



# Debussy's La Mer

Friday, Nov. 17  
10:30am



## Water, Water Everywhere

Water is one of the most interesting elements to portray in art; it can be still or flowing, wild or calm, peaceful or dangerous. This concert features several Classical pieces that evoke water, including one of the most famous, Debussy's *La Mer*.

## Hector Berlioz, French Composer (1803-1869)

This French composer is most famous for his orchestral work *Symphonie fantastique* which is a programmatic work known for its psychedelic dream-like nature. His contributions to the modern orchestra also include his *Treatise on Instrumentation*, a technical study of Western musical instruments, which was studied by many famous composers like Mahler and Richard Strauss.



## Overture from *Le Corsaire*

composed in 1851,  
duration is 9 minutes

This overture was written on a holiday trip to the Riviera near Nice, France and was inspired by Lord Byron's poem by the same name. The poem, which was very popular in its day, is thought to chronicle and memorialize the life of a French pirate/buccaneer by the name of Jean Lafitte. The music certainly inspires images of a pirate ship sailing through choppy storms and serene and placid waters.

## Lord Byron's *Le Corsair*



"Corsair," meaning a private sailor engaged in naval warfare, was thought to be based on the life of Jean Lafitte, a buccaneer with a legendary reputation for piracy and naval conquests. It was such a popular literary work that when it was first published, it sold out all 10,000 copies in the first day.

## REPertoire

- BERLIOZ  
*Le Corsaire Overture*
- LALO  
Cello Concerto
- LIADOV  
*The Enchanted Lake*
- DEBUSSY  
*La Mer*



## Edouard Lalo, French Composer (1823-1892)

Lalo was a French composer who wrote during a time period when the French were having a musical revolution by trying to create a new “French” sound. Lalo continued to compose in the plot-driven “German” style of composition, while incorporating his own twists, exploring French orchestrations that Germans would’ve never used.

**Cello Concerto**, composed in 1877, duration is 35 minutes

Though not as popular as his largest work, *Symphonie Espagnole*, this Cello Concerto radiates charm. The first movement lets the cello provide a melodic base for strong orchestral hits. The second movement splits the orchestra into strings and winds, as the groups dance around the soloist. For the final movement the orchestra comes together with the cellist in an exciting syncopated ending.

## Comparing German and French Composition Styles



the time had maxed out the musical growth and expression they could provide.

## Julian Schwarz, American Cellist (b. 1991)

Playing professionally since the age of 11, Julian Schwarz is a pioneer of new music, regularly commissioning new pieces to expand cello repertoire. His father is Gerard Schwarz, former music director of the Seattle Symphony, so Julian started his immersion in the symphonic world at birth. His cello was crafted in Naples, Italy in 1743 and it is older than any of the music you’ll hear in this concert!

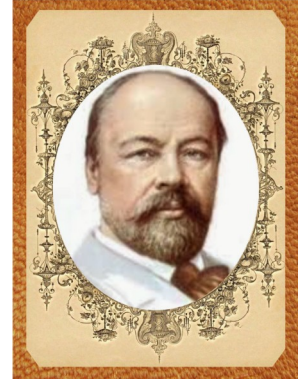


As musical greats like Beethoven and Wagner capitalized on huge, dramatic, and serious symphonic works and operas, other composers opted to scale down writing such large works, instead focusing on orchestration and tone color. The longstanding tradition of secular French dance suites being the antithesis of German chorales and religious works, created a rift between the German and French styles.

Hence the French began crafting their own sound, uniquely un-Germanic. Though French composers drew inspiration from composers like Wagner, many believed that the prominent Germanic composers of

## Anatoly Liadov, Russian Composer and Teacher

Liadov was a professor of composition at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. He was a strict and conservative teacher, and during the turn of the century, this made him stand out. Composers who studied with him tell stories of his intimidating presence and harsh critiques. He was, however, self-conscious of his own works, so he never published much music.



### The Enchanted Lake composed in 1919, duration is 7 minutes

Historians argue that Liadov never finished a large scale work, such as a symphony, opera, or ballet. Luckily he adapted some of his unfinished work into smaller pieces.

*The Enchanted Lake* is believed to have been part of a larger opera Liadov worked on. The humanistic breath-like phrases help the listener relax and imagine the scene of the lake. The strings are speckled with woodwinds, harp, and brass.

## Claude Debussy, French Composer (1862-1918)

Debussy was a composer who created an entirely new sound of music, inspired by the art movement called Impressionism.

**Impressionism** is characterized with a cloudy and abstract quality of painting with no hard lines or focused brushstrokes. Impressionism in music means neutral sounds, and rhythmic ambiguity. Debussy had trouble at the beginning of his career because he was working against the established school of composing. His peers and teachers thought his writing was outrageous, but soon his popularity spiked and he has left a lasting mark on today's classical composers.



The Cliff Walk at Pourville, 1882.  
Claude Monet  
Oil on Canvas



### 3 Symphonic Sketches

- I. *From Dawn to Noon on the Sea*
- II. *Play of the Waves*
- III. *Dialogue of the Wind and Sea*

### La Mer, Composed in 1905, duration is 25 minutes.

Unlike the stillness of Liadov's lake, Debussy captures the ever-moving ocean with new techniques. Before Debussy, triads (Do Mi Sol) were used to depict water movement. Debussy changes this tradition, avoiding triads altogether and instead opting for open chords in the strings, and soaring melodies in the woodwinds. Hear the strings create the pitter-patter of falling drops of water. Labeled three "symphonic sketches," there is no break between each sketch. This was possibly the first piece of music to have this type of open-form.



JoAnn Falletta, Conductor

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## Explore and Learn:

**When listening to the programmatic music from this concert, you may create a picture in your mind of what you are hearing. What words describe the music and the images you see? Write down any words you think of (descriptive, emotional, etc.). Then write a short poem using those words. This poem could accompany the music that inspired your word choices, or it may stand alone. Share your poem with someone else.**

**Did you know?** Today's concert is conducted by Chilean conductor, Maximiano Valdés who was the BPO's music director from 1989-1998. He is currently the music director of the Puerto Rico Symphony. This is a homecoming weekend for him!