

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

JUNE

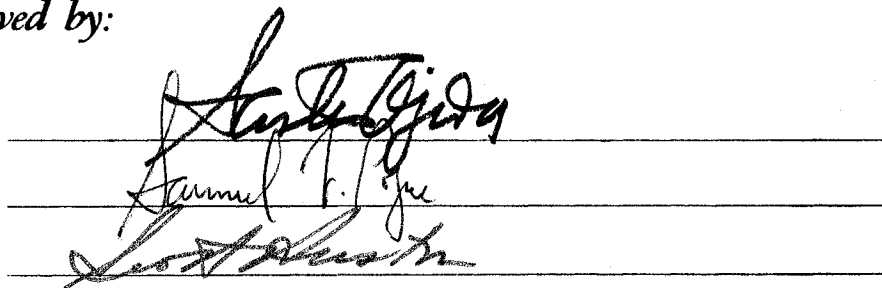
19 74

I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under my supervision by CAROL VAN NOSTRAND

entitled THE TWELVE ETUDES OF CLAUDE DEBUSSY

be accepted as fulfilling this part of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS IN PIANO PERFORMANCE

Approved by:



THE TWELVE ÉTUDES OF CLAUDE DEBUSSY

A THESIS

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

in

PIANO PERFORMANCE

Respectfully Submitted

by

CAROL VAN NOSTRAND

COLLEGE-CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

1974

UMI Number: DP16121

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI®

UMI Microform DP16121

Copyright 2009 by ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC
789 E. Eisenhower Parkway
PO Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am personally indebted to Ms. Susan E. Gorrell whose thoughtful, meticulous criticisms of style helped me to achieve the objectivity necessary to state clearly my ideas. She was also of invaluable assistance in the typing of the original manuscript and in the preparation of the musical examples for the finished thesis.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my thesis advisor, Mr. Santos Ojeda, who gave so generously of his time. His personal encouragement, professional criticisms and helpful suggestions for additional areas of exploration significantly contributed not only to the completion of the thesis but also to my continued growth as a musician.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.	1
Chapter One: THE COMPOSER.	2
Aesthetics	2
Influences	6
Compositional Techniques	9
Chapter Two: THE NEW PIANO STYLE	14
Piano Sound	14
Technique	16
Chapter Three: DEBUSSY'S SOLO PIANO MUSIC BEFORE THE <u>ÉTUDES</u>	23
Stylistic Traits	23
The Music	25
Chapter Four: THE ETUDE	30
The Practice Etude	31
The School Etude	33
The Virtuoso Etude	34
The Concert Etude.	35
The Etude After Liszt	38
Chapter Five: DEBUSSY'S <u>ÉTUDES</u>	39
Historical Background	39
Musical Background	42
Analysis	45
I. "Pour les 'cinq doigts' (d'après Monsieur Czerny)".	45
II. "Pour les tierces"	53
III. "Pour les quartes"	59
IV. "Pour les sixtes".	65

	Page
V. "Pour les octaves"	70
VI. "Pour les huit doigts"	80
VII. "Pour les degrés chromatiques"	87
VIII. "Pour les agréments"	95
IX. "Pour les notes répétées"	102
X. "Pour les sonorités opposées"	112
XI. "Pour les arpèges composés"	122
XII. "Pour les accords"	131
CONCLUSION.	138
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	144

LIST OF EXAMPLES

Example	Page
1. "Pour les 'cinq doigts, '" meas. 1-2	46
2. "Pour les 'cinq doigts, '" meas. 85	46
3. "Pour les 'cinq doigts, '" meas. 91	47
4. "Pour les 'cinq doigts, '" meas. 32-33	48
5. "Pour les 'cinq doigts, '" meas. 48-49	48
6. "Pour les tierces, " meas. 1.	54
7. "Pour les tierces, " meas. 18-19.	54
8. "Pour les tierces, " meas. 55	55
9a and	
9b. "Pour les tierces, " excerpts from meas. 7 and 10	56
10. "Pour les quartes, " meas. 7-9.	59
11. "Pour les quartes, " meas. 1.	60
12. "Pour les quartes, " meas. 18	61
13. "Pour les quartes, " meas. 53-54.	62
14. "Pour les quartes, " meas. 77-79.	63
15. "Pour les quartes, " meas. 7-8.	64
16. "Pour les sixtes, " meas. 16-18	66
17. "Pour les sixtes, " meas. 27-28	67
18. "Pour les sixtes, " meas. 42.	68

Example	Page
19. "Pour les octaves," meas. 1-2, excerpt from meas. 3. . .	71
20. "Pour les octaves," meas. 5-6	72
21. "Pour les octaves," meas. 49-50	75
22a and	
22b. "Pour les octaves," meas. 72 and 76	78
23. "Pour les huit doigts," meas. 1.	81
24. "Pour les huit doigts," meas. 5-6	81
25. "Pour les huit doigts," meas. 40	82
26. "Pour les huit doigts," meas. 60	83
27. "Pour les degrés chromatiques," theme from meas. 11-14.	88
28. "Pour les degrés chromatiques," meas. 11-12	88
29. "Pour les degrés chromatiques," meas. 59	91
30. "Pour les degrés chromatiques," meas. 65	92
31. "Pour les degrés chromatiques," meas. 1-2	93
32. "Pour les degrés chromatiques," meas. 78-79	94
33. "Pour les agréments," meas. 12	97
34. "Pour les agréments," meas. 18	98
35. "Pour les agréments," meas. 20	99
36. "Pour les agréments," meas. 34	100
37. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 1.	102
38. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 10	103

Example	Page
39. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 28-29.	105
40. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 47-48.	105
41. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 58	107
42. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 26	109
43. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 50	109
44. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 62	110
45. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 1-3.	112
46. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 7-8.	113
47. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 15	114
48. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 36	116
49. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 49-50.	118
50. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 51-52.	118
51. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 53-54.	119
52. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 61-62.	120
53. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 74-75.	121
54. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 2	123
55. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 7	124
56. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 13.	124
57. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 15.	125
58. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 28.	126
59. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 31.	127

Example	Page
60. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 35	128
61. "Pour les accords," meas. 1-2, excerpt from meas. 3	132
62. "Pour les accords," meas. 45-47	133
63. "Pour les accords," meas. 51-53, excerpt from meas. 54	134
64. "Pour les accords," meas. 80-81	135

INTRODUCTION

We have, accordingly, the last and perhaps the greatest of the piano works, the twelve Studies, appropriately dedicated to the memory of Chopin, and representing a summary of the composer's entire pianistic creation.¹

The Études are among Debussy's final works and are also the last music he wrote for solo piano. Coming as they do at the end of his career as a composer, they must be studied in relationship to his work as a whole rather than as an isolated set of pieces taken out of their context. This historical perspective can best be gained by examining Debussy's attitude toward music and composition, his role in the development of a new piano style, and his other solo literature for piano. Since the etude itself has a long tradition, it will also be helpful to examine briefly the development of the genre. From this background, we will look at the Études both analytically and pianistically. The knowledge gained from the study of Debussy's art as a whole will not only illuminate the analysis of the music but will enhance one's appreciation and performance of it.

¹Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy, 3rd ed. (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1949), p. 155.

Chapter One

THE COMPOSER

Aesthetics

Music was many things to Debussy. He referred to it as "a sum total of scattered forces."¹ He felt that more was to be gained from the individual artist's perception of nature than anything that could be found in any book on music.

Every sound you hear around you can be reproduced. Everything that a keen ear perceives in the rhythm of the surrounding world can be represented musically . . . my desire is to reproduce only what I hear.²

He also felt that complexities in music, theories about the nature of musical composition, rules to follow--all of these things were antithetical to true musical expression. Composers were too engrossed in the effects they created on paper. They attached importance to the writing itself, to the craft of composition, rather than to the sounds they created in space.

For Debussy the essence of music was inexplicable; its

¹Leon Vallas, The Theories of Claude Debussy, trans. by Maire O'Brien (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 11.

²Ibid., p. 10.

language could not be translated to any other: "Music begins where words are powerless to express."¹ He did not attempt to explain music; in fact, he cautioned against that, almost as if he were afraid the explanation would destroy the magic. The closest Debussy came to explaining music was to say it is a mystery ("Music is a mysterious form of mathematics."²) and a dream ("Music is a dream from which the veils have been drawn!"³).

In something of an oversimplification, Debussy has stated that he felt the purpose of music was to please.⁴ This is clearly in line with what Martin Cooper says is the general rule in France where music is "the art of arranging sounds in agreeable and intellectually satisfying patterns."⁵

Whether Debussy's purpose in creating music was simply to give pleasure is certainly open to debate, but the fact of his influence on the history of music is not.

¹Martin Cooper, French Music from the Death of Berlioz to the Death of Fauré (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 89.

²Vallas, The Theories of Claude Debussy, p. 8.

³Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind, vol. 1 (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1965), p. 171. (Hereafter referred to as Life and Mind.)

⁴Vallas, The Theories of Claude Debussy, p. 13.

⁵Cooper, p. 1.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of Debussy's position in the history of music, and a reason for his importance to contemporary composers, is his break with important elements of the past. The considerations of form and functional harmony, and their reciprocal relationship, were no longer relevant for Debussy.

In an article comparing Debussy to Bartók, Anthony Cross states that, until recently, academicians have largely ignored Debussy because the analytical procedures derived from nineteenth-century music were not applicable to his music. "Unlike Bartók, Debussy, though inaugurating a new tradition, stands outside previous tradition."¹ A. Whittall, in discussing Debussy's influence on Boulez, stresses Debussy's spontaneity and originality of formal structure, in addition to his technical discipline, which "is the result of freedom, rather than of a received tradition which cannot be relevant to the present."² In a discussion with his harmony teacher, Ernest Guiraud, Debussy is reported to have said, "There is no theory. You have merely to listen. Pleasure is the law." When Guiraud pressed him on this point and on the necessity of acquiring a musical education, Debussy replied, "True enough, I feel free because I have been

¹Anthony Cross, "Debussy and Bartók," Musical Times 108 (February 1967): 131.

²A. Whittall, "After Webern, Wagner--Reflections on the Past and Future of Pierre Boulez," Music Review 28 (1967): 136.

through the mill, and I don't write in the fugal style because I know it."¹

The key to understanding Debussy's music and its effect on his contemporaries, as well as on succeeding generations of composers, is the fact that the impulse behind it was so personal and so different from the prevailing constructive approach. Debussy clearly disapproved of this type of compositional procedure: "They combine, construct, imagine themes in which to express ideas. . . . All this is metaphysics, it is not music."² Further on, he declared "a hatred of classical development whose beauty is only technical."³

According to Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy wanted his music to seem to be an improvisation, a creation of that particular moment in time.⁴ Music was no longer to abide by a set of formulas for its construction; it was to represent "the mysterious affinity between Nature and the Imagination."⁵ For Debussy the act of composition was "to write my musical dream with the most complete detachment from myself. I wish to sing of the inner landscape with the naïve candor of

¹Lockspeiser, Life and Mind, p. 207.

²Vallas, The Theories of Claude Debussy, p. 14.

³Ibid., p. 15.

⁴Edward Lockspeiser, "Debussy in Perspective," Musical Times 109 (October 1968): 905.

⁵Vallas, The Theories of Claude Debussy, p. 107.

childhood."¹

So, music is for Debussy the direct translation of his highly individual perception of the natural world and of his inner feelings into sound. It is an irreducible medium, which need not and cannot be explained by any other symbology, and which is apprehended directly by the listener.

Influences

The influences on Debussy were many and varied. Although as a young man he was greatly influenced by Wagner, and later by the Russian school (principally Moussorgsky), he was more influenced by poets and painters than by other musicians. His favorite painter was Joseph Turner, whom Debussy called "the finest creator of mystery in art."² He was greatly attracted to the symbolist poets--in particular Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Mallarmé. He wrote several sets of songs on poems of Baudelaire and Verlaine; and his most famous orchestral piece, Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune, is a setting of a poem by Mallarmé.

The poet with perhaps the most influence on Debussy, however, was Edgar Allan Poe, whom he read in translation (by Baudelaire), probably upon returning from Rome in 1887. He was

¹J. G. Prud'homme, "Claude Achille Debussy," Musical Quarterly 4 (October 1918): 564.

²Lockspeiser, Life and Mind, vol. 2, p. 22.

particularly sensitive to Poe's ideas about dreams and their relationship to the creative process. In fact, during the last ten years of his life, Debussy was involved in the setting of two stage works of Poe's, The Devil in the Belfry and The Fall of the House of Usher. Although these works were never completed, it is clear from his letters to his publisher, Durand, that they occupied a great amount of his creative energy.

In 1899 at the World Exhibition in Paris, Debussy heard a Javanese gamelan orchestra. This orchestra was composed of a single string instrument, various flutes, and a variety of gongs and bells struck with thickly padded sticks. The music was based largely on the pentatonic scale. Debussy was very impressed by this group, and its influence was to be heard in his later pieces. This, together with his thorough knowledge of acoustics, was a basis for many of the beautiful bell-like effects which he achieved in his piano music.

Debussy was also greatly attracted to the shows at the Music Hall in London, which he visited for the first time in 1909. He considered these shows treats with which he rewarded himself after supervising rehearsals of Pelléas at Covent Garden. This influence showed itself the next year in his first book of Préludes, in the work "Minstrels."

Spain, especially Andalusia, was also a direct influence, although he spent only one afternoon there. Two of his Préludes,

"La Sérénade interrompue" and "La Puerta del Vino," and the "Soirée dans Grenade" from Estampes were directly inspired by the Spanish scene.

According to W. H. Mellers, the commedia dell'arte was also an underlying influence, particularly in Debussy's later works;¹ but there is no such clear-cut relationship as is illustrated by the Spanish pieces.

Although Debussy admired Beethoven as a musician, his ideas regarding Beethoven's piano style were very forcefully put:

Beethoven's sonatas are very badly written for the piano; they are, particularly those that came later, more accurately described as orchestral transcriptions. There seems often to be lacking a third hand which I am sure Beethoven heard; at least I hope so.²

Debussy was clearly more in sympathy with the music of his own French tradition and with that of Chopin. He considered Rameau a great composer who had unfortunately been overshadowed by Gluck. His "Hommage à Rameau" from Images I is a beautiful tribute to this man whom he felt was the true father of French opera. He called Couperin "the most poetic of our clavecinists"³ and went on to say, "We should do well to study the examples set us in certain little

¹W. H. Mellers, "The Final Works of Claude Debussy," Music & Letters 20 (1939): 174-75.

²Claude Debussy, Monsieur Croche the Dilettante Hater, trans. by B. N. Langdon Davies (New York: Lear, 1948), p. 10.

³Vallas, The Theories of Claude Debussy, p. 37.

clavecin works by Couperin. They are exquisite models of a grace and spontaneity such as we no longer know."¹

For Chopin he felt the highest respect:

Chopin's music is amongst the most beautiful ever written. To acknowledge this in 1915 is but an inadequate tribute. It does not dispense one from commenting on the significance of Chopin's music and the influence it has never ceased to exert on contemporary music The freedom of his form deceived his commentators just as the many brilliant passages suggest the virtuoso; but one should nevertheless appreciate the sure and skillful use he makes of them.²

These then were the important influences on the creative mind of Debussy. From this wide and varied background he formed a unique, highly personal art whose influence is still being felt.

