

# **Singing ‘Le Jet d’eau’, or the song-alongside (Baudelaire, Debussy *et autres*)**

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# From Text to Performance

Claire Croiza

[Debussy] has caught the poet's rhythm so perfectly that the poem can be declaimed without changing anything in the rhythm.

Betty Bannerman, ed., *The Singer as Interpreter: Claire Croiza's Masterclasses* (London: Gollancz, 1989), pp.108-9 , cited in Richard Langham Smith, 'Debussy on Performance: Sound and Unsound Ideals', in James Briscoe (ed.), *Debussy in Performance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, p1993), p.19

# Le Jet d'eau

Tes beaux yeux sont las, pauvre amante!  
Reste longtemps, sans les rouvrir,  
Dans cette pose nonchalante  
Où t'a surprise le plaisir.  
  
Dans la cour le jet d'eau qui jase  
Et ne se tait ni nuit ni jour,  
Entretient doucement l'extase  
Où ce soir m'a plongé l'amour.

La gerbe épanouie  
En mille fleurs,  
Où Phœbé réjouie  
Met ses couleurs,  
Tombe comme une pluie  
De larges pleurs.

# The Fountain

Your pretty eyes are tired, poor darling!  
Rest there a long time, without opening them,  
in that nonchalant pose  
in which pleasure caught you by surprise.  
  
Out in the courtyard the fountain which chatters away  
And is never silent night or day  
Gently prolongs the ecstasy  
into which love has plunged me this evening.

The spray unfolds into  
Thousands of flowers,  
Into which joyful Phœbe  
Puts her colours.  
  
It falls like a rain shower  
of large teardrops.

Ainsi ton âme qu'incendie  
L'éclair brûlant des voluptés  
S'élance, rapide et hardie,  
Vers les vastes cieux enchantés.  
Puis, elle s'épanche, mourante,  
En un flot de triste langueur,  
Qui par une invisible pente  
Descend jusqu'au fond de mon cœur.

La gerbe épanouie...

Ô toi, que la nuit rend si belle,  
Qu'il m'est doux, penché vers tes seins,  
D'écouter la plainte éternelle  
Qui sanglote dans les bassins!  
Lune, eau sonore, nuit bénie,  
Arbres qui frissonnez autour,  
Votre pure mélancolie  
Est le miroir de mon amour.

La gerbe épanouie...

Similarly your soul, set ablaze  
by the burning flash of pleasure,  
leaps up, rapid and bold,  
towards the vast enchanted skies.  
And then it spills, dying,  
in a wave of sad languor  
down an invisible slope  
into the depths of my heart.

The spray unfolds ...

Oh beloved, whom night makes so beautiful,  
How sweet it is, as I lean over your breasts  
to listen to the eternal lament  
that sobs in the fountain-basins!  
Oh moon, resonant water, blessed night,  
oh trees trembling all around,  
your pure melancholy  
is the mirror of my love.

The spray unfolds ...

# Scope of ‘Le Jet d’eau’

*Le Jet d’eau [...], with its three verses each followed by a refrain, is the simplest in form and in style most premonitory of Debussy’s later songs.*

Robin Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London: Ernst Eulenberg, 1979), p.44

Contrary to many of his contemporaries, the young Baudelaire doesn’t make any clear distinction between *chanson* and poetry. [...] What’s more, Baudelaire is far from believing that *chanson* is merely a simple joviality

Graham Robb, *La poésie de Baudelaire et la poésie française 1838–1852* (Paris: Aubier, 1993), p.248, *my translation*

