ASPECTS OF DEBUSSY'S PIANO MUSIC
AS FOUND IN THE TWENTY-FOUR PRELUDES

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INTRODUCTION

Piano literature before Debussy had undergone a process of development that reached its peak with the giants of nineteenth century piano music. Such composers as Chopin, Brahms and Liszt created music which formed the foundation of the repertoire and established the piano as one of the most popular musical instruments of the century. The advent of Debussy at the apex of the development of the piano is most significant: When it seemed that the instrument had reached its fulfillment, Debussy expanded its resources yet further, and adapted idiomatic piano technique to a new musical language. Moreover, he created a totally individual piano style and musical idiom, which, due to its uniqueness, did not allow imitation.

Debussy's sophisticated refinement, his unique sound and treatment of the piano, require an artistic and technical approach altogether different from that which one would bring to Mozart or Brahms. Studying or teaching Debussy's music therefore requires a unique kind of musical awareness and keyboard approach. It will be the purpose of this study to discuss aspects of Debussy's style as they are especially evident in the twenty-four Preludes, with the particular intent of aiding both the performer and teacher.
Extra-musical considerations are unusually important. Debussy's well-known association with contemporary literary and artistic movements are pertinent, as well as his lesser-known, but equally important fascination with the world of myths and fantasy, nature, and Paris music halls; although seemingly unrelated, all are essential to an understanding of his music.

Of course, any performer must be well acquainted with the compositional techniques and formal content of his repertoire. Here, the piano music of Debussy poses a unique challenge, due to the composer's unprecedented structural ideas and sound materials.

Equally important in performance of Debussy is an awareness of the piano as Debussy used it. This includes not only use of the keyboard and pedals, but mastery of touches and methods of practice, as well as ability to perceive and control the many necessary sound possibilities of the instrument.

The Preludes, of all Debussy's piano works, are especially appropriate for this type of study, as they represent a variety of forms, lengths, moods, and pianistic techniques. As short pieces, they present a succinct, microscopic view of Debussy's pianistic style; as relatively late works, they present a summary of his innovations and contributions to piano technique.

This study will not analyze each Prelude, but rather will discuss important concepts or techniques as they are found in the Preludes. Nor will each composition be discussed relative to every concept; rather, representative pieces have been chosen. Although
this study deals primarily with the Preludes, other piano works of Debussy are referred to occasionally.

The first three chapters deal with descriptive or analytical information; the final chapters deal with performance and interpretation. Finally, the concepts examined in this study are considered in relation to Debussy's use of the piano as a vehicle for musical expression.
CHAPTER I

MUSICAL AND EXTRA-MUSICAL INFLUENCES

ON DEBUSSY

Extra-Musical Influences

The term "impressionism" has been commonly applied to Debussy's style, particularly to that of the piano compositions. It has been convenient to use this term in contrast with other stylistic classifications, such as realism, pointillism, and romanticism, many of which were borrowed from the graphic arts.

Castagnary, the famous nineteenth century art critic, is said to have coined the term "impressionist" in his review of contemporary French painters who exhibited their works in 1874: 1 "If one wants to characterize them with a single word that explains their efforts, one would have to create the new term of Impressionists. They are impressionists in the sense that they render not a landscape but the sensation produced by a landscape." 2 Monet's well-known picture entitled Impression: Lever de soleil (1872), exhibited at the 1874 show, could well have prompted the use of the term.

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It was over ten years later that the term was first applied to Debussy's music, and then with undertones of derision. In 1887, the Journal Officiel, recording the official report of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, spoke of the 'vague impressionism' of Pintemps:

His feeling for musical color is so strong that he is apt to forget the importance of accuracy of line and form. He should beware of this vague impressionism which is one of the most dangerous enemies of artistic truth.

Again in 1894, the term was directly associated with Debussy when a concert of his works was given in the gallery of the Libre Esthétique in Brussels, where there was concomitantly a showing of Impressionist painters, including Renoir, Pissaro, Sisley, Gauguin and others.

A number of resemblances in artistic concepts have encouraged the now common association of Debussy with the Impressionists. The painters were primarily concerned with conveying sensations of light and color. They were not interested in clearly defined forms and distinct outlines; rather, they preferred vague, blurred, and merging shapes, for "... the realistic rendering of an object mattered less to them than the opportunity provided by sun on water, or sun on snow, to juxtapose the seven colours of the solar spectrum." Monet's several series of paintings of a single object or scene (e.g. the Rouen Cathedral and haystacks) at various times of day are notable studies of the varied effects of changing light. There are numerous


indications that Debussy shared these concerns. He too seemed intrigued with sensuous light and color effects at various times of day, and at various seasons of the year and in different kinds of weather as well. The titles of several of the Preludes, and of numerous other piano works, attest to this interest. Remarkable musical effects, often edited in the score by such words as *lumineux*, are created to evoke sensuous reactions; his experiments with sound, the basic phenomenon of music, can be said to correspond to the impressionist painters' experiments with color and light. Debussy's avoidance of linear clarity and distinct classical forms is similar to the formal vagueness of the painters. Furthermore, many of the subjects indicated in Debussy's Prelude titles could well have been chosen by an Impressionist painter. Debussy, like the painters, had a particular sensitivity to nature and the out-of-doors. Of all the elements, water seemed to hold a special fascination for them. Many Impressionist paintings, and numerous works of Debussy—*Pélles et Melisande*, *La Mer* and *Reflets dans l'eau*, as well as the Preludes *Voiles*, *La Cathédrale engloutie* and *Ondine*, to name a few—deal with the subject of water. Edward Lockspeiser suggests a common artistic spirit among Renoir's *The Boat* (1867), Monet's *Sail-boats at Argenteuil* (1873-4), and Debussy's *Voiles* (1910). In a different writing, Lockspeiser reviews a book by Émile Viullermoz, who compares

\[5\text{Ibid., p. 20.}\]
Debussy with the painters and sees:

. . . the fragmentation of clouds reflected in water in the famous 'La Grenouillère' by Monet as an image of the fragmentation of chords, manipulated by the two hands on the keyboard, in 'Reflets dans l'eau'. Other pictures chosen by M. Viullermoz in illustration of similar parallels are Monet's 'Soliel levant', Pissaro's 'Dulwich College' and Sisley's 'La Barque pendant l'inondation'. Significantly, an earlier canvas is included in this illuminating study: the prophetic 'Rain, Steam and Speed' by Turner, proclaimed by Debussy as "the greatest creator of mystery in art".

The height of Debussy's career, however, did not coincide with the main period of the Impressionist movement (1870-80), which came to its peak before Debussy was a mature man. It is therefore doubtful that he was intimate with any of the Impressionists. It seems, in fact, that his taste in painting was more drawn to Whistler, the expatriate American, than to these Frenchmen. Peter Yates finds many similarities between these two artists, and metaphorically speaks of Debussy's " . . . Whistlerian refinement of monochrome, 'scenes which move in their locality and character.' " Debussy himself deplored the label "impressionist," as he expressed in a letter to his publisher Durand in 1908: "I am trying to make something new—realities, as it were: what imbeciles call 'impressionism.' "

It seems highly improbable, therefore, that Debussy consciously

followed the Impressionists' creative techniques. The parallels which exist between his music and their paintings are probably the result of the far-reaching artistic aesthetics and cultural trends of the years surrounding the turn of the century in France. Many of the creative concerns we have mentioned, for instance, the breakdown of classical forms, were shared also by the Symbolist movement in literature. As Oscar Thompson has said, "In literature, in painting, in music, the aim of these kindred artists was to suggest rather than depict; to mirror not the object but the emotional reaction to the object; to interpret a fugitive impression rather than to seize upon and fix the permanent reality."\(^9\)

In fact, Debussy was more personally associated with the Symbolists than with the Impressionists. Several Symbolists were among his close friends, and he was, moreover, a voracious reader. There are innumerable literary allusions in his letters, giving further evidence that his "aesthetic was . . . largely determined by literary influences."\(^10\) He found both the artistic ideas and work of the Symbolists stimulating:

All these poets\(^{e.g.}\) Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Maeterlinck\(^8\) fortified his courage to deviate from common practice. They sharpened his sensitivity to unique forms. They recommended subtle suggestion as opposed to bald statement, and vivid sensuous imagery as opposed to diffuse emotion. Debussy did seek and find the musical equivalents of their verbal techniques.


Strongly preferring understatement or even silence, Debussy, like the Symbolists deprecated rhetoric. His "subtle suggestion" and "sensuous imagery" are perhaps most obviously manifested in his placement of the Preludes' titles: they come at the ends, rather than the beginnings of the pieces. Furthermore, as E. Robert Schmitz writes, it is not so much the objects themselves that are of concern to Debussy in the Preludes, but "the mood evoked by the object[s] and his personal reactions to [them]. . .". Debussy's "musical equivalents" of symbolism, as well as impressionism, will be discussed in the ensuing chapters. Suffice it to say here that both of these artistic concepts are essential to an understanding of Debussy's piano music; as Edward Lockspeiser has said, "Literary and pictorial features need to be assessed in Debussy's work."13

Both symbolism and impressionism originated in France, largely in reaction against German romanticism. In the musical world, it was Wagner who had dominated the thoughts of late nineteenth and early twentieth century European composers. Music pedagogy on the continent had rigorously followed German models. Debussy had faced these academic methods at the Paris Conservatoire, and his refusal to follow them was apparently quite troublesome to the Conservatoire officials. When he first heard Wagner at the Bayreuth Festival in 1888, he was overcome by what seemed to him to be a break with old traditions, an idea compatible with his individualistic temperament; to him Wagner signaled a new era in music. His admiration did not,

12 Schmitz, op. cit., p. 182.
however, lead him to the stylistic imitation which characterized the "post-Wagnerian" trend of many of his contemporaries. In fact, his Wagner-infatuation dwindled as he matured and became increasingly inventive, independent, and French in attitude. H. H. Stuckenschmidt cites two factors that kept the French from giving in completely to the Wagnerian trend:

First, all French art of the period was marked by a growing cultivation of delicacy and restraint. It maintained an aristocratic attitude towards musical expression which proscribed any over-direct or even loud gesture. Secondly, French music had always kept alive the tradition of a 'modal' melodic and harmonic style. This ruled out the ever-growing chromaticism that had dominated German music since Bach. 14

Certainly, of all twentieth century French musicians, Debussy is notable for "delicacy and restraint." He himself recognized the "... pure French tradition full of charming and tender delicacy, well-balanced." 15 Even his personal habits evidence his predilection for refinement and simple elegance: A true epicure, he was disgusted by any slight vulgarity, including a plate piled with food, and ate, according to his friend, pianist Ricardo Viñes, "delicately, savoring each detail of the meal." 16 The dynamic ranges of many of the Preludes, in some cases not rising above "piano," reflect this traditionally French propensity. Debussy's undeniably nationalistic traits grew stronger as he grew older: he signed his last works


"Claude Debussy, musicien français". There are obvious manifestations in the Preludes, including the "Marseilles" quote at the end of Feux d'Artifice and the humorous, if not scornful poke at British pomposity in Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P. P. M. P. C.

Martin Cooper describes another aspect of the French, thus giving further insight into the extra-musical artistic influences on Debussy's music:

The regarding of a piece of music as an artefact—a thing of planned shape, dimensions, color and consistency—rather than as the expression of an emotion whose end is in itself, brings the French composer nearer than any other to the plastic artist. The pictorial element, varying from the most naive to the most sophisticated, has been a permanent feature in French music. . . 17

Moreover, Cooper finds a predilection for the Oriental in French culture, a fact which elucidates Debussy's fascination with the exotic. Cooper writes:

The oriental vein in French art goes back at least as far as the Lettres Persanes of Montesquieu and the 'chinoiseries' of the eighteenth century. It reappears in the Orientales of Victor Hugo and in Félicien David's poème-symphonie, Le Désert (1844) and his Lalla Roukh (1862). Bizet's Pêcheurs de Perles and Meyerbeer's L'Africaine continue the tradition. . . 18

"Exoticism" became an important element of Debussy's creativity after the World Exposition of 1889 introduced him to the Javanese gamelan. He was particularly intrigued by the sound-texture, slendro scale, 19 and timbre of the gamelan; he wrote that this music "make[s]  


18 Ibid., p. 44.

19 Perhaps the prototype of Debussy's whole-tone scale, the slendro scale has five nearly equal steps in the octave, each step slightly larger than a whole tone.
our tonic and dominant seem like ghosts. . ."²⁰ Debussy's impres-
sions of the gamelan were lasting, as evidenced by these vivid
recollections years later in 1913:

There were, and there still are, despite the evils of
civilization, some delightful native peoples for whom
music is as natural as breathing. Their conservatoire
is the eternal rhythm of the sea, the wind among the
leaves and the thousand sounds of nature which they
understand without consulting an arbitrary treatise.
Their traditions reside in old songs, combined with
dances, built up throughout the centuries. Yet Javanese
music is based on a type of counterpoint by comparison
with which that of Palestrina is child's play. And if
we listen without European prejudice to the charm of
their percussion we must confess that our percussion
is like primitive noises at a country fair.²¹

Easily associated with courtly elegance, the refined and often
esoteric sound of the Javanese gamelan was compatible with Debussy's
aesthetic tastes. Furthermore, the sound was delicate and sub-
dued: "Soft mallets. . . produce a softly undulating, rarefied
tonal color which blends well with the voices and which creates a
most pleasing illusion."²² It may be that Debussy experimented
with the Javanese gamelan acquired by the Paris Conservatoire in
1887. In any case, whether by chance or by design, many of the
sounds of his music parallel those of the gamelan. The "exotic"
trend can also be seen in pieces whose subjects deal with remote
times and places, such as Dansesuses de Delphes and La Puerta del Vino.

²⁰Quoted in Lockspeiser, Debussy: Man and Artist,
²¹Ibid.
²²Donald A. Lentz, The Gamelan Music of Java and Bali, (Lincoln:
At this same 1889 Exhibition, Debussy became very interested in the decorative arts of the Japanese and the Art Nouveau movement. Japanese art, characterized by understatement and delicacy, became a passion for Debussy: he often bought objets d'art with his last pennies, instead of food. One Japanese piece, a lacquer, is said to have inspired Poissons d'or, and Hokusai's famous print The Deep-Sea Wave off Kanagawa was to be reproduced on the cover of La Mer. While Japanese art appealed to Debussy's taste for the refined and delicate, Art Nouveau perhaps appealed most to his love of nature. The designs of Art Nouveau, characterized by asymmetrical, curling, curving shapes, and lines, derived from nature. Like the contemporary movements of Impressionism and Symbolism, Art Nouveau refused to accept ties with the past; the decorative objects it produced, such as wallpaper and vases, were to represent nature realistically, with lines and shapes that actually seemed to move and grow, rather than ideistically, with symmetrical, cloyingly pretty designs which are uncharacteristic of nature. Anything curling or curving, such as hair or waves, appealed to the Art Nouveau sensibility, as it did to Debussy. Not only did he choose subjects such as these to represent musically, but he also created musical designs comparable to those of Art Nouveau. These aspects of Debussy's style, as well as the other extra-musical concerns we have discussed, will be recalled later as we apply them to the musical conception of the Preludes.
Musical Influences

Debussy's style, like that of any composer, derives in part from techniques and ideas of other composers. We are principally concerned here with those musicians who influenced Debussy's pianistic style, particularly that of the Preludes. However, several more general influences also deserve mention.