Compositional Techniques

It is not within the scope of this paper to present a detailed discussion of Debussy's method of dealing with the basic materials of music. However, I would like to summarize briefly some of the important ways in which his handling of the basics was unique.

To begin with, Debussy did not use the complex system of functional harmony as a basis for the relationships between sounds. He felt that the very ideas of consonance and dissonance, with the corollary requisite of resolution, were absurd and declared, "There is nothing more mysterious than a perfect chord."³ The whole interlocking system of tonality was no longer viable for him:

¹Ibid., p. 38. ²Ibid., pp. 142-43. ³Ibid., p. 25.

Relative keys were nonsense too. Music is neither major nor minor. Minor thirds and major thirds should be combined. . . . The mode is that which one happens to choose at the moment. It is inconstant.¹

With his disregard for normal resolution, particularly his use of successive seventh chords, Debussy creates a feeling of ambiguity, suspense, and rootlessness. This feeling is enhanced by his use of common chords of differing tonalities directly juxtaposed-- a technique which further breaks down the accepted syntax. Chords no longer relate to each other by their position in a predetermined order. This simultaneously gives them a new individuality and a new capacity for interrelationship based on their intrinsic sound qualities. In this way Debussy reverses the process Louis Laloy ascribes to the establishment of tonality in Western music. As Laloy said, "The sound ceases being a sound in order to become a note, that is an ordered number."²

Debussy recognized that since his music no longer relied on functional harmony, it could also no longer utilize the old forms which depended on this procedure for their structure. In the same way in which he had freed sound from its codified limitations imposed by tonality, he wished to free form from confining molds:

¹Lockspeiser, Life and Mind, vol. 1, p. 206.

²Louis Laloy, "Claude Debussy et le Debussysme," trans. by Ruth Caldwell, La Revue S.I.M. 6 (August-September 1910): 511.

Beethoven's real teaching then was not to preserve the old forms, still less to follow in his early steps. We must throw wide the windows to the open sky; they seem to me to have only just escaped being closed forever.¹

Just as painters of the period derived form from color, Debussy associated form with timbre--with the unique sound characteristics of the particular instruments used. The inner coherence of his form is generated by the use of motives or what Robert Mueller calls "tonal pillars."² These pillars may be simply melodic in nature or may be associated with a specific sonorous structure. They do not contain harmonic implications, nor do they imply a particular tonality, but, rather, their function is structural as they

assume the character of unifying forces regardless of their particular nature or degree of ambiguity. In this manner a primary idea, whether it is whole-tone, or a veiled diatonic progression, retains its fundamental character in the course of a composition.³

Critics of his time accused Debussy's music of formlessness; but, on the contrary, it has a highly unified inner structure based on a motivic design of great subtlety. They considered it formless largely because he abandoned the accepted "old forms" and classical tonality and substituted instead a method of structuring which defied the formal

¹Debussy, pp. 35-36.

²Robert E. Mueller, "The Concept of Tonality in Impressionist Music, Based on the Works of Debussy and Ravel" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1954), p. 10.

³Ibid., p. 80.

analytical procedures of the time.

Although much has been said regarding Debussy's use of whole-tone and pentatonic scales as a basis for his melodic constructions, it is debatable whether the use of these particular scales was conscious. Laloy asserts that it was not. He states that although the music seems to use many different scales, it "does not really use any of them. It is not built on scales; it is built only on melodies."¹

This seems circuitous, to say that melodies are based on melodies, but Laloy is describing an important distinction in attitude. Debussy's melodies may in fact use pentatonic or whole-tone scales; but is that because he wanted to compose a melody using those scales, or because the melodies he wanted to write happened to lie within those scalar constructs? This is, of course, something which we can never definitely answer, but asking the question is preferable to making hasty assumptions about an art as subtle and as free from formulas as Debussy's.

Debussy conformed to the convention of meter signatures and bar lines, not out of regard for the system itself, but for the sake of notational convenience and performers' reading habits.

Rhythms cannot be contained within bars. It is nonsense to speak of "simple" and "composed" time. There should be an interminable flow of them both without seeking to bury the rhythmic pattern.²

¹Lockspeiser, Life and Mind, vol. 2, p. 80.

²Ibid., vol. 1, p. 206.

This concept of a rhythmical ebb and flow independent of metric organizational patterns, whose roots can be found in the unmeasured music of the periods 500-1200 and 1550-1600, is a direct antecedent of the unbarred music of the middle of the twentieth century.

Perhaps Debussy's most original contribution to compositional procedure was his alliance of form to timbre. This applied with special force to his piano music, whose unique nature grew out of his concept of the inherently illusory quality of piano sound.

Chapter Two

THE NEW PIANO STYLE

Piano Sound

During the nineteenth century there existed simultaneously two conflicting attitudes toward piano sound. The dominant doctrine held that piano sound was equal to the sound of sustaining instruments. This theory simply disregarded the piano's important characteristic of decay, which occurs immediately after the sound originates. As mechanical improvements led to greater strength and increased duration of the sound, the theory became more plausible; and the production of a "singing tone" became the desired objective in performance.¹

The other school of thought held that since piano sound is the result of a percussive blow of the hammer to the string and can only be extended in time by the use of the damper pedal, this duration is itself artificial and illusory. The two outstanding pianist/composers who subscribed to this belief were Chopin and Liszt. They were also the composers who had the most direct influence on Debussy and Ravel.

¹Edward Dent, "The Pianoforte and Its Influence in Modern Music," Musical Quarterly 2 (1916): 281.

The first twenty years of the twentieth century in France were what Lockspeiser calls "a golden age of piano music."¹ The initial impulse was Ravel's Jeux d'eau, first performed on April 5, 1902. Although the new style resulted from the independent efforts of both Debussy and Ravel, the concentration here will be only on Debussy's works.

The essential contribution of this style was the utilization of the evocative nature of piano sound as a basic tool with which to approach piano composition. This style is based on the concept that piano sound, far from being equal to that of other instruments, is quite different; it is essentially ambiguous, and its duration is indefinable.

Since the damper pedal is largely the creator of this ambiguity, its use is integral to this style. Rather than worrying about using too much damper pedal (a frequent criticism of performances of Baroque and Classical music), the performer and composer now considered the pedal an equal partner to the keyboard. Ricardo Viñes, the Spanish pianist who premiered most of the music of Debussy and Ravel, was their ardent champion. He quotes Ravel as recommending pedaling, in Jeux d'eau, in such a way as to bring out "not the clarity of the notes, but the hazy

¹Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind, vol. 2 (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1965), p. 33. (Hereafter referred to as Life and Mind.)

impression (l'impression floue) of vibrations in the air."¹

The late nineteenth-century composers of the German Romantic tradition superimposed their compositional techniques on the piano. They may have thought partly in terms of color and register, but their main focus was on the piano's harmonic and contrapuntal capacity. It was these qualities which they utilized for music which was essentially absolute and abstract.

Debussy, on the other hand, considered the sound qualities of the particular medium for which he was writing as an important element in the total compositional process. The evocative nature of piano sound--its illusory quality--was used to generate forms based on contrasts and shadings of sonority and register.² The result of Debussy's attitude, together with his concept of sound for itself and not as a function of classical tonality, was a transformation of the instrument. The grand manner of the Romantic piano tradition, which relied heavily on emotion and heroic gesture, was replaced by an art of nuances, colors, and aural imagery.

Technique

Debussy himself was a fine pianist. Although he did not concertize extensively, he performed many of his own works, including the first performances of eleven of the Préludes and En blanc et noir

¹Ibid., vol. 2, p. 43.

²Ibid., vol. 2, p. 50.

(with Roger-Ducasse). He also made a few piano rolls for Welte,¹ recordings of which are available. They give a general idea of his playing and are helpful regarding specific areas of technique and interpretation which will be discussed below. However, on the whole, they are not fully successful, since the gradations of touch and dynamic inflections which were so essential to his style are simply not reproduced very sensitively. However, in regard to tempo and rhythm (especially in the controversial "La Cathédrale engloutie") these piano rolls shed an unquestionably dependable light.

Debussy intended to write a piano method articulating his individual approach to the keyboard, but unfortunately the work was never even begun. We do, however, have accounts of contemporary pianists and critics who have recorded some of his remarks concerning piano technique and their own impressions of his playing.

Marguerite Long, a well-known concert pianist of the day, spent the summer months of 1917 with Debussy and his wife at Saint-Jean-de-Luz on the Basque coast. They worked daily for three months on his music, discussing both technique and interpretation. That Debussy thought highly of her is attested to in a letter to his publisher of July 1, 1917, wherein he remarked that she "plays the piano so well. May God be with her and not allow her to work for anyone else."²

¹Debussy and Ravel Perform Their Own Compositions in 1913, Welte Legacy of Piano Treasures (Hollywood, California: Recorded Treasures Inc., 1963), No. 663.

²Marguerite Long, At the Piano with Debussy, trans. by Olive Senior-Ellis (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1972), p. 12.

In her book, At the Piano with Debussy, Long discusses some of Debussy's concepts regarding technique.

One of his most frequent comments in their work together was that "one must forget that the piano has hammers."¹ Any harshness of sound was foreign to his style. His technical approach to achieving a smooth, continuous sound was to keep the fingers as close to the keys as possible, thus minimizing the initial "edge" to the tone. Long repeatedly refers to "that Debussyan total adherence to the keyboard." She concludes by saying:

To obtain this legato the pianist, while taking care of his touch, must feel the sound at the end of his fingers and ensure that he maintains gentleness in force, or force in gentleness.²

Maurice Dumesnil, who worked with Debussy for a short time, also remarks on Debussy's emphasis on the need for sensitivity in the fingertips. With regard to playing chords, Debussy advised him:

Play the chords as if the keys were being attracted to your finger tips, and rose to your hand as to a magnet. Too much relaxation, all the time, is not advisable . . . the fingers must have a certain firmness; but the firmness of rubber, with no stiffness whatsoever. The little cushions at the finger tips should be extremely sensitive, and, through their "feel" one should be almost able to foretell the quality of the tone which is going to come out.³

¹Ibid., p. 13.

²Ibid., p. 22.

³Maurice Dumesnil, "Debussy's Principles in Pianoforte Playing," Etude 56 (1938): 154.

In recounting a performance he heard Debussy give of the "Hommage à Rameau," Dumesnil comments that Debussy's fingers in soft chord passages were almost flat and goes on to say, "He seemed to caress the keys by rubbing them gently downward in an oblique motion instead of pushing them down in a straight line."¹

The opinion of all who wrote about his playing was unanimous regarding the quality of his touch and tone. The outstanding features were his legato, obtained with no hint of the operation of a percussive mechanism, and his wide range of nuance.

Unfortunately, there is more mystery than agreement regarding the proper approach to pedaling--even to the extent of disagreement about the number of pedals for which Debussy wrote. With regard to this problem, Dumesnil states that Debussy was reluctant to include pedal indications in his music as he felt that the notation system available for indicating pedaling was so inadequate. "He limited himself to a few mentions of 'the two pedals;' and his marks of the damper pedal alone are exceptionally scarce."²

In an extensive article on this subject, Arthur Tollefson insists that "one fact is beyond dispute, however; no evidence currently exists to substantiate the all-too-common assumption that

¹Maurice Dumesnil, "Coaching with Debussy," Piano Teacher 5 (September-October 1962): 11.

²Dumesnil, "Debussy's Principles in Pianoforte Playing," p. 154.

Debussy conceived his compositions for a three-pedaled piano." He asserts that, therefore, the use of the sostenuto pedal is both unnecessary and inaccurate historically.¹

Viñes, the foremost exponent of this style, makes no mention of the use of the sostenuto pedal. To the contrary, his playing is described as being based "on a subtle and complex use of the two pedals."²

Although it is historical fact that Debussy's piano did not have the sostenuto pedal, an automatic exclusion of its use does not seem warranted. There are many instances within the music itself ("Hommage à Rameau," or "Prélude" from Pour le piano, for example) where the sostenuto pedal can take long pedal points, thus clarifying and enhancing the texture.

In his book on the piano music of Debussy, E. Robert Schmitz, a recognized authority in the field and a friend of Debussy, makes many references to the use of the sostenuto pedal. For example, in discussing the Étude "Pour les sonorités opposées," he suggests that in the opening section the notes which are to be held should not be replayed, "but either taken by the sustaining pedal [sostenuto],

¹A. R. Tollefson, "Debussy's Pedaling," Clavier 9 (October 1970): 22.

²Lockspeiser, Life and Mind, vol. 2, p. 34.

wherever possible, or held by the fingers."¹

The performer of today, faced with directly conflicting viewpoints from two people who knew and worked with Debussy, is placed in a difficult position. To rule out completely the possibility of using the sostenuto pedal, as Tollefson does, seems unnecessarily rigid and restrictive in the face of powerful examples in Debussy's piano music demanding its use. On the other hand, reliance on the sostenuto pedal in all situations calling for sustained bass notes under changing harmonies excludes the possibility of experimentation with differing pedal effects. In addition, there are many situations in which its use is ruled out because it is not possible to sustain only the desired pitch or harmony. Rather than making a blanket decision for or against the use of this pedal, the performer, knowing of this conflict of opinion, can make decisions regarding each individual situation after carefully considering all the alternatives. Since Debussy himself refused to indicate pedal marks, because the use of the pedal was so dependent on the total acoustical situation as well as on the individual instrument's capabilities, it would seem that the most "authentic" approach to the use of the sostenuto pedal would be one of exploration and experimentation and not one of rigid adherence to one system or the other.

¹Elie Robert Schmitz, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy, ed. by Merle Armitage (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1950), p. 215.

There are of course many other considerations regarding pedaling which will be discussed within the context of individual etudes.

Chapter Three

DEBUSSY'S SOLO PIANO MUSIC BEFORE THE ÉTUDES

Stylistic Traits

As a preface to the following brief summary of the piano music up to the Études, a few remarks about general stylistic traits are appropriate. One of the most consistent features of Debussy's writing is his simultaneous use of different levels of material. The materials used may be rhythms, melodies, harmonic structures, motives, sonorities, or pedal points. He may use one or any number of these materials in an infinite variety of combinations. The resulting texture, paradoxically, is at once complex and clear.

His manipulation of textures is also the basis of his ability to create a sense of space and distance. The feeling of space is achieved simply through very open textures and the simultaneous use of the outer registers of the keyboard. But, frequently, in combination with this feeling of space, there is a use of fleeting motives, recalled either from earlier sections in a piece or from the composer's memory. The end of the Étude "Pour les quartes" and the end of the Prélude "Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir" are examples of this type of writing. It is also noteworthy that they are

both marked to be played lontain.

