Claude Debussy and *Pagodes:* At the Crossroads of Impressionism, Symbolism, and Orientalism

Jay Verchin

MUSC 210 Final

Spring 2020

Prof. Cailin Marcel Manson

Jay Verchin
MUSC 210
Prof. Cailin Marcel Manson

Comprehensive Biography

Early Life, Family, and Schooling

Achille-Claude Debussy (August 22nd, 1862 – March 25th, 1918) set the trend of shifting stylistic tendencies from a Germanic, more Wagnerian mainstream towards the abstract musical idioms present in the early 20th Century[1]. His lineage stems from the Auxois region of Burgundy, France, surrounded by the towns of Montbard, Semur, and Benoisey, where his ancestors were part of a distinct peasant population with a reputation for being "stubborn and conservative."[2] His grandfather and his parents were shopkeepers. In 1870, the Franco-Prussian war began, and so did the siege of Paris. Debussy's father enlisted in the French Army and Debussy and his siblings went to stay with his aunt in Cannes, where he had his first musical experiences.[3] At his aunt's suggestion, Debussy began to learn the piano; his aunt started him in lessons with an Italian musician named Jean Cerutti.[4] He quickly gained skill and enrolled at the age of 10 as a piano student at the Conservatoire de Paris in 1872, almost immediately after the conservatory had to suspend classes during wartime. [5] His primary instructor at the Conservatoire was Antoine François Marmontel, who had also taught Georges Bizet and Theodore Dubois, among others. This was his first academic experience, as he was the only one of his siblings to not go to a primary school; his mother

[1] Mark DeVoto, Debussy and the Veil of Tonality: Essays on His Music (Pendragon Press, 2004). xi.
[2] François Lesure and Marie Rolf, *Claude Debussy: A Critical Biography* (Boydell & Brewer, 2019). 3.
[3] Gertrude Schwartzman, "Claude Debussy's Opera Pelléas et Mélisande: Secrecy, Mystery and Ambiguity in Debussy's Life and Art," International Forum of Psychoanalysis 25, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 32.
[4] François Lesure and Roy Howat, "Debussy, (Achille-)Claude," Grove Music Online. 1.
[5] Jess Tyre, "Music in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune," The Journal of Musicology 22, no. 2 (2005): 188.

had taught him to read and write at home.[6] The cast of Debussy's other Conservatoire teachers included Albert Lavignac who taught courses in sight-reading and musical dictation, Émile Durand who taught music theory and harmony and Ernest Guiraud who taught composition.[7]

After his first couple years with Marmontel, the twelve-year-old Debussy was called a "prodigy who promises to be a virtuoso of the first order," [8] However, this honeymoon period at the Conservatoire did not last forever, as Debussy was somewhat rebellious in nature with regards to his studies. He rejected German philosophy regarding symphonic development, which was a courageous opinion to uphold so openly as a budding professional.[9] As he continued his education, Debussy was finding great success in his musical abilities, but not necessarily as a pianist, his piano teacher even commenting, "he doesn't care much for the piano, but he does love music."[10] He started to move towards composition at the Conservatoire and was taught how to write traditional forms of music which he found to be "sterile, academic structures," [11] and believed that the training he was receiving would only lead him to mediocrity and conformity. He believed the nature of music to be more organic, deformalized, and instantly gratifying to the listener without needing academic analysis.

---

[6] Roger Nichols, *The Life of Debussy* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). 6.
[7] Maureen A. Zoltek, "The Piano Music of Debussy and Ravel: A Comparative Study of Their Conservatoire Experiences as Pianist-Composers, Musical Philosophies, Influences Pertaining to Their Piano Works, and Individual Pianistic Styles" (Roosevelt Univesrity, 2007), 2.
[8] Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy: Volume 1, 1862-1902: His Life and Mind (CUP Archive, 1978). 26.
[9] C. Henry Phillips, "The Symbolists and Debussy," Music & Letters 13, no. 3 (1932): 303.
[10] Nichols, The Life of Debussy. 12.
[11] Caroline Potter, Simon Trezise, The Cambridge Companion to Debussy (Cambridge University Press, 2003). 138.

During Debussy's time at the Conservatoire, he met Marie-Blanche Vasnier, an amateur singer as he was the accompanist for her singing classes. He asked her husband, Eugène-Henri Vasnier to study at the Vasnier Paris apartment, and M. Vasnier provided Debussy a private study with a piano where he would spend the majority of his afternoons and evenings studying and composing. Mme. Vasnier often joined him, and he would accompany her singing, and he ended up falling in love with Mme. Vasnier. Nonetheless, the Vasniers provided Debussy an academic environment and would often converse with M. Vasnier, as he was a lover of the arts.[12] Debussy regarded the both of the Vasniers and their two children as his "second family." [13]

Beginnings of Professional Work and the Prix de Rome

Debussy before graduating from the Conservatoire had been working as a pianist since 1879 for bourgeoisie families, thanks to his piano teacher, Marmontel who helped him find and supported him in being hired for these positions. In 1889, a seventeen-year-old Debussy found himself playing in the Chenonceaux castle for the mistress of Frances president. From the summer of 1880 to the summer of 1882, worked for Nadezha von Meck, one of Tchaikovsky's patrons, teaching lessons for her children, being an accompanist to her daughter's singing, and playing piano duets with her. The position with the von Meck family allowed him to travel to Austria, Switzerland, Italy, and Russia.[14] During this time, Debussy found his passions in composition and shifted his studies at the Conservatoire in that direction.

[12] Phaik Suan Quah, "Debussy's Life through His Letters" (Union College, 2015). 5-6
[13] Lockspeiser, Debussy: Volume 1, 1862-1902: His Life and Mind. 68.
[14] Nichols, The Life of Debussy. 12-13.

Only two months after leaving the von Mecks, he had enrolled at the Conservatoire as a composition student and on December 24th, 1880 had enrolled in his first composition class with Ernest Guiraud.[15]

In 1882 Debussy also took interest in the Prix de Rome, an esteemed composition competition that was described as "the capstone of musical study, and winning it signalled the start of a promising career." [16] The award included a two-year residency at the Villa Medici and a third year of travel. The requirements to enter the competition were incredibly academic. The first round was comprised both a fugue on a given subject and a work for chorus and orchestra to be written in six days, while the second round required a full lyrics scene for three voices and orchestra. As Debussy generally pushed against formalist musical structures such as classical forms, he was critical about the judges of the competition, "who rewarded conformity rather than imagination."[17] In a later interview regarding the Prix de Rome, Debussy remarked, "Someone looks up the winning formula in all the previous prize-winning cantatas, and that's all there is to it."[18] Regardless, he began preparing for the competition in 1882, and entered in 1882 where he didn't make it through the first round, in 1883 where he placed second, and in 1884 won the Prix de Rome as he was approaching twenty-two years of age, though he had watered down his composition to conform to these academic tastes, noticed by his peer, Maurice Emmanuel. This strategy was at the suggestion

[15] Lockspeiser, Debussy: Volume 1, 1862-1902: His Life and Mind. 56.
[16] David A. Grayson, Simon Trezise, The Cambridge Companion to Debussy (Cambridge University Press, 2003). 61.
[17] Potter, Trezise, The Cambridge Companion to Debussy, 138.
[18] Grayson, Trezise, The Cambridge Companion to Debussy, 62.

of his composition teacher, Ernest Guiraud, who advised that a more conservative style would go over better with the judges.[19]

Residency and Return to Paris

After winning the Prix de Rome, Debussy felt a loss of freedom with regards to his living situation. In his final stretch of time at the conservatoire, he announced to one of his peers, Paul Vidal, that "under no circumstances would he go to Rome."[20] He wasn't making much money in Paris and needed the stipend and residency that the Prix de Rome provided, but was resistant to leaving behind the Vasnier family, especially due to his romance with Marie-Blanche, in addition to the connections he had made in Paris. He was set to entered in another Paris-based competition to be able to maintain his life in Paris but ran out of time while working on his entry and reluctantly began his residency in Rome at the Villa Medici.[21]

Debussy's distaste for his residency and the Villa had many layers, from how his peers had a different taste in music, to his friends becoming more egoistical the more time they spent at the Villa, to his dislike for the house itself.[22] He wrote M. Vasnier frequently and relied on his responses for emotional stability. Nonetheless, an aspect of the residency Debussy enjoyed was his freedom to compose which was a major contrast to his French schooling where students were limited to classes. While some students struggled with this, Debussy found boundless creative freedom even if he was physically confined.[23] After

[19] Grayson, Trezise, The Cambridge Companion to Debussy, 64.
[20] Lesure and Rolf, *Claude Debussy: A Critical Biography*. 50.
[21] Quah, "Debussy's Life through His Letters," 13.
[22] Carolyn Rose Rynex, "Arabesque and the Early Music Influence in Debussy's Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans" (Arizona State University, 2016). 46.
[23] Quah, "Debussy's Life through His Letters," 14.

Debussy's two years of residency were through, Debussy returned to Paris, expecting to continue his romance with Mme. Vasnier and friendship with M. Vasnier, though both of these key relationships were short-lived. However, throughout the first few months of his return home, his beloved Marie-Blanche served as a muse of sorts for him, her being the inspiration behind works such as his famed *Fêtes Galantes*, a six-song cycle set to Paul Verlaine poems which he had discovered at her home. [24] He famously dedicated these songs to her, leaving the famous inscription on an album:

> "To Madame Vasnier. These songs which she alone has brought to life and which will lose their enchanting grace if they are neveragain to come from her singing fairy lips. The eternally grateful author" [25]

Early and Middle Periods

Debussy's early period is defined from 1879 – 1892 and includes his years at the Conservatoire, the *L'enfant prodigue* (1884) cantata which won him the Prix de Rome, and the time during his Prix de Rome residency, in addition to the *Fêtes Galantes* mèlodies from his return to Paris. Up until his residency at the Villa, he did not have full freedom to compose freely, as both his conservatory professors and the Prix de Rome judges had quite conservative tastes that Debussy needed to appease in order to be successful in those environments. He would take structured intellectual exercises such as fugue-writing and writing choral settings very seriously and often find academic success with them, but that success was just a façade behind which were harboured revolutionary ideas," as noted by

[24] Lesure and Rolf, *Claude Debussy: A Critical Biography*. 40.
[25] Lockspeiser, Debussy: Volume 1, 1862-1902: His Life and Mind. 69.