We previously referred to the impact of Wagner on Debussy, and the fact that Debussy did not join with the "post-Wagnerians". He was in fact quite scornful of them, as he indicated when he wrote:

We are bound to admit that nothing was ever more dreary than the neo-Wagnerian school in which the French genius has lost its way among the sham Wotans in Hessian boots and the Tristans in velvet jackets. Wagner did, however, create lasting impressions on Debussy. Although he revolted against Wagner's musical techniques and expression, he admired his spirit of experimentation. In fact, it is conceivable that if it were not for the impetus Wagner provided--both toward experimentation and away from romantic massiveness of sound and expression--Debussy might not have reach his own inventive achievements.

Satie's influence on Debussy, like Wagner's, was more of a psychological or philosophical nature than a technical one. Although Debussy perhaps learned musical archaism and simplicity from Satie, it was Satie's sardonic humor, experimental ideas and Bohemian ways that were probably most lastingly influential.

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23 Debussy, op. cit., p. 66.
Liszt was somewhat an influence, but from all records, was impressive to Debussy more for his performing than his music. It was Ravel whose piano style was strongly influenced by Liszt. The exchange of ideas between Ravel and Debussy, comparable to that of Haydn and Mozart, perhaps accounts for the Lisztian virtuosity of a few piano pieces, including the Preludes Feux d'Artifice and Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest, as well as L'Isle joyeuse and Mouvement.

After the French Clavicin composers, whom Debussy studied and admired, he extended the keyboard manner of delicacy and restraint. Moreover, such works as "The Cuckoo" (Daquin) were the prototypes of Debussy's representational pieces.

Debussy himself admitted to his strong admiration of Mussorgsky, writing that "... he will leave an indelible impression of the minds of those who love him or will love him in the future. No one has given utterance to the best within us in tones more gentle or profound. ... he has many claims to our devotion." Martin Cooper suggests relationships between some of the Preludes and Mussorgsky's Pictures from an Exhibition:

... the conception of many of the Preludes owes something to Mussorgsky's Pictures from an Exhibition, though Debussy's nature and his way of writing for the piano were totally unlike Mussorgsky's. There are striking parallels in the simple, intimate genre pictures (cf. Mussorgsky's Il vecchio castello and Debussy's Sérénade interrompue or Puerta del Vino), fantastic portraits, fairy pieces (Mussorgsky's Hut on Fowls' Legs and Debussy's Ondine or Les fees sont d'exquisites danseuses) or mysterious evocations (Mussorgsky's Catacombs and Debussy's La Cathédrale engloutie).

25 Cooper, op. cit., p. 139.
Furthermore, the titles of Mussorgsky's *Pictures* come at the ends of the pieces, as they do in the Preludes.

However, according to the memoirs of Marguerite Long, it was Chopin whom Debussy recognized as his principal model. His piano style derives from the spirit of Chopin, as indeed does the collection of twenty-four short pieces under the title "Preludes".

The Chopin influence is directly traceable to the child Debussy's piano teacher, Madame Mauté, who was a pupil of Chopin. As a youth and student at the Paris Conservatoire, Debussy's awareness of the older composer was expanded in Marmontel's piano class, where Chopin was frequently played. From this background, Debussy apparently retained a lasting admiration and respect: Late in his life he worked on a French edition of Chopin's complete piano works, and dedicated to him his own last major piano work, the twelve *Etudes*, which, like the Preludes, found their prototype in Chopin.

The Preludes of both composers are not introductory movements, but complete pieces, which are varied in length, tempo and mood. However each individual piece maintains its peculiar quality. Both sets amply explore the resources of the piano, and offer the pianist a wide range of technical and interpretative possibilities. Both indeed exemplify idiomatic piano writing.

Debussy's compositional impetus, however, differs from Chopin's. While he did derive certain compositional ideas from his forerunner, such as ornamental filigrees, his compositional language included

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26 See Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, Vol. II, p. 44.
scales and harmonies—in a word, sounds—that were virtually unknown to the nineteenth century composer. Although both Debussy and Chopin deal with moods in their Preludes, their approaches are essentially different. Debussy's is the more objective, in the sense that his moods are reactions to particular objects or activities; Chopin's moods, unrelated to an evoking source, are subjective. As Alfred Cortot has written:

The romantic conception of the Prelude—the conception that flourished in the feverish imagination of Chopin—as the fiery, concentrated expression of a human emotion constrained only by the limit of its agony or of its passion, was to mean nothing to Debussy until altered to conform to the demands of a more objective art and a less impulsive spirit.  

Chopin's twenty-four Preludes are united by a key scheme that includes the complete major-minor cycle. Debussy's pieces have no such organization, and unlike Chopin's cycle were published in two series, Book I, 1910 and Book II, 1913. Book II is considered to be more experimental than Book I. E. Robert Schmitz explains that the second series at times proves "more advanced in its musical language, more difficult in its interpretations, and perhaps tending towards a more abstract treatment of its literary connotations." Biographer Edward Lockspeiser feels that the earlier book contains the "best examples" of musical ideas, finding that most of the later book is "lacking in spontaneity". Reviews at the time of their first

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28 Schmitz, op. cit., p. 129.
performance were also critical of pieces from Book II. The following, by E. Stoulilg, appeared in March, 1913 in Le Monde Artiste:

M. Debussy, in person, played three of his new Preludes. The first, "Bruyères", has no significance at all; the second, "Feuilles Mortes", has very little more; the third, "Puerta del vino". . . is an improvement on the two first pieces, without being at all remarkable. . . M. Debussy is undoubtedly a man of great talent and a very clever pianist. But he must realize himself that his trifling little pieces do not deserve the same ova-
tions as the masterpieces of Gluck, Beethoven or Mozart. 30

In fact, it seems that Debussy himself declared that "They are not all good". 31 Perhaps present-day critiques would not be so deprecatory of the second book. In any case, the final pleasure or displeasure with a piece must rest with the individual performer or listener.

We have mentioned that each Prelude of Debussy's is titled. In the ensuing chapter we shall discuss the significance of these titles, why they may have been chosen, and how the ideas or moods they evoke are represented musically.

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CHAPTER II

DESCRIPTIVE NATURE AND REPRESENTATIONAL CONTENT
OF THE PRELUDES

Descriptive Nature

"It seems that Debussy needed at all times some extra-musical—
poetic or pictorial—stimulus," writes Edward Lockspeiser.¹ The
Preludes, which, except for one, all have descriptive, extra-musical
titles, certainly give evidence to that statement.

Debussy's kind of description differs, however, from that of
his romantic predecessors. For them, it was the function of the
short, titled "character piece" to paint, as it were, a "musical
picture." The title announced the subject which the music pro-
ceeded to describe. Debussy's titles, on the other hand, suggest,
rather than announce; as has been previously mentioned, his pieces
were not meant to describe the scenes, objects or characters of
the titles, but rather, the mood evoked by them. In the words of
Oscar Thompson, Debussy "... dealt not with scenes, but with
feelings prompted by scenes."²

Since it is a mood and not the scene itself that is expressed

¹Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy (London: J. M. Dent and Sons

²Oscar Thompson, Debussy, Man and Artist (New York: Tudor
in the Preludes, their titles need not be the listener's prime consideration. This is indicated by Debussy himself, by placing the titles at the ends, rather than the beginnings of the pieces, preceding them with elipses, and enclosing them in parentheses. In fact, it is believed that some of the titles were added after the music was written. It seems to be Debussy's intent that the listener's attention be drawn to the music itself. Thus, "the titles merely serve to indicate what the music might possibly suggest."³

While the listener may not necessarily react according to the titles' implications, the performer's interpretation is guided and deeply enriched by considering them. A realization of how Debussy came to choose these specific titles, as well as an understanding of the subjects and their musical representation, can only serve to contribute to an effective interpretation.

Most of the Preludes demonstrate one of two general types, dealing either with nature and the out-of-doors, or characters and some kind of activity. However, these are not strict classifications, and they frequently overlap. Les collines d'Anacapri, for instance, represents both a bright outdoor scene and gay dancers. Canope, on the other hand, fits neither of the two classifications accurately, but, because this Prelude refers to a funeral urn, it could be associated with characters and occasions. The

following lists, therefore, are not final classifications, but merely present one of several possible ways of viewing the general subjects of the Preludes.¹

**Nature; Out-of-Doors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voiles</th>
<th>Danseuses de Delphes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Le vent dans la plaine</td>
<td>La fille aux cheveux de lin</td>
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<td>Les sons et les parfums</td>
<td>La sérénade interrompue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Les collines d'Anacapri</td>
<td>La Danse de Puck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Des pas sur la neige</td>
<td>Minstrels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest</td>
<td>La Puerta del Vino</td>
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<tr>
<td>La Cathédrale engloutie</td>
<td>&quot;Les fées...&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brouillas</td>
<td>General Lavine---eccentric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feuilles mortes</td>
<td>Ondine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruyères</td>
<td>Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La terrasse des audiences</td>
<td>Canope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feux d'Artifice</td>
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Debussy's love of nature seems to have two interrelated aspects: sensuous pleasure in the beauties of nature, and mystical fascination in the unknown, invisible workings of nature. He endeavored to express musically both sides of nature---visible and invisible---for he felt that:

... music, and music alone, has the power of evoking at will imaginary scenes—that real yet elusive world which gives birth in secret to the mystic poetry of the night and the thousand nameless sounds of the leaves caressed by the moonlight.⁵

Moreover, he dreamed of an "open-air music," where:

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¹Seldin (Ibid., p. 10) presents an alternate view of the Preludes' subjects; he sees them as representing either the "contemporary scene" or "remote times and places."

The murmuring of the breeze would be mystically mingled with the rustling of the leaves and the scent of the flowers, since music can unite all of them in a harmony so completely natural that it seems to become one with them.\(^6\)

The Preludes which deal with nature reflect his particularly deep sensitivity to the elements water and wind. The motion of both elements describes the wavy, lashing lines characteristic of Art Nouveau. Both elements are unstable and capable of changing temperaments and impressionistic visual effects. Several of the Preludes capture these qualities. For instance, the intoxicating calm and beauty of the sea and of the evening air are felt, respectively, in *Voiles* and *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir*. On the other hand, *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest* expresses the angry turbulence of a raging storm.

It may well be that the associations with water in many of Debussy's works have symbolic significance. Paraphrasing Debussy's friend Robert Godet, Edward Lockspeiser discusses the symbolism in several works:

Contentment is associated with the impressionistic vision of rain in *Jardins sous la pluie*, also with the ruminations of *Reflets dans l'eau*. On another, more sombre, plane, water is symbolically associated with the funereal mood of *La Cathédrale engloutie* while in *Pelléas*, in the scene of the vaults, we are made aware of the stench of stagnant water. *Pelléas* presents a variety of dream associations of this kind. Stagnant water is associated with death in the vaults scene, but Melisande's wedding-ring falls into clear fountain water.\(^7\)

\(^6\)Ibid., p. 33.

Lockspeiser further discusses theories of Gaston Bachelard, dealing with water's symbolic associations, and suggesting that they may be applied to Debussy's work. He writes that "Deeper waters and particularly stagnant waters . . . are associated with contemplation and thus lead rapidly . . . to fantasies of the unconscious." This association seems particularly applicable to Debussy's music, since several of the Preludes, including some which do not deal with water, express stagnancy and fantasy, both in subject matter and musical content.

The world of myths and fantasy was certainly an important part of Debussy's creative mind. In these excerpts from a critique of Weber, apropos of Oberon, he indicates his own intrigue with the fantastic in music:

At all events he [Weber] utilized the legend, feeling that thus music would find its natural course. . . .
He was master of every known means of interpreting the fantastic through music.  

Edward Lockspeiser feels that Debussy's mental world of fantasy is indicated by the fact that he left so many works unfinished. He writes:

Debussy's ideal was that music should convey the impression of a sophisticated improvisation. More than this, he placed greater value on the fertilization of a musical idea than on that vital point where fantasy becomes reality and the artist finds himself alarmingly severed from his dream world. The final

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9 *Debussy, op. cit.*, p. 34.
exteriorization of a work was frequently difficult for him, and even, as the ideal, repugnant. ¹⁰

The fantasies in the Preludes deal with animate creatures, as well as inanimate nature. The world of sprites or fairies of the water may be related to Debussy's Art Nouveau sensibility, for, as Nikolaus Pevsner writes, "Hair and waves and seaweeds were as alluring as such elemental creatures themselves,"¹¹ (cf. Ondine).

Other characters in the Preludes are of a variety of comical types. Puck and Pickwick are both amusing, full of misadventures. General Lavine presents a sophisticated, satiric kind of humor, whereas the humor of the characters in Minstrels is raucous and gay. Other character-Preludes represent the human traits of shyness (La sérénade interrompue), sensuality (La Puerta del Vino), and nobility (Danseuses de Delphes).

The various subjects of the Preludes seem to have been suggested to Debussy through either painting, literature or legend, myth or fantasy, or an occasion in either his life or a more remote era. Frequently, more than one of these stimuli merge in one piece, the result of an inevitable "network of associations."

Previous mention was made of those Preludes which may be associated with impressionist paintings of water (pp. 6-7). Although it would be faulty to infer that Debussy consciously imitated the


visual arts, there exist notable parallels between several of the Preludes and famous paintings. *La Cathédrale engloutie*, probably inspired by an ancient Breton myth, nevertheless strongly recalls Monet's series of paintings of the cathedral at Rouen,\(^\text{12}\) which Debussy may have seen when the pictures were exhibited in Paris in 1895. Although not a "water piece," *Brouillards*, which strongly alludes to the London fogs, was also a likely subject for the painters. Debussy's own visits to London probably provided stimulus for this piece, but Lockspeiser feels that Turner's "misty pictures of the Thames," in all probability seen by Debussy in 1902-3, could also have made an impression that the composer later expressed in this piece.\(^\text{13}\)

*La Puerta del Vino* originated from a picture, generally supposed to have been a photograph of the gate of the Alhambra, on a postcard from Manuel de Falla.

Yet in no way should one try to find the stimulus of this prelude in the door of the Alhambra, but rather in the turbulent life of the piazza in front of it, where daily are celebrated the joys of wine and song, flamenco singing, drunken roistering, the call of mule drivers, and the unifying pervading rhythm of the habanera, feline in its capacity for nervous accents one moment and languid grace the next. It is a scene of violent contrasts between passionate softness and extreme brutality, of undiluted primary colors.\(^\text{14}\)


\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 21.

This piece is particularly evocative of Debussy's vivid, imaginative reactions to visual stimuli, and is doubly remarkable since Debussy never visited Spain.

Pictorial imagery inspired several of the Preludes that are not associated with specific paintings. Nevertheless they suggest strong visual impressions of landscapes that painters might well have chosen. Des pas sur la neige achieves the bleak desolation of a winter landscape, while Bruyères recalls an almost sentimental pastoral scene in the spring. The melancholy of fall, created by the falling leaves and greying skies, is conveyed in Feuilles mortes, and the exuberence of a bright, clear summer day is felt in Les collines d'Anacapri. Le vent dans la plaine similarly evokes pictorial images. Seascapes are the visual counterparts of Voiles, where the sea is calm, and Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest, where a turbulent storm at sea is suggested.