Many of Debussy's pieces which seem to be based on rapid motion, such as "Mouvement" from Images I or "Le Vent dans la plaine" from Préludes I, are actually stationary and revolve around long, static pedal points. Anthony Cross describes this as essentially a rhythmical technique, in which rhythm is "reduced to a continual vibration . . . to permit . . . the realization of timbre effects."¹

Another frequent technique is his rapid juxtaposition of different subject matters related not on the basis of pitch but simply on the basis of their consecutive position in time. The opening to "Les collines d'Anacapri" from Préludes I exemplifies this.

Much of Debussy's music is associated with literary or pictorial ideas. The most frequent image is that of water, including snow, rain, clouds, and fog. Lockspeiser classifies this as programme music since the compositional process begins with discovering thematic symbols or aural images to represent precompositional concepts.² There are also certain motives used consistently with specific ideas--such as dragging rhythms to represent stagnation,³ as

¹Cited in Francis Dawes, Debussy Piano Music (London: B. B. Corp., 1969), p. 31.

²Lockspeiser, Life and Mind, vol. 2, p. 51.

³Ibid., p. 234.

in "Des pas sur la neige." This suggests an inner language of motivic symbology applicable to a great deal of Debussy's music.

The Études, however, have no pictorial or literary associations. On the contrary, Debussy is reported to have said to Stravinsky in 1915 that his recent works, "the Études and the sonatas, were all examples of 'pure music'."¹

The Music

Debussy's early piano pieces of the 1880's and 1890's are light in character, with very little of the originality of his later works. He subsequently disowned several of these early works² and was always nonplused at the popularity of Rêverie. Francis Dawes suggests that Debussy's success as a song composer in his early period influenced the solo piano writing. Dawes states that most of these early pieces "have similar textures to the song accompaniments."³ Certainly the texture of the early piano pieces is much simpler than that of his later works and does not exhibit to any great extent the use of differing levels of material previously discussed; but whether this is due to the adoption of the style used for accompaniments in his song writing as a basis for his solo writing is debatable.

¹Ibid., vol. 1, p. 125.

²Ibid., footnote, p. 143.

³Dawes, p. 6.

Although most of the early works can be grouped within the genre of the romantic character piece, the Suite Bergamasque is an exception. Its ancestors are clearly the clavecinists. The work is in four movements, the third of which, "Claire de lune," is easily Debussy's most popular piece for piano.

The Pour le piano is a pivotal piece in Debussy's piano music. Published in 1901, eleven years after the Suite Bergamasque, it also derives its forms from the clavecinists. The style of the writing, however, is much more experimental. In the two outer movements the first hints of the new piano style appear. The "Sarabande," although retaining a strict formal structure, employs many harmonic techniques (such as parallel streams of chords and chains of unresolved seventh chords) which later became associated with the "Debussy sound."

In the decade between 1903 and 1913, Debussy wrote the majority of his piano music. Most of the forty-five pieces written in this period were given some sort of title, suggesting a scene, a sensory impression, or quoting a line of poetry. It was in this period that Debussy's mature piano style was developed and also to this period that most people refer when discussing what is "typical" of Debussy's piano writing. As we will see, this attitude about what is typical of Debussy has had important consequences for the acceptance of the Études.

Discussion of a few pieces will be sufficient to give an overview of this middle period in Debussy's piano music. The Estampes, published in 1903, is in three movements, each depicting a different scene: pagodas of the Far East, an evening in Granada, and gardens in the rain. "Pagodes" was probably influenced by the music of the gamelan orchestra, both in its bell-like effects and in its use of the Oriental five-note scale (the pentatonicism here was very likely conscious, as it related to his depicting precompositional concepts with specific aural imagery). The second movement is one of three pieces he wrote for solo piano in the Spanish idiom (the other two are from the Préludes). Although Debussy spent only one afternoon in Spain, he wrote so convincingly in this piece that Manuel de Falla said it represented "the images in the moonlit waters of the albercas adjoining the Alhambra."¹ The last movement--a fast, light "touch" piece--belongs to that group of pieces inspired by his love of nature and fascination with water.

This set of pieces was important in Debussy's development for several reasons. First, the fact that he called the set "engravings" shows the influence of the visual arts on his music. Second, that he had the ability to evoke vividly scenes which lived only in his imagination is attested to by the music of the first two

¹Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy, 3rd ed. (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1949), p. 148.

movements. With the publication of Estampes, Debussy began the creation of his unique piano style in which the piano "not only leaves the practice-room and the drawing room; it even leaves the concert-hall. It becomes the poetic instrument of a wandering imaginative spirit . . ."¹

The two Series of Images were written in 1905 and 1907.

Five of the six pieces were given evocative titles. The first book contains representative examples of the mainstream of Debussy's pianistic composition up to this point. It opens with "Reflets dans l'eau," a beautiful tone poem which combines his genius for seemingly effortless evocation of sensory impressions and a tightly-knit motivic construction based on the opening three-note figure. Its inspiration was yet another of the myriad aspects of water. "Hommage à Rameau" shows Debussy's affinity for the clavecinists, both in its dedication to Rameau and in its use of the stylized form of the sarabande. "Mouvement" is a "touch" piece which relates back to the last movements of Pour le piano and Estampes. It is also one of the perpetual motion pieces which seem to propel themselves toward a destination while actually moving in circles around long static points of harmony.

The writing in the second Series becomes both more abstract and more complex; it even uses three staves throughout. The first two pieces are both experiments in the contrast and shadings of sonorities.

¹Ibid., p. 149.

The last piece, "Poissons d'or," although it is also a study in sonority, is more noted for its technical difficulties, which place it among his most demanding works pianistically.

In the two books of Préludes (1910 and 1913), Debussy made a small but significant change in his use of titles: they were now placed at the end of each piece in parenthesis rather than at the beginning. Although there were still extra-musical associations, their importance was perhaps becoming secondary.

In writing a set of preludes, Debussy followed a tradition as old as the development of keyboard music itself. In more immediate terms, the Préludes were an outgrowth of his respect and admiration for Chopin.

This music is a consummate example of Debussy's ability to create, by purely aural means, impressions originating from stimuli as disparate as the Victorian music hall, artistic representations of ancient Greek dancers, natural phenomena, and the scent of perfume in the evening air. As he himself said, regarding his orchestral Images, they create "an effect of reality."¹ Written at the end of his middle period, they are a summation of his mature style as well as the beginning of his development toward a more abstract compositional approach. The Études of 1915 were a logical next step in his musical growth.

¹Ibid., p. 199.

Chapter Four

THE ETUDE

According to the Harvard Dictionary, the etude is simply "a piece designed to aid the student of an instrument in developing his mechanical and technical ability."¹ This is a rather broad definition and one which could be applied to music not normally classified as etudes. Peter Ganz in his study of the development of the etude gives a much more thorough definition which includes the important aspects of musical and interpretive considerations:

a complete composition with pedagogic intent and content that features at least one consistently recurring problem of physiological, technical, or musical difficulty which require(s) of the player not only mechanical application, but proper study and correct interpretation as well.²

Although in the early nineteenth century the term "exercise" was often used interchangeably with "etude," they are not the same thing. An exercise is purely mechanical in nature. It consists of a finger pattern which is usually repeated on successive chromatic or

¹Harvard Dictionary of Music, 2nd ed. (1969), s.v. "Etude."

²Peter Ganz, "The Development of the Etude for Pianoforte" (D.M.A. thesis, Northwestern University, 1960), p. 12.

diatonic scale degrees; and its purpose is solely technical. Despite the inconsistent terminology used in this period, it is clear from an examination of the music which type of practice the composer intended.

The Practice Etude

Although Muzio Clementi has been credited with the development of the etude for the piano, his pupil Johann Cramer was actually the first composer to publish an etude collection. There were eighty-four in all, and they covered most aspects of early piano technique.¹ Published in 1804, they predate Clementi's work by fifteen years.

Beethoven was a great admirer of these etudes, saying, "These are the chief basis of all genuine playing."² He prepared an annotated edition of twenty of the etudes for his own study and for the use of his nephew Karl.

Cramer's 84 Etudes stand as a testimonial to the development of piano technique. When they were first published, they were a compilation of the most taxing pianistic problems of the day. Now they are used primarily at the beginning of a promising student's career.

Clementi's Gradus ad Parnassum, published between 1817 and 1824, totals one hundred pieces. It was his intention to organize a series of etudes which would explore all of the technical problems

¹Ibid., p. 69.

²Edyth Wagner, "History of the Piano Etude," American Music Teacher 9 (September-October 1959): 13.

confronting the pianist and which would increase in difficulty through the collection. Although he succeeded in the first of his objectives, it cannot really be said that they are organized by difficulty.

The etudes of the Gradus are considerably longer than Cramer's, since one of Clementi's intentions was to build endurance. However, since they are each based on a single technical problem, extended repetition results in a loss of musical interest. A distinct advantage they have over the earlier set by Cramer is that many of them place equal demands on the two hands. Although, historically, the Cramer etudes were the first comprehensive set to be published, it was Clementi who initiated a tremendous publication of nineteenth-century etude literature and whose influence was felt well into the mid-1800's.

In the 1820's there were new influences on the development of the etude. Mechanical improvements in the piano itself--such as the double escapement, all-metal frame, and heavier strings with increased tension--led to greater potential for virtuosity as well as new sound capabilities. The etude, in exploring these new areas, helped to discover what was possible and greatly augmented experimentation within other forms.

Concurrent with the mechanical improvements was the emergence of the lyrical character piece typifying the era's desire for romantic expression. This musically important form directly

influenced and merged with the etude, resulting in music suitable for concert performance. As Ganz states, this happened at a very opportune time: "The etude thus became a new type of small, individual piece in the piano literature at the very time that the importance of the dance movements and suites decreased."¹

At this point, approximately 1820, the development of the etude took on three different aspects which will be discussed separately.

The School Etude

The school etude was in effect an enlargement and extension of the eighteenth-century keyboard methods. It was intended for piano students--adult beginners and children--and was never intended to be performed publicly.

Easily the most prolific composer of this genre was Carl Czerny. Each of his etudes deals with only one technical problem. However effective these etudes may be for the development of technique, their musical interest is scant. John Field scathingly refers to him as an "inkwell" and accuses him of being a "manufacturer of passage and cadence clichés."² Robert Schumann goes a step further and suggests "that all musicians contribute to a pension fund which would be paid out to Czerny under the one condition that he stop writing

¹Ganz, p. 131.

²Ibid., p. 182.

forever."¹ That Czerny was not daunted by this adverse criticism is attested to by the fact that he published over 8,000 etudes in his lifetime!

The Virtuoso Etude

Virtuoso etudes were usually written by professional pianists to serve as a vehicle for displaying their particular technical accomplishments. Very little attention was given to musical content. The growth of this type of etude was partly inspired by the incredible feats of the violin virtuoso Nicolo Paganini. His 24 Capricci served as the inspiration for many transcriptions by pianists who tried to imitate his astonishing virtuosity by the creation of new pianistic effects.

There were many pianist/composers who wrote this type of etude. Among the more successful were Sigismund Thalberg, Alexander Dreyschock, and Adolph Henselt.

The center for all this activity was Paris. By 1830 it had become mandatory for a pianist to make a debut here, in order to assure a successful career. The standards which were set, however, were more fitting for athletic competition than for artistic communication. A critic of the time, August Kahlert, summed it up quite well:

Formerly one could expect from a performing virtuoso that he elucidated, interpreted, and clarified a masterwork; nowadays one wants to admire the skill of the individual Formerly² it was the piece that mattered; now it is the person that counts.

¹Ibid., p. 183.

²Ibid., p. 227.

The Concert Etude

The concert etude, culminating in the works of Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt, was constructed similarly to the virtuoso etude. The distinguishing characteristic was its high quality of musical content. It was this third type which continued the line of development from the virtuoso show piece to a concert piece of serious intent. In so doing it produced a form which was an amalgam of differing elements and influences.

In the first half of the 19th century the etude developed from a practice piece to a dramatic tone poem only the most accomplished pianist could play. In this process it became intimately linked with the romantic character piece. It was no longer a study piece, but an independent concert piece which often had high "show" skills¹

Chopin's Op. 10 was published in 1833, and his Op. 25 followed in 1837, only twenty years after the publication of the first book of the Clementi Gradus. Although there are many passages which may delight the virtuoso pianist eager to impress, the intent of the music is clearly not simply display. These etudes combine virtuosity of the highest order with the emotional expressivity of the romantic character piece.

Chopin's technical innovations were many, including exclusive use of the black keys, themes covering a large range, extension of the broken octave, and use of wide arpeggio figurations as the basic

¹Ibid., p. 314.

element of a piece. Although to pianists of today these are basic tools of piano technique, some critics contemporary with Chopin claimed that the etudes were unplayable. One even went so far as to warn that "players with dislocated fingers may be able to end their misfortune by practicing these etudes."¹

Most of Chopin's etudes are in three-part form, although there is often little contrast between the middle section and the outer sections. His melodic treatment is based on the manipulation of initial short motives. Typical of Chopin's etudes is a complex of problems in which the pianist must deal with several simultaneous technical difficulties. This last characteristic, in combination with the innovations briefly described above, resulted in a significant expansion of the utilization of the capabilities of the instrument.

Robert Schumann was a great champion of Chopin's works and was himself greatly influenced by Chopin's piano style. He wrote five sets of etudes, two of which were based on the 24 Capricci of Paganini. His most important set was the Op. 13. It was first published in 1834 under the title Études en forme de variations, which was a change from the original title, Etudes in Orchestral Style. The final revised version is the Symphonic Etudes of 1852. The changes in title reflect the different aspects of this work. The piano writing is certainly orchestral in nature. The compositional approach involves the

¹Ibid., p. 277.

application of the variation principle to the technical principle of the etude. The result is a set of etudes wherein each contains a pianistic problem, and nine also involve the working out of a specific formal compositional problem.¹ This combination of variation/etude is also basic to the Brahms Variations on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 35.

With Franz Liszt the etude reached the pinnacle of virtuosity. But more important for the history of piano literature, the etude became the vehicle for the development of a totally new style of writing. More than any of his predecessors, Liszt was concerned with the creation of new sounds. He used the entire range of the keyboard, often employing rapid changes of register and dynamics. There are passages of exquisite delicacy and finesse contrasted with orchestral writing using full chords, octave passages covering the entire keyboard, and scales in double thirds and sixths.²

Like Schumann, Liszt also wrote five sets of etudes, the most important of which is the Transcendental Etudes of 1852. Many of his etudes were rewritten several times, each time with an increase in difficulty. As with Chopin, the basic form of his etudes is ternary. His treatment of melody is different from either Schumann's or Chopin's, in that his main emphasis is on accompaniment changes and not on the potential for variation within the melody.

¹F. E. Kirby, A Short History of Keyboard Music (New York: The Free Press, 1966), p. 273.

²Ibid., p. 303.

With Liszt the process of the shift from the practice or school etude designed for students or amateurs to the finished concert piece intended only for the professional pianists was completed. The technical difficulties in his etudes are truly of a transcendent nature and are in many ways the result of his own special gifts as a pianist. But, like Chopin, his generating impulse is never one of display for its own sake but rather the desire to expand the potential of the medium for which he wrote.