Emmanuel.[26] Other notable works from this period include, *Ariettes oubliées* (1885 – 87), a set of Paul Verlaine texts for voice and piano, *Deux arabesques* (1888 – 1891) for piano, *Rêverie* (1890) for piano, and *Suite bergamasque* (1890 – 91), one of Debussy's most famous piano suites in four movements, including the iconic *Clair de lune*. As a pianist, was known to improvise and "experience" music rather than compose it in a structured manner,[27] and thus the majority of his early works reflected this and featured piano. However, these works did not bring Debussy much commercial success and he found himself struggling financially post-residency. He began visiting cafés where he met many symbolist poets and composers such as Paul Dukas, Robert Godet, and Raymond Bonheur,[28] who helped further expose him to symbolist works that would influence his music on an aesthetic level and a poetic level, as many of his songs were set to symbolist poems.

Debussy's middle period of composition (1893 – 1905) is defined by two of his largest and most notable works; his first orchestral masterpiece *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894) and his only opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1893 – 1902). This middle period is also defined by a Debussy who was only beginning to learn about and become enamored with the Javanese gamelan, with which he had his first encounter in 1889.[29] [30] *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* is an orchestral symphonic poem based on the poem, *L'après-midi*

[26] Lockspeiser, Debussy: Volume 1, 1862-1902: His Life and Mind. 58.
[27] Lockspeiser, Debussy: Volume 1, 1862-1902: His Life and Mind. 59.
[28] Lesure and Howat, "Debussy, (Achille-)Claude," 2.
[29] Kiyoshi Tamagawa, Echoes from the East: The Javanese Gamelan and Its Influence on the Music of Claude Debussy (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). 1.
[30] Brent Hugh, "Claude Debussy and the Javanese Gamelan," 1997, https://brenthugh.com/debnotes/gamelan.html.

d'un faune by Stéphane Mallarmé. Mallarmé was originally displeased with Debussy's appropriation of this poem, but after attending the premiere wrote to Debussy:

> "I have just come out of the concert, deeply moved. The marvel! Your illustration of the Afternoon of a Faun, which presents no dissonance with my text, but goes much further, really, into nostalgia and into light, with finesse, with sensuality, with richness. I press your hand admiringly, Debussy. Yours, Mallarmé."[31]

Mallarmé later asked him to write music for a theatrical project on the poem, however the project was never realized.[32] This piece to some was considered the beginning of modern music by later critics[33] yet at the time of the premiere still did not find much critical reception and was practically invisible to the public with the exception of those who knew Debussy personally.[34]

Debussy began to write his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1893 and completed his first draft of the first act by 1894. He was living with a woman named Gaby Dupont at the time, then had an affair and announced his engagement to a singer named Thérèse Roger, which was later broken off due to financial struggles.[35] In 1898, a friend set Debussy to meet Marie-Rosalie Texier, known as 'Lilly' to most. Debussy broke from Dupont the same year and married Lilly in 1899 after Debussy threatened to kill himself if she rejected him.[36] Debussy did not find her to be inspiring, and rather, she distracted him from his composing.[37]

---

[31] Maurice Dumesnil, Claude Debussy, Master of Dreams (Greenwood Press, 1979).
[32] Lesure and Howat, "Debussy, (Achille-)Claude," 2.
[33] Simon Trezise, The Cambridge Companion to French Music (Cambridge University Press, 2015). 153.
[34] Lesure and Howat, "Debussy, (Achille-)Claude," 20.
[35] "Claude Debussy - Biography : 1894 - 1902 - Centre de Documentation Claude Debussy," accessed April 29, 2020, http://www.debussy.fr/encd/bio/bio4_94-02.php.
[36] Marcel Dietschy, A Portrait of Claude Debussy (Clarendon Press, 1990), 105-106.
[37] Dietschy, A Portrait of Claude Debussy, 125.

The premiere of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1902 was the event that put him on the map. Throughout the year of its premiere, Debussy saw more recognition and distribution of his music outside of his circles, and even began to see some success with works such as the *Prélude* and *Nocturnes* being performed internationally. Even after his death in 1918, the *Prélude* the prelude was making its way to the likes of Tokyo, Japan.[38] Debussy at this point in his life started travelling to England more and making a name for himself there.

After the premiere of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Debussy had gained social standing, only to lose it after another with the second and final Mme. Debussy. In 1903, a young Raoul Bardac, one of his pupils, invited Debussy and Lilly to dinner, which they attended. Is was then that Debussy met his soon-to-be second wife, Emma Bardac, a woman of Jewish descent. She was married to a banker and had two children with him, including Raoul, but previously had an affair with Gabriel Fauré. Debussy tried to resist Emma, but began an affair with her, officially leaving Lily in 1904 while Emma and her husband divorced. The couple had a daughter named Claude-Emma in 1905 and married in 1908.[39]

Introduction to Eastern Music and Late Period

Debussy was first introduced to the Javanese gamelan in 1889 at the Universal Exposition in Paris towards the end of his middle era of composition, and again with a larger ensemble in 1900, and its influences can be seen in middle-era works such as the *Pour le Piano* suite (1894 – 1901) and *Estampes* for piano (1903) through the end of his career. He

[38] Lesure and Howat, "Debussy, (Achille-)Claude," 21.
[39] Dietschy, A Portrait of Claude Debussy, 129 - 134.

was incredibly moved by both of these performances, writing about them with feeling and detail for years after. A letter to a close friend reads:

> "But my poor friend! Do you remember the Javanese music, able to express every shade of meaning, even unmentionable shades . . . which make our tonic and dominant seem like ghosts, for use by naughty little children?"[40]

He became infatuated with gamelan music's quintessential textures, timbre, and percussive nature,[41] perhaps as it reflected how he would play the piano early in his time at the Conservatoire, violently playing the strong beats yet still able to capture fine detail in his playing.[42] Debussy didn't have a hard time falling in love with this foreign music either, as his rebellious nature stemming from his childhood always was pushing him to break the traditions of western classical music. Debussy didn't find the color washes of Javanese music to be too philosophically far-out from his desire to capture emotional experiences through tangible objects, experiences, and locations a trait he got from the symbolists with whom he spent lots of time before the success of his opera,[43] and was able to marry the two quite easily. In a 1913 article, he wrote:

> "Their school consists of the eternal rhythm of the sea, the wind in leaves, and a thousand other tiny noises, which they listen to with great care, without ever having consulted any of those dubious treatises [European traditions]. Their traditions are preserved only in ancient songs, sometimes involving dance, to which each individual adds his own contribution century by century. Thus Javanese music obeys laws of counterpoint which make Palestrina seem like child's play. And if one listens to it

[40] Tamagawa, Echoes from the East: The Javanese Gamelan and Its Influence on the Music of Claude Debussy. 21.
[41] Hugh, "Claude Debussy and the Javanese Gamelan," 2.
[42] Schwartzman, "Claude Debussy's Opera Pelléas et Mélisande: Secrecy, Mystery and Ambiguity in Debussy's Life and Art," 33.
[43] Phillips, "The Symbolists and Debussy," 300-301.

> without being prejudiced by one's European ears, one will find a percussive charm that forces one to admit that our own music is not much more than a barbarous kind of noise more fit for a traveling circus.[44]

Thus, Debussy fell into the Western European trend of the time that was Orientalism and Exoticism. *Pour le Piano* is perhaps the most interesting example of the gamelan making its way into Debussy's music as its three movements were written at different points in time, with the third *Tocatta* movement that had clear gamelan influence being finished last, after his second gamelan exposure in 1900.[45]

The three movements of *Estampes* was a work of Debussy's that borrowed from non-western music as well, as the first movement, *Pagodes* was heavily inspired by gamelan, utilizing pentatonic scales and contrapuntal textures to mimic the style. Additionally, as the title of the movement implies, the piece was meant to paint the image of a pagoda, a type of South-Asian or East-Asian temple consisting of a multi-tiered tower. However, the Javanese weren't the only culture that influenced Debussy, as he featured an Arabic scale and styles in second movement, *La soirée dans Grenade* to paint the musical landscape of Grenada, Spain, even though his only experience in Spain was for a concert in Madrid.[46]

Debussy's late period (1906 – 18) continued this trend of using elements of Javanese and other nonwestern music in his compositions until the First World War, where he had a return to classicism and grew increasingly nationalist in the heat of war. The continuation of Debussy's interest in the gamelan wasn't him participating in an exploitive musical fad to

---

[44] Tamagawa, Echoes from the East: The Javanese Gamelan and Its Influence on the Music of Claude Debussy. 45-46.
[45] Lesure and Howat, "Debussy, (Achille-)Claude," 10.
[46] Matthew Brown, Debussy's Ibéria (Oxford University Press, 2003). 56.

increase the commerciality in his music as some of his peers did, and rather suggests that his experience with this music fundamentally changed how he experienced music.[47] One of the most famous examples of this is the *Préludes* for piano (Book I: 1909 – 10, Book II: 1912 – 13), a set of 24 solo piano works divided into two books of 12. Similar to many of Debussy's other works, these were Impressionist programmatic pieces which used Javanese gamelan elements such as whole-tone and pentatonic scales in addition to utilizing the percussive nature of the piano to mimic the percussive instruments in the gamelan. Connecting these foreign elements to his symbolist and Impressionist roots, Debussy was able to effortlessly paint imagery using music.

Curiously, Debussy wasn't using these elements to perform an image of Java or any other "exotic" location, and rather the titles are often referential to either European locations directly or elements of European landscapes or traditional European culture. Examples of this include *Les collines d'Anacapri* (The Hills of Anacapri), referring to Capri, Italy, and *La cathédrale engloutie* (The Submerged Cathedral), both from Book I. Alternatively, some of these pieces that utilize gamelan elements have extremely vague titles, such as *Voiles* from Book I, which is so vague that the title can either be referring to veils or sails, as the French title is a homonym for the two.