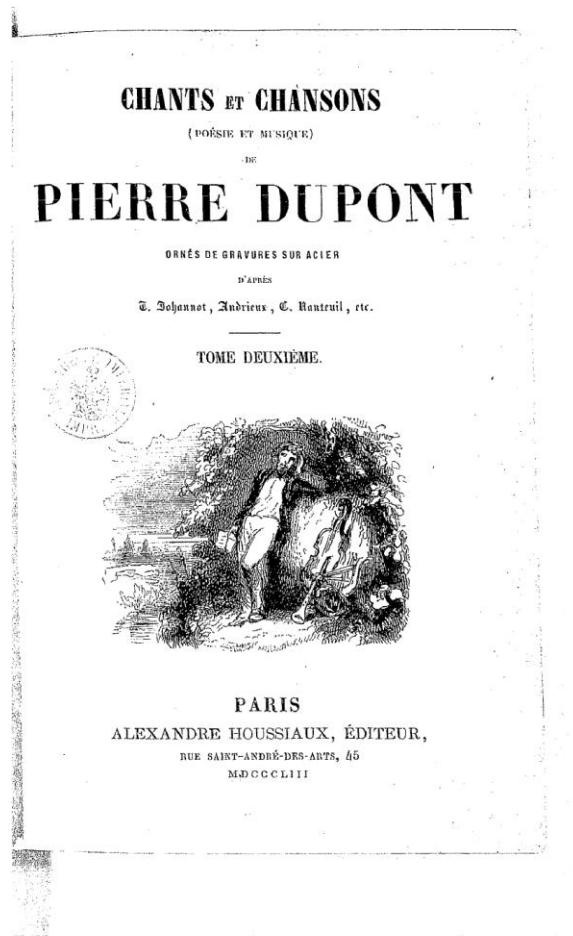
The nineteenth-century poets who were the main proponents of the poetic revival do not consider [...] *chanson* to be a minor form

Brigitte Buffard-Moret, *La chanson poétique du XIXe siècle*, p.10, *my translation*

# Le Jet d'eau: Composition / Publication history

1853	manuscript with score by Victor Robillard?
mid-1850s	collaboration with Pierre Dupont?
1865	<i>La Petite Revue</i> 8 July 1865
1866	<i>Les Epaves</i> February 1866 (Poulet-Malassis, Brussels) as part of 'Galanteries' section  <i>Le Parnasse contemporain</i> 1866 as no.IX of <i>Nouvelles Fleurs du Mal</i> (ed. by Mendès)
1868	1868 edition (3 <sup>rd</sup> edition) of <i>Les Fleurs du Mal</i> as part of 'Spleen et Idéal' section

# Pierre Dupont, *Chants et Chansons* (Poésie et Musique) t.2, 1852



**LA PROMENADE SUR L'EAU.**

Audantino.

A - vant que tes beaux yeux soient  
clos Par le som - mell ja - loux, ma bel -  
le, Des-cen - dons jus-qu'an bord des flots Et dé - ta -  
chons no - tre na - cel - le, L'air  
tiè-de, la mol - le clar - té De nos é - tol - les qui se  
bai - gneut, Le bruit des ra - nes qui se  
plai - gnent Tout res - pi - re la vo - lop -  
té. O mon a - man - te  
O mon dd - sir, Sa-chous eueil - ir L'heu - re char -  
man - te, L'heu - re char - man - te.

Refrain.

Paris. — Imprimerie de L. MARTINET, rue Mignot, 2.

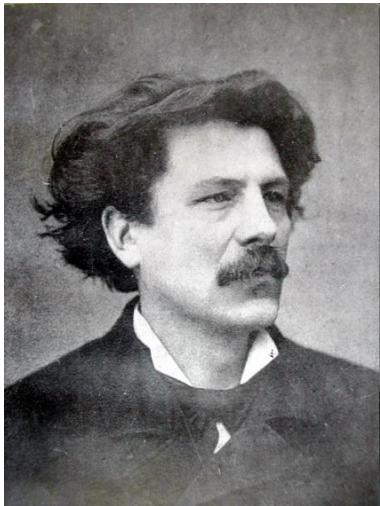
# Popular song

Which songs [tunes] remain popular? Ones which arouse the most acute feelings of love, liberty, and independence [...]; intimate feelings which are real enough **to resonate in all pure hearts.**

Pierre Dupont, *Chants et Chansons (Poésie et musique), ornés de gravures sur acier*, 4 vols (Paris: Alexandre Houssiaux, 1851-1859), I, p.20, *my translation*

