

= La fille aux cheveux de lin =

La fille aux cheveux de lin is a musical composition by French composer Claude Debussy . It is the eighth piece in the composer 's first book of Préludes , written between late 1909 and early 1910 . The title is in French and translates roughly to " The Girl with the Flaxen Hair " . The piece is 39 measures long and takes approximately two and a half minutes to play . It is in the key of G ? major .

The piece , named after the eponymous poem by Leconte de Lisle , is known for its musical simplicity , a divergence from Debussy 's style at the time . Completed in January 1910 , it was published three months later and premiered in June of that same year . The prelude is one of the most recorded pieces of Debussy 's , both in its original version and in subsequent various arrangements .

= = Background and influence = =

The title La fille aux cheveux de lin was inspired by Leconte de Lisle 's poem by the same name , one of his Chansons écossaises ( Scottish songs ) from his 1852 collection Poèmes antiques ( Ancient Poems ) . The image of a girl with flaxen @-@ coloured hair has been utilized in fine art as a symbol of innocence and naivety . Musical writers have suggested that Debussy 's successful portrayal of these emotions was tied in with the musical simplicity of the prelude ? specifically , the technical and harmonic elements . His choice of simplicity for this piece was highly unusual , since it deviated from his style at the time and brought back the simple harmonies that he had utilized in his earlier musical compositions , which were more traditional .

Debussy had previously utilized the title for a mélodie he wrote from 1882 to 1884 . However , it does not feature any similarities to the 1910 prelude , and merely has a " distant familial relationship " with the prelude at most according to James R. Briscoe in the music journal 19th @-@ Century Music . The song , which is one of his earlier works and remains unpublished , was dedicated to Marie @-@ Blanche Vasnier . She had an affair with Debussy at the time , and he dedicated most of the compositions he wrote from 1880 to 1884 to her .

= = History = =

The prelude was completed on 15 ? 16 January 1910 , and was first published in April of that same year , along with the rest of his preludes from Book I. Its first performance was given by Franz Liebich at the Bechstein Hall in London two months later , on 2 June . This was followed by an American premiere at the Stockbridge Casino in Stockbridge , Massachusetts on 26 July 1910 , performed by Walter Morse Rummel . Subsequently , the French premiere took place the following year on 14 January at the Société Nationale de Musique in Paris , with Ricardo Viñes performing the work .

A transcription of the prelude for violin and piano was created by Arthur Hartmann ? a close friend of Debussy ? and released in May 1910 .

La fille remains one of the most recorded musical compositions of Debussy 's . Despite its performance on a recurring basis , the prelude remains popular among audiences , partly because of its " memorable tune " which is juxtaposed with a " mellow accompaniment " . It has received acclaim for its expansiveness of emotion , with the Richmond Times @-@ Dispatch 's Clarke Bustard describing the piece as " perhaps the most delicately characterful " out of all his twenty @-@ four preludes .

= = Musical analysis = =

= = Placement within Preludes , Book I = = =

Debussy was known for his meticulousness in the arrangement of his preludes . Pianist and musical writer Paul Roberts asserts that this prelude , along with the two that immediately precede it , forms " the central arch " of Book I 's structure , since the three pieces provide the most " dramatic contrast " out of all the preludes in the first book . The sixth prelude , *Des pas sur la neige* ( Footprints in the Snow ) , evokes a feeling of sadness and isolation , while *Ce qu 'a vu le vent d 'ouest* ( What the West wind saw ) ? the seventh ? exudes a violent and tumultuous nature . In stark contrast to these two , *La fille* brings about a sense of gentle " lyricism " and " warmth " , which is uncharacteristic of Debussy 's music of this kind . By placing these three preludes in this particular order , Debussy ensured that arguably the most technically challenging prelude of the collection ( *Vent d 'ouest* ) was situated in @-@ between the two that are the simplest to play out of the twenty @-@ four .

= = = Composition = = =

The prelude 's central idea takes after its title ? a girl with golden hair in a pastoral setting in Scotland . Thus , it is one of many examples of Debussy 's Impressionist music , since it conjures up images of a foreign place . His utilization of pentatonic scales throughout the piece achieves this , and by blending this in with harmonizing diatonic chords and modal cadences , he creates a folk @-@ like tune . This prelude uses more plagal leading tones than any other piece composed by Debussy , and the prelude 's melody alternates between conjunct and disjunct movement throughout .

The piece begins with its well @-@ known opening theme consisting of three @-@ note phrases , grouped together as one eighth note and two sixteenth notes . It finishes with chords that form a plagal cadence between bars 2 and 3 , an element that is not featured in his previous preludes . The second part of the melody enters in bars 3 ? 4 , evoking a Scottish ballad or resembling a tune in the style of Edvard Grieg . The melody from the opening returns in bar 8 with added harmony in the left hand . At bar 19 , the melody begins its ascent to the climax of the piece , gradually building up through the use of crescendo to propel it to peak at the end of bar 21 . Near the end of bar 22 , the melody decrescendos to the subsequent measure , where the theme of the climax is repeated an octave lower . A pianissimo drone @-@ like part that moves in parallel motion ? featuring consecutive fifths in some places ? comes in at bars 24 to 27 . In the next measure , the prelude 's coda sees the return of the opening theme one last time ? albeit at an octave higher ? followed by the droning motif . Finally , the melody ascends in parallel movement and makes use of a final plagal leading cadence to get to the home key chord in root position . This cadence neither " melodically anticipates the arrival pitch " nor does it include the tonic in the left hand . Thus , it has been described as " the ideal harmonization of the plagal leading tone . " The melody ends with two arpeggiated octave chords ( D ? in the left hand followed by G ? in the right ) , bringing the prelude to a close .