

Danse

Claude Debussy (orchestrated by Maurice Ravel)

B. August 22, 1862, St. Germain-en-Laye, France

D. March 25, 1918, Paris

Scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets with timpani, percussion (snare drum, triangle, bass drum, cymbals, and crotales), harp and strings (approx. 6 minutes).

French composer and conductor Pierre Boulez declared Claude Debussy “the start of the twentieth century.” Debussy’s exploration of color, his reconception of melody, form, and musical time, and his quest for a new musical language had a profound and lasting influence on modern composers who followed him. His unique approach to composition may have stemmed in part from the fact that he felt like an outsider within French musical life. He grew up in a poor family outside Paris, and heard ancient liturgical church music as often as the standard classical repertory that was the staple of French musical education. Though he excelled at the Paris Conservatory - even winning the *Prix de Rome*, the institution’s highest honor, in 1884 - he found its strictures stifling and eventually decided to seek his own musical language. His inspiration came through non-European music, visual art, and especially the Symbolist poets, whose dreamlike imagery and subtle expression often found analogs in Debussy’s music.

Danse, for solo piano and originally titled *Tarantelle Styrienne*, was published in 1890 when financial hardships forced Debussy to sell several early works to publishers. The piece was reissued in 1903 under the present title. The work’s quick and bold modulations and free use of chords comprised of several pitches (such as what we would call “ninth” chords) presage many of the radical ideas that the composer would explore in his maturity. The lively rhythms of the work reflect the style of the *Tarantelle*, a wild dance in 6/8 that is supposedly performed to fight off drowsiness after being bitten by a tarantula spider. Maurice Ravel, who held Debussy in high esteem despite their professional competitiveness, orchestrated the work in the winter of 1922–1923.

This is Detroit Symphony Orchestra premiere of Debussy’s *Danse*.

Program note by David Heetderks, doctoral student in music theory at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance.