

The Works of Claude Debussy

Pierre Stapley

Series Editor Anne Taylor

Seed
Learning





Contents

Who was Claude Debussy?	4
<i>Suite Bergamasque (1905)</i>	13
<i>Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune (1894)</i>	16
<i>Children's Corner (1908)</i>	18
Reading Quiz	23
New Words	24
Music Timeline	26
Notes	30



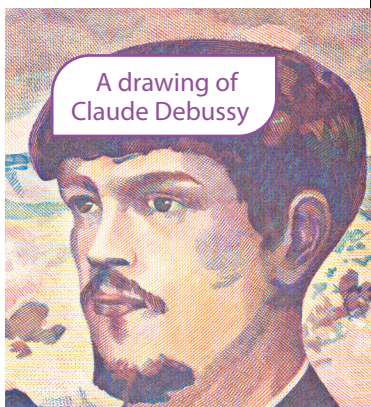
Text Audio

Who was Claude Debussy?

On August 22, 1862, the French composer Claude Debussy was born in Paris, France. His parents Manuel-Achille Debussy and Victorine had five children, Claude being the oldest.



Paris is the capital of France.



A drawing of Claude Debussy



A view inside the house where Debussy grew up, Paris



Debussy was popular around the world.

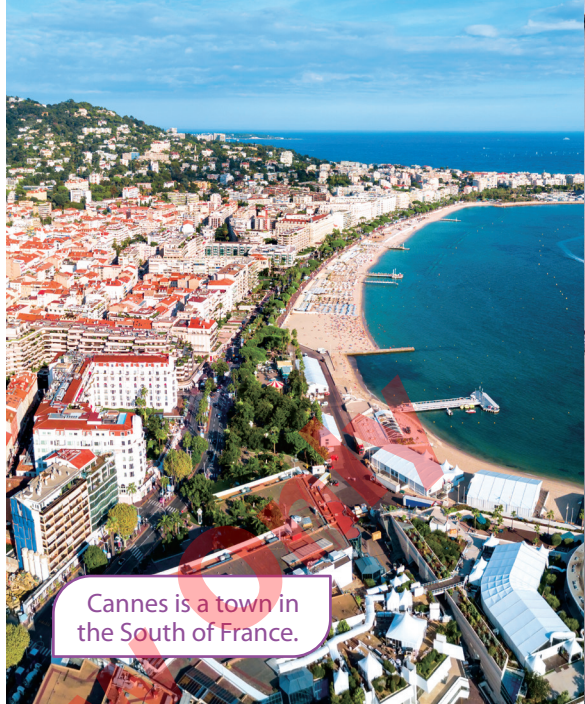


This theater in France is named after Debussy.

Debussy's most famous works include *Clair de Lune* (1890), *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune* (1894), and "The Cakewalk" (1908). Although his work is enjoyed around the world, it wasn't always like this. It took a while before his equals began to appreciate and enjoy his work.



This statue in France reminds people of the Franco-Prussian War, which lasted from 1870 to 1871.



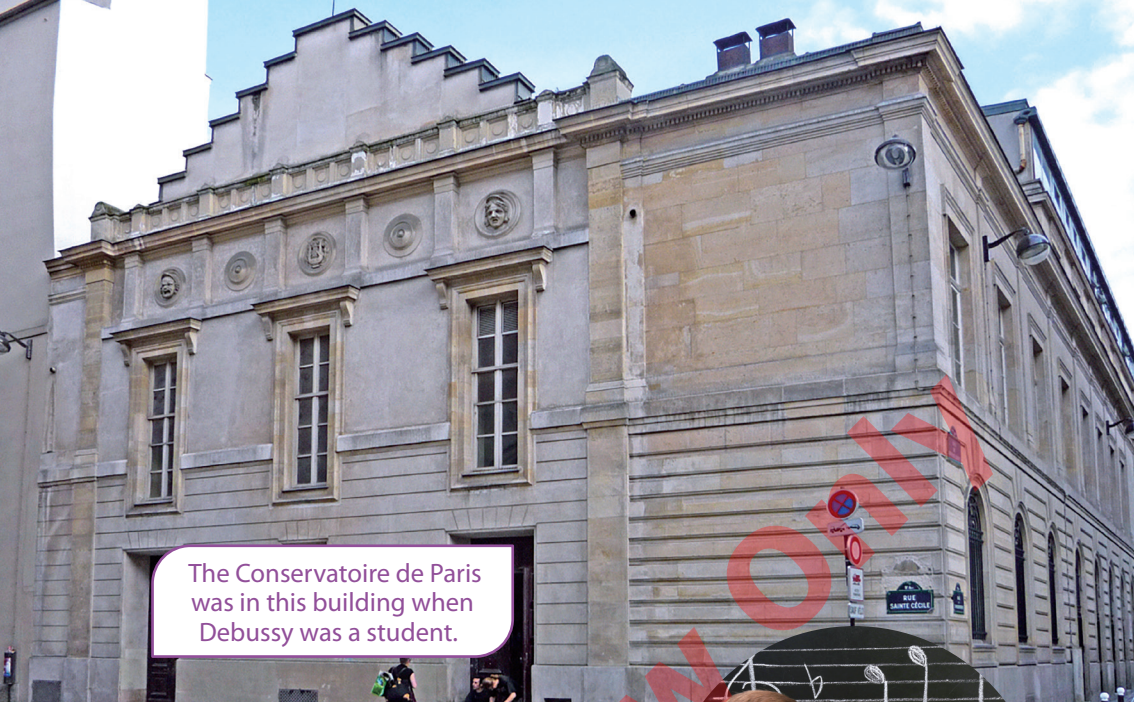
Cannes is a town in the South of France.

