ART AND MUSIC

CLAUDE MONET

Music of His Time

BERLIOZ
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BIZET
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CHABRIER
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DEBUSSY
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ELGAR
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FAURÉ
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RAVEL
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with Notes and Chronology

Claude Monet
Music of His Time

1 ***Overture Le Corsaire*, Op. 21** 8.04
Hector Berlioz (1803–69)
San Diego Symphony Orchestra, Yoav Talmi
(Naxos 8.550999)

2 **Minuet *(L'Arlésienne Suite I)*** 3.07
Georges Bizet (1838–75)
Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra,
Anthony Bramall
(Naxos 8.550061)

3 **Adagietto *(L'Arlésienne Suite I)*** 3.32
Georges Bizet
Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra,
Anthony Bramall
(Naxos 8.550061)

4 **Prélude Pastoral** 6.31
Emmanuel Chabrier (1841–94)
Orchestra Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo
(Naxos 8.554248)

5 **Imperial March, Op. 32** 4.20
Edward Elgar (1857–1934)
BBC Philharmonic, George Hurst
(Naxos 8.550634)

6 **Fêtes *(Nocturnes)*** 6.55
Claude Debussy (1862–1918)
BRT Philharmonic, Brussels,
Alexander Rahbari
(Naxos 8.550262)

7 **De l'aube à midi sur la mer *(La mer)*** 9.18
Claude Debussy
BRT Philharmonic, Alexander Rahbari
(Naxos 8.550262)

8 **Ouverture *(Masques et bergamasques)*** 3.48
Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924)
NSO of Ireland, Michael Healy, violin
(Naxos 8.553360)

Cover picture: *Wild Poppies near Argenteuil (Les Coquelicots environs d'Argenteuil)* by Claude Monet, 1873
(All illustrations provided by The Bridgeman Art Library, London)

9 **Pastorale *(Masques et bergamasques)*** 4.20
Gabriel Fauré
NSO of Ireland, Michael Healy, violin
(Naxos 8.553360)

10 **Une barque sur l'océan *(Miroirs)*** 6.05
Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)
François-Joël Thiollier, piano
(Naxos 8.550683)

11 **La vallée des cloches *(Miroirs)*** 5.10
Maurice Ravel
François-Joël Thiollier, piano
(Naxos 8.550683)

12 **Reflets dans l'eau *(Images I)*** 5.20
Claude Debussy
François-Joël Thiollier, piano
(Naxos 8.553292)

13 **Jardins sous la pluie *(Estampes)*** 3.52
Claude Debussy
François-Joël Thiollier, piano
(Naxos 8.553292)

14 **Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir *(Préludes I)*** 2.56
Claude Debussy
François-Joël Thiollier, piano
(Naxos 8.553293)

Claude Monet

Music of His Time

"He was only an eye – but what an eye!" So said Cézanne of Monet, and surely few painters have ever been so totally absorbed by the business of looking at the world. Over 2,000 oil paintings by Monet have survived – this despite the fact that he is known towards the end of his life to have burned at least 500 paintings which he considered inferior. The sheer number is an extraordinary testament to his obsession with changing appearances. It was the very fleetingness of things that fascinated him, what he called *l'instantanéité*. As he himself put it, "For me, the subject is of secondary importance: I want to convey what is alive between me and the subject." For the first time in the history of painting what was being attempted was a representation of the glance, the perception of a moment that instantly vanishes to be replaced by another.

All this was very confusing. Great art, it had always been understood, dealt with eternal truths. The painter's task was somehow to penetrate the surfaces of things and portray, or at least suggest, their underlying nature. What merit could there be in registering on canvas a particular play of colour or light that is no sooner seen than it has disappeared forever? Especially when the artist dabs and blobs the paint on in a way that by traditional standards is simply childish and incompetent. "What freedom and ease in the brushwork!" wrote Louis Leroy sarcastically, commenting on Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* in the magazine *Le Charivari*. "Wallpaper in its raw state is more finished than this sea picture!" Colour, for the academic artists of the day, was no more than the final finish. The essential element for them was meticulous draughtsmanship. "Draw lines, lots of lines", the arch-classicist Ingres exhorted his pupils. Within the Académie des Beaux-Arts, the ultimate though self-appointed arbiter of artistic merit within France, for artists to ignore line and rely only on contrasting lumps of colour, as the Impressionists did, hardly amounted to painting at all.