The creative imagination of a composer is inevitably impelled by his own experience. Thus several of the Preludes have been related to events in Debussy's life. Brouillards, for instance, may have been reminiscent of Debussy's visits to London, as has been mentioned. A sojourn much earlier in the composer's life may have retained impressions expressed in two of the Preludes. In 1879, when he was seventeen, Debussy spent the summer as pianist for Marguerite Wilson-Pelouze at Chenonceaux, the historic chateau which at one time housed Diane de Poitiers and Catherine d'Medici, among others. As an impressionable youth of little means, he must
have been overwhelmed by the luxury and magnificence of the palace built over the river Cher. Edward Lockspeiser aptly chose the words of Larousse to describe it: "Rising like Venus from the bosom of the waves."\(^{15}\) Lockspeiser goes on to suggest (p. 38), that Debussy retained this image when he composed *Ondine*. It seems entirely possible that Debussy also recalled the impression while conceiving *La Cathédrale engloutie*, which the line of Larousse quickly brings to mind.

Another incident, ten years later in 1889, may have been among Debussy's recollections when he wrote *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest*. In that year, while visiting the coast of Brittainy, he and some friends embarked on a sea voyage during a violent storm, about which Debussy is reported to have said, "Now here's a type of passionate feeling that I have not before experienced—Danger! It is not unpleasant. One is alive!"\(^{16}\) These sentiments, which exhibit a "passionate fascination for evil," are certainly evident in this Prelude, which is "full of the nightmarish quality" of the "tragically destructive, magnificently powerful element gathering force over the expanse of the Atlantic."\(^{17}\)

About 1895, Debussy began frequenting the Paris cafes that have since become a recognized aspect of artistic life at the turn

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\(^{15}\) Quoted in Lockspeiser, * Debussy: His Life and Mind*, Vol. I, p. 35.


\(^{17}\) Schmitz, * op. cit.*, p. 147.
of the century. One of them, an Irish and American bar called Reynold's, featured the singing and tap dancing acts amusingly re-called by Debussy in Minstrels. Years later (1910), another Paris music hall, the Théâtre Marigny on the Champs-Élysées, presented 'General Ed lavine, the Man who has Soldiered all his Life.' He was a famous American comic juggler, said to have appeared nine feet tall, whom Debussy saw and immortalized in General Lavine—eccentric. About a year before the death of Mr. Lavine in 1946, an article by Alfred Frankenstein appeared in the "This World" section of the San Francisco Chronicle of March 11, 1945. The following are excerpts:

Whenever you look at a campaign ribbon on a soldier's chest you are, in all probability, inspecting the handiwork of the only human being, living or dead, of whom Claude Debussy composed a musical portrait. Today Edward Lavine lives in the desert town of Twenty-nine Palms, Calif., hard by the Joshua Tree National Monument, and calmly manufactures most of the 'service bars' that are used in the Army, but when Debussy wrote about him he was one of the most celebrated figures in international vaudeville. He was a comic juggler, half tramp and half warrior, but more tramp than warrior. . . .

But whether it be an impression pure and simple or an impression concocted from music originally conceived as an accompaniment to the General's antics, the prelude certainly does convey an atmosphere of jerky movement and fantastic comedy.18

The fireworks displays of countless Bastille Day celebrations were undoubtedly the inspiration of Feux d'Artifice. The quote of the "Marseilles" theme at the end of the piece alludes to the

18 Ibid., quoted on pp. 172 and 173.
nationalistic spirit of the holiday. Fireworks, originally from the Orient, were likely to captivate a composer who was fascinated with oriental music and painting, as well as the visual sensations of splashing colors and changing patterns.

Two of the Preludes, Danseuses de Delphes and Canope, are related to ceremonies of ancient eras. Referring to the funereal urns of ancient Egypt, Canope conveys the simple dignity and mystery of an ancient burial rite. Danseuses de Delphes evokes the grave and mysterious spirit of the Temple of Apollo, located in the ancient Grecian city of Delphi. The subject was, perhaps, suggested to Debussy by sculptures and friezes portraying maidens dancing in a subdued, dignified manner, to the music of cymbals and harps. In any case, Debussy would have been attracted to the exoticism of the ancient Greeks; he was familiar with Greek drama, as he indicated when he wrote, "... why not remember the Greeks: Do we not find in Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus the mighty impulses of humanity simply portrayed with such natural tragedy of effects that they are at once intelligible to the least enlightened and to the least cultured minds?"\(^19\) He referred again to the ancient Greeks in a review of Gluck's opera Iphigenia in Aulis; he perhaps reveals here the mood or idea he wished to convey in these Preludes:

\[\ldots\] for, by a gift, which makes us believe in the survival of the ancient gods, hers is the soul of tragedy which raises the dark veil from the past and calls to life again those dead cities where the worship of Beauty was harmoniously wedded with the worship of Art.\(^20\)

\(^{19}\) Debussy, op. cit., p. 42.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 70.
Closely akin in imagination to these two Preludes of ancient lore, are those associated with myths or legends. La Cathédrale engloutie derives from the Breton legend that describes the Cathedral of Ys, "engulfed in the fourth or fifth century 'because of the impiety of the inhabitants,' but allowed to rise again and to be seen (as an example to others) at sunrise."^{21}

Ondine and "Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses" both explore the mythological world of supernatural beings. The impish fairy Puck, subject of La Danse de Puck, was the only Shakespearean character to inspire a piano work of Debussy.^{22} As page to the fairy king Oberon, Puck was the mischief maker who caused the mix-up of characters that forms the plot in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Debussy described Puck as "that merry reveller of the night, that mischievous rascal, that sweet player of pranks ..."^{23}

Pickwick, of Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C., is also a character from British literature. The humorous hero of Dickens' The Pickwick Papers, Samuel Pickwick found himself engaged in countless laughable adventures. Debussy's idea for this Prelude, or at least for the title, might have derived from his friend, poet and novelist Paul-Jean Toulet, with whom he collaborated on As You

^{21}Schmitz, op. cit., p. 155.

^{22}Other projects involving works of Shakespeare included incidental music to King Lear, which was published posthumously, and a setting of As You Like It, which Debussy was concerned with all his life, but which never came to fruition.

^{23}Debussy, op. cit., p. 33.
Like It. Toulet, a strong admirer of Dickens, wrote that he was 'almost as widely read in Paris as in London.'

La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune seems also to have had a literary inspiration, but there is some indecision regarding its exact source. Debussy may have read Pierre Loti's description of "the terraces to hold counsel at moonlight ('terrasses pour tenir conseil au clair de lune')." But it is more likely, according to most authorities, and Debussy's friend Robert Godet, that the title originated in a letter of René Piaux to the newspaper Le Temps. Piaux, apropos of the coronation of King George V as Emperor of India, spoke of 'The hall of victory, the hall of pleasure, the garden of the sultanesses, the terrace for moonlight audiences . . .'.

Poetry is linked with several of the Preludes. Like La terrasse des audiences, Les sons et les parfums must have appealed to Debussy's symbolist sense of the intoxicating sound of words, as well as the mood they evoke. The line derives from symbolist Charles Baudelaire's "Harmonie du soir" (Evening Harmony) in the set Les Fleurs du Mal. Debussy had known the poem at least twenty years before he wrote the Prelude; it was among those he set in Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire (1890). The sensuous intoxication and

25 Schmitz, op. cit., p. 175.
feeling of the piece match that of the poem:

This is the time when each vibrating flower,
like a censer, is breathing forth its scent;
perfumes and sounds in the evening air are blent; 27
melancholy waltz and dizzy languor!

Each flower, like a censer, breathes its scent;
the violin quivers, like a heart that suffers;
melancholy waltz and dizzy languor!
The sky, like an alter, is sad and magnificent.

The violin quivers, like a heart that suffers,
hating the Nothing's black extent!
The sky, like an alter, is sad and magnificent;
drowning in curdled blood, the sun sinks lower.

A heart that hates the Nothing's black extent
each vestige of past radiance must gather!
Drowning in curdled blood, the sun sinks lower; ... your memory shines in me like a Sacrament! 28

Like the Baudelaire poem, La fille aux cheveux de lin, from
Leconte de Lisle's collection Poèmes Antiques: Chansons Ecossaises,
was known to Debussy long before his Prelude appeared. It was one
of two Leconte de Lisle poems that Debussy set in 1880:

The Girl with the Flaxen Hair

By the radiant flower bed
Who sings since early morn?
It's the girl with the flaxen hair,
The beauty with cherry-red lips.

Of love, by the bright summer sun
With the lark, she sang.

Your mouth has divine colors,
My pet - and is tempting to kiss!
Do you wish to chat on the flowering lawn,
Maid with long eyelashes, and fine curls?

27 "Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir"
Of love, by the bright summer sun
With the lark, she sang.

Don't say no, cruel maid!!
Don't say yes!! I will best understand
The long gaze of your large eyes
And your rosy lips, O my beauty!!

Of love, by the bright summer sun
With the lark, she sang.

Farewell deer, farewell hare
And red partridge!! I would
Kiss the flax of your hair,
Press the crimson of your lips!!

Of love, by the bright summer sun
With the lark, she sang. 29

It is not surprising that Debussy, fascinated as he was with the
aesthetic of Art Nouveau, was enchanted by this title, and the visual
image of flowing hair. 30

Although this Prelude was almost certainly inspired by the
Leconte de Lisle poem, it is possible that Debussy had read, per-
haps on one of his journeys to the British Isles, and recalled this
poem of Robert Burns:

Lassie Wi' The Lint-White Locks

Chorus

Lassie wi' the lint-white locks,
Bonnie lassie, actless lassie,
Wilt thou wi' me tent the flocks
Wilt thou be my dearie O?

29 Translated from the French by Herbert Seldin, op. cit., pp.
95-96.

30 A pastel design of a woman with flowing hair was made by
Debussy for the frontespiece of a novel by his friend René Peter.
Now Nature decks the flowery lea
And a' is young and sweet like thee:
Oh, wilt thou share its joys wi' me,
   And say thou'll be my dearie O?

And when the welcome simmer shower
Has cheered ilk drooping little flower,
We'll to the breathing woodline bower,
   At sultry noon, my dearie O.

When Cynthia lights, wi' silver ray,
The weary sherer's homeward way,
Through yellow waving fields we'll stray,
   And talk o' love, my dearie O.

And when the howling wintry blast
Disturbs my lassie's midnight rest,
Enclasped to my faithful breast,
   I'll comfort thee, my dearie O.

Edward Lockspeiser discusses Debussy's admiration of Shelly, whom he had read in Felix Rabbe's French translation, and suggests that Debussy must have remembered the following lines from *Ode to the West Wind* when composing *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest*:

\[
\text{Thou}
\]
\[
\text{For whose path the Atlantic's level powers}
\]
\[
\text{Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below}
\]
\[
\text{The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear}
\]
\[
\text{The sapless foliage of the ocean, know}
\]
\[
\text{Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear,}
\]
\[
\text{And tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!}
\]

It is interesting to compare the two books of Preludes in light of the descriptive nature of the pieces. There are several instances in which two Preludes, one from each book, derive from similar descriptive sources and hence demonstrate similarities in both extra-musical subject matter and musical idiom.

Perhaps the most well-known pair of this kind is that of *La Puerta del Vino* (Bk. II) and *La sérénade interrompue* (Bk. I).
Each is known for its particular Spanish characteristic: the habanera rhythm in *La Puerta del Vino*,

*Ex. 1*

and the guitar figurations in *La sérénade interrompue*, for example:

*Ex. 2*

Both of these musical ideas, while different in rhythm, meter, character and style, nevertheless serve the same structural function as accompaniments that extend throughout most of each piece. The habanera rhythm, an ostinato, continues unvaried, except for one transposition to B♭; the "guitar" figures, on the other hand,
are presented in several variations of those illustrated in Ex. 2. For instance, the simple $F-g^b-F-g^b-F-G^b$ line of measures 1-2 (Ex. 2) grows into the accompaniment pattern of the initial *copla.*

Ex. 3 *La sérénade interrompue*

Each piece, while maintaining its discrete, individual character, shares with the other musical elements common to the Spanish idiom. Both, in fact, use the same melodic material, based on a Spanish folk-song. Manuel de Falla discusses Debussy's remarkable use of this folk-song in several works:

In the *Soirée dans Granade* the chant is syllabic, whereas in *La Puerta del Vino* the chant appears with ornamentations peculiar to the Andalusian *cante jondo.* This ornamented chant, used earlier in the *Sérénade interrompue* and in the second theme of the *Danse profane,* shows the extent to which Debussy was acquainted with the most subtle variations of our folk-song.

The basic melodic structure of the folk-song is characterized by

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31 *Copla* is the couplet or stanza of a Spanish refrain song; *estribillo* is the refrain.

32 *Cante jondo,* literally "deep song," is a highly emotional, tragic type of Spanish gypsy song.

a fluctuation between two notes a half step apart, frequently dropping the interval of a third at the cadence point. The most straightforward presentation of the chant appears in the melody line, measures 32-42, of La sérénade interrompue:

Ex. 4

In La Puerta del Vino the chant is more highly embellished. Thus it is useful to extract the basic melodic movement from the written melody in order to discern the presence of the chant. Measures 11-20 examined in this way reveal the folk-song, and furthermore, Debussy's use of it:

Ex. 5
The above examples, like Ex. 4, present the half-step melodic fluctuation and the fall of the interval of a third at the cadence point. Agogic stresses on the E's and F's, as well as the tenuto marks over the F's, support the view that Debussy was indeed consciously quoting the chant.

The chant appears again in La Puerta del Vino, embellished in yet another way:

Ex. 7

Ex. 8

It appears with other alterations as well: In La Puerta del Vino, it is transposed to different pitch levels, and, in the second measure of Ex. 9, the characteristic minor second becomes a major second. Notable also are the strummed guitar effects of this passage:
Ex. 9 La Puerta del Vino

In La sérénade interrompue, the tune is the basis for an harmonic accompaniment pattern:

Ex. 10
Transposed to F and G♭, the chant may also be the basic material for the opening measures of La sérénade interrompue (see Ex. 2), and the accompaniment pattern beginning in measure 25 (see Ex. 3).

Debussy's interest in the Spanish folk-song may be related in part to his interest in liturgical music and particularly its modal character. Falla writes, "Since Spanish folk-song is largely based on modal music, it came about that even in works which Debussy wrote without any idea of Spanish associations one finds modes, cadences, chord sequences, rhythms, and even turns of phrase which clearly reveal a relationship with our spontaneous folk-music."³⁴

There are several other factors which no doubt contributed to Debussy's keen awareness of the Spanish idiom. His fascination with the exotic in music, which came to the fore at the World Exhibition of 1889, led his interests to many kinds of strange and different music. Spanish music, often evocative of sensual movements and strong feelings, would certainly have appealed to Debussy's particular creative instincts; Edward Lockspeiser writes that "... the attraction of the Romantic Spanish scene for French artists had a long history."³⁵ Furthermore, Debussy's association with Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes, who premiered many of his works, may likely have increased his interest in Spanish music.

³⁴ Ibid.
Debussy's mastery of the Spanish idiom has long been recognized and admired:

The most conspicuous non-French aspects of Debussy's work are those of Spanish origin. This is not surprising; the same is true of other composers, among them Bizet, Chabrier, and Ravel, and it is a well-known historical fact, recognized by the Spaniards themselves, that the most original and often the most authentic Spanish music has been written north of the Pyrenees.\(^{36}\)

Other pairs of pieces from the two books of Preludes have non-French associations. For instance, *La fille aux cheveux de lin* (Bk. I) and *Brüeřes* (Bk. II) both evoke Scottish images: *La fille*, inspired by Leconte de Lisle's "Scottish song,"\(^{37}\) and perhaps influenced by Burns' "Lassie Wi' the Lint White Locks," and *Brüeřes*, conceived, Schmitz suggests, after the "moors of the Scottish highlands."\(^{38}\) Herbert Seldin finds several resemblences between the two pieces:

Both begin with unaccompanied melodic lines that are pentatonic in character. Technically, both are fairly easy to perform. Regarding their rather conventional harmonic style, both compositions might have been written at a much earlier date than the other preludes. Finally, very much alike in character, both are soft, melodious, and pastoral.\(^{39}\)

Furthermore, the overall form of both is ternary. The unaccompanied opening lines that Seldin mentions reappear near the ends.

