

## Debussy's Rites of Spring

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The subject of Spring served as a catalyst in Debussy's compositional growth. As a budding student composer, Debussy underwent rites of passage that thrice involved the subject of Spring – *Printemps*. For the preliminary round of the Prix de Rome competition in 1882, Debussy set “Salut, printemps,” based on a sonnet by Anatole de Ségur, for three-part female chorus, soprano solo, and orchestra. Two years later, he submitted a work for four-part mixed chorus and orchestra entitled *Le Printemps* (“L’aimable printemps”), this time based on a poem by Jules Barbier, again for the preliminary round of the Prix de Rome. But the symphonic suite that became his second *envoi* from Rome in 1887, the two-movement *Printemps*, was clearly a composition in which he took some lasting pride. Debussy allowed the first part of this work to be published for piano, four hands in *La Revue musicale* in 1903, and by Durand in 1904; in 1912, he supervised a re-orchestration of the work by Henri Busser; and in spring 1914, he gave his permission for it to serve as the basis for a ballet produced by the Alhambra Society in London, a production that would receive no fewer than 305 performances.

Just as the 1882 and 1884 settings of *Printemps* served as training grounds for the 1887 suite, so did the latter serve as a harbinger of numerous Debussyisms that would be featured in his future works. In many ways, the orchestral *Printemps* can be viewed as a direct musical antecedent to the *Faune*. This study will explore Debussy's oft neglected Spring compositions, with an eye towards their importance as preliminary essays in the his quest to develop his unique compositional voice.