The start of the World War marked Debussy's compositional endgame in addition to the last four years of his life. For the overwhelming majority of his career, Debussy rejected orthodox compositional forms and schools, however a return to classicism and an increased

[47] Tamagawa, Echoes from the East: The Javanese Gamelan and Its Influence on the Music of Claude Debussy. 28.

sense of French nationalism during wartime pushed Debussy to "rediscover the "authentic" French tradition" where "his primary concern was with the immediate extirpation of anyone he considered to be "un-French.""[48] This included classical symphonic form, as it was an originally Austro-Germanic tradition perfected by Beethoven who was a German, and to Debussy, French nationalism meant being gallantly anti-German. In a 1915 letter to Igor Stravinsky, Debussy writes about German postromantic music, saying "It will be necessary to kill this microbe of false grandeur, or organized ugliness, which we have not perceived as simply being a weakness."[49]

To Debussy, French classicism meant honoring the great French composers of the 18th century, and only writing "musique pure" as he indicated to Stravinsky in the same 1915 letter. This shows in the work he did at the time, such as his *Six sonates pour divers instruments*. Unfortunately, Debussy lost his battle with cancer in 1918, and was only able to complete the sonata for cello and piano (1915), sonata for flute, viola and harp (1915), and the sonata for violin and piano (1916 – 17). These mixed late-18th-century German features with the French baroque stylings of composers such as Jean-Philippe Rameau and François Couperin.[50] His famous *Études* (1915) were dedicated to Frédéric Chopin, even though he was not French by birth, as they were the most technically difficult pieces he had written in his career. The title itself was a direct reference to Chopin's works of the same title. He joked

[48] Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer As Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France, 1914-1940* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2005). 52.
[49] Fulcher, *The Composer As Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France, 1914-1940*. 53.
[50] Fulcher, *The Composer As Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France, 1914-1940*. 63.

about the Études, saying "These Études will be a useful warning to pianists not to take up the musical profession unless they have remarkable hands."[51]

Debussy's compositional career effectively ended in 1917 as his cancer worsened and was forced into constant bedrest. Debussy passed away on March 25th, 1918 due to colon cancer at only 55 years old. He was survived by his daughter by only one year, as she died of diphtheria in 1919, and Emma, who died in 1934.[52]

Stylistic Development

Early Influences

From his early years at the Conservatoire, Debussy was a clear rebel in terms of compositional style and stunned his teachers with his "nebulous writing."[53] As a pianist, the vast majority of his works were for or included piano, but as a composer he wrote his fair share of orchestral works. We know Debussy to have always been a free thinker, to be extremely independent and even avant-garde, but the man was not immune to influence.

The only way to begin exploring why Debussy wrote like this is to talk about Emmanuel Chabrier, a French Romantic composer with a love for Impressionist art. Chabrier was an influence on French composers such as Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Francis Poulenc

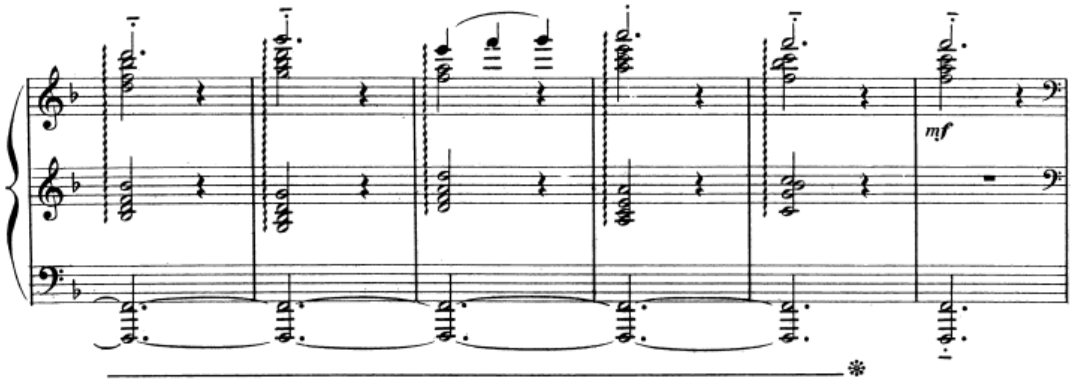
[51] Harvey Lee Snyder, Afternoon of a Faun: How Debussy Created a New Music for the Modern World (Hal Leonard Corporation, 2015).
[52] Dietschy, A Portrait of Claude Debussy, 187-190.
[53] Phillips, "The Symbolists and Debussy," 302.

who were all living and composing in France at the grey transitional time between the 19th and 20th centuries (though Poulenc was significantly younger than the other two) and bore the weight of bridging Romantic traditions to modern sensibilities. Chabrier had a very distinct style, "whose imprint can be identified in any three bars of his work," as noted by Ravel.[54] He was able to write extremely expressively, capturing emotions ranging from humor in his comic opera *L'étoile* (1877) to tenderness in his choral and orchestral work, *Ode á la musique* (1890). Not only was he a master of symphonic and thematic development like the German greats but was also able to be painterly in his composition and has moments where color and texture were the focus, such as in his two-piano work, *Valses romantiques* (1880 – 83). Debussy fell in love with Chabrier's work during his most formative years, notably playing the *Valses romantiques* for two pianos for Franz Liszt in 1886 with his friend Paul Vidal [55] and using valuable rehearsal time just to hear his *Ode á la musique* as late as 1913.[56] This suggests that even when Debussy was changing his compositional philosophies, Chabrier's was a common thread that tied his canon together. It is not unlikely that the two met, as they both went to Bayreuth in the summer of 1889,[57] but Debussy's exposure to Chabrier's works and Chabrier's influence on Debussy spans for some time before that.

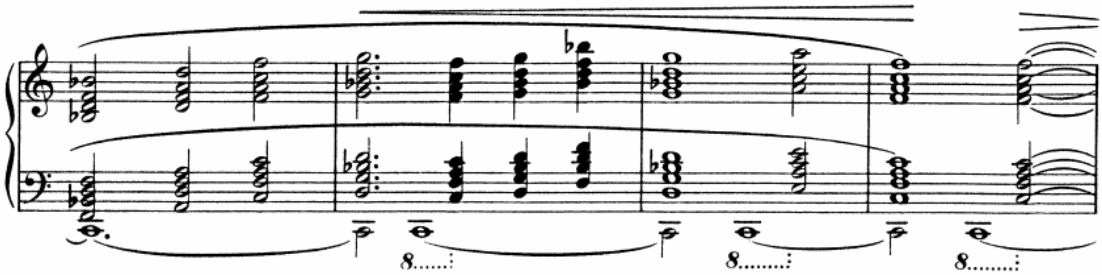
The influence of Chabrier on Debussy is most evident in his piano music, especially comparing *La Cathédrale Engloutie* from *Préludes Book I* to the third movement of *Valses romantiques.* Out of the three *Valses romantiques* movements, the first two have more

[54] Emmanuel Chabrier and Roy Howat, Works for Piano (Courier Corporation, 1995). ix.
[55] Roy Howat, The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier (Yale University Press, 2009).
[56] Emmanuel Chabrier and Roy Howat, Works for Piano (Courier Corporation, 1995). ix.
[57] Howat, The Art of French Piano Music.

traditional Germanic Romantic sensibilities just in their textural densities alone, never mind the development of their themes. The third movement is different, as Chabrier uses chromatic color and sparkling, ornamental scalar motions that give the piece a distinctly more Impressionist feel while still using traditional principles of thematic development.



Example 1.1: A thematic excerpt from Chabrier's *Valses romantiques*, Movement III (condensed).



Example 1.2: A thematic excerpt from Debussy's *La Cathédrale Engloutie*, from *Préludes* Book I.

When comparing these two short excerpts (Examples 1.1 and 1.2), we can immediately see a couple of similar elements: a use of chordal color washes taking up space as opposed to melodic rhythms, the incredibly simple melodic material taking on suspiciously similar shapes, and a low, rumbling pedal point in the left hand, with a purpose to be left rather than heard. The fact that Debussy did perform Chabrier's work suggests a

level of familiarity that would allow him to inspire his own music, especially knowing he played it for Liszt in 1886 during his early period.

Liszt along with Chopin were also influences on Debussy in the aesthetic sense, as they both "expanded the possibilities of the piano harmonically and technically," yet never aimed to use the piano as a tool for symphonic imitation. Debussy's famous *Études* were even dedicated to Chopin after years of editing his works on the basis that they were his most technically difficult piano pieces.[58] Like Debussy, Liszt as a composer was known to steer away from traditional tonal practices and use performance to achieve graphic images with music,[59] Debussy even lifted Liszt's "Gypsy" scale for his piece *La soiree dans Grenade* from *Estampes.*[60]

Musical Impressionism

When talking about Musical Impressionism, many musicians think of Debussy's name above all, as many consider him to be the quintessential French Impressionist composer, though he never associated with the term. However, Chabrier, who surrounded himself with Impressionist painters such as Édouard Manet, had an ability to sonically translate their way capturing mood and atmosphere in music and began to introduce Impressionism into his 19th-century works. If that is the case, why isn't Chabrier musicians' posterchild for Impressionism? Scholarly conversations of Impressionism in music were not discussed with

[58] Zoltek, "The Piano Music of Debussy and Ravel. 4-5.
[59] Thomas Hoi-Ning Lee, "Evocations of Nature in the Piano Music of Franz Liszt and the Seeds of Impressionism" (Thesis, University of Washington, 2016).
[60] Derek B. Scott, "Orientalism and Musical Style," *The Musical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (July 1, 1998): 319

Chabrier, as he was somewhat alone in having this influence, but rather with the emergence of Debussy and his peers that were subject to Chabrier's influence, therefore linking Debussy with the term.[61]