# Le Jet d'eau: Reworkings

early 1880s	Maurice Rollinat (1846-1903) song setting No.5 of <i>Six nouvelles poésies de Charles Baudelaire</i> , Paris: Heugel et Cie., [n.d. (1892(?))], plate no. 7503
1885	Jules Laforgue (1860-1887) parody 'Complainte du vent qui s'ennuie la nuit', in <i>Complaintes</i> , Paris: Léon Vanier, 1885
1889	Claude Debussy (1862-1918) song setting No.3 of <i>Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire</i> , Paris: Librairie de l'Art Indépendant, 1890; republished Paris: Durand, 1902, plate no. 6103.
c.1890-1895	Gustave Charpentier (1860-1956) song setting No.2 of <i>Les Fleurs du Mal</i> , Paris: Tellier [Heugel et Cie.], 1895, plate no. 8167



# Maurice Rollinat au piano

Rollinat pianist at the *Chat Noir* 1881-1883

After a break away from Paris (c.1883-1888), he started frequenting Parisian cafés again, including *Chez Thommen* and the *Brasserie Pousset* c. 1889 along with Debussy



# Rollinat Refrain

17

La gerbe é - paonni - e En mil - le fleurs, — Où Phœbé réjon - i - e Met -  
pp ad lib.

suivez.

ritard. A tempo.  
ses cou - leurs, — Tombe comme une pluie De larges pleurs.  
A tempo.  
ritard. pp

Poco animato.  
*f con anima.*

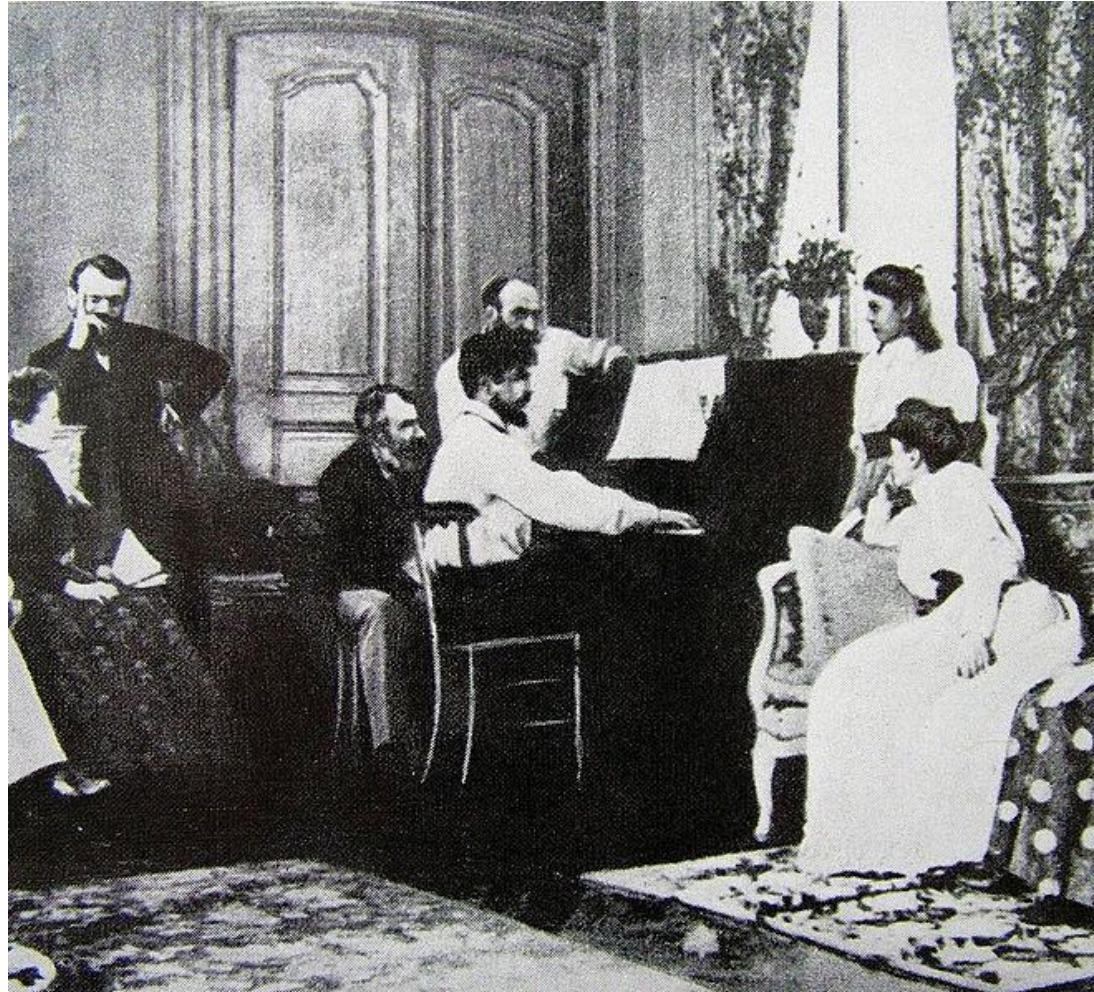
A tempo.  
O toi que la nuit  
ral - len - tan - do. <sup>3</sup> A tempo.  
p



