

# Keyboard Kids' Companion

Created by Teachers & Approved by Kids

Helen Smith Tarchalski, Editor

## Meet the Composers

### Achille-Claude Debussy

**Famous Works:** *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun), *La Mer* (The Sea), *Jardins sous la pluie* (Gardens in the Rain), *Reflets dans l'eau* (Reflections in the Water), *Golliwogg's Cakewalk*.

Achille-Claude Debussy was born on August 22, 1862 in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, a town outside Paris, where his parents ran a china shop. His father was also a traveling salesman, and his mother, a seamstress.

At age ten, after a few years of lessons, Debussy went to the Paris Conservatory to study piano, and later he studied composition. Debussy shocked and frustrated his professors with "strange" musical ideas. He believed that composers were too worried about rules of harmony and form: "I am more and more convinced that music, by its very nature, is something that cannot be cast into a traditional and fixed form. It is made up of colors and rhythms..." Debussy's work started the Impressionistic period of music, but he disapproved of the term. He felt people did not think about music deeply when calling it "impressions." Debussy won many prizes for his compositions, including the *Grand Prix de Rome*, which took him to Italy for two years of composition study.

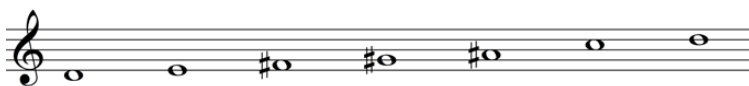
Debussy liked to think about poetry, artwork, nature scenes, and other countries when composing. He wrote many details in his compositions, but not pedal markings. Although pedal work is important in his music, he told his publisher that it must be natural, "like breathing."



Many say that Debussy gave pianists more to think about imaginatively shaping sound than any other composer since Chopin.

Debussy heard inspiring new sounds from other countries in music played at the 1889 Paris International Exhibition and during his travels. He loved composing with unusual sounds for his time, such as the *whole-tone scale*, *pentatonic scale*, and strings of *parallel chords* (chords moving as a scale). One of his most famous sets of compositions, *Children's Corner*, is dedicated to his daughter, Claude-Emma (he called her "Chouchou"). Chouchou's nanny was British, which may explain why Debussy wrote English rather than French titles for this set. He grew tired of Wagner's music and its extreme popularity. In the middle of *Golliwogg's Cakewalk*, Debussy even poked a little fun by including music from Wagner's very serious opera *Tristan and Isolde*—every few measures, he mixed in musical "giggling"!

Whole-tone scale

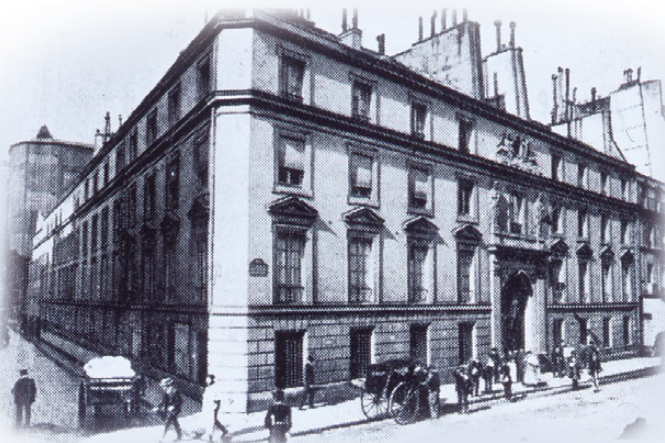


Pentatonic scale



The music room in Debussy's Paris home had a piano, a desk with carved wooden animals, and a bowl of goldfish. Debussy liked everything neat and organized. He kept fine art prints and good books. He liked nice clothes and fancy foods. As a child, while his friends stuffed themselves with cheap candy, he chose small gourmet sandwiches or fancy pastries. He did not have many friends—he preferred cats to people. He usually had one or more Siamese cats.

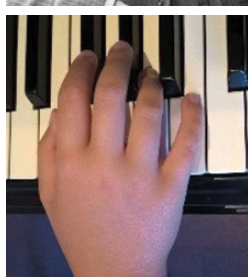
Debussy was very upset by World War I and, at first, found it difficult to work. He finally vowed to create "beauty that the enemy is trying to destroy." Debussy died in Paris on March 25, 1918 while the Germans bombed Paris. A dangerous time for France, there could be no public funeral to honor Debussy. Several months later, France celebrated victory, and finally celebrated the life and work of Debussy.



Paris Conservatory

# A Summer-y Summary

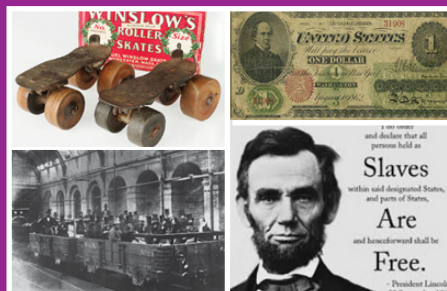
Answers for *A Summer-y Summary* can be found in this school year's past issues of *Clavier Companion* which can be found at [ClavierCompanion.com](http://ClavierCompanion.com)



- Practice using the HATT trick: \_\_\_\_\_, then together. (Sept/Oct 2017)
- Early in his career, this composer made a living by demonstrating sheet music to boost sales at a music store in New York. He was a composer who worked to make jazz music accepted as a serious art form: \_\_\_\_\_ (Sept/Oct 2017)
- Beethoven's most famous student, Carl \_\_\_\_\_, composed many beautiful exercises for piano still played all over the world today. (Nov/Dec 2017)
- Beethoven lived during the Classical period in music history, but some of his music was so unusual that his work helped to start the \_\_\_\_\_ period of music. (Nov/Dec 2017)
- Playing close to the \_\_\_\_\_ keys helps us to play more evenly, to avoid stopping or pausing, and to play with better tone. (Jan/Feb 2018)
- During England's premiere of Handel's *Messiah*, King George II was so moved by "Hallelujah Chorus" that he \_\_\_\_\_, followed by the rest of the audience. This began a tradition that still takes place today. (Jan/Feb 2018)
- Famous author E.T.A. Hoffmann wrote that "Listening to \_\_\_\_\_ is like taking a walk in the country." (Mar/Apr 2018)
- Nickname of composition by Haydn in which performers leave the stage one by one when their parts are finished: \_\_\_\_\_ Symphony. (Mar/Apr 2018)
- This composer used real cannons in the score for his *1812 Overture*. Peter \_\_\_\_\_ (May/June 2018)
- When reviewing a piece you already know, plenty of \_\_\_\_\_ practice will keep your memory refreshed and remind your fingers of details. It will also help your technique in many ways. (May/June 2018)
- \_\_\_\_\_’s work started the Impressionistic period of music, but he hated the term. (July/Aug 2018)
- Debussy loved composing with \_\_\_\_\_-tone and \_\_\_\_\_ scales. (July/Aug 2018)

## In 1862, the year of Debussy's birth...

- First U.S. paper money issued
- Slavery outlawed in U.S.
- Four-wheeled roller skates patented
- First section of the British subway, called the London Underground, opens



Reprint permission granted exclusively for *Clavier Companion* subscribers and their students. © *Clavier Companion*, 2018.