



First Edition and Facsimile of a newly discovered song by Claude Achille Debussy.

Les Papillons (The Butterflies)

“Les Papillons” for Voice and Piano. First Edition. Text by Théophile Gautier. A Performing Edition and Facsimile of the Composer’s Autograph in the Music Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center. [JOB 96-17].

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When a new work surfaces from a composer of the stature of Claude Debussy, the musical community collectively rejoices. The appearance of “Les Papillons,” composed most likely in 1881, represents one such extraordinary event, for this setting of a poem by Théophile Gautier has been virtually unknown since Debussy’s time. The song received its world premiere only in 1962, some eighty years after its composition, at New York’s Town Hall; on that occasion, conductor Wilfrid Pelletier observed in a program note that “to my knowledge, this song has never been mentioned by any biographer, nor sung in public.” More recently, in February 2004, the work was performed by acclaimed soprano Renée Fleming as part of the recital “The Art of French Song,” at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Debussy’s autograph manuscript is now in the collection of the Music Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Drawing upon this unique resource, this beautifully designed publication includes the first edition of “Les Papillons,” transcribed by Marie Rolf, and a facsimile of the manuscript. An essay by Rolf describes the provenance of the manuscript, its date of composition, stylistic issues, comparative settings, and editorial practices followed in the transcription, while Margaret G. Cobb in her preface offers relevant background information on the life and work of Debussy and Gautier. In making “Les Papillons” readily accessible to today’s performing artists, this special edition ensures and enhances the reputation of this early song by a master composer.

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