\(^{36}\)Ibid.


\(^{38}\)Schmitz, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

\(^{39}\)Seldin, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
of the pieces, in each case an octave higher than the initial statements and accompanied by full, sustained chords:

Ex. 11  La fille aux cheveux de lin

Ex. 12  Bruyères
Similar musical elements are also used in the non-French pair of La Danse de Puck (Bk. I) and Hommage à S. Pickwick (Bk. II), both portraits of humorous characters from British literature. Each piece conveys a cheerful, if not nonchalant, kind of mood, perhaps created musically by the predominant dotted rhythms in both works:

Ex. 13 La Danse de Puck

Ex. 14 Hommage à S. Pickwick

The allusion to whistling in Hommage à S. Pickwick is particularly reminiscent of the capricious, puckish nature of the earlier Prelude:

Ex. 15 Hommage à S. Pickwick

Each book of Preludes contains a piece evocative of the spirit of ceremonial rites in ancient eras. Danseuses de Delphes (Bk. I) and Canope (Bk. II), probably inspired by sculpted figures or objects, express the sense of mystery, reverence and dignity of bygone cultures. There are more dissimilarities in
musical structures than have been noted in previous examples. In *Canope*, for instance, there is a much more static musical quality than in *Danseuses de Delphes*. This is caused in part by the recurrence of sustained chordal accompaniments, which effect a slow harmonic rhythm, and by fréquent repeated-note motifs. By comparison, *Danseuses de Delphes* has rapid harmonic rhythm and is less repetitive. Furthermore, *Canope* presents tonal ambiguities, while *Danseuses de Delphes* is firmly rooted in the key of B♭ major. Nevertheless, both pieces follow ternary forms and exhibit pervasive chordal textures.

Finally, the common origin of American music hall types creates the pairing of *Minstrels* (Bk. I) and *General Lavine--eccentric* (Bk. II). E. Robert Schmitz compares the two pieces in the following paragraph; his opening remarks are apropos of *General Lavine*:

> In the mood, the harmonic and melodic language, the opposition of strident rhythms with sentimental moments, one cannot escape the comparison to "Minstrels"; indeed, these excursions into American humor share even motifs in common, but there the logic of composition ends, and the infinite psychological subtlety of Debussy contrives sufficient difference to mark his degree of observation. Lavine is more discreet, more refined in his humor, albeit perhaps less direct. His is not a folk expression, but a highly sophisticated satire. The effects are more studied, polished, further from the feline pulse of the minstrel cake-walker, and also of his bawdy jokes.⁴⁰

The common motifs that Schmitz mentions derive from the use of the pentatonic scale in both pieces. These pentatonic elements are evident in the passages quoted below, both of which are impor-

tant recurring melodies:

Ex. 16 Minstrels

Ex. 17 General Lavine

The pentatonic patterns present in the above examples, as well as throughout each piece, are given below; the pitches are arbitrary, because they vary in both pieces:

Ex. 18

These interval structures, as well as the pentatonic scale from which they derive, account for the similarities in harmony and melody in Minstrels and General Lavine.

We might then say that the two books of Preludes present a wide range of musical types and non-musical subjects, although several pieces from the two books are able to be paired according to their similarities in these two areas.
Representational Content

The extra-musical ideas that have been discussed are given meaning by the music itself; that is to say, the music conveys the imagery and mood that the titles suggest. It is therefore important to the performer to understand not only the implications of these titles, but also the musical means used to express them. This section will not involve musical devices as structural elements; that subject will be taken up in another chapter. Rather, it will examine how musical materials are employed to create extra-musical allusions.

Some of the Preludes demonstrate a wide range of representational devices, while others center around a single one or two. The latter is true of Des pas sur la neige, in which the simple ostinato conveys the picture and mood of the piece, as well as the meaning of the title. 41 "[The] stumbling rhythm [of the ostinato], persistent and immutable, is the counterpart of the faltering steps, placed first on the crusty surface, then sinking deep into the snow of this desolate, pale-gray expanse." 42

Ex. 19 Ostinato of Des pas sur la neige

41 However, it is interesting to note that the title may have been added after the piece was composed.

42 Schmitz, op. cit., p. 145.
This snap-like rhythm may represent not only the uncertainty of the steps, but also the actual sound of the foot, crunching from heel to toe in the frozen snow. The persistence of this dragging, static rhythm creates the lonely, desolate feeling of one person viewing the bleak panorama of a cold, motionless winter landscape. In Debussy's own words, the ostinato "should have the aural value of a melancholy, snowbound landscape."\(^{43}\) Other musical elements enhance the mood set by the ostinato. Open fifths in the bass (measures 5-7 and 20-23) point up the feeling of emptiness, and the line of descending fifths at the end of the composition suggests receding footsteps. The melody line is constantly broken with rests, suggesting perhaps uncertainty, sighing, weariness, and regrets—feelings "to which the footfalls add the obsession of finality beyond recall."\(^{44}\)

Edward Lockspeiser recalls the suggestion of Vladimir Jankelévitch that "the many dragging rhythms and pedals used by Debussy indicate a preoccupation in his work with stagnation and particularly the stagnation of water."\(^{45}\) This stagnant quality, seen in the rhythm of *Des pas sur la neige*, is present in the harmonic material of *Voiles*. The static, unstable rocking motion of the boat (or the free floating of veils) finds its musical counterpart in the whole-tone scale, \(A^b-B^b-C-D-E-F^#\), which permeates almost

\(^{43}\)"Ce rythme doit avoir la valeur sonore d'un fond de paysage triste et glace"

\(^{44}\)Schmitz, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

the entire composition. Having no tonal center and containing three tritones, the scale itself is inherently unstable, due to its construction by equal whole-steps. These six steps add further to the unstable quality, because they provide more possibilities of modulation than, for instance, a four-note diminished 7th chord or a three-note augmented triad; hence, there are more possibilities of key fluctuation and tonal ambiguity. The seemingly unrooted motion that the whole-tone scale creates is counteracted by the persistent $B^\flat$ pedal point, which may well represent the stability of a boat's anchor. Both musical elements—the $B^\flat$ pedal point, which is part of the scale, and the scale itself—maintain the prevalent lack of progression that creates the image and mood of the piece.

Debussy uses an oscillating accompaniment figure in *Voiles* that appears in several of the Preludes and seems to represent the turning, swirling, or wavy motion associated with water or wind. In *Voiles*, the figure probably represents the rocking boat in gentle waves:

Ex. 20

Le vent dans la plaine, which immediately follows *Voiles* in Book I, uses a similar figure throughout most of the piece to rep-
resent the whirling, perpetual motion of the wind:

Ex. 21 Le vent dans la plaine

Strong gushes of wind are represented by the sudden crashing chords which momentarily break this perpetual motion:

Ex. 22

The next piece, Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir, again uses the turning accompaniment figure, although here it is the melodic inversion of the previous two examples. The slow, languid tempo of this figure, like that in Voiles, suggests an intoxicating, languorous mood, as opposed to the energetic, nervous mood created by the figure in Le vent dans la plaine. As the title suggests, the figure below represents the swirling fragrances of the evening air:
Ex. 23  Les sons et les parfums

La Cathédrale engloutie contains a similar figure, representative of water's lapping waves; this composition will be discussed presently in greater detail.

Just as the turning figure represents a certain quality, so does the trill. Debussy uses this ornamental device in only two Preludes, La Danse de Puck and "Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses," both of which deal with supernatural beings. In both pieces, the trill seems to represent hovering fairies, who, like humming birds, have the inhuman ability to flutter in stationary motion and then suddenly dart elsewhere.46

Two of the Preludes are remarkable for their extensive use of musical representation. Minstrels and La Cathédrale engloutie will therefore be examined in detail.

Minstrel shows, based on the popular late nineteenth-early twentieth century music and entertainment of the American Negro, are described by Herbert Seldin:

A typical show contained songs, dances and acrobatics, interspersed with jokes. . . . Three characteristic instruments that added to the rhythmic complexity were bones, tambourines and banjos. Minstrel shows offered a wide variety of acts that embraced humor, sentimentality, satire, pathos, and above all, exciting rhythms. The prelude faithfully reflects the gaiety and vitality.

46Poissons d'or (Images II) is also remarkable for its use of trills and quivering accompaniment figures to create the illusion of a goldfish hovering and then quickly darting about.
of these rapidly shifting moods.\textsuperscript{47}

The Prelude begins with the typical "vamp until ready" of variety shows:

Ex. 24 Minstrels

The increasing length of anacrases in this opening seems to indicate the nervousness of the piano player as he awaits the performer's entrance. At the caesura after the fourth bar, one can imagine the pianist looking quickly over his shoulder to see if the performer is ready. But there is no sign of him, so the "vamp" is repeated.

After the second caesura the performer does appear, apparently doing some fancy tumbling:

\textsuperscript{47}Seldin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 123.
Ex. 25 Minstrels

Dance steps are suggested by frequent bouncy staccatos. The passage below, for instance, is typical of the well-known "soft-shoe":

Ex. 26 Minstrels

Measures 28-30 might represent the chord strumming of the banjo:

Ex. 27 Minstrels
The characteristic shake-hit way of playing the tambourine is represented in measures 58 ff.:

Ex. 28 Minstrels

The performers tell a joke, or play one upon the other, in measures 37-45, as Debussy indicates by the instruction "Moquer."

The sudden burst and then pause at the end of this section could represent the "punch-line":

Ex. 29 Minstrels

The characteristic sentimental song changes the mood to "Expressif" in measure 63:

Ex. 30 Minstrels
But the intrusion of the interlude, which has been frequently played between the "acts" of the show, makes even this song humorous, and perhaps indicates the pianist's attempt to get this act over with:

Ex. 31 Minstrels

Three measures later the interruption occurs again, this time causing mock anger from the performer (cf. the harsh, accented chords); the sentimental song then ends with the same abruptness of the "mocking" section (see Ex. 29), perhaps suggesting it too, was a joke.

The return of the "vamp until ready" material perhaps depicts the performer strutting off-stage; the hush when he is out of sight is alluded to by the quiet tambourine roll previously heard. Suddenly the performer jumps out again for one last somersault before the final curtain:

Ex. 32 Minstrels
The entire piece conveys the humorous gaiety of the minstrel show by abrupt musical changes from "act" to "act," abrupt endings and pauses (see Ex. 24), and sudden changes in dynamics (e.g. measures 18-19, 25-26, 46). Debussy's use of rests and caesuras is particularly interesting as a humorous musical device. He frequently replaces the expected cadential resolution on the strong beat with an unexpected hocket-like rest. To summarize, Minstrels displays many musical devices that convey humor and might represent the actions of the minstrel show performers.

La Cathédrale engloutie conveys a very different mood and picture. Its descriptive materials derive in part from musical, rather than extra-musical ideas. This is in keeping with the subject of the Prelude, the Church, which, until the seventeenth century, was the center of Western musical activity. However, Debussy's musical materials are "historically heterogenous," as E. Robert Schmitz explains:

... here a legend of the fifth or sixth century, in association with organum of the ninth or tenth century, and in association with church arches, evolved from Roman to Gothic forms over some six centuries, and bells calling the congregation to worship, yet produces a closely integrated mood to which each element has contributed immeasurably, by its strong psychological association.48

The opening measure of the Prelude reveals elements to which Schmitz refers. The subject of the legend is suggested by the rising lines. Organum of fourths is evident in the planed chords. Furthermore, the opening six measures are harmonically built on a

church mode--Phrygian on E. The repeated E's in measures 6-13 perhaps represent the hollow quality of a distant bell, and suggest, by the persistent attacks of repetition, the thudding of the clappers.

Perhaps the most remarkable representational feature of the composition, also introduced in the opening measures, is what Schmitz alludes to as "association with church arches." He suggests that examination of the score from a slight distance reveals typical church arch forms--shapes that are created by the notes--and he gives sketches of typical arch designs: ④⁹

Ex. 33

Another possible use of such graphic representation occurs in the accompaniment pattern previously mentioned (p. 50); the wavy line produced by the notes suggests the waves of water which are once again engulfing the cathedral:

Ex. 34 La Cathédrale engloutie

Other Preludes exhibit possible uses of graphic representation.

④⁹Ibid.
For instance, the turning figures mentioned earlier (Exs. 20, 21 and 23) may be graphic, as well as sonorous, wavy lines. Graphic representation, sometimes referred to as Augenmusik (eye-music), would certainly seem to be a possible technique of a composer concerned with reactions to visual stimuli.  

Tolling bells, mentioned by Schmitz, seem to be heard again in measures 42-46 of La Cathédrale, and also in measures 63-67, where the low register suggests that the cathedral is beginning to sink back into the sea. The reference to organum at the beginning of the piece returns in measure 28, and suggests the chanting of monks. The single line melody beginning in measure 47 also alludes to a chant.

Thus, La Cathédrale engloutie achieves extra-musical representation of the Breton legend through musical sounds associated with the Church, and through visual designs.

It may be that the opening line of La fille aux cheveux de lin (see Ex. 11) is also a visual, as well as aural, representation of falling, tumbling tresses of hair, comparable to the "falling hair" scene in Pelléas. The single line melody, the unruffled quality of the tempo, and the long wait when the low D is reached perhaps suggest the independent, self-assured character of the lady depicted.

Many of the Preludes have passages which seem to represent a

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50 Eye music is a characteristic which can be found in earlier French music; see, for example, the heart-shaped notation of Belle Bonne by Baude Cordier in Willi Apel's The Notation of Polyphonic Music (Cambridge, Mass.: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1949), p. 427.
musical instrument; sometimes Debussy himself indicates the specific instrumental sound suggested, for instance "quasi tambourino" in measure 58 of Minstrels (see Ex. 28) and "quasi guitarra" in the first measure of La sérénade interrompue (see Ex. 2). Bells, seemingly heard in La Cathédrale engloutie, are also represented in measures 1 ff., 63 ff., and 92 ff., of Les collines d'Anacapri. The horn that is Puck's trademark is "sounded" at various points throughout La Danse de Puck (e.g. measures 6-7, 41 and 69). The punctuating high-pitched major seconds in Danseuses de Delphes suggest the metallic sound of the dancers' finger cymbals, or "crotals." Pastoral scenes in Bruyères and perhaps La fille are depicted by the characteristic shepherd's flute or pipe, possibly represented by the opening unaccompanied lines (see Exs. 11 and 12).\[51]\ Numerous sweeping arpeggios in the Preludes, e.g. Feux d'Artifice and Brouillards, as well as in many other piano works, suggest the harp sound that is characteristic of Debussy.

