



Claude Debussy

Composer of the Week





Born in St-Germain-en-Laye,
France, in August 1862
Died in Paris, France, in March
1918



One of the most famous French composers.

The eldest of five children Debussy came from a poor family. Despite this, he began piano lessons at the age of seven.

So good was he that, at the age of 10, he gained a scholarship to the Paris Conservatoire, where he studied for the next 11 years.

He won the Prix de Rome which meant a four year period of study there.

Debussy realised that he would never be good enough to be a concert pianist so he concentrated on composition.

However, he did compose many pieces of piano music, several of which have become very famous.

Debussy wanted to create a new way of composing based around the literature and paintings of the time.

This was called **Impressionism** and it was about creating a quick look or 'impression' of a subject rather than a detailed copy.

One of his famous piano pieces is '**La Cathedrale Engloutie**' – the story of a sunken cathedral, off the coast of Brittany, which sometimes appears magically above the waves, when you hear the bells ringing.



Debussy didn't want to follow the old rules of composing, so he didn't write symphonies. He devised new ways of combining the notes of the scale and wrote more relaxed rhythms. This made the music sound very different. Due to this many people didn't like his music.



Based on a poem, this is his
**'Prelude a l'Après Midi d'un
Faune'**. Prelude for the
afternoon of a faun – some
critics said that the faun
must have had a very boring
afternoon.



Debussy spent some time in England, specifically in the seaside town of Eastbourne, where he completed his orchestral work '**La Mer**' – The Sea.

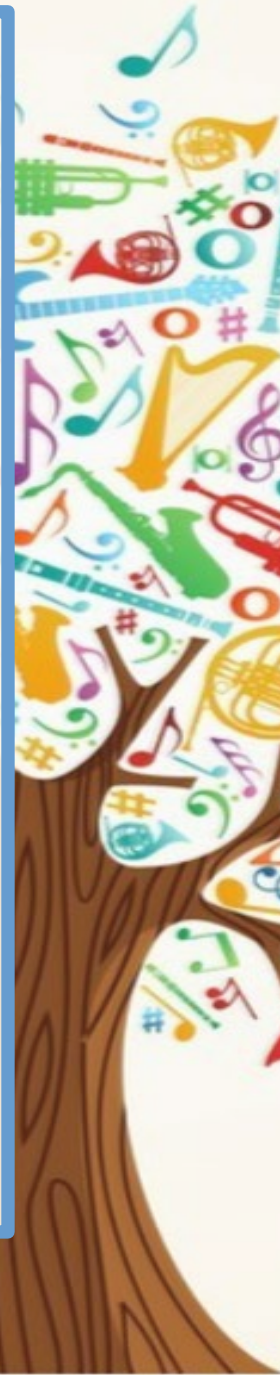


He said that it was looking at the sea in Eastbourne and the paintings of the British artist, J.M.W. Turner that influenced his composing.



One of Debussy's most famous piano pieces is '**Clair de Lune**' (Moonlight).

The title refers to a folk song about the French traditional **Pierrot** – a sad, clown-like character in French pantomime.



This also influenced the composers Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg...more later!