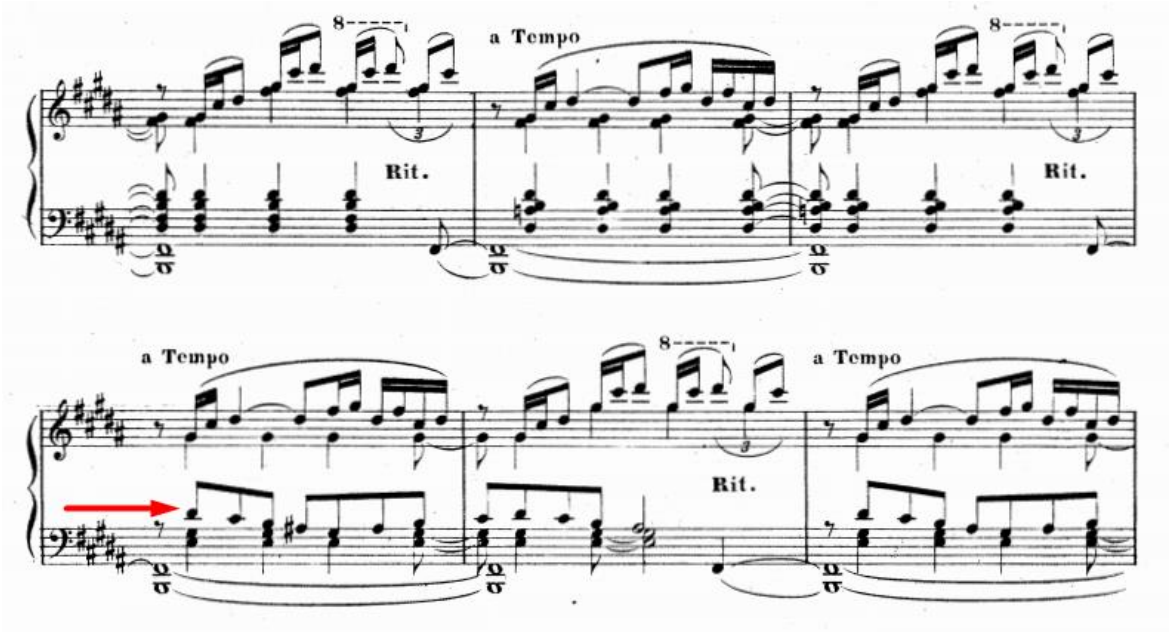
Impressionism as a movement began with a group of Parisian painters' departure from realism and a reaction against expectation to follow traditional academic rules throughout the 19th century and allowed the artist to take more control of the interpretation of the work. Instead they aimed to capture light and color and the feeling those bring to an environment rather than precise, rigid details. Part of this practice was painting "en plein air," or getting out of the studio to experience the environment being captured in the painting. Already in this description of the movement, we can see parallels between Impressionist philosophy and the Debussy's desire to challenge traditional music conventions from a young age.

The translation of these philosophies into musical impressionism however was manifested in composers like Chabrier. Chabrier's use of color washes throughout his work was unequivocally a sonic translation of these Impressionist philosophies, and the frequency of which he used this technique helped to push Impressionism towards the musical mainstream. This paralleled how Impressionist painters used light to capture feeling and movement in their works. Use of color is found throughout Debussy's works, and is especially obvious in the amorphous nature of his piano compositions that turned away from melodic theme. Sonically speaking, the ability of these color washes in Debussy's music to

[61] Ronald L. Byrnside, "Musical Impressionism: The Early History of the Term," The Musical Quarterly 66, no. 4 (1980): 524.

transport the listener can be accredited to his ability to subvert our expectations regarding harmony. This was a feature he not only obtained from Chabrier, but also from Liszt, though Liszt was more focused on freeform chromaticism while Debussy tended to favor the use of untraditional and unconventional scales[62]

Another key feature of Chabrier's style also found in Debussy was able to effortlessly combine "unpromising" melodic elements with accompaniment and bass.[63] This framed melodic fragments almost as descants that were simply present as passing witnesses to atmospheric harmonic structures. The first movement of Debussy's *Estampes, Pagodes,* is a fantastic example of this in just its first few bars.



Example 2.1: An excerpt from *Pagodes* showing the melody floating above a simple accompaniment with the addition of another voice in the second system.

[62] Zoltek, "The Piano Music of Debussy and Ravel. 6.
[63] Howat, The Art of French Piano Music.

Within the first three systems in the piece (Example 2.1), the harmonic material stays stagnant in quarter-note chords under a sparkling melody. The addition of a contrapuntal line in the second system simultaneously stands alone as its own voice while enriching and supporting the melody similar to the addition of a voice in a Renaissance era work, though this comes as no surprise, as we've already seen Debussy's love and respect for Palestrina.[64]

In a series of 1905 letters with music critic Pierre Lalo, the son of composer Edouard Lalo, Debussy rejected Lalo's description of his works being connected to nature, and instead believed at as an artist, his connection to nature must remain intangible,[65] clearly opposing Impressionist philosophy. Needless to say, regardless of whether Debussy identified as an Impressionist or should be classified as such, Impressionist influence held weight in Debussy's style.

Debussy and the Symbolist Movement

After Debussy's return from his residency at the Villa Medici, he found himself associating with many Symbolist poets in Paris who influenced his composition. Even before his return from Rome, Debussy had already been introduced to Symbolist texts via the poetry of Paul Verlaine during his Conservatoire days, as he had written a song cycle set to Verlaine texts dedicated to Marie-Blanche Vasnier, his muse of the time.

[64] Tamagawa, Echoes from the East: The Javanese Gamelan and Its Influence on the Music of Claude Debussy. 45-46
[65] Peter Dayan, "On Nature, Music, and Meaning in Debussy's Writing," 19th-Century Music 28, no. 3 (March 1, 2005): 216.

Jay Verchin
MUSC 210
Prof. Cailin Marcel Manson

Symbolism as a movement was a response to the decline of romanticism in the later part of the 19th century by French writers. Jean Moreas' Symbolist Manifesto itself states:

> "So Romanticism, having sounded all the tumultuous warning bells of uprising, had its days of glory and battle, lost of its force and its favour, abdicated its heroic boldness, became ordered and classified, sceptical and full of common sense; in the honorable and mean-minded attempts of the Parnassians, Romanticism hoped for a false resurgence, only finally, such a monarch had to fall into senile decay, and in the end was only able to be dethroned for the naturalism in which one could grant seriously a value of protest only, legitimate but poorly advised, against the insipidity of some novelists then in fashion."[66]

The characteristics of Symbolist writings as a result were defined by two things: human interaction with nature and mystery. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writings depicting an untamed, savage wilderness had been on-trend for far too long and became stale in the eyes of Symbolist writers.[67] Nature was still a prominent feature in Symbolist works, however the focus was shifted on human interaction with and the writer's emotional response to nature. Additionally, Symbolist writers "sought to express ideas which had been neglected by French Literature – the vague, the sentimental."[68]

Because of this personal connection to their writing, Symbolist writers often wrote for themselves above an audience, leading to confounding, vague and difficult to interpret poetry. That brings us to the other defining characteristic, the mysterious meanings of Symbolist poems, a trait that poet Stéphane Mallarmé embroiled into the movement. This

---

[66] Jean Moreas, "The Symbolist Manifesto (Trans. Mutablesound.Com)," accessed May 1, 2020, http://www.mutablesound.com/home/?p=2165.
[67] Phillips, "The Symbolists and Debussy," 298.
[68] Phillips, "The Symbolists and Debussy," 305.

mysteriousness was quiet the duality, as the writers were incredibly specific in their word choice yet did so in a way that was incredibly secretive and would obscure the true meaning to the reader. Mallarmé consistently obscured his feelings in his writing by symbolically expressing them, one of the ways in which Symbolist poetry was more self-serving than anything else. Just as symbols are used as a rhetorical device in every era of writing, only the author can truly know the meaning behind a symbol and as the readers, our inferences can only be assumptions.

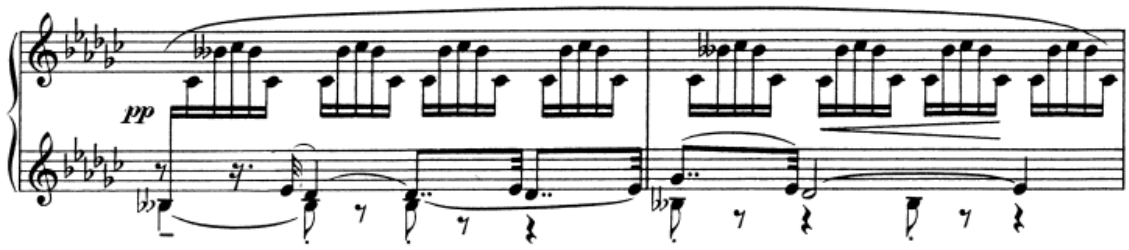
While Debussy rejected the term Symbolist in reference to him and his music,[69] these Symbolist ideologies are reflected in his music, rooted in his disgust with structured academic forms and symphonic development and translated into his aesthetic choices of writing music 'au grand air.' Like Symbolist writers, Debussy was outspoken against traditional structures in their respective artforms, with Symbolist poets writing freeform poetry and Debussy rejecting Germanic influences such as Beethoven's logical ways of symphonic development or Wagner's inescapable influence. His philosophy of writing "the music of open landscapes and free-mindedness" mirrored not only Symbolists' departure from form, but similar ideologies as the Impressionist influences that he lived with while discovering his identity as a composer. [70] All of this would lead one to think that Debussy as a composer is a quintessential symbolist, but the disconnect lies in one fundamental discretion between the Symbolists and Debussy; while the Symbolists aimed to discard all logic in regards to art,

[69] Lee, "Evocations of Nature in the Piano Music of Franz Liszt and the Seeds of Impressionism". 16.
[70] Phillips, "The Symbolists and Debussy," 303-306.

Debussy's compositional upbringing as an academic led him to believe that intellect would assist him in his musical pathos.[71]

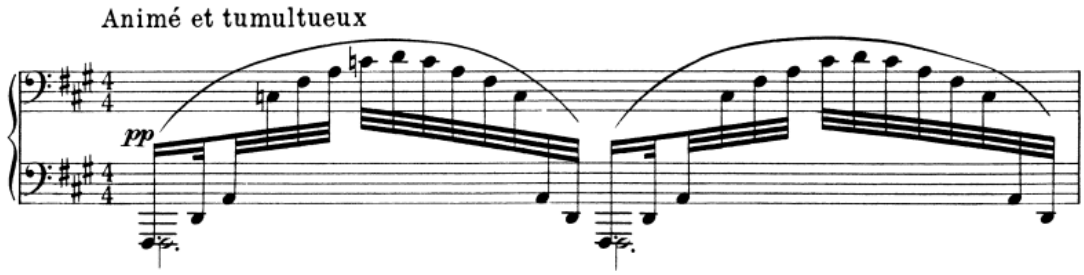
How Symbolism influenced Debussy's music is more abstract than some of his other influences such as that of Chabrier, Chopin and Liszt, as the movement pushed Debussy towards a type of work the public hadn't seen from him up until this point: programmatic compositions. Unlike other programmatic composers such as Berlioz and his programmatic posterchild *Symphonie Fantastique*, Debussy's methods of instrumental storytelling and picture-painting could be quite abstract. How he achieved this was similar to Symbolist poetry in the ways which his musical rhetoric symbolism appeared to be so vague, yet his intentions so specific. Again, Debussy's piano works are most telling of this, with special attention to two of his *Préludes, Le vent dans la plaine* and *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest* from the first book.