The Etude After Liszt

After Liszt there is no continuous line of development of the etude. In the twentieth century, composers (among them Szymanowski, Prokofieff, Stravinsky and Bartok) frequently have written etudes as a means of acquainting pianists with their style, both pianistic and compositional.¹ In this way the etude becomes a key work in a composer's total output, serving the dual purposes of an introduction to the unique nature of a particular composer and providing literature for public performance. As we will see, Debussy's Études belong to this category.

¹Ganz, p. 319.

Chapter Five

DEBUSSY'S ÉTUDES

Historical Background

The First World War had an initially devastating effect on Debussy, particularly on his creative energies. Between the outbreak of the war and the summer of 1915, he wrote only one new piece, the Berceuse héroïque. In a letter to his publisher in the fall of 1914, Debussy said, "It is almost impossible to work. To tell the truth one hardly dares to, for the asides of the war are more distressing than one imagines."¹ In another letter from the same period, Debussy states that the effect of the horror of the war was to:

almost grind one to extinction. I am not referring to the past two months in which I haven't written a note or touched a piano. This, needless to say, is of no importance by comparison with the events of the war. Yet I cannot help reflecting on this without sadness. At my age, time lost is lost forever.²

In the winter months of 1915, Debussy was involved in preparing a complete edition of the works of Chopin for Durand. This

¹Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy, 3rd ed. (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1949), p. 103.

²Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind, vol. 2 (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1965), p. 207. (Hereafter referred to as Life and Mind.)

intimate contact with the music of a composer he greatly admired may have been partly responsible for restoring his creative powers. But, whatever the reason, the summer and fall months of the same year were a period of exceptional productivity and were to be his last sustained period of composition. He spent the months from the middle of July to the middle of October in a cottage, Mon Coin, overlooking the sea near Dieppe.¹ During this period he wrote En blanc et noir, the Twelve Études, and two sonatas, one for 'cello and piano and the other for flute, viola, and harp.

In a letter to Durand in which he describes his feelings during his stay at Mon Coin, Debussy states:

I am taking advantage of these last days of liberty, for Paris seems to me to be a kind of open prison where one no longer has the right to think And so I am writing down all the music that passes through my head, like a madman, and rather sadly.²

In a more optimistic letter of the same period, he wrote to his friend Robert Godet and stated that he had decided that he could not join "the ranks of the disabled" and that he must fight the war the only way he could, "by creating, to the best of my ability, a little of that beauty which the enemy is attacking with such fury."³

¹Lockspeiser, Life and Mind, vol. 2, p. 210.

²Ibid., p. 211.

³Leon Vallas, Claude Debussy: His Life and Works, trans. by Maire & Grace O'Brien (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 255.

Debussy's attitude toward the Études was always very positive. He was first of all aware, even proud, of their pianistic difficulties. He warned that some of the passages will "terrify your fingers" and that "some fine records will be established."¹

Since Debussy was himself a fine pianist, he knew that many of these passages would present problems in fingering. In his Preface to the Études (translated by Ruth Caldwell), Debussy says that he has intentionally not provided any fingerings. The reason he gives is that "the imposition of a fingering cannot logically be adapted to the different hand structures." He also refers back to the clavocinists who did not indicate fingerings, "putting their trust, doubtless, in the ingenuity of their contemporaries. It would be unseemly to doubt the ingenuity of our modern virtuosos." He concludes with the motto, "One is never better served than by oneself," and the admonition, "Let's seek our fingerings!"² With this in mind, the pianist is both freed from outside restrictions and challenged to find independently the best possible solution to each particular problem.

Debussy was at first undecided regarding the dedication of the Études. The choice was to be between Chopin and Couperin, but the decision was difficult, since he felt "an equal respect for these two

¹Ibid., p. 259.

²Claude Debussy, Douze Études Pour le Piano, livre I (Paris: Durand, 1916), p. ii.

composers, both so admirably intuitive."¹ In finally dedicating them to Chopin, he knew he was inviting comparisons, some of which would be unfavorable, but his attitude was nevertheless optimistic:

The most minute Japanese print is child's play by comparison with the writing of some of the pages; but I am so pleased, it is good work . . . without false modesty I may say that they will acquire a place of their own.²

Musical Background

The late works of Debussy have in common certain compositional techniques and attitudes which set them apart from the works of his middle period. Perhaps most important is the fact that they no longer employ evocative titles. The extra-musical associations which had played such an important part in the aural imagery of so much of his music were no longer present, thereby eliminating any hint of a "programme." This music is absolute, in that the generating impulse behind it is of an intrinsic nature: the compositional process now involved the manipulation of materials to create images and sound structures evolved not from poetic, sensory, or pictorial inspiration but from the inner relationship of pitches to each other. In the Études this inner relationship is extended to include the creation of sound structures based on what is intrinsic in abstract musical constructs-- for example, the opposition of sonorities, or the qualities of

¹Vallas, Claude Debussy: His Life and Works, p. 258.

²Lockspeiser, Life and Mind, vol. 2, p. 212.

particular intervals.

In addition to this change in compositional technique, one feels that Debussy has a more objective approach to the music. Cortot, in describing the late piano works, refers to the "special pleasure" derived from the "apparent reserve of feeling." It is not that the music is cold, but that it is restrained. "It solicits our receptivity gently, invites it, by the wise choice of subjects, to a delicate effort" ¹

Wilfred Mellers, in his article on the late works of Debussy, states that the most important change is in the music evoking the spirit of the commedia dell'arte. Instead of the sensuous, playful quality found in the earlier works, there is now a biting, sometimes sardonic quality. Mellers suggests that the proposed subtitle to the 'cello sonata Pierrot fâché avec la lune could be applied to all the late works. He goes on to say that "more balanced and controlled examples of the characteristic Pierrot music are to be found in the oddly remote and fanciful virtuosity of the piano Études" ²

As stated earlier, composers often wrote a set of etudes which were a compendium of their pianistic writing style. Debussy's Études are in this tradition. All of the effects that went into creating

¹Alfred Cortot, The Piano Music of Claude Debussy, trans. by Violet Edgell (London: J. & W. Chester, 1922), p. 24.

²W. H. Mellers, "The Final Works of Claude Debussy," Music & Letters 20 (1939): 175.

the new evocative piano style are to be found--together with new sounds which are the result of his unique treatment of such ideas as ornamentation and the inherent potential of intervals. Additionally, there is the element of transcendent virtuosity which stems not from Debussy's attempt to create pianistic difficulties but from his desire to explore thoroughly the potential of specific musical situations. Distinctions can, of course, be drawn between those etudes dealing with matters traditionally of concern to pianists, such as various kinds of double notes or equalization of the five fingers, and those dealing with mainly compositional ideas; but, in all the etudes, the problems the pianist must solve are a result of Debussy's experiments with musical materials and not the result of a desire on his part to extend piano technique per se.

It remains now to examine the Études themselves to see how these principles, ideas, and techniques are applied to specific situations.

Analysis

I. "Pour les 'cinq doigts' (d'après Monsieur Czerny)"

In the first etude there is an obvious parallel to an earlier work of Debussy's--"Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum" from Children's Corner Suite. Like the earlier work, this etude is a playful spoof of the standard five-finger etudes or exercises designed to give the pianist that elusive prize of "equality of all fingers." In view of Czerny's 8,000 etudes, many of which are devoted to the pursuit of this "equality," the reference in the title is particularly apt. Although the humor is apparent from the start, the etude nevertheless incorporates many of the same elements found in Czerny's and other standard school etudes. As Debussy himself said with regard to all the Études:

Anyhow, these Études hide a rigorous technique under a flowing harmony--"one does not catch flies with vinegar." To be more serious, you will agree with me there is no need to inflict technique unnecessarily. A little charm has never spoiled anything. Chopin proved that.¹

Debussy immediately contrasts the two elements of humor and technique, as shown in Example 1, by the inclusion of the staccato a-flat set against the standard five-finger pattern.

This pattern is a recurring motive throughout the piece. In meas. 11 through 14 it is repeated, transposed to G major. The hands alternate the pattern, thereby introducing the technical problem

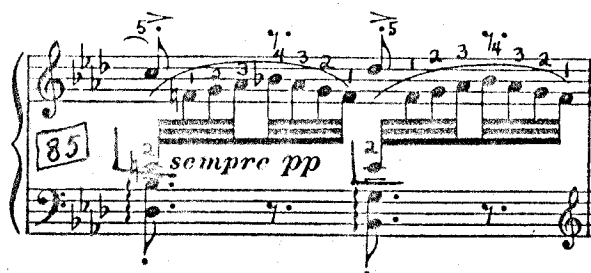
¹Marguerite Long, At the Piano with Debussy, trans. by Olive Senior-Ellis (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1972), pp. 41-42.

Example 1. "Pour les 'cinq doigts,'" meas. 1-2



of equalization of the two hands, as well as the transfer from one to the other. In meas. 72, 79, and 83 the rate of speed increases to thirty-second notes. In addition there is an accompaniment in triplet sixteenth notes. The combination of three against four adds the element of rhythmic control to the more purely physical problem of equalization of touch. In meas. 85 and 87 the thirty-second note pattern itself appears divided between the hands with rolled sixths and accented eighth notes as accompaniment. As can be seen from Example 2, the placement of the pattern between the hands and in the

Example 2. "Pour les 'cinq doigts,'" meas. 85



middle of the total texture would create severe technical difficulties. But, in the spirit of "Cherchons nos doigts" this is solved according to the fingering suggested (see Example 2). From meas. 91 to 96 there is a cadenza based on the rapid alternation of the first five notes of black-note and white-note scales grouped by twos: 1 G-flat to 1 G , then D-flat to D, etc. (see Example 3). The cadenza culminates in a

Example 3. "Pour les 'cinq doigts,'" meas. 91



triumphant return to C major at meas. 97. The pattern now occurs simultaneously in the two hands, both of which also use the standard technical device of holding down one finger while the others continue to move. Meas. 98, an extension of the pattern, juxtaposes the difficulties of an all white-note pattern, black- to white-note pattern, and black- to black-note pattern.

There are of course other technical difficulties. The left hand pattern which occurs from meas. 32 through 34 is quite awkward. The legato which is called for only adds to the difficulty (see Example 4).

Example 4. "Pour les 'cinq doigts,'" meas. 32-33



The third large section of the etude opens with a finger pattern based on the device of the stationary finger opposed to the moving fingers, which calls for the free movement of four of the fingers while the remaining finger is held stationary (see Example 5).

Example 5. "Pour les 'cinq doigts,'" meas. 48-49



As mentioned above, the five-finger pattern was a standard device designed to equalize the fingers. The passage additionally calls for a smooth motion of the second finger over the thumb. There are very few scales in the piece. However, in the coda there is a brilliant five-octave D-flat scale (Neapolitan relationship) which sweeps up the

keyboard to the concluding C major chords.

There are no really difficult interpretive problems in this etude. Long warns that the tempo should not be too rapid¹ (a basic tempo of 88 to the quarter note would seem reasonable). The fluctuations in tempo which are an integral part of the humor are clearly indicated. The left hand passage which occurs at meas. 59 and 60 is the only one which presents pedaling problems. It is an extension of the figure in Example 5, but it now covers a twelfth! There is no way to sustain the bass note with the fifth finger, so either the sostenuto pedal or the damper pedal must be used. The use of the damper pedal would mean that the right hand chords would all be under one pedal. Since the rest of the etude is all clear and straightforward, this pedaling would seem inappropriate as it would be the only passage with a blurred effect. For this reason the sostenuto pedal may be useful here.

For this first etude a complete analysis of the motive/phrase structure has been diagramed (see Chart 1). The nomenclature devised by Mueller in his work on impressionist tonal organization has been used throughout. Each motive or tonal pillar is given a letter designation--some of them further classified with small arabic numbers, such as A₂ or A₃. Then the various possible manipulations with their corresponding abbreviations are added to this letter, resulting in

¹Long, p. 43.

Chart 1. Motivic Analysis of 'Pour les 'cinq doigts''

Section 1

A	A ₂	A _v & tr	A ₂	A _{2v} & ext.
1-6	7-10	11-16	17-20	21-27

Section 2

B	B ₂	B _v & tr	B ₃ & ext.
28-31	32-34	35-41	42-47

Section 3

C	C _v & ext.
48-51	52-61

Section 4

B _{3v}	A _{2o}	B _o & ext.	B _{2tr}	A _v & tr	B _{2tr}	Bridge	
62-64	65-66	67-68	69-70	71	72	73	74

Section 5

D	A _v & tr	D _v	A _v & tr	D	A _v & tr
75-78	79	80-82	83	84	85-96

Section 6

A _v & ext.	B _v	A _v & ext.	B _v & ext.	Cadential ext.
97-98	99-100	101-102	103-110	111-116

four basic sets of symbols:¹

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| 1) Repeated, unvaried, same pitch level | A_o |
| 2) Repeated, unvaried, different pitch level | A_{tr} |
| 3) Varied, same pitch level | A_v |
| 4) Varied and transposed | $A_v \text{ \& tr}$ |

A study of the diagram shows that the traditional formal patterns such as ternary, binary, rondo, or sonata-allegro are not used. The work is clearly sectional, with some sections consisting of material grouped under one letter heading while other sections employ two different motivic groups. The resulting form is similar to a mosaic design. Although some of the other etudes do have an overall ternary form, most of them follow this same sectional/mosaic pattern.

The organization of the music is achieved by appearances throughout the composition of the motivic groups, either simply repeated or varied as described above.² This accomplishes the very basic formal principle of statement, repetition, and contrast. One of the primary organizing forces is the return, at the end of a work, to a main motivic group in either its original form or a form only slightly varied.³ A further unifying effect is the recurrence of the original

¹Robert E. Mueller, "The Concept of Tonality in Impressionist Music, Based on the Works of Debussy and Ravel" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1954), p. 40.

²Ibid., p. 140.

³Ibid., p. 145.

pitch level. As can be seen from the diagram, in section six, both the A and the B groups return at the original pitch level, although somewhat varied. In addition, Debussy uses a scale progression from F to C starting in meas. 106. The addition of the interpolated D-flat scale adds not only technical flourish but also the pull of the minor second to tonic (characteristic of the Phrygian cadence) for a thoroughly decisive close on C major.

II. "Pour les tierces"

This etude is Debussy's second work dealing solely with thirds. The first was his Prélude "Les tierces alternées." The Prélude, a rapid, "touch" piece, was rather limited in scope, dealing principally with the alternation of thirds between the hands. Undoubtedly, Chopin's "Etude in G-sharp minor" in thirds (Op. 25, No. 6) was also an important background to Debussy's exploration of the technical and musical possibilities inherent in the interval of the third. In the Chopin etude, also in fast tempo, the use of thirds focuses mainly on trills and scales, both diatonic and chromatic, although there is one section from meas. 27 to 35 which deals with the alternation of thirds from the outer fingers to the inner fingers of the hand. With the exception of this particular section, the thirds occur only in the right hand.