Claude Monet (1840–1926)

Born the son of a Paris shopkeeper in 1840, Monet grew up in Le Havre on the north coast of France. The sea and the landscape of Normandy were to provide an eternal inspiration for his painting. Already in his mid-twenties, under the influence of Eugène Boudin, Monet was painting in the open air, and early works were exhibited and gained modest recognition at the Salon of the Academy of Fine Arts. For him, as for any French painter of the time, this was a matter of the highest importance. Monet was a man of immense resolution, even stubbornness, who had little time for academic methods and disciplines. But he also nourished a healthy urge to succeed in the world's terms, and for that it was essential to have his pictures exhibited by the Salon.

The attitude of the Salon itself towards new movements in painting was becoming something of a scandal in the 1860s. In 1863 the policy of the selection committee for the Salon had been so rigid that, in response to a direct appeal, the Emperor set up a Salon des Refusés for those artists whose paintings had been turned down. Among its contributors was Edouard Manet, eight years older than Monet, whose provocative *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* created an immediate sensation. The following year Manet was back in the Salon with the equally provocative *Olympia*, together with a number of modernists including Degas, Renoir and Monet himself. But fundamental attitudes had not changed, and admission to the Salon remained elusive. Manet found himself the leader of an increasingly disgruntled group who met regularly at the Café Guerbois to exchange their thoughts on art and the injustice of the world.

It was not simply the style of their painting that raised hackles, it was also the subjects. A nude female, for instance, was perfectly acceptable, so long as she was set in an idealised past. Manet's *Le déjeuner* was disgraceful not because the woman was nude but because no pretence was made that she was a Greek or Roman goddess: her male companions were well-dressed contemporary Parisians. As for landscapes, these were supposed to be representations of nature. So why was Monet painting the port of Le Havre, with its warehouses and steamships? What was the strange attraction for

him of the railway bridge at Argenteuil? And what on earth was he doing producing a succession of paintings of the Gare St Lazare?

His friend Zola provided an answer: "Monet loves with a particular affection nature that makes man modern." Though he grew less and less interested in depicting the changing social life of a great city (a matter of continuing fascination for Manet, Degas and Renoir), or indeed in including any human figures at all in his paintings, Monet's world was always a product of man. Sometimes obviously so, as in his pictures of London, Venice or the towns of the Côte d'Azur. But even in a 'pure' landscape, the human element is always visible or at least implied: poplars are planted in a straight line, grain stacks sit in a field after the harvest, waterlilies grow in a formal garden under a Japanese bridge.

Painting out of doors was itself an inescapably modern phenomenon. Only with the invention of tubes for oil paints had it become feasible (though still hardly a simple matter) for the artist to take a canvas and work on it away from the studio. And with the spread of railways city-dwelling painters could now quite easily get out into the country around Paris, stopping at the small towns that were fast becoming leisure resorts for the urban middle classes. If two of them went together, they could sit side-by-side painting the same scene of day-trippers in and out of the water (Monet and Renoir, *La Grenouillère*, 1869). Best of all, perhaps, was to own your own boat and turn it into a studio, as Monet did after he moved to the village of Argenteuil in 1871. As you sat in it, painting the river Seine, you might even yourself become the subject for one of Manet's paintings.

Monet in his Floating Studio, 1874 by Edouard Manet (1832–83)

All of this was revolutionary and exciting, but it was not commercially profitable. So frustrated did the Impressionist painters become by their inability to storm the citadel of the establishment that in 1874 they decided to found their own society and mount exhibitions of their work. It was out of that first exhibition that the very word Impressionist arose, as Louis Leroy used the title of Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* as a derisive label for the entire movement.

Yet the picture was not as bleak as it has sometimes been made to appear. Although Monet claimed destitution and repeatedly wrote begging letters to his friends, he was actually earning more during this period than many doctors and lawyers in Paris. From 1872 onwards the art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel was a regular buyer of his paintings, as well as providing both moral and material support. Recognition, when it came, was sweet, bringing Monet not just friendship with prime ministers but also the money to pay six gardeners as he sat by the pool at Giverny painting the waterlilies.

