

La Mer: The Real Story



In the summer of 1905, Claude Debussy was ecstatic that he'd finally finished his three-movement symphonic sketches for orchestra but bummed that he couldn't think of a name for it. Symphony of Thongs? El Salon Texico? Bee Eater Grimes? Nothing seemed to fit. So, one afternoon, he took time off to visit a Parisian pal whose flat overlooked the Seine. As more friends stopped by, the sedate atmosphere turned rowdy. Entertainment proceeded to the rear balcony where, to impress a young lady, a man did the classic banana peel pratfall. But he slipped too far to the left and plunged into the river, yelling "Merde!" as he fell. Debussy only heard the first part of the curse but that was good enough for what became, of course, his tune's title.