

The *Trois Chansons* by Claude Debussy are from a 1908 collection, relatively late in the composer's lifetime although two of these three contrasting vignettes were actually written ten years earlier. The only a cappella choral works he wrote, barring some unfinished pieces, they set three texts by medieval poet and prince, Charles d'Orléans, who was imprisoned in England after the Battle of Agincourt in 1415.

*Dieu! Qu'il la fait bon regarder* is a seemingly simple but beautiful love song admiring the grace, virtues and beauty embodied by the lady in question. Its homophonic opening uses harmonies rooted in medieval music but the piece quickly develops into richer more Romantic tonalities with some gentle interplay between the voices.

The solo voice in the next chanson, *Quant j'ai ouy le tabourin*, pronounces the narrator's desire to stay in bed rather than join in the May Day festival, heralded by the tambourine which is portrayed by the choir's rhythmic accompaniment.

In *Yver, vous n'estes qu'un villain*, Debussy personifies winter and the poet's anger with winter using stark single lines and cold harmonies sung in harsh haste. In contrast, the middle section, his reflections on the warm colours of summer and to my ear the sleepy sounds and smells of summer as well, is filled with gloriously rich, lilting harmonies initially sung by a group of soloists. Rather appropriate to late September, just as we warmly settle into these pleasant daydreams of bygone summer, Debussy violently brings us back to the reality of the cold, wind and sleet and tells winter directly that as he is no flatterer he will speak plainly of his wish to banish winter into exile. A vain hope!