This examination of representational devices, while not at all exhaustive, serves to indicate Debussy's means of creating musically, pictorial imagery and aural illusion. The extensive use of representation further points up the extent of Debussy's extra-musical concerns, which are initially suggested by the Preludes' titles. As we shall see in a later chapter, his meticulous editing with extra-musical descriptive terms is another manifestation of this concern.

\[51\] "The Little Shepherd" from The Children's Corner also opens with an unaccompanied line which suggests a flute or pipe.
The subtle placement of the titles and nature of the representational devices encourage the listener to bring his own experience to the music, and make of it what he wants. Passages such as the opening of *La fille aux cheveux de lin*, which could suggest such different images as falling hair, an independent woman, or a shepherd's pipe, indicate the number of different associations that the music might evoke. The meaning of a passage would then seem to be a personal matter, which depends on the experience which the listener brings to it. This in fact seems to have been Debussy's intent in the Preludes.
CHAPTER III

STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Form

Debussy was an innovator. He did not culminate developments of previous composers nor start a "school" of new composers. Rather, he developed and brought to culmination his own individual stylistic techniques. Just as he did not try to imitate techniques of writers and painters whom he admired, neither did he choose to accept for himself the established musical structures of respected composers. His scorn for imitation is apparent in the following caustic remarks:

To endeavor to overthrow those whom they imitate is the first principle of wisdom with certain artists, who call such reprehensible methods the struggle for art. This hackneyed phrase is somewhat disingenuous and has, moreover, the defect of likening art to a kind of sport.

In art the struggle is more often against oneself alone and victories so achieved are perhaps the finest. By a curious irony, however, we are afraid of a victory over ourselves, and it seems preferable to be quietly merged in the public or to imitate our friends, which amounts to the same thing.¹

He was particularly disdainful of the classical forms adhered to by many other composers. In a letter to Durand of 3 September,

1907, he wrote:

... I am more and more convinced that music is not, in essence, a thing which can be cast into a traditional and fixed form. It is made up of colors and rhythms.

The rest is a lot of humbug invented by frigid imbeciles riding on the backs of the Masters who have almost always written music of their own time.²

He strongly admired Mussorgsky, as he explained when he wrote, "... he is unique ... because his art is spontaneous and free from arid formulas ... Nor is there ever a question of any particular form; at all events the form is so varied that by no possibility whatsoever can it be related to any established, one might say official, form ... ."³

In his quest for original concepts of form, Debussy abolished a century-old tradition, and furthermore, "did not," writes Aaron Copland, "establish any system of construction to take the place of the one he discarded."⁴ Rather, he worked intuitively: When the austere registrar of the Conservatoire asked him "What rule do you follow?" he responded "Mon plaisir!"⁵

Thus, one cannot successfully apply textbook forms to Debussy's music. The form of each separate Prelude evolves from

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²Composers on Music; An Anthology of Composers' Writings from Palestrina to Copland, ed. by Sam Morgenstern (New York: Pantheon, 1956), pp. 329-330.

³Debussy, op. cit., p. 19.


its particular motivic, rhythmic, harmonic, and textural materials. Instead of developed themes, we find compact repeated motifs; instead of developmental unfolding of form, we find sections of unequal proportions.

However, because the Preludes are sectional, they have sometimes been analyzed as various song forms and even as classical rondo or sonata forms. The table on the following page illustrates the analytical conclusions of two authorities, H. D. Seldin and E. Robert Schmitz. Schmitz often describes the Preludes with the classical terms "first and second subject," "exposition," "development," and "recapitulation," whereas Seldin refers to "motives" and "sections." With these differences in approach there result differences in conclusions. This fact alone gives cause to question the absolute conclusiveness of either formal analysis, and it indicates that the Preludes are indeed not adaptable to strict forms. Furthermore, considering Debussy's own words, it is questionable that such concepts as "exposition" and "recapitulation" carry meaning in the Preludes; certainly, the meaning is not the same as "exposition" and "recapitulation" in tonal classic or romantic music.

Although such formal structures may be useful in showing sectional relationships in a given Prelude, they do not provide the formal foundation of the piece. Sonata and rondo forms, as well

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ternary</th>
<th>Binary</th>
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<td>Des pas sur le neige</td>
<td>Voiles*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le vent dans la plaine</td>
<td>La Cathédrale engloutie</td>
<td>Les sons*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Les collines d'Anacapri*</td>
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<td>(Les collines)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest*</td>
<td></td>
<td>La Danse de Puck*</td>
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<tr>
<td>La fille aux cheveux de lin</td>
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<td>Minstrels*</td>
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<td>Ondine</td>
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<td>Hommage à S. Pickwick*</td>
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<td>Les tierces alternées</td>
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<td>Feux d'Artifice</td>
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<tr>
<th>Seven-Part</th>
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<tr>
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<td>(La sérénade interrompue--&quot;)</td>
<td>(Ce qu'a vu)</td>
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<td>(Minstrels--&quot;)</td>
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<td>General Lavine--eccentric</td>
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<td>(General Lavine, rondo-son.)</td>
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<td>La terrasse des audiences*</td>
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<td>(Hommage à S. Pickwick)</td>
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*Titles without asterisks or parentheses indicate concurrent conclusions on the form of the piece.
Titles with asterisks indicate the conclusions of Seldin only.
Titles with parentheses indicate the conclusions of Schmitz only.
as classical song forms, were built on established harmonic patterns and key relationships. The music moved forward through series of chord progressions to climactic goals and cadence points. Debussy, however, eschewed functional chords and traditional harmonic progressions, and frequently ended pieces with weak, vague cadences (cf. the final cadences of *Le vent dans la plaine*, *Voiles*, *Brouillards* and *Canope*). He recognized that "... since an advanced stage in harmonic development had been reached the older forms of music could not be maintained ... Thematic or harmonic development, in the form of a musical argument ruthlessly pursued, demands a firmer, less ambiguous harmonic structure, and it was no doubt for this reason that Debussy particularly distrusted musical development as a method of composition."  

Furthermore, "The question in form for Debussy was not 'Where does this go?' or even 'What comes next?' but 'How long can this last?'" This idea is compatible with Debussy's preoccupation with static or stagnant qualities. Hence, the structural materials are those which achieve unity through prolongation or repetition. Repeated motifs, melodic, rhythmic and harmonic, are the basic unifying elements. These repetitions seldom have the forward thrust of those found in music of previous eras; they do not assume the active function of increasing the listener's expectation of what is to come. Rather, they effectively prolong the impression of

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the present moment. Specific techniques of repetition, such as pedal points and ostinato, appear frequently in the Preludes. Ostinato, for instance, is the cohesive force in Des pas sur la neige and La Puerta del Vino.

Repetition techniques have many different manifestations in the Preludes. For instance, there are numerous recurrences of two- or four-measure "cells", created by immediate repeats of material in one or two measures, with only slight changes of notes or directions at the ends of the repeated measures. The following list indicates the extensive use of this technique, yet the list is by no means exhaustive:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Prelude</th>
<th>Measures</th>
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<td>Les sons et les parfums</td>
<td>18-22, 31-34, 38-39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Les collines d'Anacapri</td>
<td>21-24</td>
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<td>Des pas sur la neige</td>
<td>8-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest</td>
<td>35-36, 39-40</td>
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<tr>
<td>La Danse de Puck</td>
<td>8-11, 24-27, 41-44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minstrels</td>
<td>28-31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brouillards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feuilles mortes</td>
<td>10-11, 37-40</td>
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<tr>
<td>La Puerta del vino</td>
<td>9-10, 13-14, 33-34, 50-51</td>
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<td>Les fées</td>
<td>62-63, 109-112</td>
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<td>Bruyères</td>
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<td>La terrasse des audiences</td>
<td>10-11, 34-35</td>
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<td>Ondine</td>
<td>3-6, 8-9, 11-12, 65-68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canope</td>
<td>14-15</td>
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</table>

(The minus sign, -, indicates less than an entire measure.)
Occasionally in the Preludes sections are repeated in their entirety, but usually a contrasting section intervenes. In General Lavine, for example, measures 11-34 = 70-93, and in Les tierces alternées, measures 11-31 = 125-145.

More often, however, sectional repetitions involve some sort of variation or transformation technique. Les collines d'Anacapri and La Danse de Puck contain exact melodic repetitions with changes in accompaniment patterns:

Ex. 1 Les collines d'Anacapri

Ex. 2 La Danse de Puck
In *La sérénade interrompue*, *Ondine* and *Feux d'Artifice*, melody as well as accompaniment are transformed in the repeats.

Ex. 3 *La sérénade interrompue*
Ex. 4 Ondine
Ex. 5 Feux d'Artifice
Recurring rhythmic patterns, other than ostinato, are important formal elements in many of the Preludes. *Danseuses de Delphes* is unified by the prevailing rhythmic motif of dotted eighth and sixteenth notes (\(\text{♩♩♩♩}\)). The main body of *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest* is also permeated with dotted rhythms of various
time values which seem to be the result of two diminution series, one in each half, approximately, of the piece; the following motifs comprise the first half: \( \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \) (meas. 10), \( \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \) (meas. 15), \( \text{\textmu} \) (meas. 19), \( \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \) (meas. 21); the second diminution series begins in measure 35: \( \text{\textmu} \) (meas. 35), \( \text{\textmu} \) (meas. 47), \( \text{\textmu} \) (meas. 62). We mentioned previously the prevalent dotted rhythms (\( \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \)) in *La Danse de Puck* and *Hommage à S. Pickwick*. The rhythmic pattern of a note stressed agogically followed by three short anacrustic notes is a unifying element in both *Bruyères* (\( \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \)) and *La terrasse des audiences* (\( \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \)).

Occasionally a single recurring motif binds the whole form, as in *Minstrels* (see Ex. 16, Chapter II) and *Brouillards*,

Ex. 6

or a single motif supplies the melodic material of the entire piece, as in *La Cathédrale engloutie*:

Ex. 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Melodic Motif</th>
<th>Variants of Motif</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} ]</td>
<td>[ \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ M_1 \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} ]</td>
<td>[ M_2 \text{\textmu} \text{\textmu} ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ M_2 \times 3 ]</td>
<td>[ M_2 \times 3 ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More often, however, several motifs, none more prominent than the other, alternate and combine throughout the piece in various orders to create a binding structural force. The following examples from Voiles illustrate important motifs as they appear initially and then diagram the main occurrences of the motifs throughout the piece:

Ex. 8 Principal motifs of Voiles

\[ A \]
\[ B \]
\[ C \]

Ex. 9 Diagram of motifs in Voiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motif</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C'</th>
<th>C''</th>
<th>B+A'</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Processes of repetition are therefore basic to Debussy's formal structures. Through repetition of various musical elements, Debussy achieved a structural unity much different from that of classical forms.

Recently, new theories regarding Debussy's structural procedures have equated them with present-day compositional concerns. One such theory is presented by Dieter Schnebel, who finds tendencies in Brouillards that look forward to electronic music. In this piece, he writes, "... there is: no theme, no development; no traditional form; no counterpoint, but no so-called harmony
either; neither 'melody' nor 'accompaniment'; no main and subsidiary voices; neither definitely diatonic tonality nor chromatic tonality."\(^9\) Rather, he finds two basic structural ideas: sound motion, both downward and upward, and overtones, both harmonic and, in Schnebel's theory, rhythmic. "The result is formant composition, composed timbre-change, the organization of sound movements. Debussy is tending toward composition with sounds."\(^10\)

He concludes that "These ... are the tendencies shown in Debussy: composition with musical elements to form sound-structures--sound-movements, tone-masses, etc.--as a method."\(^11\) Whether or not one agrees with Schnebel, his proposals do create new and illuminating approaches to the problem of structure in the Preludes.

We might then say in regard to form that Debussy's structures are made by motivic repetition and transformation, and that they therefore vary according to the motivic basis of a particular piece. In the words of Edward Lockspeiser, "The motif is the generating design or symbol. How it proceeds to acquire form is so much an internal matter that any kind of formal analysis is bound to be inadequate."\(^12\) While it is therefore inadvisable to make general


\(^10\) Ibid., p. 36.

\(^11\) Idem., p. 37.

\(^12\) Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind, Vol. II, p. 244.
statements about formal structures, it is possible to be specific about the various elements of structure, i.e. rhythm, harmony, melody and texture, which will now be examined separately.

Rhythm

Debussy indicated his main compositional concerns when he wrote that music is made up of "colors and rhythms" (see p. 61). The Preludes present a wide range of Debussy's rhythmic techniques on all structural levels. Specific rhythmic types and devices, as well as general rhythmic characteristics, are basic to an understanding of performance problems in Debussy.

William Austin writes that Debussy's rhythms "are like those of French speech and gesture."\(^{13}\) Debussy himself seemed concerned with that idea when he criticized Gluck because he made "the French language one of accentuation, whereas it is a language of inflection."\(^{14}\) It can then be said that Debussy's rhythms, like the French language, are bending and supple; unlike the German language, these rhythms are not accented and frequently have no audible metric regularity. The opening of La fille aux cheveux de lin illustrates this free-flowing metrical ambiguity. One cannot be sure of the meter (duple or triple), or the placement of the barline by depending only on the ear. The following example gives two possible ways one might hear the metrical organization, as well as the


\(^{14}\) Debussy, op. cit., p. 69.
actual notation:

Ex. 10 La fille aux cheveux de lin

A.

B.

C. Actual notation

This concept of rhythm is comparable to the free-flowing, nonmetrical rhythm of Gregorian chant as interpreted by the Benedictine monks of Solesmes.\(^15\)

An outstanding example of rhythmic ambiguity can be seen in Des pas sur la neige. The entire piece is built with a melody and ostinato which repeatedly present rhythmic contradictions. A prob-

\(^{15}\) For a complete explanation of this rhythm, see Dom Mocquereau, Le nombre musical gregorien ou rythmique gregorienne, trans. by Aileen Tone (Paris: Desclee, 1932). Although not yet conclusively substantiated, it may be that Debussy visited the Benedictine Abbey at Solesmes. As recorded in 1893 by an English musicologist, Dr. Becket Gibbs, Debussy arrived at the Abbey on the Feast of Our Lady of the Snows in '1893 or 1894' [sic], and there discussed Gregorian chant with Henry Drehbridge Briggs, founder of the Plainsong and Medieval Music Society.
ing analysis of this problem is discussed in The Rhythmic Structure of Music, by Grosvenor Cooper and Leonard B. Meyer. They show that the initial rhythmic ambiguity is in the ostinato itself, whose essential melodic movement may be either D-E-F, with F as a resolution, or E-F-D, with F as an échappée. This is illustrated in the following diagram; the brackets indicate rhythmic groups and the — and — represent strong (accented) and weak ("unaccented") beats, respectively:

Ex. 11

Cooper and Meyer then show, by a similar diagram, that either rhythm is equally possible, according to the melodic line of measures 2-4. Measure 2, they point out, is strongly anacrustic, but ends in no accent, thus making the ostinato seem to end on D. However, the accented A at the end of measure 4 makes the ostinato seem to end on F.