These are the two wind themed *Préludes* of Book I and have textural similarities that depict subtly different stories: "The Wind in the Plain" (*Le vent dans la plaine)* and "What the West Wind Has Seen" (*Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest*).

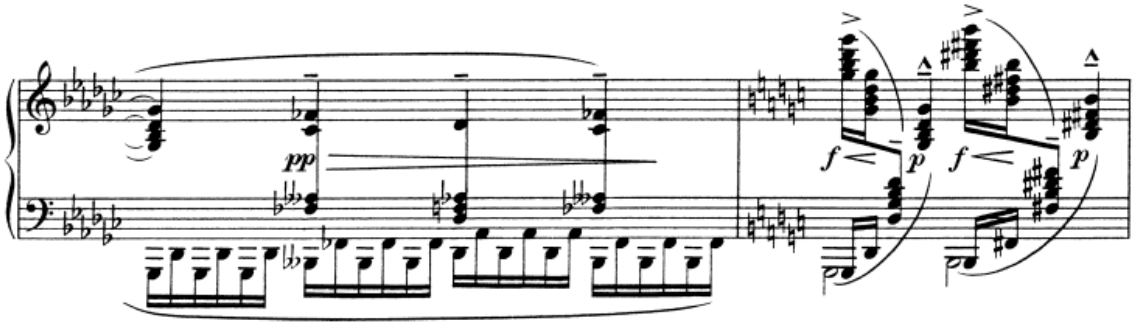


Example 3.1: The opening wind motif in *Le vent dans la plaine*.

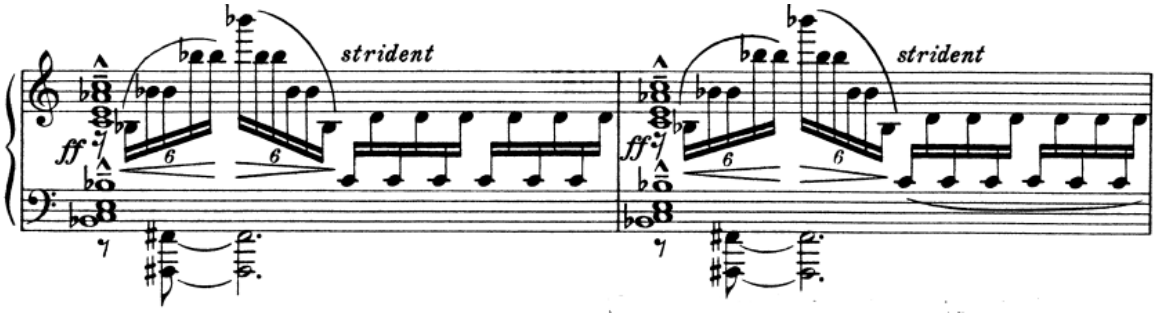
[71] Phillips, "The Symbolists and Debussy," 307.



Example 3.2: The opening wind motif in *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest.*



Example 4.1: A programmatic wind gust from *Le vent dans la plaine*.



Example 4.2: A programmatic wind gust in *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest.*

Even upon first glance, comparing the opening wind motifs and gust effects of each piece against (Examples 3.1 and 3.2 and Examples 4.1 and 4.2, respectively) shows clear visual similarities. In terms of the wind motifs, both figures are repeating symmetrical fragments that appear melodic, but in reality, are played too quickly to function as anything but texture. In both pieces, these serve as accompaniment to the melodies that play in

conjunction with these fragments. The wind gust effects also function similarly to one another in the manner that they interrupt the alternating notes in the accompaniment. However, the subtle difference in the two of these gestures shows how Debussy's nuance is specific and impactful yet so vague, mirroring the Symbolists. The *Le vent dans la plaine* excerpt (Example 4.1) seems to condense the initial wind motif of the piece (Example 3.1) into a gesture that feels like a wave of sound, almost as if to mimic rippling grass in a plain, like a compression in the musical equivalent of a longitudinal wave. Contrastingly, the interruption in *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest* (Example 4.2) is much more percussive yet simultaneously more melodic in nature. To the listener, it sounds almost like a cry that pierces through even the rumbling wind, and as the title suggests, could have been one of the things that the west wind has seen. Of course, these are mere assumptions based on my own experience with these works, and the Symbolist obscurity of these gestures make their meanings near-impossible to define.

Eastern Influence

The introduction of nonwestern music and sounds into Debussy's musical vocabulary was unequivocally one of his largest influences towards the end of his middle and throughout his late period. While many composers of Debussy's time became interested in music in the east, what set him apart from these other composers is how he adopted these influences so intensely to the point where he "made much of it his own language, even identity."[72] In 1889, the Javanese gamelan came to Paris for an exposition, and Debussy was "spellbound" by the

[72] Howat, The Art of French Piano Music.

ensembles 'infinite arabesque' and use of percussion. This musical revelation was a turning point for Debussy compositionally, as he was already questioning Wagner and symphonic development, but his exposure to the gamelan was Debussy's gateway drug to finally turn away from these Germanic traditions.[73] Wagner's influence can still very clearly be seen in *Pelléas et Mélisande,* but after its 1902 premiere, many of Debussy's works turned towards the texture and scales of Javanese music. The music of Java wasn't by any means Debussy's sole eastern influence and the composer as he also had encounters with Indian, Arabic and "Gypsy," music that played a role in his writings, however the influence of the gamelan is by far the most obviously used and perhaps the most prominent of these different foreign styles.

It is important to note that Debussy was no stranger to music of "the orient" as many scholars call it (though the term is racist and outdated), as Debussy was connected to the Symbolists who were familiar with "oriental" philosophies long before these Expositions, along with at least three ethnomusicologists.[74] This influence can be seen in his early use of color wash and unconventional scales in conjunction with the Impressionist influence of Chabrier, and his exposure to the gamelan at the 1889 and 1900 exhibitions only further solidified and amplified his appreciation for and integration of this music into his own works.

To be able to discuss how Debussy was inspired by the gamelan, we first have some understanding of what gamelan music is. To start, there two major forms of gamelan music: Javanese gamelan from the cities, and Sudanese gamelan from west Java. Gamelan orchestras

[73] Lesure and Howat, "Debussy, (Achille-)Claude," 10.
[74] Howat, The Art of French Piano Music.

are ensembles comprised of many pitched percussion instruments that fall into several categories including pitched mallet (tabuh) instruments, gambang, a wooden xylophone, kendhang, a double-headed drum that sets the tempo. There are also non-percussion instruments, such as the rebab, a bowed string instrument, a plucked zither instrument, a bamboo flute, and singers.[75] The character of the music is dictated by four key elements, which are as follows:

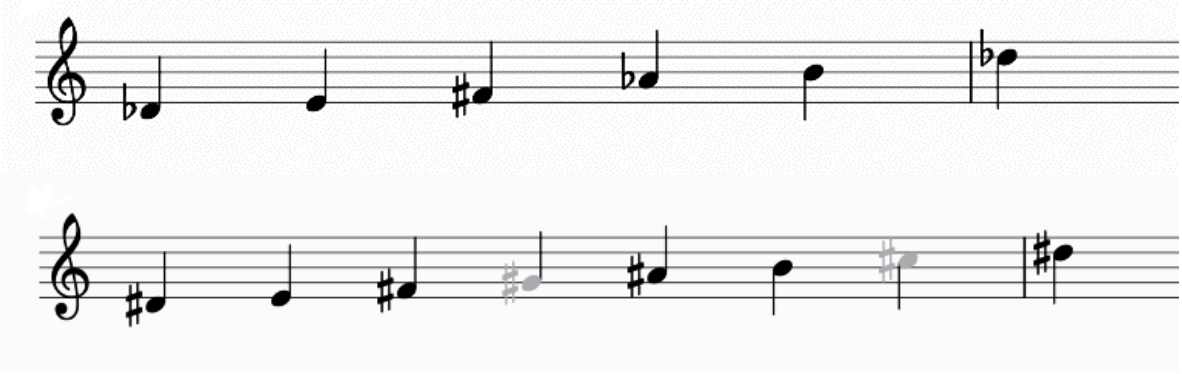
> "(1) colotomic foundation in which the stroke of different gongs define cyclical structure of the music; (2) abstracted melody or melodic skeleton played by a group of instruments; (3) elaborate melodic form, and (4) drum patterns that reinforce the cyclical structure, regulate temporal flow, and synchronize its patterns with dance movements."[76]

The key elements of the Javanese gamelan sound that Debussy attempted to recreate in his music were an imitation of their tuning systems (laras) and the sonic nature of the gamelan's multiple pitched instruments,[77] which can be described as a "'carpet of sound' produced by its pointillistic textures and rhythms."[78]

There are two primary tuning system in gamelan orchestras named *sléndro* and *pélog*. Sléndro is a five-tone tuning system and pelog uses seven tones. While the precise tuning of these modes cannot be conflated to western notation due to the unstandardized nature of the tuning systems, an approximation of each tuning system can be represented as such:

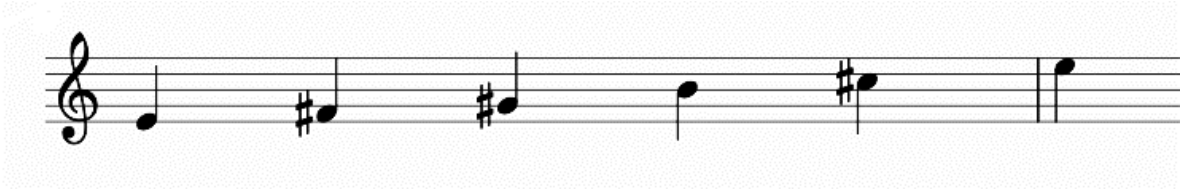
---

[75] Sumarsam, "Introduction to Javanese Gamelan," 1998. 2.
[76] Sumarsam, Javanese Gamelan and the West (University Rochester Press, 2013). 93.
[77] Norito Irei, "French Orientalism in Reynaldo Hahn's Series 'Orient' from Le Rossignol Eperdu" (University of Miami, 2012). 35.
[78] Howat, The Art of French Piano Music.