Claude Monet (1840–1926) from *La Revue Illustre*, *c.* 1890, engraved from a photo

Music of the time

If the outlook was depressing for aspiring painters in the period leading up to the Franco-Prussian War, it was even more so for composers. This is how Hector Berlioz (1803–69), with characteristic spleen, described the world around him in 1855: "Apart from Saint-Saëns, a fine musician 19 years old, and Gounod, who has just written a very fine Mass, I can see nothing but ephemeral insects hovering over this stinking morass which we call Paris." Berlioz was bitter after more than a quarter of a century of prophesying without honour in his own country. His own works were almost never performed, and public acclaim, as he saw it, was reserved for nonentities and timeservers. In 1838 the opera *Benvenuto Cellini* had been a failure, and worse was to come with the mangling at the Théatre Lyrique of his masterpiece *Les troyens*. The emotional temper of the 1844 concert overture *Le Corsaire* (track 1), with its breezy picture of the Mediterranean in all its splendour, was seldom echoed in his personal feelings, which were overshadowed by a profound sense of neglect. By the end of his life Berlioz was a disillusioned and broken figure.

Berlioz, it may be argued, was a difficult character, sensitive to a fault. But his picture of French musical life receives support from a much more urbane and successful source – Saint-Saëns, writing in 1900:

> The young musicians of today would find it difficult to imagine the state of music in France when Gounod came on the scene. The *beau monde* thought of nothing but Italian music; the last ripples of the tide on which Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, and the wonderful generations of singers who had interpreted their works, had sailed to take Europe by storm, were still sensible; and the star of Verdi, veiled as yet with the morning mist, was just appearing above the horizon. The real public, that is the *bon bourgeois*, recognised no music outside the opera and French comic opera, which included works written for France by distinguished foreigners. There was a universal cult, a positive idolatry, of 'melody' or, more exactly, of the tune which could be picked up at once and easily remembered. A magnificent period such as the theme of the slow movement in Beethoven's Eighth Symphony was seriously described as 'algebra in music'.

This was a world in which every opera had to have a ballet, and every ballet had to take place in the third act to allow time for the admirers of the young dancers to have dinner first. Music, like art, was stultifying in the hands of a reactionary minority and change was inevitable. The first signs came early in 1871, while Monet was in London avoiding conscription, and just before the Prussian army marched into Paris. The Société Nationale de Musique was founded, its motto *Ars Gallica*. Four years later Georges Bizet (1838–75) abandoned all the conventions of the old opera to produce his single masterpiece *Carmen*, in which directness and simplicity are combined to unprecedented effect.

Bizet's acute sense of characterisation had already been demonstrated in the music for Alphonse Daudet's *L'Arlésienne* (tracks 2 and 3). Unfortunately the old form of the *mélodrame*, in which spoken words alternated with incidental music, was felt to be ridiculous, and the production in 1872 was a failure. But Bizet swiftly adapted and rescored four excerpts from the music for full orchestra and these were performed as a suite with great success the same year. Martin Cooper has explained its appeal:

> There is no escaping the Provence of the *Arlésienne* music; the landscape is not merely a background to the work, it is the main character, always present and perpetually active, and Bizet's music catches exactly the vigour and simplicity, the emotional torridity and the tragic fatality which underlie the uncompromising contours of the countryside.