This accented A, to be sure, is not altogether satisfying as a goal of end-accented rhythmic motion, because it is at variance with the meter. The meter has been unequivocally established by the ostinato. Though grouping of the ostinato is ambiguous, it is clear that the D receives the accent and that the F is unaccented. Therefore, where the melodic A in measure 4 is felt to be accented, it coincides with an unaccent in the ostinato. 16

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The following example, quoted from the book, may be compared with Ex. 11 to illustrate the independent rhythmic levels of the two lines:

Ex. 12

The authors then demonstrate, using the following example, that if the melody were changed so that the accents corresponded to those of the ostinato, the rhythmic ambiguity would be dismissed, but the character of the piece would be altered:

Ex. 13

"... it has lost its air of vague desolation. Now, it is precisely this air which is to arise from the piece as a whole. If the vagueness and ambiguity disappear, so will the character of the piece. One might well say that what is wanted here is clear vagueness and unambiguous ambiguity." This "accentless rhythm" is maintained throughout the piece. In order to retain its desired character, Cooper and Meyer offer the following performance suggestions:
The ostinato needs to be thought of and played without grouping, almost mechanically...
...the rhythm has to be developed in such a way as to be end-accented but without satisfactory accent.
We must be prevented from hearing feminine rhythms, and we must hear anacruses everywhere.\textsuperscript{17}

The technique of creating strong anacruses that reach no goal, but rather, are cut off by rests or caesuras, is characteristic of Debussy. Discussed in the previous chapter with regard to Minstrels, the technique occurs in most of the Preludes as a result, or perhaps cause, of the frequent caesuras and rests in the music. These silences, which punctuate the sectional structures of the Preludes, impede anacrusic movement and prevent accents. In Austin's words, "Debussy's rhythm never surges ahead long without a sighing interruption, and it never drifts far without at least a shudder."\textsuperscript{18}

Another manifestation of anacrusic interruption is rhythm contained within the measure; that is, rhythm which does not progress anacrustically beyond the barline. These rhythms are often indicated by the slur, which ends at the barline. The following examples are illustrative:

Ex. 14  La Danse de Puck

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{ex14.png}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 173.

\textsuperscript{18}Austin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 9.
Such examples may be compared with German music, which, on the other hand, is usually slurred over the barline (e.g., the keyboard works of Bach and the Chopin Preludes).

The rhythmic techniques we have discussed reflect the inflected, rather than accented, nature of French speech. Debussy's use of meters also demonstrates this characteristic. Many of the Preludes contain metrical changes, indicated in parentheses over the barline. However, in every case the basic unit of measure is maintained. La terrasse des audiences, for instance, has measures of $\frac{6}{8}$, $\frac{3}{8}$, and $\frac{9}{8}$ meters, and Feux d'Artifice, $\frac{2}{8}$, $\frac{3}{8}$, $\frac{4}{8}$, $\frac{5}{8}$, and $\frac{6}{8}$ meters. Debussy's
use of changing meters and his subtle way of indicating them seem again to evidence the slight import of metrical pulse, or accent, in his music. Indeed, a regular metrical pulse is seldom felt in the Preludes. It may be concluded that meters in the Preludes serve more often as means of note organization, the barlines serving as aids to the eye, than as means of creating metrical pulse.

Many of the Preludes are constructed with or unified by a particular rhythmic pattern. Dance rhythms are prominent in La Puerta del Vino, where the habanera rhythm functions as an ostinato, an in Les collines d'Anacapri, where a tarantella rhythm pervades most of the piece. Tap dancing is suggested in Minstrels, and General Lavine--eccentric is constructed principally in cake-walk rhythms.

Ostinato figures are well-known as characteristic of Debussy. By establishing a focal point, they allow for freedoms without sacrificing a cohesive structural result. We have previously mentioned two Preludes whose overall form is created by ostinato. Others, including Voiles, Le vent dans la plaine, Feux d'Artifice and Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest, contain unifying ostinato figures. Recurring rhythmic figures other than ostinato were discussed as unifying structures on pp. 70-71.

Harmony

The concept basic to Debussy's often discussed harmonic experiments is the sonorous, rather than functional, quality of the chord. Traditional harmony, dependent on leading tones, fifth relations
and chord direction, had been taken to its functional extreme in the
chromaticism of Wagner. As Richard Crocker writes, "The warmth--
the very substance--of Wagner's music comes from the functions of
chords, the directions implied by them, whether or not these direc-
tions were actually followed out. Debussy minimized the functions
of chords, concentrating instead on their sonorous quality." Just
as we have seen in Debussy's forms, so the question in his harmony
is not "Where is this going?" but, "How long can this last?" or "How
does this sound?" Here again is evidence of Debussy's concern for
static qualities, suggested already in the concepts of form and
rhythm, and even in the extra-musical subjects of the Preludes.

Debussy found numerous means of breaking down the system of
functional chords. A recurring technique involves tones added to
basic tertian harmony, frequently added sixths or ninths. Prominent
examples of each occur in the final cadence of *Ce qu'a vu le vent
d'Ouest* (added sixth) and *La Puerta del Vino* (added ninth):

Ex. 17 *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest*

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19 Richard Crocker, *A History of Musical Style* (New York: McGraw-
Chords built on intervals other than thirds diminish traditional harmonic functions, as for instance the chords of fourths at the end of *La Cathédrale engloutie*:

Ex. 19

There are several occurrences of superimposed seconds, or tone clusters, in the Preludes. While these usually derive from a scale structure—whole-tone scale in *Ce qu’a vu le vent d’Ouest*—or a chord—dominant ninth in *La Puerta del Vino*, dominant thirteenth in *Ondine*—they nevertheless create tone "color," or in other words, they direct attention to the chord itself, thus diminishing progres-
sional tonal function.

Ex. 20 Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest

Ex. 21 La Puerta del Vino

Ex. 22 Ondine
Seventh and ninth chords are used consistently, almost always denying traditional preparation and resolution. The following example illustrates the tonal ambiguity that arises from this technique:

Ex. 23 La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune

Tonal ambiguity is also achieved through scale types in which the necessary leading tone and tonic-dominant relationships are absent. Such are the two whole-tone and numerous pentatonic scales. Neither of these types admits of a positive tonal center, although in comparison, the pentatonic scale gives a stronger feeling of tonality. While these two scales are often associated with Debussy's style, the whole-tone scale in particular is perhaps not as often used as is commonly thought. With a few exceptions, such as Voiles and L'Isle joyeuse, both scale types are used more frequently for transitional passages or melodic lines, or for a coloristic effect, than for the basic structural material of a piece. For example, we mentioned previously that pentatonic tunes are common to Minstrels, in the recurring transition passage, and General Lavine--eccentric,
in the principal tune. The whole-tone scale on C is the basis of the following transition passage from *Feux d'Artifice*, which again uses superimposed major seconds:

Ex. 24

![Musical notation image]

Probably the most notable use of both whole-tone and pentatonic scales occurs in *Voiles*. The entire piece is constructed with the whole-tone scale on C, except for a brief central pentatonic section (measures 42-47). This serves as a tonal contrast, replacing the normal tonal relationships which are absent in the unstable whole-tone scale. A persist B♭ pedal point counteracts the fluctuating whole-tone sound, and, because of its repetition, can almost be heard as a tonal center. Such lengthy pedal points occur in many of the Preludes, serving as tonal focal points where tonal focus would not otherwise be apparent.

Other scale patterns used by Debussy include chromatic and modal scales. Chromaticism is not used by Debussy in the harmonic manner of Wagner. Rather than Wagner's chromatic harmonic progres-
sions, where chromaticisms are chosen for their harmonic logic, Debussy's chromaticisms tend to be linearly conceived, and are best described in terms of the horizontal motion of melodies and transitional passages, such as the following:

Ex. 25 Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest

Modal scales also are most often employed as melodic material, although H. D. Seldin feels that the first six measures of La Cathédrale engloutie are harmonically in Phrygian mode. Chromaticism and modality do influence Debussy's harmony, which is seldom strictly diatonic, but rarely do they provide systematic harmonic foundations of an entire piece or section. Both scales will be further discussed with regard to melody.

Chromatic relationships are implied in chords which superimpose the white and black keys of the piano. Such chord constructions suggest bi-chordal harmonies or polyharmonies which again are means of destroying tonal clarity. Brouillards, Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses and Feux d'Artifice all display the ambiguous tonal relationships caused by such chords:

\[20\text{Seldin, op. cit., p. 109.}\]
Ex. 26  Brouillards

Ex. 27  Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses

Ex. 28  Feux d'Artifice

Ex. 29  Feux d'Artifice
It is interesting to note that these examples are taken from Book II of the Preludes, which was written after Debussy heard Stravinsky's Petrouchka in 1912. It can be speculated that his great enthusiasm for the piece, with its characteristic sound of superimposed C and F♯ major triads, may be reflected in his use of similar sounds in these three Preludes.

Establishment of a "tonic" is also denied by the frequent, abrupt changes of tonal center, evident, for instance, in Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses, and La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune:

Ex. 30 Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses

Ex. 31 La terrasse des audences du clair de lune

In the sense of achieving harmonic contrast, these abrupt changes replace the function of modulation in traditional harmony.

Parallelism, or planing, is one of the chief means of diminishing traditional harmonic function, and is a hallmark of Debussy's style. It is a technique used in almost every one of the Preludes in one of several possible ways: as intervallic reinforcement of the melody (Ex. 32), as a chordal accompaniment (Ex. 33), or as an arpeggiated reinforcement of parallel chords (Ex. 34).

Ex. 32 La fille aux cheveux de lin

Ex. 33 Des pas sur la neige
Ex. 34  Brouillards

It is interesting to note that the Javanese music which so intrigued Debussy consisted of various gamelan instruments playing the same melodic line with various degrees of rhythmic or melodic elaboration. It can only be speculated that perhaps it was here that Debussy acquired the sound of parallelism which he developed as an integral aspect of his style.

Harmony in the Preludes is directly related to embellishments, which either fill in chordal tones or add contrasting non-chord tones, and also the acoustical phenomena of overtones and combination tones. These three harmonic materials are, however, color-producing devices which relate more generally to Debussy's characteristic sound. They will therefore be discussed in the final chapter, which deals more specifically with typical sonorities in the Preludes.

Melody

In Monsieur Croche, Debussy seems to elaborate upon his concept of melodic, or linear design. He speaks of:

that musical arabesque, or rather that principle of ornament, which is the basis of all forms of art. The word "ornament" has here nothing whatever to do with the meaning attached to it in musical grammars.

The primitives, Palestrina, Vittoria, Orlando di Lasso and others, made use of this divine arabesque. They discovered the principle in the Gregorian chant. . . When Bach went back to the arabesque he made it more pliant and more fluid . . .

In Bach's music it is not the character of the melody that stirs us, but rather the tracing of a particular line, often indeed of several lines, whose meeting, whether by chance or design, makes the appeal. . . .

. . . It is infinitely more "true" than the wretched whimperings and the tentative wailings of lyric drama. Above all, the music keeps all its dignity; it never lowers itself by truckling to the desire for sentimentality of those of whom it is said that "they do so love music"; 23

We might conclude from these remarks, as well as those previously quoted with regard to form, that melody was for Debussy primarily a curving, fluid musical line, or design, rather than a thematic musical device for formal development or subjective emotional expression. His notion of arabesque-like lines, or the "principle of ornament," is strongly evocative of the aesthetic of Art Nouveau. Nikolaus Pevsner writes that "Art Nouveau is indeed very largely a matter of decoration," 24 or ornament, and that "vermiculating lines . . . became a hallmark of Art Nouveau." 25 Connections between Art Nouveau and Debussy's "arabesque designs" are discussed by Edward Lockspeiser. He paraphrases Vladimir Jankélévitch (Debussy et le Mystère, Neuchâtel, 1949), who discovered similarities between Debussy's melodic designs

23 Debussy, op. cit., pp. 22-23.


25 Ibid., p. 57.
and a botanical phenomenon:

Geotropism is the name given to the phenomenon which causes the roots of plants to gravitate towards the centre of the earth. Positive geotropism is the term used for this attraction to a centre of gravity, while negative geotropism signifies the tendency of stems to grow away from the centre of the earth. One is reminded here of the symbolical significance of the floral and plant designs of the Art Nouveau and their connexion with the flowing lines of women's hair. Many of the typical arabesque designs of Debussy appear to be propelled by a downward-moving force... These are unquestionably a musical counterpart of the decorative designs carried over into Impressionism from Art Nouveau. 26

A typical "arabesque" seemingly attracted by a "downward-moving force" is this line from La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune:

Ex. 35

The above example also illustrates Debussy's use of linear chromaticism, a device which is particularly compatible with the curving, supple lines of the arabesque. Such chromatic lines perform several different functions in the Preludes: as a transition to a different pitch register (Ex. 36), a preparation of a cadential passage (Ex. 37), or a principal melodic line (Ex. 38).

Along with chromaticism, modality usually appears in melodic lines, as we mentioned earlier. The examples below are in Mixolydian mode on C (Ex. 39) and Dorian mode on F (Ex. 40).

Ex. 39 La Cathédrale engloutie

Ex. 40 La Danse de Puck

Like the melodic lines of Gregorian chant, Debussy's melodies often develop long, continuous fluid lines which defy metricality, as we noted in Ex. 10 from La fille aux cheveux de lin. These lines frequently unfold in asymmetrical proportions, in contrast to the symmetrical and periodic structures of the classic and romantic eras.

There are several instances in the Preludes of melodic quotes. Often the quotes are used to convey humor, such as the sentimental song in Minstrels, which, if it is not a direct quote, is certainly
an imitation of the popular song style of the day. Humorous satire of the British is effected with the quote of "God Save the Queen" in Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P. P. M. P. C., just as the Wagnerians were satirized by the Tristan quote in Golliwog's Cake-Walk. In La Puerta del Vino and La sérénade interrompue, the quoted Andalusian chant helps create the Spanish character of the music, just as the sentimental song, either a quote or a stylistic imitation, depicts the Italian scene of Les collines d'Anacapri. The "Marseilles" quote at the end of Feux d'Artifice, which sounds faintly in the distance, seems to signal the end of the French Bastille day celebration. Finally, it may be that La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune opens with the initial motif of the French folk-song "Au clair de la lune," although the resemblance is remote.

**Texture**

Before Debussy, texture had usually been a by-product of rhythm, harmony and melody, or at best a secondary structural consideration. With Debussy, however, texture becomes an important structural element. Textural contrasts achieve variety and sound motion in Preludes which have static or ambiguous rhythm or harmony. Brouillards, for instance, is characterized by vague, bi-chordal harmony at close spacing and predominant falling motion in its principal motif (see Ex. 26). In contrast to these thick-textured, blurred harmonies is a brief section of open octaves in the high

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27 Another satirical poke at the Germans is in the second movement of En Blanc et Noir for two pianos, which quotes Luther's "A Mighty Fortress" in "lumpish, heavy" chords.
and low extremes of register. Not only do the octaves create a spacious, open texture, but also they effect contrast by their pitch clarity and their rising melodic motion. The example below is illustrative:

Ex. 41 Brouillards

On the other hand, in Preludes in which contrasts are achieved by other musical elements—perhaps harmony or rhythm—textural homogeneity is a unifying element. For instance, La Cathédrale
engloutie, whose form moves harmonically through several contrasting keys and modes, is constructed with a virtually consistent full-chord texture. These two structural functions of texture relate to the overall, or macro-form of a piece. In fact, every Prelude has degrees of both textural similarities and differences on the micro-formal level.

Texture in the Preludes, or more inclusively, in Debussy's piano music, is affected by dynamics, register, intervallic spacing, and chord structure. Certainly, dynamics are closely associated with texture: A loud, rich, full sonority is perceived as being a thicker texture than a soft, delicate sonority. The dynamics in the Preludes reflect Debussy's delicate French tastes:

The volume of sound in the Preludes frequently approaches that of a whisper, the soft passages far outnumber the loud ones, and in places in which pianissimo is indicated, generally, the softer the pianist can play, the greater the effectiveness of the performance.\textsuperscript{28}

Furthermore, such dynamically restrained passages reflect Debussy's taciturn nature,\textsuperscript{29} and are musical companions of his frequent silences and caesuras. Although a later chapter will specifically discuss Debussy's treatment of the piano, it is important to note here his seemingly conscious use of the rapid-decay sound phenomenon of the piano for achieving soft dynamic levels. This technique is illustrated in these measures from Danseuses de Delphes, in which the progressively diminishing sound of the vibrating strings produces the decrescendo from forte to pianissimo.

