LISTENING GUIDE "La cathédrale engloutie" (La cattedrale sommersa — The Sunken Cathedral)
CLAUDE DEBUSSY - SIMPLIFIED TWO-VOICE SCRIPT FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL

MARCO: Good morning, everyone! Today we will guide you through a fantastic piece of music: La cattedrale sommersa by the French composer Claude Debussy.

ELENA: Imagine standing by the sea on a very foggy day. Beneath the water lies a mysterious cathedral. The water draws back and the cathedral slowly rises, before sinking back into the sea!

MARCO: Debussy was a composer of musical Impressionism. Just as Impressionist painters painted light using colours, Debussy paints images and emotions using the sounds of the piano.

ELENA: This piece is inspired by an old French legend. But Debussy does not use words: he makes us "see" this story through our ears alone. Let's listen together to find out how he does it!

♫ MOMENT 1 - THE CATHEDRAL IS UNDERWATER (LISTEN TO: THE BEGINNING OF THE PIECE)

• What to listen for: Slow, calm, deep sounds. Light chords floating in the air. • What to imagine: The calm sea, the fog and the cathedral still hidden deep underwater.

MARCO: At the beginning, the piano plays very softly and mysteriously. There is no easy tune to sing, but you will hear chords that seem to float in the water.

© ProfMusica Maristella Povellato

Made with ♥ by Maristella Povellato

♫ MOMENT 2 – THE BELLS CAN BE HEARD (LISTEN TO: THE BEGINNING OF THE MIDDLE SECTION)

• What to listen for: High notes that repeat and ring out for a long time. • What to imagine: The sound of the cathedral bells reaching us from far away through the water.

ELENA: Little by little, we hear repeated high notes. Debussy does not imitate real bells, but uses the resonance of the piano to help us imagine them!

♫ MOMENTS 3 AND 4 – THE CATHEDRAL RISES AND BECOMES VISIBLE (LISTEN TO: THE CRESCENDO AND CLIMAX)

• What to listen for: The music grows louder (crescendo), becoming loud, powerful and majestic like an organ. • What to imagine: The spires and walls rising out of the water. The whole cathedral is visible and looks magnificent!

MARCO: Now the music becomes louder and fuller! The piano almost seems to turn into a great church organ. The cathedral has risen completely out of the water in all its splendour!

© ProfMusica Maristella Povellato

Made with ♥ by Maristella Povellato

♫ MOMENTS 5 AND 6 – THE SEA RETURNS AND THE CATHEDRAL DISAPPEARS (LISTEN TO: THE ENDING)

• What to listen for: The sound becomes very soft (pianissimo) again, slow and distant. • What to imagine: The sea covers the cathedral, which gently sinks back into the depths.

ELENA: Finally, the sea begins to rise again. The music loses its power and becomes very gentle and distant. The cathedral goes back underwater, but the ending remains open and mysterious...

Listening Summary Chart

Moment What do we imagine? What does the piano sound like?

1. Beginning The cathedral underwater Calm, mysterious, deep notes

2. Bells Bells in the distance High, ringing notes

3. Rising The cathedral rises from the water Crescendo, growing louder

4. Peak The cathedral is visible and solemn Loud, majestic, sounding like an organ

5. Sinking back The sea covers the city Diminuendo, a lighter sound

6. Ending The cathedral disappears Pianissimo, delicate and left hanging

A Little Class Challenge (Listening Quiz)

1. Which natural element is present throughout the piece? (The seawater) 2. Which musical instrument are we listening to? (The piano) 3. Does the music stay at the same volume throughout? (No, it goes from pianissimo to fortissimo — very soft to very loud) 4. How would you describe the most majestic moment? (Loud and solemn, like an organ) 5. Does Debussy use words to tell the story? (No, he uses only musical colours and sounds)

“Debussy does not paint the cathedral with brushes: he paints it with the sounds of the piano.”

© ProfMusica Maristella Povellato

© ProfMusica Maristella Povellato

© ProfMusica Maristella Povellato