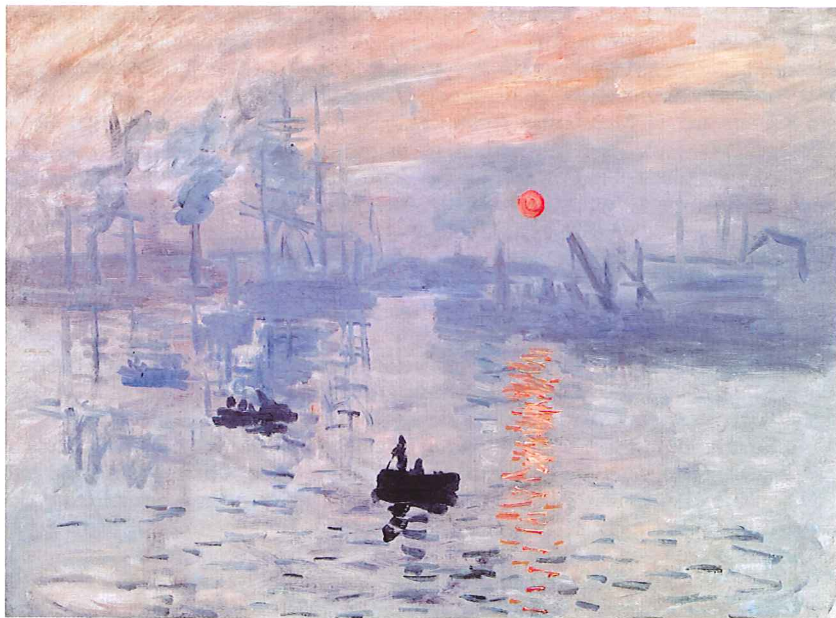
Ars Gallica, however, was never going to be an easy task in a universe inhabited by Wagner. The shrine at Bayreuth was visited by d'Indy and Saint-Saëns in 1876, Duparc and Chabrier in 1879, Fauré in 1883, Debussy in 1888 and 1889. Not all ended up true worshippers, but none remained untouched by "that old poisoner", as Debussy was later to call him. The admiration of Emmanuel Chabrier (1841–94) in particular was unbounded. Wagnerian echoes are heard throughout the Prélude Pastoral of 1888 (track 4), but it was not the bold harmonic advances that inspired him so much as the dream of a new kind of opera unifying every kind of expression

within a single structure. Yet somehow the picture of Chabrier as a true Wagnerite remains an incongruous one. Forced into the civil service by his family and working as a professional musician only towards the end of his life, he was never systematically taught and his style remained full of contrasts. Most characteristic and appealing are the wit, verve and boisterousness. But for all his apparent rusticity Chabrier was no simpleton. Friend of Verlaine, of Manet, of Leconte de l'Isle, he was perhaps better placed than anyone to comprehend that unification of the arts which was the Wagnerite theology. At the time of his death Chabrier owned eight Monets, six Renoirs and 11 Manets: his portrait by Manet is now in the Fogg Museum in Harvard.

Across the Channel in England, the fountain of native inspiration had been pretty well dry for over a century. Whether it was Wagner or Brahms, the authority of Germany was absolute. But by 1900, a small renaissance was just beginning. After years of failing to make an impact beyond the provincial choral circuit, Edward Elgar (1857–1934) had just scored a resounding success in the capital with the *Enigma Variations*. At the very time that Monet was painting views of the Thames from a balcony of the Savoy Hotel and a window of St Thomas's Hospital, Elgar was working on a different kind of London picture, *Cockaigne*. Four years earlier, his Imperial March (track 5) had been written for the Jubilee of 1897; although an occasional piece, it is a gem.

In France, meanwhile, something truly original had appeared. Claude Debussy's (1862–1918) *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* was modern, it had charm, grace and colour, it was so unlike Wagner it could never have been imagined. Berlioz, it seemed, had been more successful than he realised. His extraordinary feeling for orchestral colour had been an inspiration to the Russian composers Glinka and Mussorgsky, and they in turn had been a revelation to the young Debussy. Though his music avoided precise pictorial representations, there was often a powerful suggestion of something visual – a cause of unease to the secretary of that same Académie des Beaux-Arts which regulated access to the Salon. Criticising the lack of

any precise structure in *Printemps*, Debussy's entry for the Prix de Rome in 1887, Berlioz blamed it on "an exaggerated sense of musical colour" and expressed a hope that Debussy would learn to avoid such vague "impressionism" – one of the most dangerous enemies of truth in art.



Impression, Sunrise, 1872 by Claude Monet

But tastes were changing. More people were buying and admiring Impressionist paintings, and in 1894 Debussy's String Quartet was actually praised by one critic for its impressionism. The term seemed to convey something of the hazy, blurred quality of the harmonies, the rippling and shifting effects that might suggest the play of light on water. Debussy himself, who disliked even to be thought of as a professional musician, was a sworn enemy of labels and categories. His own artistic interests were many and varied. As a young man, he was much drawn to the pre-Raphaelite movement; he shared Monet's enthusiasm for Turner; through his friend James Whistler he developed an interest (again like Monet) for all things Japanese. The original printed score of *La mer* carried a reproduction of one of Hokusai's *Views of Fujiyama.*

The *Nocturnes* were originally planned in 1892–3 as a set of pieces for violin and orchestra, under the title *Three Scenes at Twilight*, but at some point the violin disappeared and a purely orchestral version was completed in 1900. Fêtes (track 6) is a picture of holiday festivities in the Bois de Boulogne: rather as in Monet's paintings, the rustic dream is modified by contemporary surroundings (to the tune of the band of the Garde Républicaine). The first movement of *La mer* (track 7) is a more complex work with a kaleidoscope of different textures. Themes begin and are broken off, shapes and colours succeed one another in a shifting array of rhythms. All is irregular, harmonically ambiguous.