Example 5.1: An approximation of the pitches in the sléndro (above) and pélog (below) scales based on approximations of Sumarsam, a scholar who grew up playing Javanese gamelan.[79] Less commonly used pitches are marked in grey.

The sléndro scale closely resembles a pentatonic scale whereas pélog resembles a whole-tone scale. (Example 5.1) Rearranging the sléndro scale to start on "E" reveals this:

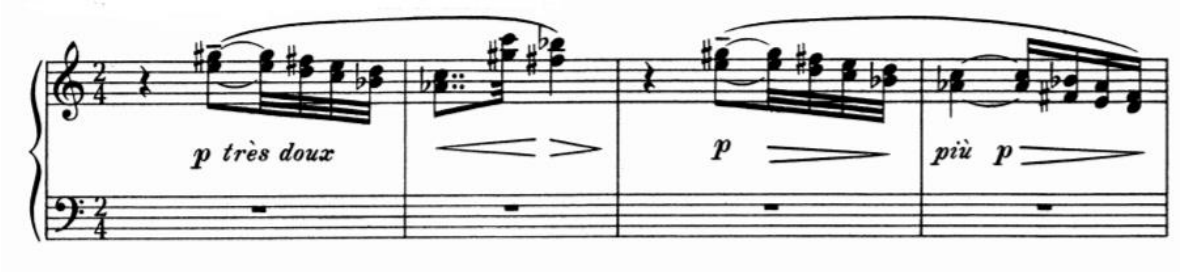


Example 5.2: A rearrangement of the sléndro scale, showing that starting the scale on "E" forms a pentatonic scale

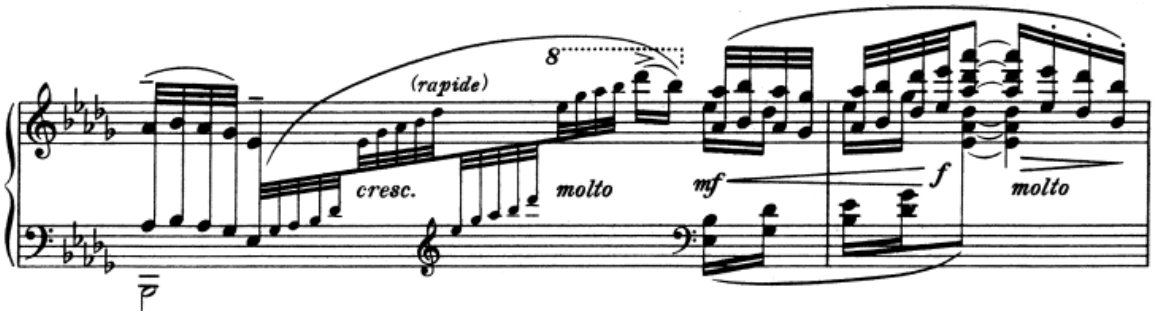
The use of pentatonic and whole-tone scales that mimicked these Javanese scales made increasing appearances throughout Debussy's work after 1890, one of the most famous examples being his piece *Voiles* (1904).

[79] Sumarsam, "Introduction to Javanese Gamelan," 4-5.

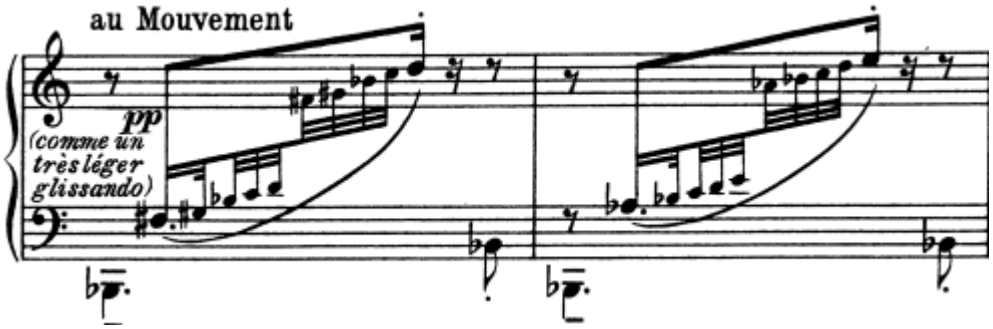
Jay Verchin
MUSC 210
Prof. Cailin Marcel Manson



Example 6.1: The opening measured of *Voiles* which utilize a complete whole-tone scale.



Example 6.2: A brief pentatonic scalar passage in the middle of *Voiles.*



Example 6.3: A whole-tone appropriation of the brief pentatonic passage (Example 6.2) in *Voiles.*

The piece uses a distinct whole-tone tonality that mimics pélog scale in just the first few bars (Example 6.1), with a brief pentatonic passage in the middle referencing the sléndro scale (Example 6.2). Immediately after this pentatonic wash, the whole-tone tonality returns in a way that parodies the short passage that precedes it (Example 6.3). The pentatonic passage feels somewhat out of place, being so consonant and harmonious in the midst of the

dissonant music surrounding it. Perhaps, this is referential to the two different sets of instruments in a gamelan orchestra, one set of sléndro and one set of pélog instruments, and how they aren't played simultaneously.

Debussy as a composer of piano works and a pianist himself was always known to use the piano quite percussively even since his early Conservatoire days,[80] and this stylistic feature of his blended well with the pointillistic percussiveness found in the texture of gamelan music. Gamelan music is known to have rhythmic layers, with the tempo being established by the kendhang and the fundamental time units called gendhing are marked by the gong's low, rumbling timbre.[81] From there, melodic material is layered by various instruments based on these three groups:

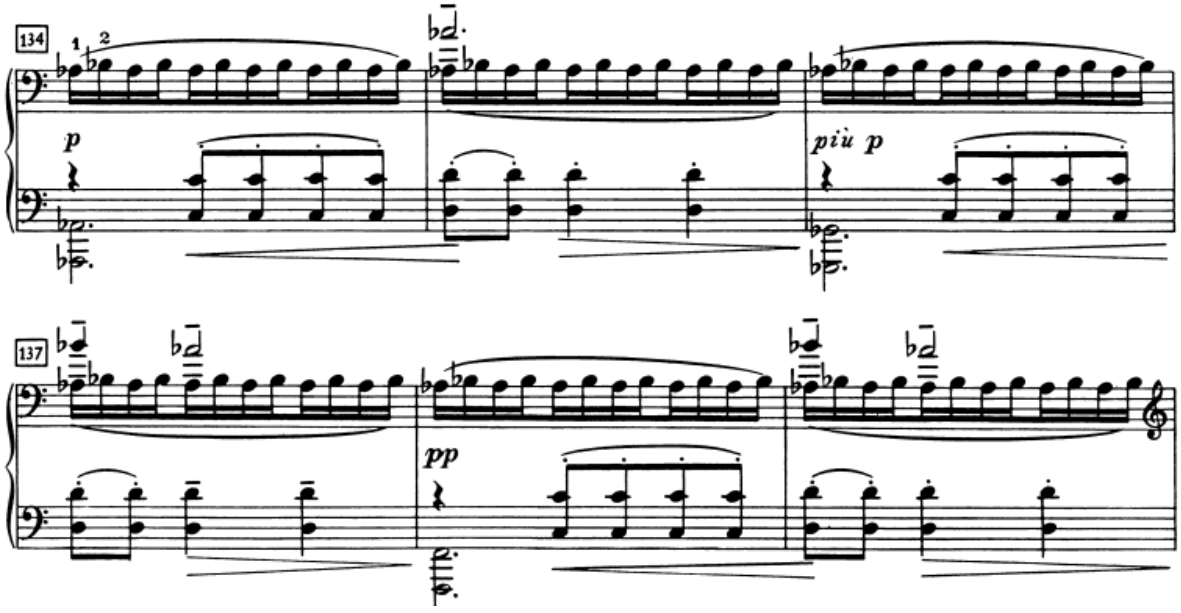
> "a. The instruments and vocalists which represent elaborate melodies. Employing wide melodic range, rebab, gendèr barung, gambang, sindhèn, and gérong have the important function of determining the melodic essence of compositions.
>
> b. The instruments which play a melodic abstraction of a gendhing (balungan) within their one-octave range.
>
> c. The instruments which melodically mediate between group a and b."[82]

This layered gamelan texture is featured in Debussy's music in his work *Pour le piano* (1894-1901) in the first *Prelude* movement.

---

[80] Schwartzman, "Claude Debussy's Opera Pelléas et Mélisande: Secrecy, Mystery and Ambiguity in Debussy's Life and Art," 33.
[81] Sumarsam, "Introduction to Javanese Gamelan," 20.
[82] Sumarsam, "Introduction to Javanese Gamelan," 6.

Jay Verchin
MUSC 210
Prof. Cailin Marcel Manson



Example 7.1: An excerpt from the *Prelude* of *Pour le piano* with layers that represent the various instrumental groups in a gamelan orchestra.

This short excerpt (Example 7.1) from *Pour le piano's Prelude* movement contains plenty of layers that correspond quite well with the different elements of the gamelan. Firstly, in the left hand there is a low, rumbling tone that sonically mimics the rumbling effect of a gong. Similar to how the gong marks the gendhing for the gamelan, Debussy uses this as a phrase-marker in this piece, with it only appearing every two bars. The simplistic yet soaring melody brings a colorful focal point to the phrase and help to define its mood. This serves the same function as and could possibly even be a reference to the large ranges of these instruments which establish melodic essence in the gamelan. The trill-like motion in the right hand is similar to the description of group B, as it plays in a similar register to group A and its density relative to the other layers in the moment takes up space and obscures the melody.

The other content in the left hand can be approximated to the group C instruments which help mediate between groups A and B, providing harmonic material to support group B while not detracting from group A's melody. Most importantly, none of these features unique to this work and can be seen throughout Debussy's other piano works in the canon.