\textsuperscript{28}Seldin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., pp. 26-27.
Subdued dynamic levels are closely related to the textural idea of spatial distance, an effect of remoteness which Debussy indicates by lointain coupled with pianissimo. Among numerous occurrences of this device are: Les sons et les parfums, meas. 50-53; Les collines d'Anacapri, meas. 3; Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest, meas. 10 ff.; La Puerta del Vino, meas. 83; Feux d'Artifice, meas. 1 ff.

Spatial distance, or "open" texture, is also created by widely spaced intervals or chords, which frequently utilize the extreme registers of the piano. Such aerial textures as we noted in Brouillards are evident throughout most of Feux d'Artifice, and in meas. 25 ff. of La terrasse des audiences. Open, aerial textures are also effected by incomplete chords and open octaves, by melodic lines accompanied only by a sustained chord or pedal point, or by delicate, rapidly ascending lines, such as the following:

Ex. 43 La Danse de Puck
Thick textures, on the other hand, are produced with closely-spaced chords or by tones added to basic tertian structures, such as the added sixth; textural thickness may be further increased by using the damper pedal. The techniques for creating these textures appear in numerous instances throughout the Preludes.

Many of Debussy's structural ideas are directly related to the piano itself, its sound possibilities and timbral qualities. In a later chapter we will examine Debussy's treatment of the piano with regard to structural considerations.

In conclusion, these remarks of Pierre Boulez offer the insights of a contemporary composer who was highly influenced by Debussy:

Challenging heritages, he followed his dream of vitrified improvisation; he repudiated those games of construction which so often transform the composer into a child who plays at architecture; for him, form is never taken for granted; his quest is constant for the unanalyzable, for developments which, on their path, admit the rights of surprise and of the imagination; he has only mistrust for the architectural monument, preferring structures in which strictness and arbitrary freedom blend: for him, words, keys, all scholastic claptrap loses its point and relevance; the usual categories of an exhausted tradition could not be applied to his work. Wishing to create his technique, his vocabulary and form, Debussy was led to overthrow ideas which, till his day, had remained static: the mobile and the moment erupt in his music; not only the impression of the instant, or intangible, to which it is reduced, but a relative and irreversible conception of musical time, and more generally of the musical universe. In the organization of sounds, this conception is expressed by a refusal to acknowledge existing harmonic hierarchies as the unique data of the world of sound. The relation of object to object is established in its context according to functions that are not constant. As to the rhythmic writing, it, too, participates in a similar manifestation, a similar desire for mobility in the metric conception; in the same way, the quest for color profoundly affects the writing.

30 Pierre Boulez, "Boulez Conducts Debussy: La Mer, L'Après-midi d'un Faune, Jeux," Columbia Masterworks recording no. MS 7361, record jacket notes.
CHAPTER IV

PEDALING: SOME PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTIONS

Pedaling is perhaps the most enigmatic of all the problems presented to an interpreter of Debussy's music. While Debussy is normally quite explicit in his performance and interpretative instructions, he gives only four pedal indications in all the Preludes.¹ La sérénade interrompue demands use of "les deux pédales" in bar 25, and pedal signs appear in bars 14 and 41 of Brouillards, and in bar 62 of Voiles.

Ex. 1 La sérénade interrompue

¹An absence of pedal markings is common to nearly all of Debussy's piano works. Besides these three Preludes, there are scattered indications in only a few pieces, including Jardins sous la Pluie (final measures), Serenade of the Doll (final measures) and Soirée dans Grenade (final measures).
One should not infer from this that Debussy did not intend the pedals to be used. Accounts of his own playing indicate that he used both the damper and una corda pedals (the sostenuto pedal
was not then commonly used in Europe).\textsuperscript{2} It seems, in fact that he had some definite ideas about pedal use. Recalling Madame Mauté's advice apropos of Chopin, he wrote these comments in a letter to Durand, dated 1 September, 1915:

Chopin wished his works to be practiced without pedal, and with but very rare exceptions, he did not wish it used at all. This is, moreover, that art of making the pedal a sort of breathing apparatus, which I observed in Liszt's playing when I had the opportunity of hearing him in Rome.\textsuperscript{3}

The real truth is, perhaps, that the abuse of the pedal is only a means of hiding a lack of technique, and it is also useful as a means of making a lot of noise to cover the music which is being butchered. Theoretically, one should be able to find a graphic means of indicating this "breathing"... That is not impossible to find.\textsuperscript{4}

These remarks raise several puzzling questions. Was Debussy implying that his own music was being "butchered" by pedal abuse? If so, would he have desired altogether less use of pedal, or simply a refinement of various pedal techniques? Finally, is it possible that Debussy experimented in his own pieces with the

\textsuperscript{2} While some authorities declare that Debussy did not know about the sostenuto pedal, there is no conclusive evidence to prove it. The Marseilles firm of Boisselot & Sons was apparently the first to use the sostenuto mechanism in 1844. French patents of a Pédale de harpe, which allowed selective sustaining, were recorded in both October and November, 1874. Thus, the sostenuto pedal had been introduced in France years before the composition of Debussy's important piano works, and so it seems possible that he may have known of it. However, the pedal was evidently not popularly accepted in France, and is still, in fact, seldom used by European pianists. Therefore it probably has not been included on many French pianos. Until more concrete evidence is found, one can only speculate as to Debussy's knowledge or approval of the sostenuto pedal.

\textsuperscript{3} Apparently Liszt's breathing pedal had made a lasting impression, for Debussy had heard this performance thirty years earlier in 1885.

\textsuperscript{4} Composers on Music; An Anthology of Composers' Writings from Palestrina to Copland, ed. by Sam Morgenstern (New York: Pantheon, 1956), p. 327.
"graphic" notation to which he referred? Should such a theory be demonstrable, it would not only explain Debussy's avoidance of traditional pedal markings, but also solve the many problems of pedaling his music.

Several of these pedaling problems are illustrated below:

Ex. 5 Danseuses de Delphes

In this passage the pedal must be employed throughout if the F pedal point is to be maintained. This, however, will obscure the upper two moving lines and thwart the detached touch indicated in the chord texture.

Ex. 6 La fille aux cheveux de lin

As in Example 5, the damper pedal is necessary in Example 6 for maintaining the pedal point. But, of the three left-hand notes
struck in the first measure, only the low G is to be held. Moreover, the harmony resolves in the second bar and thus would normally require a pedal change.

Ex. 7 La Danse de Puck

The damper pedal, used in the above example to retain the D and A, will also retain the staccato sixteenth note B, and hamper the effectiveness of the two-note slurs, E-F and B-G.

Ex. 8 La Puerta del Vino

The passage above requires that the embellishing notes vibrate throughout each measure, but that the octave melody and habanera bass be detached. Once again the damper pedal would at once both facilitate and hamper the desired effect.
The problem common to all these examples is that of sustaining certain sounds without retaining or adding unwanted ones. As notated, many such examples in the Preludes, as well as in other works of Debussy, appear virtually impossible to execute in the manner the composer seems to intend. It might be speculated that Debussy notated his compositions ideally, as he heard them in his mind, expecting only that his interpreters approximate these sounds as best they could.

In any case, such "impossible" passages have given rise to much controversy among pianists and interpreters of Debussy. A particularly troublesome point involves the sostenuto pedal, which obviously would be of use in many of these instances. Because we are not sure that Debussy knew or approved of this mechanism, purists argue that the damper pedal alone should be used in solving sustaining problems. They point to the impressionist predilection for blurred sonorities as justification for its use in passages such as those reviewed above. One of these advocates, Louis Crowder, writes:

I simply cannot believe that his [Debussy's] tonal effects, breathtaking and magical as they are without the sostenuto, should be arbitrarily modified and other effects substituted in the interest of a 'clarity' that might be appropriate even in Chopin, but which it is virtually certain was not Debussy's intention. It is more difficult to pedal Debussy without a sostenuto but the same tonal effect cannot be achieved with it. And the tonal effects of following Debussy's directions are sufficiently rewarding to justify a historically accurate performance—that is, one without the sostenuto.⁵

Those who agree with Crowder's point of view might well refer to the variety of effects possible with the damper pedal. For instance, the depressed pedal allows the strings to vibrate sympathetically with a struck note, thus creating a resonant sound rich in overtones. According to Robert Dumm, this effect is required in *La Cathédrale engloutie*. His authority is Debussy's own recorded performance of the piece, about which Dumm writes: "In his own playing Debussy relied on the damper pedal . . . , to open all the strings to vibrate sympathetically with the generating bass." And further, Debussy generates "whole phrases on a single bass tone, sustained by the damper pedal," such as the following:

**Ex. 9 La Cathédrale engloutie**

It could well be that Debussy suggested this pedaling in the score, with the "graphic" notation he mentioned in his letter to Durand (p. 102). Thus, in the above example, one might assume that both the slur marking over the entire phrase and the tied C pedal point

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7 Ibid., p. 19.
throughout the phrase indicate one prolonged depression of the pedal. Herbert Seldin hypothesized that Debussy indirectly indicates pedalings in this manner. "In places where the pianist is required to sustain certain notes for several beats, while at the same time perform other notes in different registers - thus making it virtually impossible actually to sustain these notes - he can carry out the composer's intentions only by using the damper pedal."  

In his treatise on pedaling, the English pianist York Bowen also refers to passages in La Cathédrale engloutie that seem to call for a "hazy" or "unclean" form of pedaling:

> There are numerous examples in modern French music where it is essential to hold the pedal through passages of mixed harmonies . . . The strangest of them is Debussy's Cathédrale engloutie where all kinds of diatonic combinations of notes are intended to be merged together. Indeed, in order that the last page should create the illusion of something seen hazily through a depth of water, the pedal is hardly changed at all--at any rate not fully--and an occasional "flick" pedal is all that is necessary.

This "flick" pedal is one of a number of pedaling methods, each of which produces a slightly different effect. Discussed above by Bowen, the "flick" pedal is produced by occasionally slightly releasing the pedal from a fully depressed position, so that the strings are never fully opened; it allows for indistinct, merged sonorities and is therefore useful when Debussy's

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title or instructions seem to call for a veiled, misty effect, as for instance in *Voiles* and *Brouillards*.

Bowen also discusses the "half pedal". By depressing the damper pedal halfway, the strings become slightly damped, but the vibrations are not obliterated. Richard LaMar aptly describes its effect: "It gives partial resonance without blurring tones unpleasantly or allowing a passage to sound 'sterile' through lack of brilliance."⁴⁰ It is useful in achieving diminuendos and in giving partial resonance to passages of scales or runs where full pedal would not achieve the effect. For instance, these passages from *La Puerta del Vino* and *Brugères* could benefit by half pedaling:

**Ex. 10 La Puerta del Vino**

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A third pedaling technique is often referred to as the "vibrato" or "flutter" pedal. The pedal is made to quiver with the foot several times in succession, partially, but not completely dampening the strings. This is helpful in achieving a diminuendo, more gradual than that produced by the half pedal. Since the treble strings are the first to cease vibrating by means of this technique, the bass strings, which vibrate longest, retain the tone. Thus it is useful for many sections of the Preludes which demand retention of a
bass pedal point while the left hand must be occupied elsewhere. "In cases where the left hand is not able to sustain the lowest bass tone and there are non-chord tones in the upper register, the pedal may be shaken several times to remove some of the dissonance from the treble without completely damping the low bass."\textsuperscript{11} Vibrato pedaling would therefore be helpful in solving the problems seen in \textit{Danseuses de Delphes}, (Ex. 5) as well as the following:

\textbf{Ex. 13} Feuilles mortes

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{feuilles_mortes.png}
\end{center}

\textbf{Ex. 14} Les sons et les parfums

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{sons_parfums.png}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 48.
The damper pedal techniques discussed above are less essential for achieving certain effects if the sostenuto pedal is employed. Because of its ability to sustain selected tones, the sostenuto mechanism is well suited to many of the "impossible" sustaining problems in the Preludes. For instance, Ex. 7 from La Danse de Puck presented the problem of sustaining low tones without the use of the fingers, while playing staccato notes in the upper registers. The sostenuto pedal easily solves the problem by sustaining only the low notes and allowing the staccato notes to be performed crisply.

Those who favor using the sostenuto pedal might argue that it is the only way of accurately rendering "impossible" passages. Although it could be that Debussy was not aware of the sostenuto pedal, he did leave the problem of pedaling to the interpreter, thus apparently giving him freedom to pedal as he pleased, as long as the desired effect was achieved. It might be further speculated that had Debussy known of this pedal he would not have disapproved of its use.

Like the damper pedal, the sostenuto can be used several ways. Its most obvious use is for sustaining selected tones that are struck alone in the passage. The example below illustrates that by applying the sostenuto on the A major $\frac{6}{4}$ chord, the other notes can be struck and released as indicated, allowing effective performance of the rests and sustained chord at the third beat of the measure:
Ex. 15 Les sons et les parfums

In passages where the tones selected for sustaining are not struck alone, the sostenuto pedal can still be employed if it is possible to depress the desired keys silently. This is not difficult to do if the passage occurs at the beginning of a piece or a section. The passage below from Danseuses de Delphes, previously discussed in Ex. 5, does begin a section; the pedaling problem here is easily solved by silently depressing the F octaves with the sostenuto pedal before starting to play, and then employing frequent changes of the damper pedal throughout the passage:

Ex. 16 Danseuses de Delphes

This technique is also possible during rests. Wolfgang Fetsch gives as an example measures 14 ff. of Ondine: 12

In the above example, the bass notes D and A cannot be caught by the sostenuto pedal in the first measure without the interference of other notes. They can, however, be depressed silently in the second measure along with the sostenuto pedal, simultaneously releasing the damper pedal.

Fetsch discusses a further application of the "silent depression" technique for creating "pedal blur" effects.\textsuperscript{13} Giving Voiles as an appropriate example, he suggests that these three notes,

\begin{equation*}
\text{\之外} \quad \text{D, E, F\#}
\end{equation*}

be depressed silently, with application of the sostenuto pedal, before the piece is begun. The sostenuto pedal, held throughout the piece, thus faintly sustains the whole-tone scale on which

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 17.
almost the entire piece is based:

Another method of manipulating the sostenuto pedal is described by Samuel Randlett. He maintains that the performer can avoid sustaining unwanted tones with the sostenuto by learning to control the level of the dampers. He explains that the sostenuto pedal manipulates a comma-shaped rod that runs in front of the dampers. When the pedal is used, this rod rotates and catches a tab that protrudes from the damper, which has been raised to the level of the rod. Only the notes whose damper tabs have been caught in this manner will be sustained. Since the rod will not catch tabs which are not raised above the critical height, learning to recognize and control the damper height will allow the performer to sustain only the desired tones.

According to Randlett, this technique is learned by fully depressing the key and then gradually lifting; eventually, however, the preparatory step of full depression can be eliminated and the key can be initially depressed just part way. Although it would take some time to master this technique, particularly in the context of a piece, its usefulness, if mastered, cannot be denied in Debussy's music. Such pedaling difficulties as shown in Ex. 5 (Danseuses de Delphes) and Ex. 6 (La fille aux cheveux de lin) could easily be overcome by employing damper level control.

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It would seem that the decision of whether or not to use the sostenuto pedal ultimately depends on the performer's taste. Since Debussy seldom indicated the degree of note or textural clarity that he desired, the performer is not bound to a certain pedaling interpretation. Therefore, if he prefers to project discrete lines or textures, he is likely to use the sostenuto pedal frequently. If, on the other hand, he is not bothered by dissonant effects, or wishes to be historically accurate, he may prefer to depend on the damper pedal. In instances where either the damper or sostenuto pedal could be used effectively, amateurs and young students would probably find the sostenuto easier to control.

