

87. Chanson, L. 92, No. 1 (Dieu! qu'il la fait bon regarder!)

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)
arr. William Melton

Debussy, Achille-Claude

(born 22 August 1862 in St. Germain-en-Laye; died 25 March 1918 in Paris)

The young Claude Debussy was coached by Antoinette Mauté de Fleurville, a pupil of Chopin, for entrance into the Paris Conservatory. He was admitted at the tender age of ten, making strides in piano technique and taking harmony from Emile Durand. At his graduation he was employed by Tchaikovsky's patroness Nadezhda von Meck as piano tutor to her children. With the Meck family he resided in Switzerland, Italy and Russia, familiarising himself with the newer Russian composers while in Moscow. He won the coveted Grand Prix of Rome with an early cantata, and on his return to Paris he came in contact with the French symbolist poets and was profoundly influenced by the music of Annam and Java that was demonstrated at the Paris Exhibition of 1889. Five years later came the premiere of Debussy's epoch-making *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faun*. Despite having to augment his income as a music critic (the feared 'Monsieur Croche'), Debussy produced a slew of pieces that would become classics, including *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Trois Nocturnes*, and *La Mer*. Beginning in 1908, the year his first biography appeared, Debussy enjoyed a vogue as a conductor of his own works, with many engagements across Europe. This period came to an end at the outset of war in 1914. A year later his health collapsed, and the composer died of cancer in 1918.

Debussy composed in many genres — for stage, orchestra, chamber ensembles, piano, solo voice and chorus. 'Dieu! qu'il la fait bon regarder!' ('God! What a Vision She is!') was the first of *Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans* for mixed four-voiced chorus a cappella, L.[esure] 92 (Paris: Durand & Fils, 1908; Plate No. 7179). The chanson had been performed privately with amateur voices at the home of the Fontaine family in Paris in early 1898, but its public unveiling would not occur until 9 April 1909,

when Debussy conducted the work for the Concerts Colonne. The text was by Charles d'Orleans (1394-1465), and biographer Léon Vallas noted that Debussy had composed the piece 'in modern harmonic fashion, but with the old modes and antique contrapuntal style, in a conscious attempt to evoke the Renaissance master'.

Text by William Melton