In the Debussy etude the focus is on the use of the interval of the third, in all its various forms, as the single unifying factor. This etude differs from the other two works in that it is in moderate tempo and is lyrical in character which reduces the emphasis on finger dexterity and increases the considerations of control.

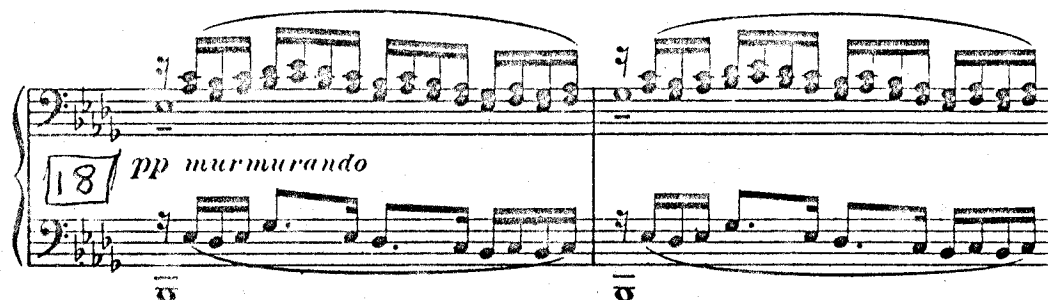
One of the basic problems found in the etude is the necessity for legato in situations where finger connection is either difficult or impossible. In the opening of the etude this occurs in the thirds themselves (see Example 6). Legato in this passage may be achieved by

Example 6. "Pour les tierces," meas. 1



proper fingering. However, in the passage which occurs from meas. 18 to 25 finger connection is not possible. Here we have an example of the use of different kinds of material to create levels of sound--a technique discussed in Chapter III. The B-flat_1 is a pedal point, the e-flat and g-flat are melody, and the thirds and left hand line are accompaniment. Since the physical connection of the melody notes is obviously impossible, the connection must be made by the use of the pedal (see Example 7).

Example 7. "Pour les tierces," meas. 18-19



The passage from meas. 53 to 58 has several technical problems (see Example 8). The connection of the top line again must be

Example 8. "Pour les tierces," meas. 55

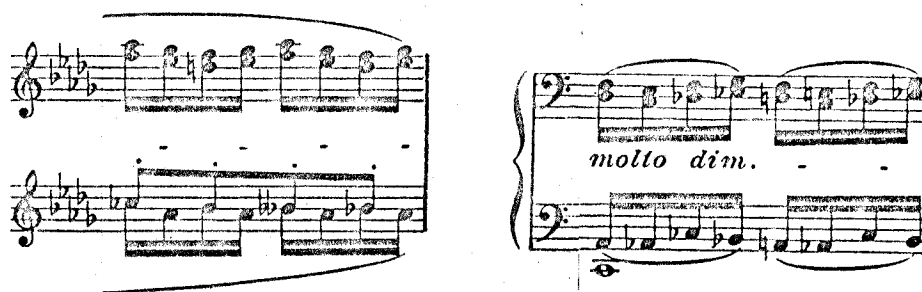


made by pedaling. The use of levels is even more complex than in the previous example. There are now four elements to be considered, each with its own particular articulation. Although the top line is marked staccato, as are the inner accompanying chords in the left hand, the two would not be articulated the same way. The top line, also marked with a slur, would need longer sounds, as well as more weighted tones, in order to bring out the melody. In addition, both hands must accomplish two different types of articulation: the accompanying thirds in the right hand need to be soft and smooth while the upper pitch must have a "ping" to it; the left hand must alternate between portamento single notes and lightly "plucked" staccato chords and fifths. This passage exemplifies the point made earlier that the focus is on control and not speed or virtuosity per se.

The trills in thirds which occur are often used as accompaniment (for example in the passage from meas. 21 to 25) and are not on a level of difficulty with the trills in Chopin's etude. The scales in thirds which occur are also not particularly difficult--in fact, they are used as accompaniment in one passage (meas. 61) and must not be made conspicuous.

This etude has seven sections. The first section, meas. 1-12, opens with the A motive (see Example 6 above), a diatonic, smoothly flowing melody. These two elements--diatonicism and flowing lines--are contrasted within this section by chromaticism and by movement around a fixed point. This opposition of chromaticism to diatonicism is found throughout the etude (see Example 9a and 9b).

Example 9a and 9b. "Pour les tierces," excerpts from meas. 7 and 10



Section two consists of only two measures: 13 and 14. It is a more dramatic section and does not return again until the end.

The third section, meas. 15 to 33, begins with the A motive transposed and delayed by metrical displacement of one sixteenth note.

The section contains a long pedal on $\flat$ B-flat, from meas. 15 to 27, part of which is shown in Example 7 above. The pedal resolves not on E-flat as one might think but on E, via a bass progression of B-flat, E-flat, F-sharp, $\flat$ B, E. The result is both charming and unexpected.

The fourth section, meas. 34 to 44, is highly chromatic. The passage from meas. 36 to 40 presents the same technical problem discussed earlier of connecting sound by means of pedaling while simultaneously playing melody and accompaniment in the same hand. Meas. 43 and 44 relate back to meas. 10 in their movement around a stable point.

The fifth section, meas. 45 to 52, is a variation of the first section. It is three measures shorter but deals with the same material. The A motive introduces the section at the original pitch level. The reduction of the section by three measures is due to the telescoping of the material into shorter segments, which also heightens the contrast between the diatonic and chromatic elements.

The sixth section, meas. 53 to 58, is a clear example of the influence of the commedia dell'arte, discussed at the opening of this chapter. The character of the section is light and whimsical, which may seem ironic to the pianist, since the level of pianistic control called for is quite demanding (see Example 8 above).

The last section, meas. 59 to 76, exemplifies the use of important motivic material at the end, on its original pitch level. It

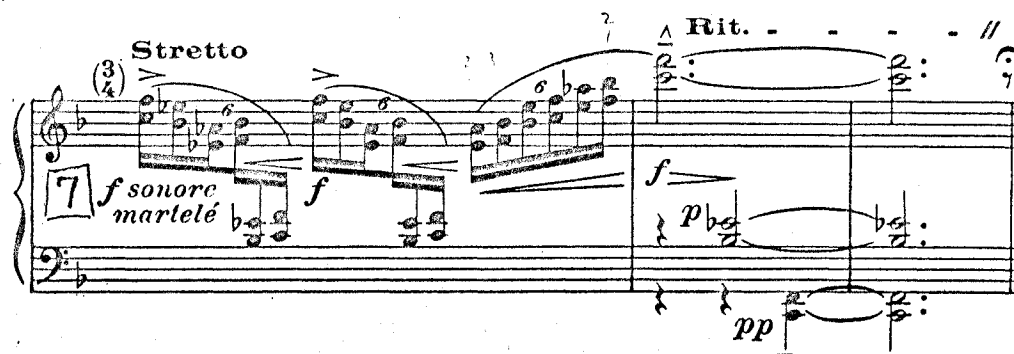
opens with the A motive, which is extended by fragmentation and sequence. The second section returns at meas. 67, also on its original pitch level. It too is fragmented and sequenced to lead to a dramatic fortissimo close on B-flat minor.

III. "Pour les quartes"

This etude is the most unusual in the first book, in that it has no ancestors either in the history of the etude or in Debussy's solo piano works. It is, however, a natural outgrowth of Debussy's harmonic language and reflects his disdain for traditional harmonic practice. Although this etude deals mainly with the interval of the fourth, its inversion--the perfect fifth--is also an important compositional factor.

The A and A₂ motives exemplify one of the main principles discussed earlier in this chapter under Musical Background: Debussy is now working with the construction of sonorities derived from the manipulation of abstract musical concepts--from the relationships between pitches implied in the choice of particular intervals. For instance, the A₂ motive, meas. 7-9, uses four notes melodically and has, for its total pitch content, only five pitches (see Example 10).

Example 10. "Pour les quartes," meas. 7-9



The chord in meas. 8 and 9 is simply a vertical realization of the material from meas. 7 (leaving out the fourth e-flat¹ to a-flat¹).

The A motive, meas. 1, illustrates this same compositional procedure (see Example 11). It also exemplifies another character-

Example 11. "Pour les quartes," meas. 1



istic technique of Debussy's: the use of added notes. These additional notes are used either linearly, to fill in open intervals, or vertically, to add to a harmonic structure--as in the added sixth chords. In this particular instance the melodic line has a compass of a ninth derived from two conjunct perfect fifths: g¹ to d² and d² to a². The melodic line is a result of the addition of two pitches (g² and c²) to these open fifths. These additional pitches are themselves a fourth above the root of each perfect fifth--another illustration of the intricacies of Debussy's compositional process.

The first section ends in meas. 18 and 19 with the A₃ motive. This motive and the A₂ motive act as important unifying structures throughout the etude. As in the two earlier motives, harmonic and

melodic elements are related to the choice of interval--in this case, just the perfect fourth. The melody itself is also another example of his technique of filling in the basic interval used. The plagal cadence on F major is the only straightforward cadence in the whole etude (see Example 12).

Example 12. "Pour les quartes," meas. 18



The rest of the etude is divided into three sections. The second large section, meas. 20 to 48, is in itself sectional, consisting of five subsections, and is more melodic than the rest of the etude. The first subsection introduces a new motive based on an E-flat minor triad juxtaposed to a diminished fourth on c^2 . (Throughout the etude Debussy uses not only perfect fourths and fifths, but also the diminished and augmented forms.) This subsection closes with the A_3 motive rhythmically varied. The next subsection is totally melodic: the whole texture is reduced to a single line melody. The next two subsections are based on the A_2 and A_3 motives and are basically

chordal in structure. The last subsection introduces another new motive at meas. 43--also based on melodically filling in the interval of a fourth. That Debussy can derive so many motives from the same intervallic structure is due to his use of the technique of rhythmic variation.

The third large section, from meas. 49 to 64, is the most dramatic. It also contains the most difficult pianistic writing in this etude. It consists of five basic elements: the opening bass motive in meas. 49, chords built on combinations of fourths and fifths, another motive derived from the perfect fourth, a double note passage based on fourths, and a pedal point--A-flat to D-flat--from meas. 53 to 63. These last four elements can be seen in Example 13.

Example 13. "Pour les quartes," meas. 53-54

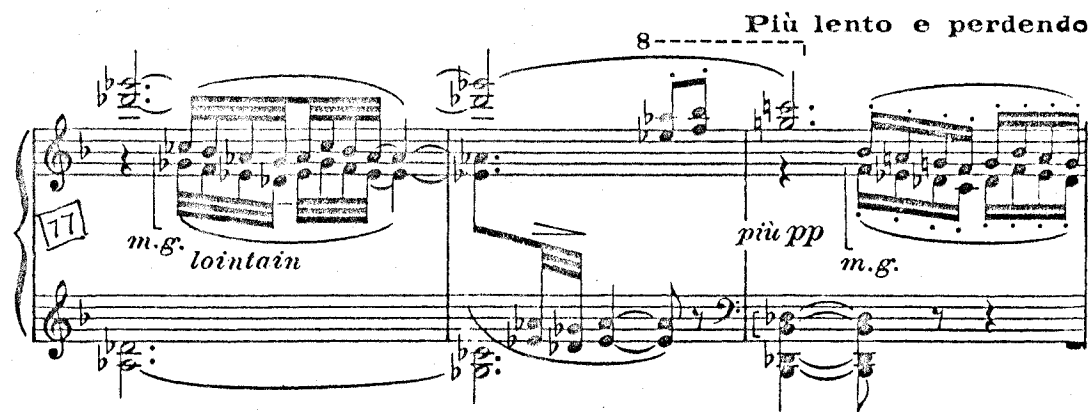
The musical score for Example 13, measures 53-54, is presented in a grand staff. The top staff (treble clef) contains the main melodic line, which begins with a *p* dynamic and a box labeled '53'. Above the staff, the tempo/mood instruction *poco a poco accelerando e cresc.* is written. The bottom staff (bass clef) features a pedal point, starting with a *pp sempre* dynamic. The score includes various dynamics: *p* (piano), *sfz* (sforzando), and *p leggiero* (piano, light). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and slurs, indicating a complex, flowing texture.

The whole section builds, both dynamically and texturally, to the dramatic climax of the piece in meas. 58 to 61.

The last section, meas. 65 to 85, is a great contrast to the preceding section. The texture is clear and open, the dynamic level is

soft and muted, and the rhythmic motion is quiet, almost static. We again have the return to original motivic material in the use of A_2 and A_3 motives, although they are both varied and transposed. As was mentioned in Chapter Three, the ending section of this etude is a beautiful example of Debussy's creation of a sense of space, into which floats a fragment from an earlier melody (see Example 14).

Example 14. "Pour les quartes," meas. 77-79



Pianistically this etude on the whole is not so difficult as the previous etude. The main problem is the use of double note passages in fourths, something which most pianists do not normally encounter. The passage which first occurs in the third beat of meas. 7 (see Example 15) is at first sight quite awkward. One solution is to divide the sextuplet between the two hands.

The passage quoted earlier in Example 13 is a part of the most difficult section in the entire etude. The difficulty inherent in the use of double notes in fourths is further increased here by the way the passage lies on the keyboard and by the necessity for a soft, light

Example 15. "Pour les quartes," meas. 7-8

The musical score for Example 15, "Pour les quartes," measures 7-8, is written for piano. It begins with a **Stretto** marking. The right hand (R.H.) plays a series of chords, while the left hand (L.H.) plays a bass line. The tempo is marked **Stretto**. The dynamics include **f** (forte), **p** (piano), and **pp** (pianissimo). The score ends with a **Rit.** (Ritardando) marking.

touch. However, with the exception of the third section, this etude is much more accessible technically than many of them. The requirements for a successful performance are basically tonal and dynamic control.

IV. "Pour les sixtes"

Debussy, in a letter to his publisher about this etude, said:

For a very long time, the continuous use of sixths reminded me of pretentious misses, sitting in a drawing room, sulking over their embroidery, while envying the scandalous laughter of the mad ninths Yet here I am writing the étude, in which attention to the sixth goes so far as to organize its harmonies solely with the aggregates of this interval, and-- it is not ugly! (Mea culpa)¹

Debussy's use of the sixths as the organizing harmonic element in this etude is not quite so straightforward as his letter suggests. In the first sentence of the quote he describes metaphorically what is the normal expectation of a work based on sixths--that it will be consonant. This expectation is a result of the fact that the sixth is a basic element of major and minor chords in first and second inversions. However, since chords of the seventh and ninth are simply extensions of the basic triad, their inversions will also create "aggregates of this interval," as will any other chord in the tertian system.

It is this property of the tertian system which Debussy has exploited. He has used, as the basic harmonic material for this etude, chords which are traditionally considered unstable and dissonant--that is, in need of resolution (seventh chords, augmented and diminished triads). He has then used them in inversion and spaced them so as to form double sixths. But what is most important is that he has used

¹Francis Dawes, Debussy Piano Music (London: B.B. Corp., 1969), p. 60.

them as independent entities with no need for resolution. The very concept of the resolution of dissonance is no longer applicable since the music revolves around the use of these chords--once considered dissonant--now functioning as the organizational support of the harmonic structure. Example 16 illustrates this technique.

