *tapas* (appetizers) cooking, preparations for a bull fight, etc.)

Background information on the piece:

“With Ibéria, Debussy joined the line of French composers...who drew inspiration from Spain. Save for an afternoon spent in San Sebastian near the border, Debussy never visited the country. For him, therefore, ... Spain represented that unknown land of dreams which every artist carries in his heart. However, no less an authority than Spain’s greatest composer, Manuel de Falla, wrote of Ibéria: ‘the intoxicating spell of Andalusian nights, the festive gaiety of a people dancing to the joyous strains of a band of guitars and bandurrias...all this whirls in the air, approaches and recedes, and our imagination is continually kept awake and dazzled by the power of an intensely expressive and richly varied music.’” (*Introduction to Contemporary Music*, p. 102)

References:

(Author not listed), *Orchestra Picture Book*. Washington D. C.: John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 1971.

Midgely, Ruth, ed. *Musical Instruments of the World*. New York: Paddington Press, 1976.

 **Link Up!**

- www.spainview.com/fiestas.html
- www.donquijote.org/Spain/fiestas
- www.geocities.com/thalaric1/entertainment/fiestas.html
- www.sispain.orgt/DB/fiesta/index.html
- www.red2000.com/spain/primer/fest.html
- www.corc.oclc.org

Debussy p. 2

Woodwinds

Woodwinds

Let's go dance the Flamenco! Let's go dance the Flamenco! La la la....

||: Let's go dance the Flamenco! Let's go dance the Flamenco! La la la... :||



1 1 1 1 | 7 FFF F 7 FFF F | 7 FFF F 7 FFF F | 7 FFF F 7 FFF F

3 1 1 1 | n n 1 1 | 1 1 1 1 | n n 1 1

1 1 1 1 | n n 1 1 | p p 7 p n n



||: Let's go dance the Flamenco! Let's go dance the Flamenco! La la la... :||