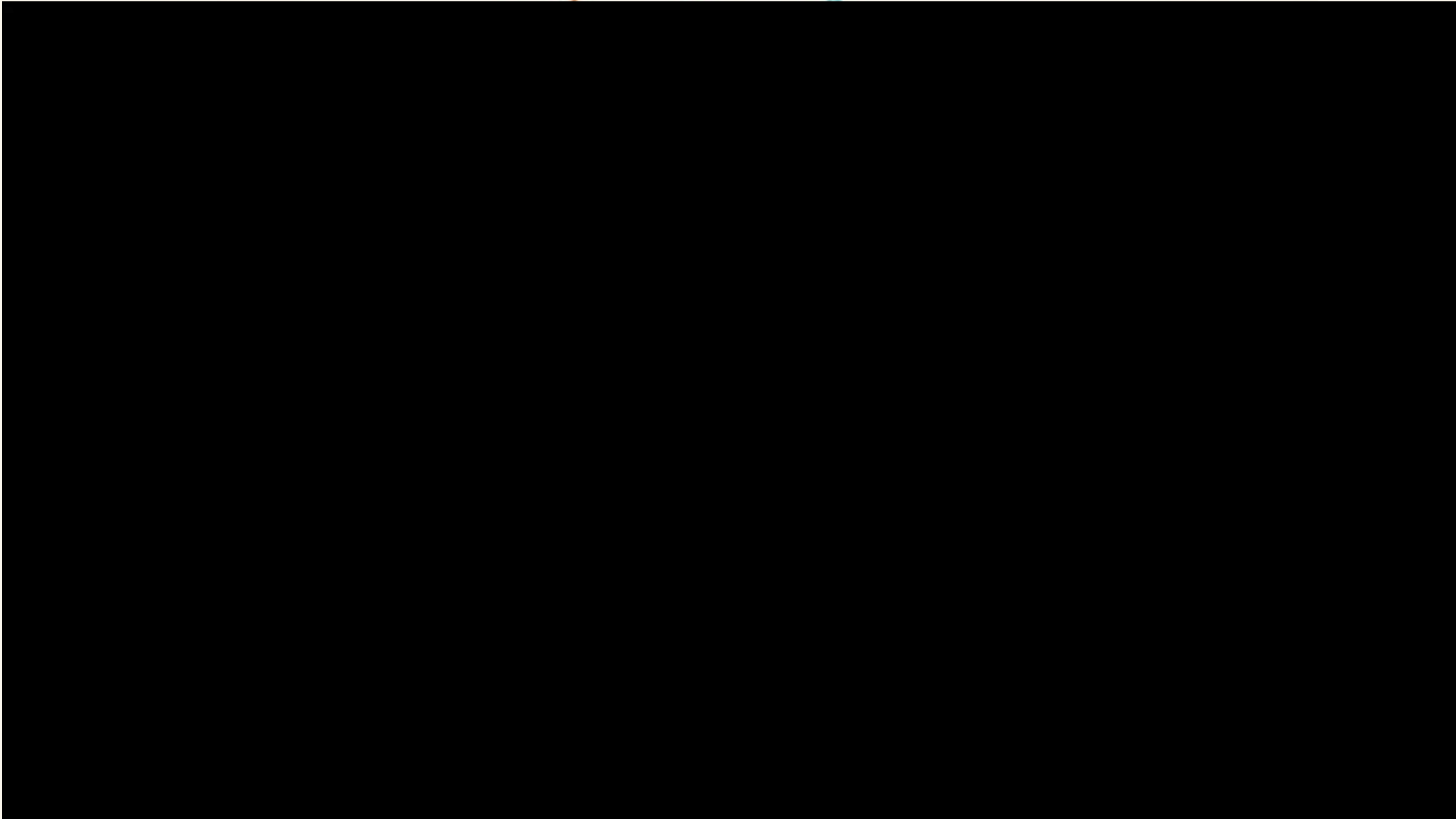
This is Debussy himself playing the piece – recorded in 1913!

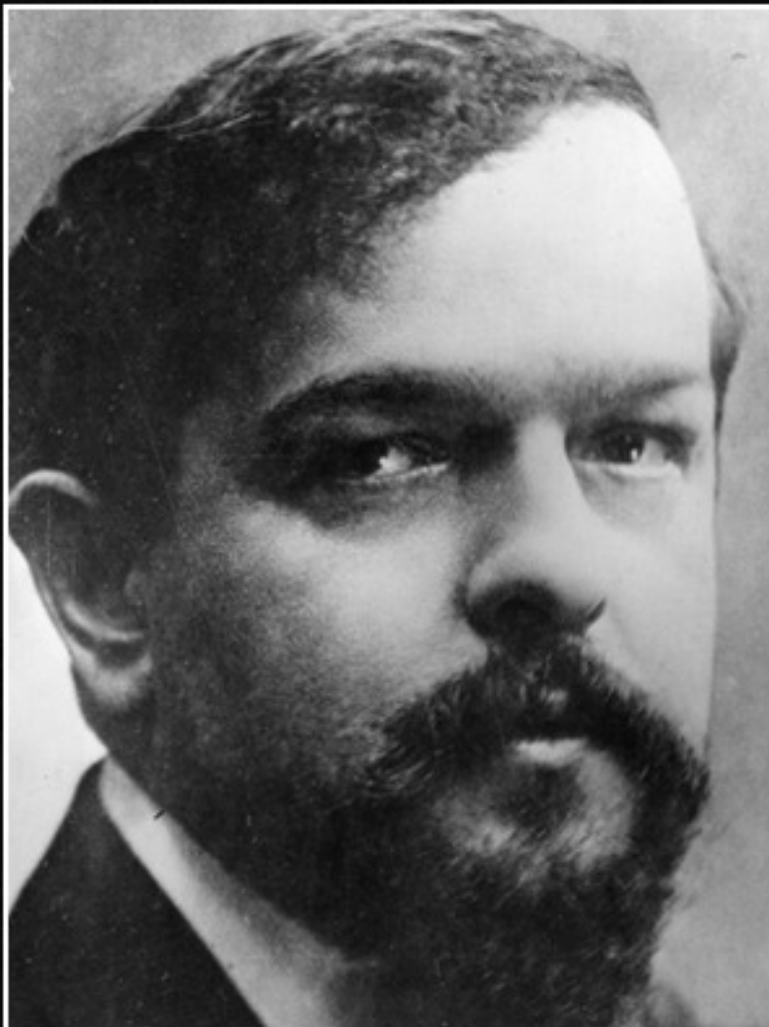




Debussy died on 25th March 1918, during the First World War, when German planes were bombing Paris.

There could be no public funeral, like some other composers, so he was buried quickly in a temporary grave before being moved the following year to Passy Cemetery.





Music begins where words are powerless to express. Music is made for the inexpressible. I want music to seem to rise from the shadows and indeed sometimes to return to them.

— *Claude Debussy* —

AZ QUOTES