Example 16. "Pour les sixtes," meas. 16-18



The first section, meas. 1 to 20, is lyrical in character.

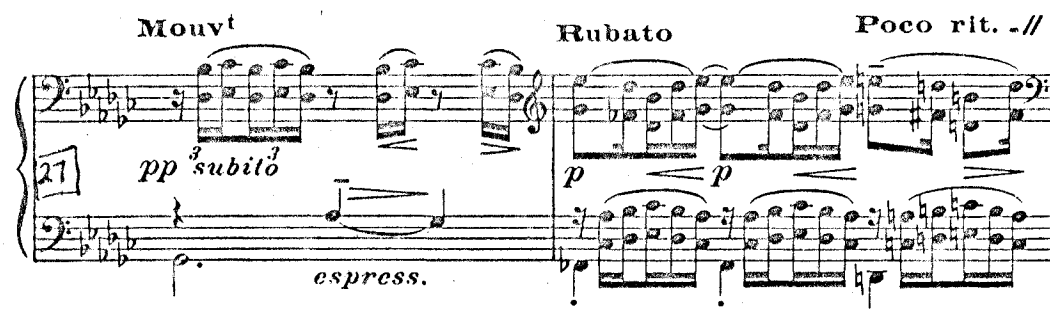
The A motive melodically outlines a seventh chord followed by a diminished triad--another example of Debussy's deriving both melodic and harmonic structures from the same precompositional source (Examples 10 and 11 also illustrate this). Meas. 10 to 12 illustrate the rocking motion that is used so much in these etudes. It gives the illusion of motion while actually remaining stationary.

The second section, meas. 21 to 26, changes character. It is marked poco agitato, and, although the tempo remains the same, the rhythmic pace increases, now employing constant triplet sixteenth notes. The continuous movement back and forth between pitches within

a small range heightens the feeling of unrest or agitation.

The third section, meas. 27 to 37, is composed of several subsections based on the material in meas. 27 and 28 (see Example 17).

Example 17. "Pour les sixtes," meas. 27-28

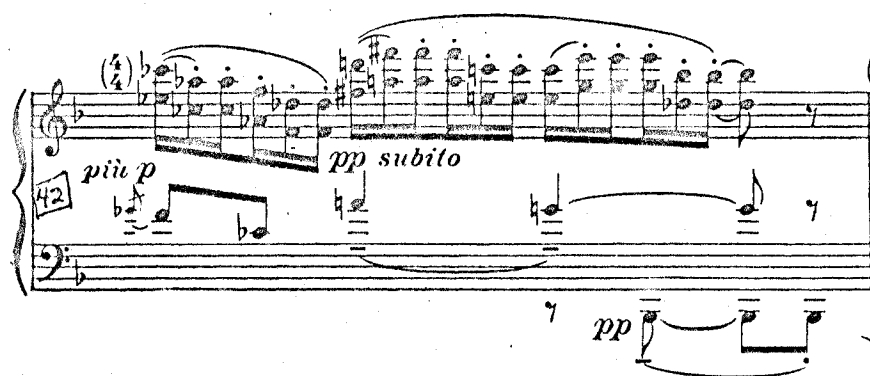


Here we have, in two measures which are immediately juxtaposed, the two basic styles found in the first section: the gentle rocking motion and the lyrical melody based on the melodic outline of a seventh chord. From meas. 29-30 there is an extension of the lyrical melody into the most extended double sixth passage in the etude. The passage does not change the lyrical character of the section but, rather, intensifies it. The ends of meas. 31 and 32 also incorporate the rocking motion so that at this point the two elements are joined rather than opposed. The end of the section returns to the opening pattern of opposition of material.

The fourth section, meas. 38 to 45, uses the same material as the second section. Meas. 38 to 41 parallel meas. 21 to 24, with some minor changes in the left hand. Meas. 42 to 45 illustrate

Debussy's ability to create a sense of space by his use of differing levels of sound (see Example 18).

Example 18. "Pour les sixtes," meas. 42



The fifth and last section, Meas. 46 to 59, uses material from the opening section. Thus the shape of this etude is an arch form. If we designate the first three sections A B C, then the overall diagram would be: A B C B' A'. There is also a return of the material at the same pitch level: meas. 46 to 50 relate to meas. 1 to 4; and meas. 51 to 54 relate to meas. 10 to 12. Meas. 55 to 59 are a cadential extension. The root movement at the cadence is by a third, from an F^9_7 chord to a D-flat chord with an added sixth. Although the use of added sixth chords is of course common to Debussy's style, it is interesting to speculate that it has special significance here, occurring as it does in his etude "Pour les sixtes."

Debussy was undoubtedly influenced to some degree by Chopin's "Etude in D-flat" (Op. 25, No. 6). The opening right hand

figure of the Chopin etude is the same as that which occurs in meas. 27 of the Debussy etude (see Example 17 above), but the resemblance is only one of pitch and does not involve rhythm or overall character. In addition, both etudes extensively employ the use of double sixths.

Although the obvious parallel to Debussy's etude in sixths is the "Etude in D-flat," Chopin's "Etude in E major" (Op. 10, No. 3) also may have been of some influence. The passage from meas. 21 to 28 of the Chopin etude uses the same rocking motion as does the passage in Debussy's etude from meas. 10 to 12.

The pianistic demands in this etude are again those of control rather than virtuosity. The opening section, with its subdued dynamic level and legato melody in sixths, requires tonal balance in the voicing of the right hand sixths. Meas. 5 and 6 illustrate the frequent use of different articulation between the two hands. Sections two and four employ different levels of material which are individualized by their own particular articulation pattern. All of these are instances in which the pianist is called upon to exhibit not the more usual virtuosic attributes of speed, endurance, or agility in wide leaps but the careful control of the quality and balance of sound. The one extensive double note passage, meas. 31 and 32, is only moderately difficult. So, again, we have an etude in which the pianist must develop the more subtle aspects of a truly refined piano technique.

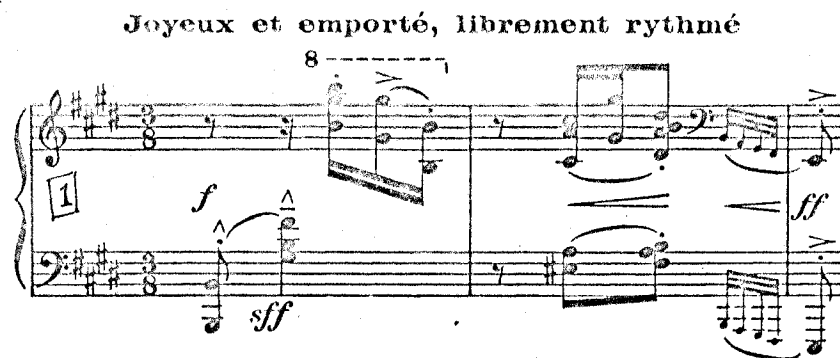
V. "Pour les octaves"

This etude stands out from the others in the first book in several ways. It is the most tightly knit motivically: most of what happens throughout the etude can be related back to the material which occurs from the opening measure through the first beat of the third measure. Its character is more robust and energetic than any of the others--perhaps as a result of its focus on octaves. And, it is the first etude which may be called virtuosic.

The overall form of the etude is: A B C A. The opening A section, meas. 1 to 20, is made up of two smaller subsections. The first subsection, meas. 1 to 10, opens with a four-measure introduction which is in its construction a microcosm of the etude. The introduction is heard as two groups of two measures each, with the first two measures acting as an upbeat to the third measure, both rhythmically and harmonically. In addition, the introduction illustrates one of the most consistent factors throughout the etude: the opposition of ascending and descending motion.

The key portion of the introduction is shown in Example 19. For purposes of analysis this material is best handled as two separate cells. For identification the material of the first measure will be called "x" and the material in meas. 2 and the downbeat of meas. 3, "y." "X" consists of a leap of a perfect fifth ascending, followed by a descending pattern of an octave which is divided into the conjunct

Example 19. "Pour les octaves," meas. 1-2, excerpt from meas. 3

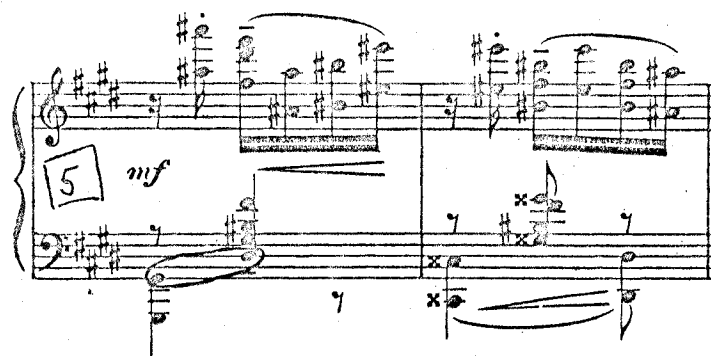


intervals of a third and a sixth. "Y" opens with a chordal pattern whose melodic outline is an ascending perfect fifth followed by a descending fourth. It closes with a descending fifth filled in diatonically. As mentioned above, the first two measures act as an anacrusis to the first beat of meas. 3. The harmonic motion can now clearly be seen: the opening ascending fifth on V is balanced by the descending perfect fifth to I. The material between these two harmonic poles sounds suspended--an effect further enhanced by the opposition of the opening ascending motion followed by the closing descending motion. Meas. 3 and 4 are an octave passage based on the melodic outline of the "y" cell. They act both as a spin-off of the energy released by the downbeat of meas. 3 and as an extension of the tonic E major.

The rest of this first subsection, meas. 5 to 8, is made up of a four-measure group derived from "x" and "y" and a two-measure

group which is simply two different transpositions of "y." A closer examination of meas. 5 and 6 (Example 20) illustrates how Debussy

Example 20. "Pour les octaves," meas. 5-6



uses the two cells. The ascending fifth is in the left hand, only it is now between the top of the octave and the bottom of the following chord (he does put in a helpful tenuto mark, however, in case the performer should miss the relationship). The right hand pattern in meas. 5 is a combination of "x" and "y" cells. The opening three notes are a transposition of the opening measure. The last two notes are an inversion of the fourth derived from the "y" motive. In the sixth measure the bass line motion ascending by half step is the same as the bass motion in meas. 2. The last three notes in the right hand of meas. 6 are a retrograde of the last three notes of the right hand in meas. 5. They are preceded by a rocking motion between the e-sharp² and b-sharp¹.

In the second subsection, meas. 11 to 20, the right hand provides an ostinato, using the right hand pattern from meas. 1. The left hand incorporates the ascending fifth into an accompaniment to an inner melody which is derived from "y" and played by the left hand thumb. It uses the descending fourth but then follows this with a filled-in perfect fifth ascending. Since this interval is used three times in the two cells, it is not possible to say from which cell it is derived unless further identified by its original rhythmic pattern.

The B section, meas. 21 to 48, is more fragmentary than the A section. There are no long lines as in the left hand melody in meas. 11 to 20. In addition, the constant changing of textures, dynamics, and articulation further enhances the feeling of highly contrasted fragments of sound directly juxtaposed.

The first four measures of B, 21 to 24, act again as a prism, as do meas. 1 to 4, in that the former are functionally related to the latter, beginning with an exact repetition of the first measure. However, whereas in the introduction the tonal direction is to E, here the direction is to E-flat, the main tonal center of the B section.

The remainder of the B section, meas. 25 to 48, can be divided into two subsections: meas. 25 to 42 and meas. 43 to 48. The first of these subsections is clearly derived from the material in meas. 23 and 24, with the exception of the chromatic run in meas. 29 to 32. Again excepting these same four measures, 29 to 32, there is

a consistent rhythmic pattern in this subsection comprised of an emphasis on the downbeat of every other measure, which results in two-measure groupings. This is quite different from the A section where, if there is a rhythmic emphasis within a measure, it falls most often on beat two (the "y" cell is the consistent exception to this since its emphasis is on beat three). This change in rhythmic emphasis is accompanied by a change in articulation pattern: whereas, before, the first note of a group in the right hand would be lighter, now the first note is strongly accented.

The chromatic run, meas. 29 to 32, is also of interest rhythmically. The first two measures both have sharp accents on the downbeat in contrast to the alternating pattern described above. In meas. 31 and 32 Debussy indicates sharp cross-rhythmic accents of three over two by superimposing accents in groups of two on a triplet rhythmic pattern:



The second subsection, meas. 43 to 48, acts as a bridge into the C section. It continues the use of triplet sixteenth notes, first begun in meas. 38. This will remain the constant rhythmic motion of the entire C section. In its thinner texture and staccato touch this bridge passage effects a smooth transition into the C section which is, for the most part, lighter in texture and touch than the A and B sections.

The C section, meas. 49 to 82, is another example of

Debussy's light "touch" style. In its rapid alternation of hands it is also reminiscent of the Prélude "Les Tierces alternées."

The first subsection, meas. 49 to 58, opens with a four-measure motive derived from the "y" cell. Again there is the use of constant motion within a small area and the juxtaposition of ascending and descending motion. Meas. 53 and 54, which repeat meas. 49 and 50, are followed by a new pattern made up of rocking fifths. They also initiate a new pattern, between the hands, of even alternation between octaves and single pitches (see Example 21).

Example 21. "Pour les octaves," meas. 49-50



Measures 59 to 67 return to the opening motive of the C section while continuing the even alternation established in the preceding four measures. Most of this section is based on a variation of the octave passage from meas. 3. It is the only section in C which is in E major and not D-flat major.

Measures 68 to 82 comprise the last subsection of C. The

first four measures, 68 to 71, are a varied repeat of 49 to 52. The section from meas. 72 to 79-1/2 has by far the most difficult octave writing in the etude. For the first time both hands have octaves simultaneously. The right hand of meas. 72 to 75 is a repeat of the material from meas. 49 to 52. It is accompanied by duplet sixteenth notes in a sequential treatment of the ascending perfect fifth motive from "x," resulting in a rhythmic pattern of two against three. The last three and one-half measures open with the main C motive now in parallel motion with octaves in both hands. The passage from the last half of meas. 79 to 82 acts as a bridge to the A¹ section.

A¹ is thirty-nine measures long, nine measures shorter than A. It opens with a repeat of the first ten measures. Meas. 93 to 98 use the left hand melody from meas. 11 to 14 with an accompaniment based on the interval of a third from the right hand of "x." Meas. 99 to 108 are based on the third and on the fifth--both descending and ascending--and on a variation of the octave passage in meas. 3 and 4. Meas. 109 to 121 are basically an extension of the material from meas. 1 to 4 (again, the principle of the return of original material within the closing section). The four-measure interruption from meas. 115 to 118 is based on filled-in thirds and fifths as were meas. 99 to 108, only now there are octaves in both hands. The etude ends with a repetition of the "y" cell with a cadential extension of one and two-thirds measures as added emphasis.