Far less threatening than Debussy, to all appearances, was Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924). Yet even he was regarded as a subversive influence by Ambroise Thomas, director of the Paris Conservatoire. It was not until 1896, after Thomas's death, that Fauré was invited to teach composition at the Conservatoire, where his pupils were to include Maurice Ravel and Nadia Boulanger. Nine years later Fauré was himself director of the Conservatoire, sweeping away the most reactionary elements of that institution with a ruthlessness of purpose which belied the gentle and charming exterior. As a composer, Fauré preferred to concentrate his energies on songs and chamber works. The suite *Masques et bergamasques* (tracks 8 and 9),

written just before his retirement from the directorship in 1920, is one of the few works he wrote for full orchestra. Here, in the words of Martin Cooper, is "the last great traditionalist in French music, more human and fruitful than Ravel, more sane though less original than Debussy and more wholly, unequivocally French than either."

Fauré's appointment as director of the Conservatoire had been precipitated by *l'affaire Ravel*. For four years in succession, the old regime had refused to award the Prix de Rome to the one candidate who was clearly better than all the others, Maurice Ravel (1875–1937). By the time of his fourth attempt, in 1903, the matter had become a scandal. Ravel had already composed *Jeux d'eau*, the String Quartet and *Shéhérezade* and was beginning to establish an international reputation. For Debussy, here was a serious rival. That Ravel felt the influence of the older composer, indeed revered him, is certain; but there were elements in Ravel's writing, especially for piano, which could offer inspiration to Debussy. The result is a fascinating cross-fertilisation, though beneath the superficial similarities lie profound emotional differences (tracks 10–14). In Ravel the continuous, logical progression of thought is maintained, often emphasised by the insistent repetition of a single pattern. Debussy's aim, in contrast, is to achieve an effect of freedom and improvisation. A scene or sense-impression is mediated through the composer's consciousness until there emerges in musical form "an emotional transposition of what remains invisible in nature".