Certainly, pedaling is very important to an effective performance of the Preludes, and, in fact, of all Debussy's piano works. We have pointed out the necessity of the damper or sostenuto pedal for sustaining tones impossible to sustain with the fingers. The una corda pedal is extremely useful in achieving the subdued dynamic levels which occur frequently throughout the Preludes. Furthermore, the sustaining pedals in particular, are useful in achieving representational and tone-color effects. The damper pedal can be used to create the harp-like sounds mentioned in Chapter II, p. 58; its use in passages where bells are suggested allows the free vibration of all the strings, creating the rich sound of overtones characteristic of ringing bells. Finally, when the pedal is depressed at caesuras or cadences, the lingering vibrations create the tone color effect that Debussy often indicated with laissez vibrer. This use of the piano, as well as instructional terms, will be discussed in the ensuing chapter.
CHAPTER V

PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Norman Demuth writes that "... in general French composers are meticulous in the editing of their music."¹ However, we have seen that Debussy indicated very few pedalings; neither did he indicate fingerings. On the other hand, his directions for phrasing, dynamics and desired tone are explicit and detailed. We might infer from this that Debussy's indications are usually musical, rather than technical. That is to say, he did not direct the performer as to what action he should perform at a given time, but rather he indicated the desired musical result. The importance Debussy attached to exact markings is shown in a letter to Durand in which he begged his publisher to "'induce his engraver to respect the exact place of nuances,'" and further, "'It is very important.'"²

The markings are scrupulous. There is hardly a note which is not edited by means of a slur or mode of attack. Guido Gatti speaks of a marking that appears frequently, the tenuto, and quotes Louis Laloy as to its performance:

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As regards those notes marked with a little line, some are played staccato, others are emphasized. What should determine the manner of rendition, "is, instead, a transparent sonority, which may be secured by a frank attack for a tone without hardness which the pedal will prolong, the finger suddenly releasing the key . . . "

Several of the markings were, at the time, unusual. Changes of meter were indicated with the time signatures over the barline, enclosed in parentheses. As we mentioned in our discussion of rhythm, this practice perhaps indicated an attempt to destroy strict metricality. Recurrent caesuras and fermatas further serve to deny regular metrical pulse. The use of indeterminate ties (e.g. Les collines d'Anacapri, measures 68ff.) is still cause for speculation among pianists, but it is generally accepted that they indicate prolonged sustaining, probably with the pedal. These ties, as well as the slurs mentioned in the previous chapter, may be the result of Debussy's experiments with a "graphic" means of indicating pedaling (see p. 102).

A further unusual practice was that of notating piano music on three staves. This occurs in many of the Preludes, perhaps to indicate the discrete components of the texture, perhaps as a visual aid to the performer. In regard to notation, Ernest Hutcheson cautions the performer to look for errors in note values, citing, for example, the thirty-second notes where sixty-fourth notes are intended in Poissons d'or.

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Perhaps the most innovative aspect of Debussy's editing involves his use of descriptive words of direction. Unlike his predecessors, who, with few exceptions, indicated tempos and other musical instructions in the traditional Italian, Debussy wrote his instructions most frequently in French. Although it has become common for twentieth century composers to edit their works in their native tongues, this practice was still unusual early in the century. Besides being in French, Debussy's editings are frequently extra-musical, nevertheless indicating a desired musical expression or sonority. In the Preludes, Debussy uses such descriptive words as emporté or caressant, in passages where Beethoven or Brahms would in all probability have indicated agitato or legato. It seems that Debussy was concerned to find the word which would precisely convey his conception of a passage, because the same general concepts are often expressed by different words, having slightly different shades of meaning, in different passages. For instance, the following passages all contain a descriptive word which generally indicates that the sounds are to be bright or sparkling; each word, however, carries a slightly different nuance, appropriate to the specific passage:

Ex. 1 Les collines d'Anacapri
Further illustrating this concern with the nuances of words are the various ritard indications found throughout the Preludes, for example, "en peu retardé," "en rentenant," "retenu," "cédez," and "traîné."

Extra-musical words or phrases are occasionally used to elaborate musical terms, such as the rhythm or tempo indications at the beginnings of pieces. The initial instructions of the following pieces are perhaps verbal equivalents of the mood evoked by the music: *Voiles*, "Modéré (Dans un rythme sans rigeur et caressant.); *Des pas sur la neige*, "Triste et lent, Ce rythme doit avoir la valeur sonore d’un fond de paysage triste et glacé"; *La Puerta del Vino*, "Mouvt de Habanera, avec de brusques oppositions d’extrême
violence et de pasionnée douceur”.

La Cathédrale engloutie also opens with extra-musical directions which describe the mood evoked by the piece and also suggest its representational content. "Profondément calme (Dans une brume doucement sonore)” (meas. 1) is followed by "doux et fluide” (meas. 7), "Peu à peu sortant de la brume” (meas. 16), and "Flottant et sourd” (meas. 72), all of which verbally allude to the legend depicted in the music. Many of the Preludes use words in a similar way, seemingly to elucidate verbally the extra-musical scene or story of the Prelude. La sérénade interrompue is particularly illustrative. The piece opens with figurations "quasi guitarra (comme en préludant)," suggesting that the serenader is beginning with an instrumental introduction on his guitar. At measure 32, where the song enters, the directions "expressif et peu suppliant (estompé et en suivant l'expression)” evoke the image of a timid lover attempting to win his lady with his serenade. A sudden interruption is indicated at measure 46 by the abrupt musical change and "Très vif,” but the serenade quickly resumes. The songster seems to be interrupted again in measure 80, where the music and indications "Modéré, lointain,” suggest perhaps a group of marchers some distance away. Apparently annoyed by this second interruption, the serenader momentarily loses his temper,

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5 See Chapter II, p. 35, Ex. 2.
6 See Chapter II, p. 36, Ex. 3.
Ex. 4 La sérénade interrompue

is again interrupted and angered (meas. 87-90), and then slowly regains control of the situation:

Ex. 5 La sérénade interrompue

Singing "doux et harmonieux" (meas. 113), the serenader sings a final verse and then makes his exit—"en s'éloignant" (meas. 129).

From this illustration and others we have mentioned, we might infer that Debussy's verbal editings often are directly related to the extra-musical representational content of a given Prelude.

For an effective interpretation of a given piece, the performer
should be aware of each indication, and be able to effect the desired nuance.

Dynamic nuances are certainly as important to an effective performance as other expressive nuances. As we mentioned in an earlier chapter, much of Debussy's music—the Preludes as well as other piano works—is to be performed piano or pianissimo. It is therefore necessary that the performer be able to control the various dynamic levels of softness. Maurice Dumesnil discusses this problem in some detail. According to him, Debussy himself suggested that the pianist "'Play with more sensitiveness in the finger tips. Play chords as if the keys were being attracted to your finger tips, and rose to your hand as a magnet.'" Dumesnil stresses that the fingers should be kept in contact with the keys in pianissimo playing. Moreover, he writes that pianissimo effects are best achieved by "an oblique, slanting, indirect attack, which will bring the finger in contact with the key progressively:

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Profile view} \\
\text{Direct Attack}
\end{array} \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{Profile view} \\
\text{Indirect, Caressing Attack}
\end{array} \]

... in the 'direct' attack, the tone is produced by the extreme tip of the finger, whereas in the 'indirect' attack, the finger can be stretched out so that this position in itself cooperates in softening the tone, since the progressive attack is done by the elastic

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little cushion of flesh, which is under the finger tip."\(^8\)

From accounts of his contemporaries, it seems that Debussy's own playing was extremely subdued, and occasionally, scarcely audible. Alfred Cortot writes that "his touch was exquisitely fluent, sweet, and warm, made for delicate nuances and intimate expression, without a jarring or strident note ... like Chopin he loved instruments of an almost slack ease of action."\(^9\) Cortot suggests that in playing Debussy, one should work for "quality of tone" rather than "mass of tone." According to Marguerite Long and Louise Liebich, Debussy insisted that the piano was to sound as if it were 'an instrument without hammers' and he wanted the fingers on the keyboard to appear to 'penetrate into the notes.' The illusion was to be complete. Nothing was to be allowed to destroy the impression that the mechanical piano, a mere 'box of hammers and string', was not a piano. It was sometimes to be an instrument that drew music from the circumambient air, or that could project patterns made up of myriads of little sounds. It was never admitted to be an instrument inferior, in the range or shadings of its dynamics, to wind or string instruments. Its defects were its virtues.\(^10\)

Debussy's treatment of the piano will be further discussed in the concluding chapter. Suffice it to say here that an effective performance of Debussy demands an extremely sensitive touch which is able to produce the most subtle nuances and delicate sounds.

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 13.


Léon Vallas has written that Debussy did not like the complete series of Preludes to be played as a whole. In fact, he related to his first biographer, Louisa Shirley Liebich, that several of the pieces, especially *Danseuses de Delphes* and *Des pas sur la neige*, should be played "entre quat' z yeux"—for a single listener. The record of first performances of the Preludes indicates that Debussy seemed to prefer the programming of only three or four at one time. These first performances, listed in the table on the following page, perhaps reveal the composer's idea of successful groupings for performance.

We might then summarize that in order to perform effectively the Preludes, as well as other piano works of Debussy, the pianist should pay special attention to every marking and direction, and practice controlling the keyboard and pedals to produce the slightest nuances with ease. Furthermore, in the music of Debussy, the performer should be particularly aware of the extra-musical associations, as well as the musical content. Finally, in the words of William Austin:

All his piano music needs . . . a big piano with rich tone in the extreme registers, and a pianistic technique that controls the finest gradations of loudness throughout the range, so as to produce 'opposed sonorities' rather than the warm, homogeneous blend, centering in the baritone range, that is typical of Brahms and his contemporaries. On the other hand, parallel

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12 Extracted from Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, Vol. II, pp. 40-41. First performances of seven of the Preludes have not been traced.
TABLE II

FIRST PERFORMANCES OF THE PRELUDES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of First Performance</th>
<th>Preludes</th>
<th>Performer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 May 1910</td>
<td>Danseuses de Delphes</td>
<td>Debussy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Voiles</td>
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<td></td>
<td>La Cathédrale engloutie</td>
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<td></td>
<td>La danse de Puck</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 January 1911</td>
<td>La collines d'Anacapri</td>
<td>Viñes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La fille</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>La sérénade interrompue</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>29 March 1911</td>
<td>Les sons et les parfums</td>
<td>Debussy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Le vent dans la plaine</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Des pas sur la neige</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minstrels</td>
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<td>12 March 1912</td>
<td>Preludes (not specific)</td>
<td>Debussy</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 1913</td>
<td>Bruyères</td>
<td>Debussy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Feuilles mortes</td>
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<td>La Puerta del Vino</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 April 1913</td>
<td>Les fées</td>
<td>Viñes</td>
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<td>Feux d'Artifice</td>
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chords must smoothly parallel the melody's rise and fall of loudness, with never a perfunctory treatment of their inner voices. The pedal must help sustain long notes and color short ones without destroying the carefully marked silences, staccatos and subito pianos. A dry sound is seldom appropriate, but there is no place whatever for the blur that many pianists suppose warranted by "impressionism."  

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: DEBUSSY'S TREATMENT OF THE PIANO

Edward Lockspeiser has written that:

... the latter part of Debussy's life coincided with a golden age of piano music in which he played the most important part. This age, in which a new conception of the piano was triumphantly established, was short: it consisted of barely more than a decade and came to an end with the first World War. Yet not since the era of the great works of Chopin had there been a period in which the piano was transformed into what amounted to another instrument.¹

The piano had been closely associated with the Romantic movement. Its climb to popular acclaim resulted largely from its ability to produce realistic effects, thus expressing the romantic predilection for "the awakening of associations." As Edward Dent wrote in 1916, the dependence on association was one of the chief characteristics of romantic music. "Not only did it [romantic music] love to reproduce as best it could sounds really external to music altogether, but it made constant use ... of genuinely musical effects of a kind which even the unlearned could recognize as having definite associations with concrete ideas."² The piano was called upon to produce all kinds of effects, such as military and ecclesiastical. Furthermore, the piano could sup-


posedly produce "singing tone" or orchestral sounds, both are in reality physically impossible on the instrument. Writing in 1921, Guido Gatti said:

... the orchestra is the dream of the German romanticists! Owing to this, the piano, little by little, becomes none other than an orchestra of reduced means, the echo of an immense instrumental phalanx, and the arena for effects... Just as the piano tends to lose its autonomy in an increasing measure, its distinctive character, thus the compositions written for it lose their intrinsically pianistic design, and increasingly convey the impression of being orchestral scores reduced for the keyboard instrument.³

This concept of the piano was radically changed with Debussy's music. The Preludes in particular, as relatively late works, varied in form and content, coincide with the "golden age" of the piano of which Lockspeiser speaks, and reveal most, if not all, of Debussy's pianistic innovations. These innovations can perhaps be categorized in one or more of the following closely related areas: aural imagery, or the evocative qualities of the piano which are able to stimulate senuous impressions; non-developmental, non-progressive forms, or forms created by contrasts in register, sonority, or figuration; coloristic sonorities, or sonorities conceived pianistically according to the sound producing nature of the instrument.

In Chapter II we discussed aural imagery in the Preludes. Each piece, we found, is closely associated with an extra-musical idea, in either descriptive nature or representational content.

The form of a given Prelude, its musical devices, performance instructions, and in some cases, visual appearance, combine to create a sensuous sound experience effected by aural imagery. This aural imagery is closely related to the sound possibilities of the instrument, particularly its wide pitch and dynamic ranges, as well as its acoustics. In Chapter III we discussed the relation of pitch, texture, and dynamic contrasts to the unfolding of form; Debussy found that the piano is capable of producing many diverse contrasts of these elements, and he developed that characteristic. Furthermore, many of the sonorities in the Preludes are pianistically conceived. We might cite, for example, the Petroushka-like chords discussed on pp. 86-88. In fact, all the musical components of the Preludes can be said to be pianistically conceived. In the words of Guido Gatti:

All that Claude Debussy has written for the piano ... exists to testify to a regenerated and sonorous piano technic, intrinsically pianistic in its nature, whose every dynamic and timbre effect is born of the instrument itself, and which generates an ample, novel, and fascinating sonority.⁴

The "fascinating sonority" is created in part by Debussy's utilization of the piano's acoustics. Indeterminate ties and "laissez vibrer" effects indicate his awareness of the rapid decay, or fading tone that is characteristic of the instrument. Furthermore, it may be that Debussy employed Tartini's acoustical phenomenon of combination tones. In Grove's Dictionary, Thomas P. Fielden suggests this possibility in La Cathédrale engloutie, in

⁴Ibid., p. 419.
which "the hearer fancies he hears notes far below the real compass of the pianoforte . . . "

Thus, Debussy revolutionized piano technique and piano sounds, and in doing so, greatly expanded the resources of the instrument. Edward Lockspeiser aptly summarizes Debussy's innovations:

All those effects marked 'laissez vibrer,' 'doux et estompé,' 'le plus doux du monde,' the glissando-like runs, the tinges of harmony against a continuous design like dots of colour in a wash, the contrast of registers, the Impressionist reproduction of chords, opened up a new world of piano technique. This technique of illusion was Debussy's own creation.

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