Although Chopin wrote an etude in octaves (Op. 25, No. 10), the resemblance between the two etudes extends no further than the concentration on this particular interval. The treatment of the piano, as well as the character and style of the two pieces, is quite different. The Chopin etude is marked Allegro con fuoco and is in cut time, while the Debussy etude is marked Joyeux et emporté, librement rythmé and is in a waltz rhythm--albeit a rather unsteady one. The A section of the Chopin etude projects an ever-mounting emotional turmoil using rapid octaves as a means to create this mood. Its constant triplet motion and generally loud dynamic level put an added emphasis on endurance. Its B section, however, is a study in the control of a legato melody in octaves, creating a blissful mood in contrast to the turbulent sections which precede and follow it. Debussy's approach to the use of octaves differs from Chopin's. Throughout the A section Debussy makes as much use of octaves in combination with other intervals as he does of single octaves. This develops the ability of the hand to adjust quickly to different inner configurations within the octave span. Equally important is his use of skips. While the Chopin etude almost always employs a step-wise motion, the Debussy etude predominantly employs skips. This requires not only the ability to play octave passages but also the ability to move about the keyboard with great accuracy. These pianistic elements are illustrated in Examples 19 and 20 above.

The middle sections of the two composers' etudes are also quite different. As mentioned, the Chopin etude is a study in octave melodic playing, while the Debussy etude makes no such demands. But, since this is hardly a hallmark of Debussy's style in general, it is understandable that he would not include it in his etudes. The C section of the Debussy etude is in his toccata style and demands a light, even touch as well as a secure spatial sense of the keyboard. The passage from meas. 72 to 79-1/2 is technically the most difficult in the etude, as illustrated in Example 22a and 22b. This is the only passage in the C section which is above the level of piano.

Example 22a and 22b. "Pour les octaves," meas. 72 and 76

Accelerando poco

Strepitoso

Finally, there are the considerations of articulation and dynamics. The Chopin etude requires control over long sections having the same general dynamic level (particularly difficult to effect at a high dynamic level without sounding forced or harsh); however,

the articulation requirements are quite straightforward and present no great problems.

In the Debussy etude, on the other hand, with the exception of the first twenty-three measures of the C section, the dynamic level is always changing. With the same exception, the articulation is also constantly changing. Example 19 above clearly illustrates the latter point: within the first measure alone there are five different articulation signs. The combination of these continually changing elements requires of the pianist, in addition to considerable technical expertise, a great degree of tonal control over the instrument. So, again, the element of tonal control, while important for Chopin, is an integral part of the total technical requirements for Debussy.

VI. "Pour les huit doigts"

This etude is an outstanding example of the use of rapid motion within a confined area--a technique which has been discussed in Chapter Two, page 24. In addition, the rhythmic motion is almost constant, varying only from thirty-second notes to triplet thirty-second notes (with one exception in meas. 40). These two factors in combination give the piece a kind of fluttering, feathery quality.

The overall form of this etude is an A B C A with coda. With the exception of the coda, this is the same design as "Pour les octaves." While the outstanding feature of "Pour les octaves" is Debussy's intricate manipulations of motivic material, what is unusual about this etude, in comparison, is its lack of a motive in the sense of a pitch outline. What Debussy has used instead for his motivic material are total sound units, such as tetrachords, trills, and clusters. In his use of these sound units to create images, this etude, of all those we have seen, is the most like the music of his mature period.

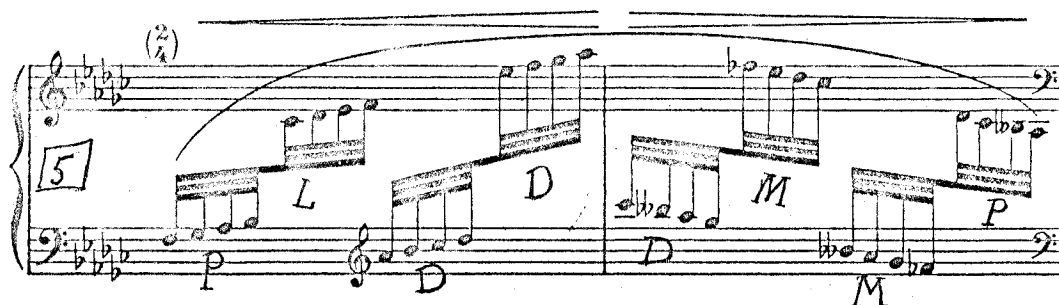
The A section, meas. 1 to 12, is made up of two basic elements: the partial filling in of the interval of a fifth, using opposing motion between the hands, and scales divided between the hands. Example 23 is taken from the opening of the etude and illustrates the first basic element. For the tetrachords, given in turn to each hand, Debussy has used the first tetrachords of the church modes: Dorian,

Example 23. "Pour les huit doigts," meas. 1



Phrygian, Lydian, and Mixolydian. These have been indicated in the example with the abbreviations D, P, L, and M. Debussy continues to use the modal tetrachords for the scale passages which make up the second element, as shown in Example 24.

Example 24. "Pour les huit doigts," meas. 5-6

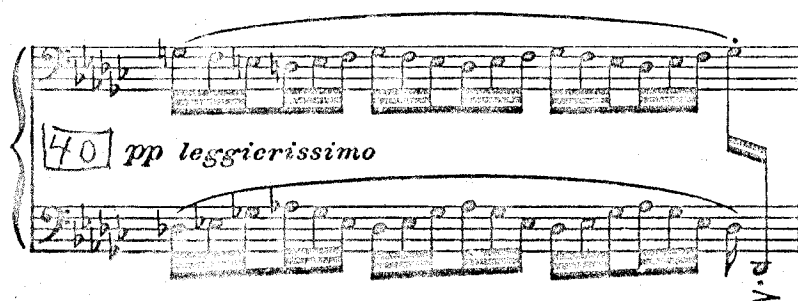


Measures 13 to 16 serve as a bridge into the B section, meas. 17 to 34. Although the key signature has switched to E-flat major, the section itself centers around the pitch of B-flat. The first of the two subsections within B, meas. 17 to 28, changes from the

tetrachordal structure of the previous section to a pattern based on only two notes per hand in a type of modified trill. The b-flat ostinato from meas. 17 to 20 acts as a support for the constant motion. In meas. 21 to 24 the third d-flat¹ to f¹ acts as a partial ostinato. The second subsection, meas. 29 to 34, can be broken down into three two-measure groups, each having its own pattern. The section ends with all-black- and all-white-note glissandi which, when combined with the damper pedal, result in a blur of sound with totally undefined pitch.

The C section, meas. 35 to 41, centers on D-flat. The entire section is made up of pitch combinations grouped together in varying clusters of sound. The first five measures are either trills or trill-like patterns of triplet thirty-second notes. The section concludes with yet another example of filling in a fifth, this time with all the possible notes divided between the hands by grouping all the white notes in the right hand and all the black notes in the left hand (see Example 25).

Example 25. "Pour les huit doigts," meas. 40



The return of A, meas. 42 to 53, is an exact repeat of the opening A section. The coda, meas. 54 to 68, is made up of two subsections. The first subsection, meas. 54 to 59, is based on the filling in of the octave. The pattern here basically alternates fifths in opposing motion, with a tetrachord occasionally substituted for the fifth. The final subsection, meas. 60 to 68, is similar to the final subsection of C, meas. 40 and 41, in its use of the two hands simultaneously opposing each other and in its use of tightly spaced clusters of pitches within a small span. These clusters of sound, as illustrated in Example 26 and in Example 25 above, both foreshadow the style of Example 26. "Pour les huit doigts," meas. 60



writing Bartók made so famous in his Night Music. That the piece ends so clearly V to I is an amusing and totally unexpected finish, coming as it does directly out of these ambiguous tonal clusters.¹

¹It is clear from the musical context that the last pitch in the right hand should be g-flat³ regardless of the missing treble clef.

Like the preceding etude, this one calls for a high level of physical dexterity. It is also related to the first etude in that it falls under the classification of "finger technique"; but it differs from that etude in that it uses only the four fingers, not the thumb--a suggestion made by Debussy himself at the bottom of the first page of the etude. Debussy thus contradicted his dictum that fingering should not be indicated; but it may be that this was his way of intimating that, in writing this etude, he was attempting to recapture the old keyboard practice of playing with the four fingers minus the thumb.

There are three main problems in this etude: accustoming the hand to the ever-changing patterns of the tetrachords, working within a confined area with the hands closely positioned, and rapid shifting of the hand from one position to another. For all these problems it is helpful to practice in blocks of sound--for instance, taking the tetrachords as simultaneous four-note clusters. This enables the hand to feel the tetrachord as a unit. In passages such as those shown in Examples 23 and 24, it also helps to position one hand as far back on the black keys and the other hand as far forward on the white keys as possible. This way there is less chance for the two hands to stumble over each other.

It is also pertinent here to discuss Debussy's use of pedal marks. As with much of his music, there are no indications for pedaling in the entire etude. This does not mean that he wanted no

pedal, but that he felt that the notational symbols for pedaling were simply inadequate and misleading. In his own performance of the Prélude "Le Vent dans la plaine,"¹ he used pedal throughout. This is particularly noteworthy since there are also no pedal indications in the prelude and, even more to the point, there is frequent use of staccatos. Debussy's own performance shows that he did not mean for these staccatos to be "dry" or detached sounds. On the contrary, he intended a bell-like effect resulting from a quick release of the note in combination with the use of the damper pedal.

With regard to this etude, as well as all the other etudes making use of fast passage work, the best approach is to experiment with the pedal as an aid in the shaping of the phrases and of the sound possibilities of whole units of pitches. For instance, in Example 23 the pedal could be used throughout the measure, while in Example 24 one pedal could be used for two measures. The resulting blur of sound, offensive in Mozart or Bach, would here help to express the structure of the phrase.

Of all the etudes of the first book, this one is the most idiomatically conceived for the piano. As mentioned above, there are no discernible motives, only sound units. In addition, the use of four-note groups--analyzed earlier as derived from modes--can just as

¹Debussy and Ravel Perform Their Own Compositions in 1913, Welte Legacy of Piano Treasures (Hollywood, California: Recorded Treasures Inc., 1963), No. 663.

well be thought of in pianistic terms as the alternation of different combinations of white and black notes. We cannot, of course, be certain what was the actual generating impulse behind this etude; however, the title itself suggests that Debussy was thinking in terms of exploration of the pianistic possibilities offered by the use of only eight fingers. And the overall effect of the piece certainly confirms that he was effective in exploiting these possibilities to their utmost.

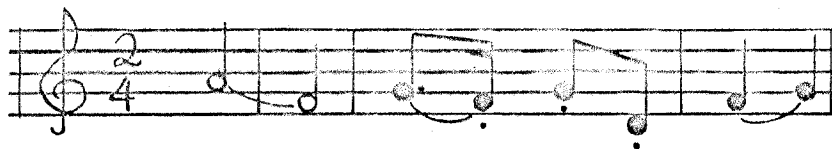
VII. "Pour les degrés chromatiques"

This etude is comparable to the preceding one in its almost constant thirty-second note motion, generally very soft dynamic level, and its requirements of a high degree of control over touch and dynamics. Unlike its predecessor, however, much of the writing here makes extensive use of extremes in register as well as single-hand finger patterns which range over several octaves. The returned use of the thumb accounts for other noticeable differences--for instance, full chords, octaves, and the use of chromatic scales or finger patterns (the previous etude used no chromatic passagework; see Examples 23 and 24 for typical patterns). The sixth etude is almost completely single-line texture, with a few notable exceptions (see Examples 25 and 26 above). In contrast, this etude has as one of its basic elements the opposition of chordal to linear material.

The seventh etude has, in common with the Schumann Symphonic Etudes, characteristics similar to the theme and variation form. The piece centers around a recurring theme which is stated several times in varied forms and with varied accompaniments; it is always, however, aurally recognizable and clearly distinguishable from its surroundings (that is, it has a highly defined profile, basically due to its rhythmic pattern, which is a constant factor in all but one of its appearances).

An examination of the theme (see Example 27) shows that it

Example 27. "Pour les degrés chromatiques," theme from
meas. 11-14



illustrates the use of added notes--a technique previously discussed on page 60. The basis of the theme is the D minor triad with g¹ as an added fourth. Its clear diatonicism is in contrast to the chromaticism of the rest of the etude.

The etude is in six major sections. The first, meas. 1 to 10, serves as an introduction. It presents techniques such as four-note chromatic patterns and the use of harmonic seconds.

Section two, meas. 11 to 24, opens with the theme. In its first appearance it is a single line accompanied by a four-note chromatic pattern in constant thirty-second notes, which follows a descending chromatic scale from e-flat² to b¹ (see Example 28).

Example 28. "Pour les degrés chromatiques," meas. 11-12

sempre leggerissimo

pp III

dolce espress. - - - - (un peu en dehors)

From meas. 15 to 24 chordal and chromatic linear patterns are contrasted. Some measures have only a two-line texture. These passages are always chromatic and in two instances, meas. 15 and 17, are simply chromatic scales. The remainder of the writing exhibits a simultaneous use of chordal and chromatic material.

Section three, meas. 25 to 42, opens with the theme, now in chords. The former rhythmic pattern remains while the melodic outline changes. Debussy uses both seventh chords and triads as harmonic accompaniment to the theme with added single pitches on the weak beat below the chords. The chromatic single-line accompaniment is in thirty-second notes (as are all the chromatic accompaniment figures). It fills in the interval of a minor third but remains fixed to the same third--in contrast to the figure in meas. 11 to 14 which moves within the compass of a diminished fourth.

The remainder of the section contrasts chordal to chromatic material. Meas. 35 to 38 use the two elements simultaneously. Meas. 39 to 42 use only chromatic material, with meas. 42 serving as a kind of bridge to the next section, in that the right hand material becomes the accompaniment pattern used for the next statement of the theme.

The fourth section, meas. 43 to 52, is made up entirely of thematic material. The first statement occurs in meas. 43 to 46. The constant factors are the melodic pitches and the rhythmic pattern

which both appear as they did in the original statement. The changed factor is the setting of the theme: the accompaniment pattern is like that in the second statement--moving within a fixed compass of a minor third. With the exception of the first chord, the left hand accompanying chords are simply octaves with filled-in fifths, resulting in an open, sparse sound.

The second statement of the theme in this section, meas. 47 to 50, is more altered than in any of its other occurrences. This is the only time the rhythmic pattern is changed from the original. Debussy has inverted the position of the half notes and quarter notes so that in this statement the quarter notes come first, placing the measure with the dotted rhythm and eighth notes second rather than third. The melodic outline of the theme is also changed. It begins with intervals similar to the original, but in the second measure the interval of a sixth is introduced--the largest interval used in the theme so far. The other alteration is that, for the first time, the theme changes its tonal center at the third and fourth measures. The accompanying thirty-second notes are simply chromatic scales--the only departure from the four-note patterns. The left hand chordal setting is full, using four-note major chords and seventh chords.