In 1870, Paris came under attack during the Franco-Prussian War. Debussy was eight years old. His mother took him and his sister to stay with their aunt in Cannes in the South of France. She believed they would be safer in Cannes.

While Debussy was in Cannes, his aunt paid for him to have piano lessons. A year later, the family returned to Paris. By this time, Debussy was showing a lot of musical talent.



Debussy had piano lessons. ➡



The Conservatoire de Paris was in this building when Debussy was a student.

Debussy loved playing the piano, and his parents thought he would become a piano genius. He was so talented that he was admitted to the Conservatoire de Paris, a respected music college, when he was only ten years old.



He went to music college at the age of 10 years old.

At first, Debussy didn't do well at music college, but not because he was bad at music. His professors were always unhappy with Debussy for his style of playing music. Even his music composition teacher was unhappy with his composing.

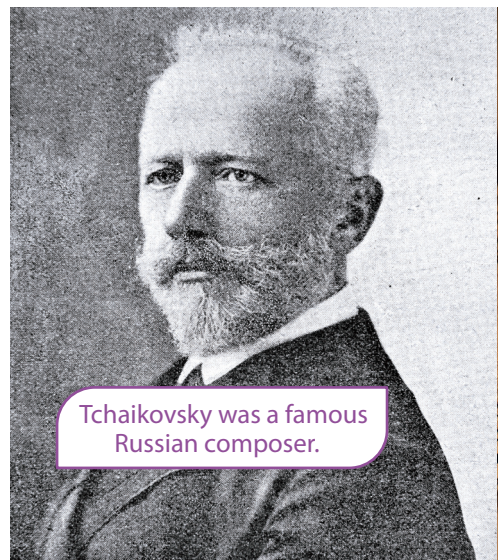
Nadezhda von Meck spent a lot of money on supporting young musicians.



In 1880, while still a student, Debussy got a summer job playing the piano in the house of Nadezhda von Meck, a wealthy Russian businesswoman who often gave money to support the arts. She hired him for private performances for her family and friends. She also arranged for Debussy to give her children piano lessons. Wanting to help Debussy, she sent some of his compositions to her friend, the famous composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. He was not very impressed and was very critical of Debussy's work.



Many famous composers and musicians came from Russia.



Tchaikovsky was a famous Russian composer.

While Debussy was at college, he entered the Prix de Rome competition three times. The first two times he entered, he didn't get through because the judges didn't understand his musical style. They didn't think his music was good enough.

The French government offered the Prix de Rome to artists and musicians from 1663 to 1968.



Many people thought Debussy's music was very strange.

Debussy studied in this building while he was in Italy.

Debussy made changes to his music style to please the judges, and on his third attempt in 1884, they finally awarded him the prize. The piece of music that helped him win the competition was *L'enfant Prodigue* (*The Prodigal Son*).

The award for winning this competition was a free place in a four-year course at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Rome. To attend the school, he had to move to Italy.



Rome is the capital city of Italy.





Maybe Debussy's accommodation looked like this!



Opera is a kind of play in which the actors sing the words.



Donizetti was an Italian composer who wrote 70 operas.

Debussy used this opportunity to further his studies in music. While he was in Italy, he found the people bad-mannered, the food terrible, and his accommodation dirty. He was often depressed and found it very difficult to concentrate and compose music. Debussy found that he didn't like Italian opera, especially the operas by Donizetti and Verdi.



Do you play a musical instrument?

Inspiration eventually came to Debussy during one of the regular visits of composer Franz Liszt to the college. Liszt often played music for the students and his work gave Debussy new ideas.



↑ Composer Franz Liszt lived from 1811 to 1886.

After struggling for months to compose, Debussy finally presented four pieces of music to the academy. They were still not impressed with his work and scolded him for writing music that was “very strange and impossible to perform.” He returned to Paris in 1887.