Hugh Griffith

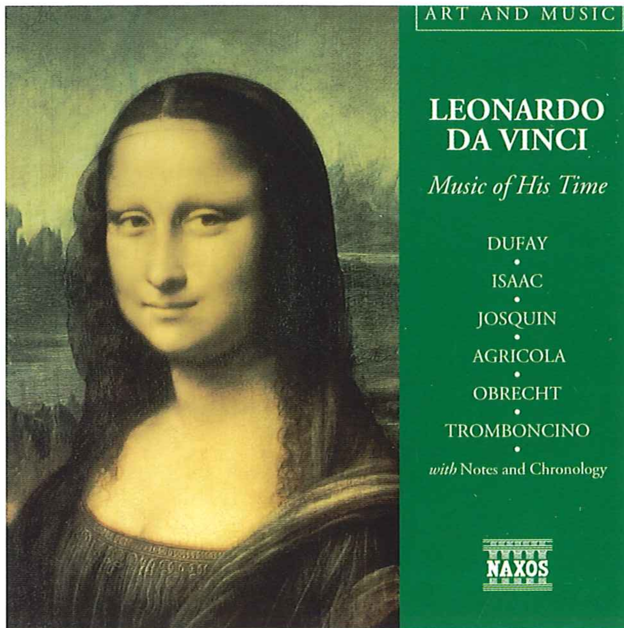
CHRONOLOGY

	Monet	Contemporaries
1839		Cézanne and Alfred Sisley born
1840	Monet born in Paris	
1841		Renoir and Frédéric Bazille born; Chabrier born
1842		Mallarmé born
1844		Verlaine born
1845	family moves to Le Havre	Berlioz *La damnation de Faust*; Fauré born
1848		Gauguin born
1853		van Gogh born
1854		Rimbaud born
1858	Eugène Boudin introduces Monet to painting in the open air	
1859	goes to Paris to study art, meets Pissarro	Gounod *Faust*
1860	military service in Algeria	
1861	discharged on grounds of ill health	
1862	returns to Paris, joins studio of Charles Gleyre; meets Renoir, Sisley and Bazille	Debussy born
1863		Berlioz *Les Troyens*
1865	two seaside views accepted at the Salon	
1866	*Lady in a Green Dress* shown at the Salon	
1867	Camille Doncieux gives birth to a son Jean	Baudelaire dies
1869		Berlioz dies; Matisse born
1870	marries Camille; on outbreak of war moves to London, where he meets art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel;	Franco–Prussian War Bazille dies
1871	returns to France and rents house at Argenteuil	Paris Commune; armistice; Proust born
1872	paints *Impression, Sunrise* in Le Havre	
1874	first Impressionist exhibition	

	Monet	**Contemporaries**
1875		Bizet *Carmen*; Bizet dies; Ravel born
1876	meets Ernest Hoschedé and his family	
1878	birth of second son Michel; moves to Vétheuil with Hoschedé family	
1879	death of wife Camille aged 32	
1880		Offenbach dies; Flaubert dies; Reynaldo Hahn born
1881		Picasso born
1883	takes a house in Giverny	Japanese exhibition in Paris; Manet dies
1884	painting with Renoir on French Riviera	Massenet *Manon*
1885		Victor Hugo dies
1886	eighth and last Impressionist exhibition	Franck Violin Sonata
1887		Fauré Requiem
1888	revisits London; begins *Grain stacks* series	
1889		Universal Exhibition in Paris; Eiffel Tower built; visit of Javanese gamelan orchestra
1890	begins *Poplars* series; buys the house he has been renting in Giverny	van Gogh dies
1891		Ernest Hoschedé dies; Rimbaud dies
1892	marries Hoschedé's widow Alice; begins *Rouen Cathedral* series	
1893		Debussy String Quartet; Gounod dies
1894		Debussy *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*; Chabrier dies
1896	begins *Morning by the Seine* series	Verlaine dies
1897	builds second studio at Giverny; second Venice Biennale includes 20 Monets	Dukas *L'apprenti sorcier*
1898		Mallarmé dies
1899	begins *Waterlilies* series at Giverny; revisits London, paints views of the Thames	Debussy *Chansons de Bilitis*; Sisley dies

	Monet	**Contemporaries**
1900	several visits to London	Debussy *Nocturnes*, Charpentier *Louise*
1901		Ravel *Jeux d'eau*; Toulouse-Lautrec dies
1902		Debussy *Pelléas et Mélisande*; Zola dies
1903		Debussy *Estampes*, Ravel String Quartet; Pissarro dies; Gauguin dies
1904	drives to Madrid by motor car to study paintings of Velasquez and others	
1905		Debussy *La mer*, *Images I*, Ravel *Miroirs*
1906		Cézanne dies
1907		
1908	visits Venice with Alice	Ravel *Gaspard de la nuit*
1909		first appearance in Paris of Dyagilev's Ballets Russes
1910		Debussy *Préludes I*
1911	Alice dies	
1912	successful show of Venice pictures	Ravel *Daphnis et Chloé*; Massenet dies
1913		Stravinsky *Rite of Spring*
1914	Clemenceau and other friends suggest Monet donate a waterlilies series to the nation	
1915		
1916		Debussy Cello Sonata
1918	gives eight waterlily pictures to the nation	Debussy dies; Apollinaire dies
1919		Renoir dies
1921	important retrospective at Durand-Ruel's	Saint-Saëns dies
1922		Proust dies
1924		Fauré dies
1925		Satie dies
1926	Monet dies	

Other works in the Naxos 'Art and Music' series



Leonardo da Vinci with music by Dufay, Isaac, Josquin, Agricola, Obrecht, Tromboncino
(Naxos 8.558057)

Claude Monet (1840–1926) was at the forefront of the Impressionist revolution in painting. Together with a small group of like-minded friends, he scandalised the critics by devising a new way of representing the world in all its bewildering variety of light and shadow. On this CD, the world of Monet is given a musical perspective with a carefully chosen selection of pieces by the finest composers of his time. Inside, Hugh Griffith provides explanatory notes on Monet's life and musical environment.

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    Claude Debussy

The Naxos Art and Music series presents the composers active during the lives of the leading painters and sculptors, setting a musical context to their work.

DDD

8.558058

Playing time
1:19:15

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