# Debussy chez Chausson

First performance of Debussy's *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* chez Chausson 1890 (image from 1893).

First public performance of 1903 – Victor Debay, critic and singer, performed 'Le Jet d'eau' and 'Recueillement' in Lyon.





# Charpentier at the *Conservatoire populaire*

*Conservatoire populaire de  
Mimi Pinson* founded 1902.

Performances across Paris,  
including open-air annual  
festivals *Le Couronnement  
de la Muse*, and at the Paris  
*Bourse*.



# Charpentier Refrain

*CHŒUR LOINTAIN.*

Soprani.

*pp* La gerbe é-pa-nou-i-e, En mil-le fleurs,

Contralti.

*mp* La gerbe é-pa-nou-i-e, En mil-le fleurs,

*pp* La gerbe é-pa-nou-i-e, En mil-le fleurs, *cresc.*

Où Phœbé ré-jou-i-e Met ses cou-leurs,

Où Phœbé ré-jou-i-e Met ses cou-leurs,

*pp* La gerbe é-pa-nou-i-e *cresc.*

La gerbe é-pa-nou-i-e

*cresc.*

En mil-le fleurs, Tom-be comme une

En mil-le fleurs, Tom-be comme une

*dim.* plui-e, comme une plui-e De larges pleurs.

*dim.* plui-e, comme une plui-e De larges pleurs.

*dim.* plui-e, comme une plui-e De larges pleurs.

*morendo.* Comme une plui-e De lar-ges

*morendo.* Comme une plui-e De lar-ges

*morendo.* Comme une plui-e De lar-ges

Ain-si ton à-me quin-cen-  
pleurs.

Tempo.

*cresc.*

# Refrain 1

[*La Petite Revue*, 1865  
main version]

La gerbe épanouie  
En mille fleurs,  
Où Phœbé réjouie  
Met ses **couleurs**,  
Tombe comme une pluie  
De larges pleurs.

The spray unfolds into  
Thousands of flowers,  
Into which joyful Phœbe  
Puts her **colours**.  
It falls like a rain shower  
Of large teardrops.

# Refrain 2

[*La Petite Revue*, 1865  
footnoted ‘variante du refrain’]

La gerbe d'eau qui berce  
Ses mille fleurs,  
Que la lune traverse  
De ses **lueurs**,  
Tombe comme une averse  
De larges pleurs.

The spray of water which waves to and fro  
Its thousand flowers,  
Which the moon cuts through with  
Its faint **light**,  
Falls like a shower  
Of large teardrops.

# Refrain 3

[Debussy variant]

La gerbe d'eau qui berce  
Ses mille fleurs,  
Que la lune traverse  
De ses **pâleurs**,  
Tombe comme une averse  
De larges pleurs.

The spray of water which waves to and fro  
Its thousand flowers,  
Which the moon cuts through with  
Its **pallid rays**,  
Falls like a shower  
Of large teardrops.