Pagodes as a Culminative Composition

A Unity of Influences

One of Debussy's most famous works that captures his quintessence as a composer is undoubtedly *Pagodes* from the larger 1903 work of *Estampes.* This piano work was from his middle period where his style was crystallizing, but still not fully developed, yet captures the fundamental elements of the "Debussy" sound. Historically and compositionally it lives at the crossroads of the three periods of his composition: it blends the French musical impressionism which he was steeped in from a young age and shaped the early part of his canon, the influence of his time spent in circles of Symbolist writers during his middle period, and his haunting memories of Javanese gamelan music that swept through the end of his career.[83] These of course are all tied together by Debussy's ability as a pianist to be painterly rather than trying to imitate a symphony, a skill he acquired from Chopin and Liszt. *Pagodes*

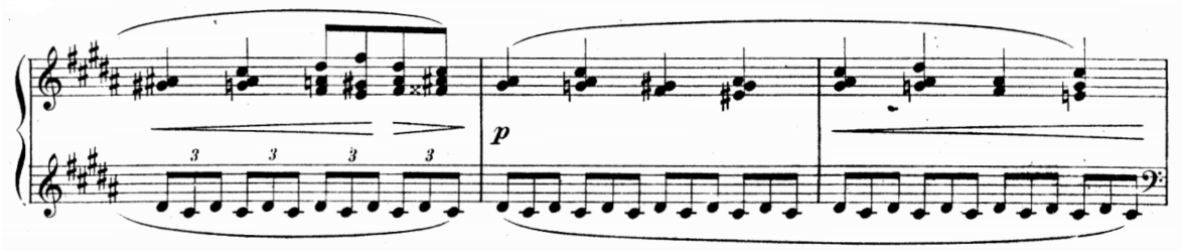
[83] Irei, "French Orientalism in Reynaldo Hahn's Series 'Orient' from Le Rossignol Eperdu." 16.

is the quintessential Debussy work as it Captures and marries together Debussy's most prominent influences in his compositional career.

Impressionist and Symbolist Influence

The title of the piece, *Pagodes* is a direct reference to the pagodas of the far east – a large, towering temple with a tiered roof. However, Debussy's goal in writing the piece was neither to depict nor make a statement the pagoda, but rather capture his own emotion surrounding it. He achieved this in two ways: using ambient washes of color from his impressionist roots, and by being obscure and mysterious in his symbolism surrounding the pagoda. These two schools of thought connect, as Impressionist simplicity disguises itself in mysterious symbolism.

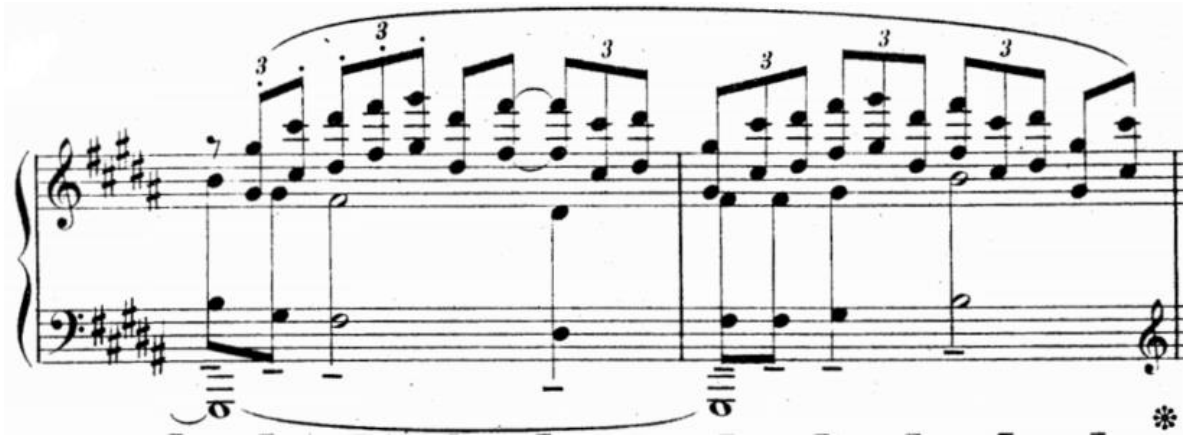
In the opening bars of *Pagodes'* A section (mm. 1-30), stagnant harmony sets the mood and atmosphere for the music. There is little rhythmic complexity, and rather the simple serenity that a temple would hold. This mirrors the Impressionist philosophy of shifting focus away from precise details in order to capture the feeling of existing in a particular setting, in addition to the influence of Chabrier. The nuance of setting the chords starting in m.3 in first inversion could even be compared to the thin brushstroke of the Impressionist painters. Additionally, Debussy adds G#, the sixth to these opening chords, avoiding the rigidity of basic triads and increasing the harmonic texture of the opening's ambiance. The next distinct wash of color over the scene is from mm. 15-18 (Example 8.1) where the chords become chromatic relative to the scale and create a sense of curiosity and wonder.



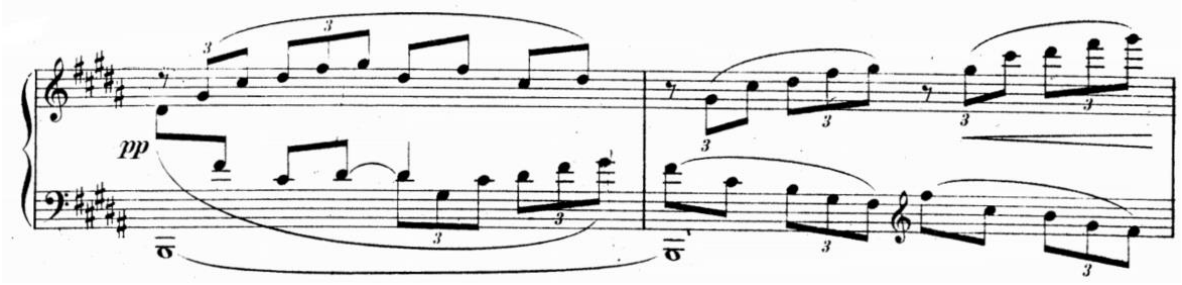
Example 8.1: mm. 16-18 using chords that drift away from and back towards the piece's tonal center and base pentatonic scale.

This could possibly represent the feeling of amazement one may feel while standing before an architectural wonder… The lack of harmonic definition in this short segment also could be a detail representative of being at a complete loss for words while present in the pagoda's environment.

Debussy's use of the pentatonic scale is an aide in easing in color shifts from a calm and bright feeling (Example 9.1) towards darker tones (Example 9.2).



Example 9.1: A shift of tonal center to G# in mm. 13-14.



Example 9.2: The same melody from mm.13-14, recontextualized with B as the tonal center in mm. 25-26.

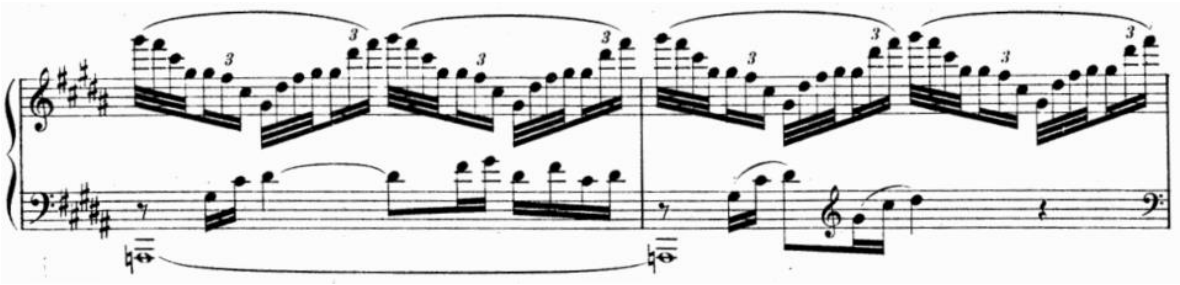
The pentatonic scale's lack of any leading tones gives the scale flexibility in terms of staring point, and many composers who used the scale, including Debussy will choose to start the scale on its fifth note (the 6th scale degree in the context of a diatonic scale). This allows for an effortless exchange between the standard pentatonic scale and its "relative" minor variant.

Debussy also is able to use subtle symbolism to depict human interactions with the environment being described in the music. This was a key feature of Symbolist poetry, as Rosseau's Romantic ideology of "untamed nature" fell out of style with Symbolist poets in favor of writing vaguely about one's emotional experiences with nature.

An example of this is an excerpt we've already looked at in m. 15 (Example 8.1), but this time the focus is on what the left hand is doing. This slow flutter back and forth between the major second helps to enhance the speechless feeling behind the right-hand chords. This figure is used quite frequently in Debussy's piano works, and in this instance could represent a number of experiences in relation to the mood of its accompanying chords. As listeners, we

are left in the dark about what this figure could mean, which is Symbolist in the way that it's reminiscent of Mallarmé's obscurity in his writings.

Another example of mysterious symbolism is in the variation on the second A section (mm. 78-end) and the quick, rippling right-hand melody (Example 10.1).



Example 10.1: An example of the high-right-hand rippling ostinato (mm.82-83).

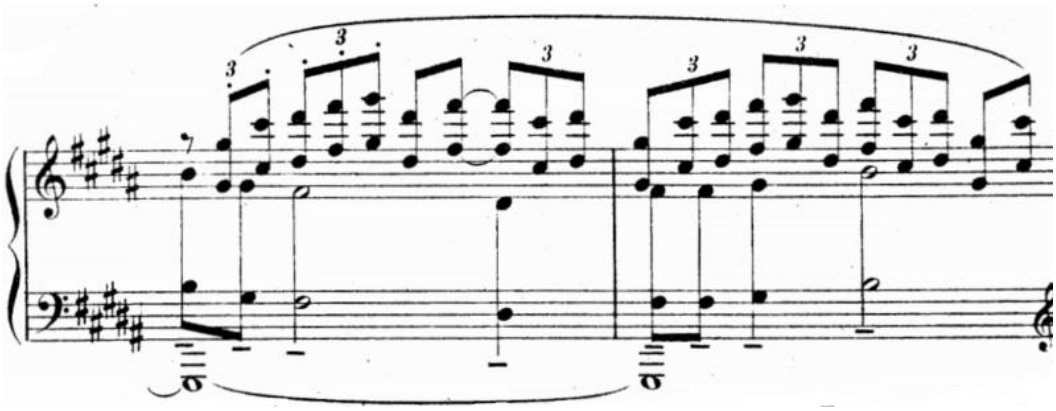
This could be representative of the vastness of the roof of a pagoda as it towers over its onlooker. The large range of these runs are able to sonically capture a feeling of overwhelming smallness in comparison to these large buildings. The way in which this figure lasts through the end of the work suggests the pagoda's grand and endless appearance.

