

# 'Clair de Lune'



**Composer:** Claude Debussy (1862–1918)  
**Nationality:** French  
**Source/Date:** *Suite Bergamasque* (1890–1905)

'Clair de Lune' is a movement from Claude Debussy's piano suite, *Suite Bergamasque*, one of the French composer's most popular works. The piece is arguably the most famous movement in the publication and takes its name from Paul Verlaine's 1869 poem, translating to 'Moonlight' in English.

Claude Debussy was born in the outskirts of Paris in 1862. At the age of seven years old he had his first piano lesson and so began his love for music. Debussy was so talented that at just ten years old he was accepted to study at the Conservatoire de Paris, where he remained a student for eleven years. On leaving education he went on to become one of the most influential composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with many labelling him the first 'Impressionist'.

## Preparation



The opening dyad (two notes played together) in the left-hand part begins on beat three of the bar. In music, this is known as an anacrusis or pick-up bar. To ensure you immediately establish a secure  $\frac{3}{4}$  feel, practise the opening by counting in the first two beats in your head, playing the dyad on beat three. Both parts may benefit from rehearsing individually to secure the notes and rhythmic patterns before putting together.

Notice that the left-hand part begins in the treble clef, moving to the bass clef in bar 12. Practise moving from bar 11 to 12 in isolation to secure the shape patterns of the two chords.

In keeping with the style of the piece, aim for an evenly balanced and *legato* touch throughout. Practise perfecting your *legato* technique by playing a few warm-up scales and arpeggios, aiming to make each note connect smoothly with the next, keeping the same volume throughout. When performing this piece, ensure the *legato* feel continues right through to the end, paying particular attention to moving smoothly between the alternating hands in bars 21 to the end.

## Performance



This well-loved piece by Debussy is both atmospheric and beautiful, yet with a slightly melancholic feel that feels appropriate for a poetic scene set in the 'light of the moon'. The languid melody moves on a slow descent, gradually winding its way down to the lowest note of the piece in bar 21 before a short flourish back to the final bar. Observe the rests carefully to allow the music a sense of space, keeping a steady tempo throughout.

# 'Clair de Lune'

By Claude Debussy

Moderately

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3  
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