

**Claude Debussy,  
String Quartet No. 1 in G Minor, Opus 10 (1893)**

Debussy wrote relatively little chamber music, and only one string quartet, composed during 1893, the same year that saw most of the work completed on the ballet score *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, perhaps the composer's most famous and most performed composition. Compared to the *Prélude* and later works, the string quartet hews much more closely to the formal conventions of the time, though many of the unique characteristics of Debussy's pathbreaking style are very much in evidence here, such as the use of the modes and the whole tone scale as a source for melodic and harmonic material, and a strong interest in careful calculation of the work's time proportions.

The first movement is in sonata form. The pensive theme that closes the exposition, marked *doux et expressif*, provides the bulk of the material for the following development section, and the reprise of the exposition is greatly compressed, the secondary theme missing entirely. The scherzo-like second movement is in a three-part, or ternary form, the opening section featuring pizzicato playing and undergirded by an ostinato based on the theme of the first movement. The pizzicato playing returns after the lyrical middle section, but without the ostinato. The third movement, also in ternary form, is the most remarkable of the four in its rapt lyricism, the outer sections played with the instruments muted to enhance the sweetness of the expression. The finale, arriving after a long, two-part introduction, incorporates references to other movements; indeed Debussy continually transforms his materials in this quartet, linking all four movements closely together thematically.

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