Gamelan Features

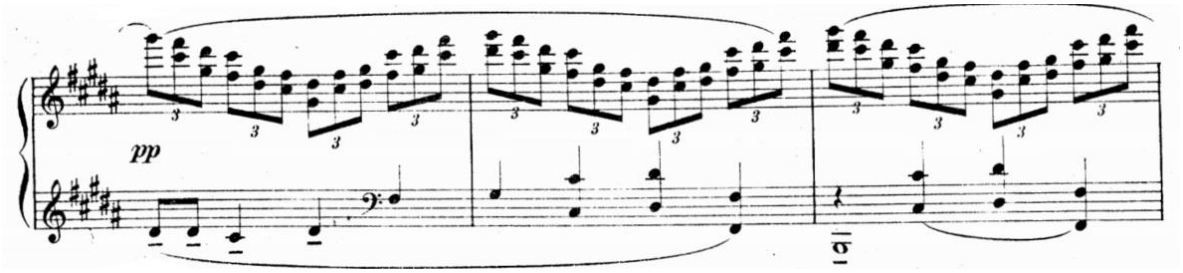
The essence of Javanese gamelan music runs through the veins of *Pagodes* from its tonality and harmonic structures to its layering of texture that mimics the gamelan's functional instrument groups. The piece from the opening bars utilizes sonorous open fifths and the pentatonic scale, which in this context, has its roots in the gamelan sléndro scale, and is harmonically still. This is partially due to the fact even with the pentatonic scales seamless ability to shift into its minor variant as previously discussed (Examples 9.1-9.2), both

resulting tonal centers function in the same tonic area in the context of tonal functional harmony. A keen observation to the gamelan inspiration in the work is the way which four of the five notes in the pentatonic scale are more heavily used, similar to gamelan pieces that avoid the use of one note.[84] The A section is a prolongation of the tonal center, B, and allows the harmony to soar above it, as we've previously seen in Example 2.1.

At m. 11 (Example 11.1), parallel octaves take over in both hands. Each melody loses its independence and falls victim to the natural resonance of these parallel octaves. This happens again at mm. 27-30, but instead using parallel fifths (Example 11.2).



Example 11.1: Double-handed parallel octave figure, mm. 13-14.

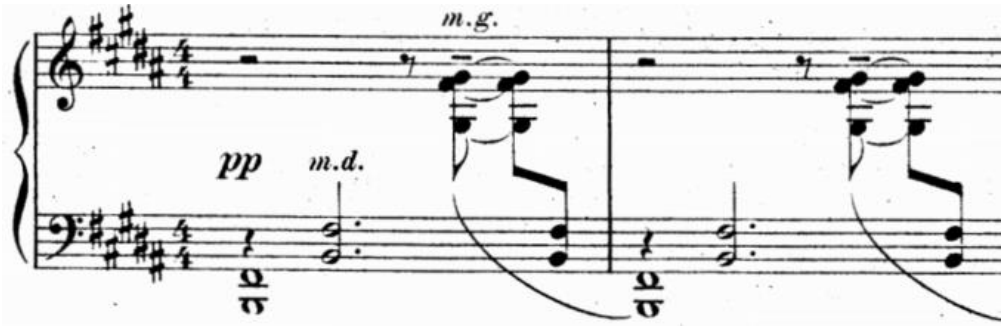


Example 11.2: A series of ascending and descending parallel fifths in the right hand, mm. 27-29.

[84] Hugh, "Claude Debussy and the Javanese Gamelan," 7.

The B section hints at the brief use of a whole-tone scale right at m. 33 with the introduction of E#, a reference to the pélog scale of the gamelan. This is a reasonable inference, seeing as we've already seen Debussy compare pentatonic and whole-tone sonorities in *Voiles* (Examples 6.1-6.3). Unlike *Voiles*, the use of this technique in *Pagodes* is much less jarring and sounds as if it could be an introduction of the Lydian mode to the pentatonic scale.

Throughout the piece we see gamelan layering techniques similar to what we've already seen in *Pour le piano.* From the first two bars (Example 12.1), a low "gong" helps to set the length of a phrase with an off-beat right-hand response mimicking that of the bonang in gamelan music which responds to the pulse of the melodic skeleton off the beat.[85]



Example 12.1: The first two bars of Pagodes depicting a call and response between the "gong" and upper register.

The discussion of the other textural layers begins with the discussion of the melodic essence of the piece, which we've already seen in Example 2.1. The first melody heard in *Pagodes* sits high in the right hand and sparkles with its quick ascents and descents over a

[85] Sumarsam, "Introduction to Javanese Gamelan," 15.

wide range of notes. This typical of many gamelan melodies, as the instruments responsible with setting melodic character are instruments with significantly larger ranges than the rest of the orchestra. The character of this melody is breezy, light, and free. This is contrasted by a countermelody in the tenor voice which enters two measures later that brings a particular intensity to the sound. Its warmth attempts to ground and abstract the original, light melodic fragment, and the range it spans is small – within an octave – similar to the gamelan instruments it mimics. In gamelan music, these two melodic forces have a mediator, which in this case is the stagnant supporting left-hand chords. Due to the lack of changing harmonic material, the range of these chords help to not only contextualize the intense countermelody, but also are a point of rhythmic unity for both of the contrasting melodies.

Debussy is a master in marrying these foreign, eastern musical elements to the artistic movements he lived with while working as a composer in Paris. He is also fortunate in the manner that all three influences are able to synergize and contribute musically to one another, as we've been able to discuss multiple functionalities for singular elements of the work. The harmonious nature in which these three compositional aspects blend together is not only to be credited for *Pagodes*' popularity as a work, but also is the intersection of Debussy's identity as a composer, making *Pagodes* his most quintessential work.

Jay Verchin
MUSC 210
Prof. Cailin Marcel Manson

Bibliography

Brown, Matthew. Debussy's Ibéria. Oxford University Press, 2003.

Byrnside, Ronald L. "Musical Impressionism: The Early History of the Term." The Musical Quarterly 66, no. 4 (1980): 522–37.

Chabrier, Emmanuel, and Roy Howat. Works for Piano. Courier Corporation, 1995.

"Claude Debussy - Biography : 1894 - 1902 - Centre de Documentation Claude Debussy." Accessed April 29, 2020. http://www.debussy.fr/encd/bio/bio4_94-02.php.

"Claude Debussy - Biography : 1903 - 1909 - Centre de Documentation Claude Debussy." Accessed April 30, 2020. http://www.debussy.fr/encd/bio/bio5_03-09.php.

Dayan, Peter. "On Nature, Music, and Meaning in Debussy's Writing." 19th-Century Music 28, no. 3 (March 1, 2005): 214–29. https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2005.28.3.214.

DeVoto, Mark. Debussy and the Veil of Tonality: Essays on His Music. Pendragon Press, 2004.

Dietschy, Marcel. A Portrait of Claude Debussy. Clarendon Press, 1990. http://archive.org/details/portraitofclaude00diet.

Dumesnil, Maurice. Claude Debussy, Master of Dreams. Greenwood Press, 1979.

Fulcher, Jane F. The Composer As Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France, 1914-1940. Oxford University Press, USA, 2005.

Howat, Roy. The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier. Yale University Press, 2009.

Hugh, Brent. "Claude Debussy and the Javanese Gamelan," 1997. https://brenthugh.com/debnotes/gamelan.html.

Irei, Norito. "French Orientalism in Reynaldo Hahn's Series 'Orient' from Le Rossignol Eperdu." University of Miami, 2012.

Lee, Thomas Hoi-Ning. "Evocations of Nature in the Piano Music of Franz Liszt and the Seeds of Impressionism." Thesis, University of Washington, 2016. https://digital.lib.washington.edu:443/researchworks/handle/1773/36781.

Lesure, François, and Roy Howat. "Debussy, (Achille-)Claude." Grove Music Online. Accessed April 23, 2020. https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000007353.

Lesure, François, and Marie Rolf. Claude Debussy: A Critical Biography. Boydell & Brewer, 2019.

Lockspeiser, Edward. Debussy: Volume 1, 1862-1902: His Life and Mind. CUP Archive, 1978.

Moreas, Jean. “The Symbolist Manifesto (Trans. Mutablesound.Com).” Accessed May 1, 2020. http://www.mutablesound.com/home/?p=2165.

Nichols, Roger. The Life of Debussy. Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Phillips, C. Henry. “The Symbolists and Debussy.” Music & Letters 13, no. 3 (1932): 298–311.

Quah, Phaik Suan. “Debussy’s Life through His Letters.” Union College, 2015.

Rynex, Carolyn Rose. “Arabesque and the Early Music Influence in Debussy’s Trois Chansons de Charles d’Orléans.” Arizona State University, 2016.

Schwartzman, Gertrude. “Claude Debussy’s Opera Pelléas et Mélisande: Secrecy, Mystery and Ambiguity in Debussy’s Life and Art.” International Forum of Psychoanalysis 25, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 31–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/0803706X.2015.1042520.

Scott, Derek B. “Orientalism and Musical Style.” The Musical Quarterly 82, no. 2 (July 1, 1998): 309–35. https://doi.org/10.1093/mq/82.2.309.

Snyder, Harvey Lee. Afternoon of a Faun: How Debussy Created a New Music for the Modern World. Hal Leonard Corporation, 2015.

Sumarsam. “Introduction to Javanese Gamelan,” 1998.

———. Javanese Gamelan and the West. University Rochester Press, 2013.

Tamagawa, Kiyoshi. Echoes from the East: The Javanese Gamelan and Its Influence on the Music of Claude Debussy. Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

Trezise, Simon. The Cambridge Companion to French Music. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Trezise, Simon, Jonathan Cross, and Trezise Simon. The Cambridge Companion to Debussy. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Tyre, Jess. “Music in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune.” The Journal of Musicology 22, no. 2 (2005): 173–202. https://doi.org/10.1525/jm.2005.22.2.173.

Zoltek, Maureen A. “The Piano Music of Debussy and Ravel: A Comparative Study of Their Conservatoire Experiences as Pianist-Composers, Musical Philosophies, Influences Pertaining to Their Piano Works, and Individual Pianistic Styles.” Roosevelt University, 2007. https://search.proquest.com/openview/b518ca1575367838edd8197b92700030/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y.