# Le Jet d'eau, *Petite Revue* 1865

N.B. Footnote with 'refrain variante'

## LE JET D'EAU

Tes beaux yeux sont las, pauvre amante.  
Reste longtemps, sans les rouvrir,  
Dans cette pose nonchalante  
Où t'a surprise le plaisir.  
Dans la cour le jet d'eau qui jase  
Et ne se tait ni nuit ni jour,  
Entretient doucement l'extase  
Où ce soir m'a plongé l'amour.

La gerbe épanouie  
En mille fleurs  
Où la lune pâlie  
Met ses couleurs,  
Tombe comme une pluie  
De larges pleurs \*:

Ainsi ton âme qu'incendie  
L'éclair brûlant des voluptés  
S'élance rapide et hardie  
Vers les vastes cieux enchantés \*\*  
Puis, elle s'épanche mourante  
En un flot de triste langueur,  
Qui par une invisible pente  
Descend jusqu'au fond de mon cœur.

La gerbe, etc.

### \* VARIANTE DU REFRAIN :

La gerbe d'eau qui bat ce  
Ses mille fleurs  
Que la lune traverse  
De ses lueurs  
Tombe comme une averse  
De larges pleurs.

### \*\* VARIANTE :

Vers les firmaments enchantés.

# Debussy Refrain

Poco mosso  
*pp*

La ger - - - be

*pp legg.*

d'eau qui ber - - ce Ses mil - le fleurs, Que la

*pp*

lu - - ne tra - - ver - - se De ses pa -

*p*

This block contains three staves of musical notation for piano. The top staff uses treble clef, the middle staff bass clef, and the bottom staff bass clef. The music is in common time (indicated by '3/4'). The first section starts with a dynamic of *pp* and a tempo of 'Poco mosso'. The lyrics 'La ger - - - be' are written below the notes. The second section begins with a dynamic of *pp legg.*. The lyrics 'd'eau qui ber - - ce Ses mil - le fleurs, Que la' are written below the notes. The third section begins with a dynamic of *p*. The lyrics 'lu - - ne tra - - ver - - se De ses pa -' are written below the notes. Measure numbers 5 and 6 are indicated above the staves.

- leurs, — Tom - - be comme une a -

*pp*

- ver - - se De lar - - - - - ges

*pp*

pleurs. Ain -

*pp en retenant*

This block continues the musical score from the previous block. It consists of three staves of piano music. The top staff uses treble clef, the middle staff bass clef, and the bottom staff bass clef. The lyrics '- leurs, — Tom - - be comme une a -' are written below the notes. The second section begins with a dynamic of *pp*. The lyrics '- ver - - se De lar - - - - - ges' are written below the notes. The third section begins with a dynamic of *pp*. The lyrics 'pleurs. Ain -' are written below the notes. Measure numbers 5 and 6 are indicated above the staves. The instruction '*pp en retenant*' is written below the bottom staff.

# Change in scope?

Debussy himself began an orchestration of *Le Jet d'eau* [in 1907], as if, perhaps, it was too important to be confined to the recital room.

Richard Langham Smith, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 2004

Charpentier's *mélodies* seem to go beyond the domain of the *mélodie*.

Françoise Andrieux, 'Les mélodies de Gustave Charpentier : du lyrisme au naturalisme' in Gérard Streletska, *Aspects de la mélodie française* (Lyon : Symétrie, 2008), pp.73-94 (p.94),  
*my translation*

what you cannot possibly imagine is the work's [*La Vie du Poete*] total absence of taste – what you might call “the triumph of the Brasserie”

Debussy Letter to André Poniatowsky, February 1893  
*Debussy Letters*, François Lesure and Roger Nichols (eds.) (Cam/MA: Harvard UP, 1987), p.41

# Memorable song

destined to eternally engrave themselves in everyone's memories

Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes* (Pléiade) II, p.175, *my translation*

to conceptualize a familiar but little-studied phenomenon, the intermediate form of expression between song and speech that arises when a melody associated with words is sounded without the melody being sung. [...] Once words have been joined to a melody, the words seem to saturate the music so that the music can voice them afterwards even in their absence.

Lawrence Kramer, 'Speaking Melody, Melodic Speech' in *Critical Musicology and the Responsibility of Response. Selected Essays*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp.263-264