Measures 51 and 52 begin in the same way as do meas. 47 and 48, but actually serve as a bridge to the next large section, meas. 53

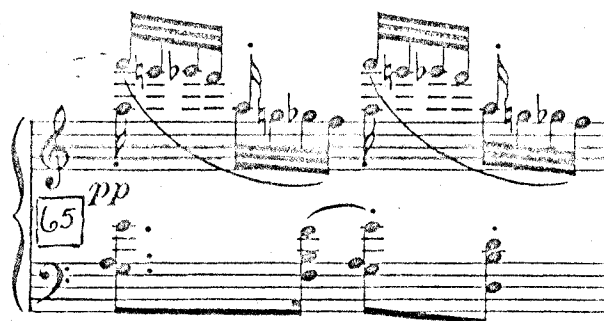
to 62. In contrast to the previous section, this one has no thematic material. It is based entirely on chromatic linear material and makes extensive use of sequence and repetition. The writing for the piano is especially colorful in this section and is quite reminiscent of the type of lacy patterns Liszt used to advantage (see Example 29).

Example 29. "Pour les degrés chromatiques," meas. 59



The sixth and final section, meas. 63 to 88, is made up of three smaller sections. The first subsection, meas. 63 to 70, opens with the theme, again in D minor. It is almost identical to the original statement, the only exceptions being the last two pitches. The left hand accompanying chords are similar to those used in the fourth section. The accompaniment pattern in the right hand is the most difficult technically of all the patterns because of the recurring octave displacement (see Example 30). The last four measures of the subsection continue this accompaniment pattern, contrasted with a parallel progression of full four-note chords in the left hand.

Example 30. "Pour les degrés chromatiques," meas. 65



Measure 70 is in a pivotal position. It completes the chordal progression in the left hand while beginning the right hand pattern of the next section, meas. 70 to 77. This pattern is similar to that of the opening section: it has the same span of three octaves, and it is the only other instance in which harmonic seconds are used. Its first six measures make use of sequence and repetition as did the previous section. They also make the widest use of the extremes of the keyboard, going all the way to $_2B$.

The theme returns in meas. 78 on the same pitch level as in meas. 25. This is the only time it is ever heard above the accompaniment. Meas. 83 to 88 act as a coda, gradually slowing the motion from sixteenth notes to quarter notes to half notes and finally dying away on two separate sounds for the last two measures.

This is one of the more demanding etudes technically. The pianist must have a good spatial sense of the keyboard, particularly in the opening and closing sections. In the opening of the latter this is

true for only one hand (see Example 30 above). Careful control of the thumb is required so that the first notes of the second and fourth groups are not accented. It all must sound as smooth as the accompaniment patterns which stay within the compass of a third--a difficult feat!

There are also many passages which are awkward because of the relative position of the hands or because the writing requires quick shifts with one hand crossing over the other. One such passage is the opening six measures of the etude. A solution which might prove helpful would be to reverse the usual placement of the hands, beginning with the left hand rather than the right. The reversal of hands shown in Example 31 would continue for the entire six measures.

Example 31. "Pour les degrés chromatiques," meas. 1-2

Scherzando, animato assai

As mentioned, this etude requires careful control over touch and dynamics. This is true for all the passagework, but the closing statement of the theme presents a special problem. Heretofore the theme has always been given to one hand, with the accompaniment staying above the chords (with the exception already noted). In meas. 78 to 82 the accompaniment and theme change relative hand position with each measure (see Example 32). This makes the shift of

Example 32. "Pour les degrés chromatiques," meas. 78-79

The musical score for Example 32 shows measures 78 and 79. Measure 78 begins with a piano (pp) dynamic and a bracketed measure number [78]. The left hand (L.H.) plays a chromatic descending line in the bass clef, while the right hand (R.H.) plays a chromatic ascending line in the treble clef. A fermata is placed over the end of measure 78. Measure 79 continues the chromatic movement, with the R.H. part now in the treble clef and the L.H. part in the bass clef. The R.H. part is marked with a 'm.g.' (mezzo-gusto) dynamic. The score includes fingerings (1, 2, 3, 5) and a 'lontain' marking above the R.H. part.

position in each hand smaller, but it also makes the smooth connection of the melody more difficult. A possible fingering solution is offered in the example. In any case, however the passage is taken, it exhibits in microcosm the etude's requirements for control of touch, dynamics, and spatial placement of the hands.

VIII. "Pour les agréments"

In a letter to Durand concerning this etude, Debussy makes a play on the various meanings of the word agrément, saying that the etude is "a study in ornaments, 'pour les agréments,' but not for the entertainment of pianists, the facetious virtuoso will say. It takes the form of a 'Barcarolle' on a rather Italian sea."¹ However, the lyrical character of the piece, as well as its general improvisatory effect, does reflect the meaning: something which pleases, a pleasure or distraction.

Although this etude makes use of many of the conventional ornaments, it is more important for its illustration of Debussy's concept of the function of ornamentation itself. In a discussion of J. S. Bach's music, Debussy stated:

Yet the beauty of this concerto stands out from among the others which appear in Bach's manuscripts; it contains, almost intact, 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 the musical grammars.²

In light of what Debussy said about the Bach work, an approach to this etude which cataloged the types of ornaments used, while interesting, would only supply the grammar of the music and might result in a view

¹ Leon Vallas, Claude Debussy: His Life and Works, trans. by Maire & Grace O'Brien (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 258.

² Claude Debussy, Monsieur Croche the Dilettante Hater, trans. by B. N. Langdon Davies (New York: Lear, 1948), p. 55.

of the ornaments as simply decorative tracery added to the main melodic motives. This would be in direct opposition to what Debussy himself said about the function of ornamentation: he felt that, far from being merely decorative, it was in fact the generating impulse behind the creation of musical line and form.

The overall form of the piece can be expressed in the following diagram:

FRAME	Bridge	A	Bridge	B	FRAME	Cadenza
1-8 (9-10)	11	12-29	30-32	33-42	42-49	50-53

Although this etude is sectional like most of the others in the set, the style of writing is different. It is much more discontinuous and improvisatory, clearly illustrating Debussy's disdain for the developmental approach to formal construction. The material in each of the three large sections is quite independent. In addition, there are no motives recurring throughout, which further heightens the effect of improvisation. Even within the sections there are abrupt changes in mood and style. There are, however, unifying elements within the sections, giving them a somewhat cohesive effect. Because of the use of the frame and the discontinuity between sections, the total effect of the piece is rather like that of a collage, wherein individual elements may not relate directly to one another, but they nevertheless are related by the fact of their existence within the same enclosed space.

The opening framing section begins with four measures in which block chords in the left hand are contrasted to lacy, arpeggiated chords in the right hand. Meas. 5 to 8, by contrast, are made up of single-line material culminating in the cadenza-like passage in meas. 7 and 8. Meas. 9 and 10 reintroduce the chordal element. They are otherwise unrelated to the opening four measures and do not recur in the rest of the etude. Meas. 11 acts as a bridge, introducing the accompaniment pattern which continues into the A section. This pattern, composed mainly of alternating thirds in constant thirty-second note motion, becomes the unifying element in the section.

The A section, which is the longest in the etude, opens with a clear, light melody (see Example 33). This flute-like melody, with

Example 33. "Pour les agréments," meas. 12

Poco animando

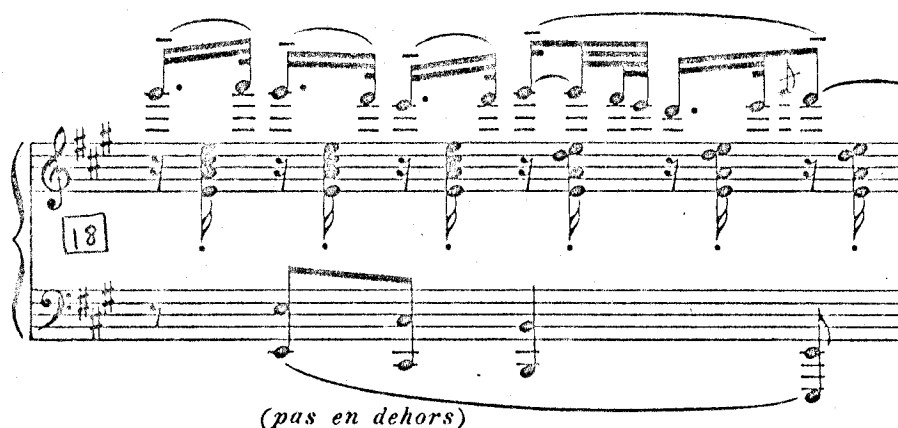
p semplice

pp murmurando

its graceful turns and embellishments, is contrasted in the following subsection by a slower moving melody in the lower register of the piano. In its opening measure, 17, it is accompanied by the same

pattern, with the addition of arpeggiated thirds. The continuation of the melody in meas. 18 and 19, however, is in great contrast to the preceding six measures. A comparison of Examples 33 and 34 will

Example 34. "Pour les agréments," meas. 18

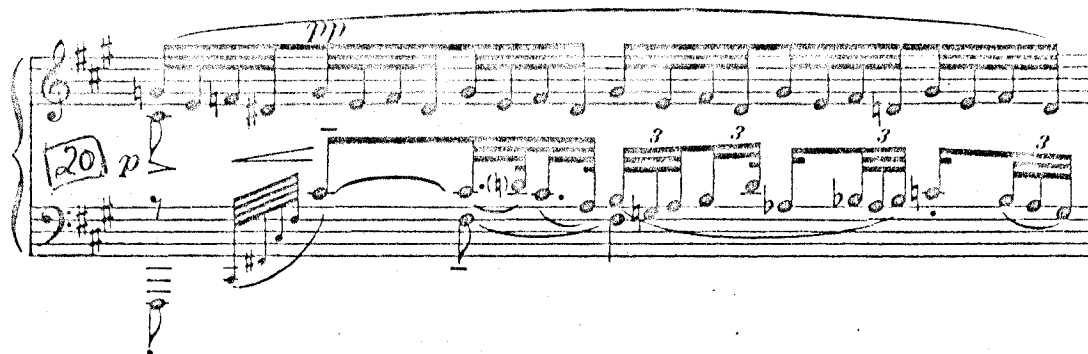


show the contrast in complexity of texture as well as differences in sonority. The use of the full range of the piano in meas. 18 and 19 is particularly striking as it extends over a five-octave span.

Measures 20 to 23 return to the accompaniment pattern and introduce a melody which is more florid in style. The intense chromaticism of this section is a new element in the etude which, until now, has been quite diatonic in nature (see Example 35).

The last five measures of the A section, 24-29, begin with a repeat of meas. 12 and 13. Meas. 26 is a variation of meas. 16 and leads into meas. 27 to 29, which are themselves a variation of

Example 35. "Pour les agréments," meas. 20



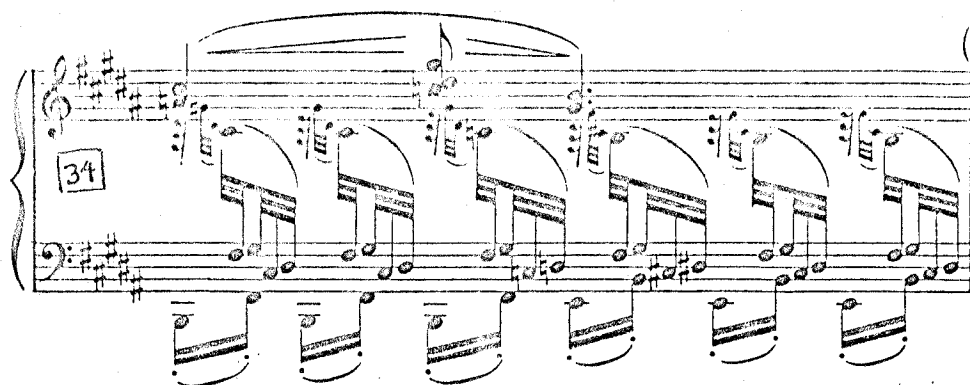
meas. 17 to 19. Thus the formal outline of the A section is a type of aba'.

The bridge section presents yet another character and style. Meas. 30 has a definite Puckish flavor to it as well as similarities to the opening of the Prélude "Minstrels." Meas. 31's feathery cadenza style is in direct contrast to this. Again, there is no attempt to unify these disparate elements--they are related simply by their juxtaposition in time. Meas. 32 leads gradually into the next large section.

The B section has some of the most difficult writing technically. It is also the section which is most reminiscent of the "Barcarolle on rather Italian seas."

Example 36, the second measure of the section, illustrates the main problems of control with which the pianist must deal. The melody must be legato and expressive but cannot be finger-connected.

Example 36. "Pour les agréments," meas. 34



Also, many of the notes within the melodic line will be approached by a leap and, unless care is taken, could be inappropriately accented, thus destroying the linear character of the phrase. The inner accompaniment figure must be smooth and continuous, while the pedal point ostinato figure underneath should be phrased in two-note groups. All this must be accomplished within the dynamic level of pianissimo. From here the section builds to the exuberant climax of the etude, meas. 37 and 38, which is very Chopinesque in its use of the instrument. Meas. 39 to 41 close off the section with the same quiet, flowing feeling that characterized its beginning.

Measures 42 to 49 are a repeat of the opening eight measures. Meas. 50 to 53 are an extension of the filigree element into a concluding cadenza. There is a momentary surge in dynamic level and tension at the end of the cadenza passage, which is followed in meas. 51 to 53 by a quiet close that juxtaposes a clear V to I motion

to a fluid ten-note run on black keys.

This is the most elegant in style of all the etudes. The technical requirements for its performance, therefore, are not on the order of acrobatics or fleet-fingered dexterity; in this it has much in common with the earlier etudes in thirds and sixths from the first book. What it does require is control over differing levels of materials and textures, imaginative use of the pedal, and a light, even touch in the feathery cadenza passages.

IX. "Pour les notes répétées"

This etude is Debussy's last work for solo piano in his light, "touch" style. It combines the toccata style with a mercurial, whimsical quality. Although the piece has definite G major tonal implications, much of the material centers around C-sharp--the pitch which divides the G scale into two tritones. This relationship of C-sharp to G major is used in several ways throughout the etude. In addition, the interval of the tritone itself is prominently used, both melodically and harmonically.

The first section, meas. 1 to 16, is fragmentary. It starts tentatively with a single-line statement of the A motive (see Example 37) followed by halting octaves. This motive consists of only

Example 37. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 1



four pitches, uses only the intervals of seconds and the tritone, and has a compass of a minor sixth. In meas. 9 and 10 the A motive is

just in the right hand and is accompanied by seventh chords whose top pitches outline a C major triad, plus the added fourth of f-sharp¹.

Meas. 10, a complementary extension of the A motive, inverts the compass of the A motive, extending up from d² a minor sixth to b-flat². It also inverts the opening direction of the A motive--initially ascending rather than descending (see Example 38). Since this

Example 38. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 10



extension is used in conjunction with the A motive for most of the remainder of the etude, it will be referred to as A₂ to facilitate discussion. The section ends with a pianissimo passage beginning in the contra register of the piano and consisting of intervals--thirds followed by seconds and tritones--all divided between the hands "chopstick" fashion.

Section two, meas. 17 to 27, opens with the B motive. Like the A motive, it is one measure in length and is based on seconds and a tritone, plus one interval of a perfect fourth. The accompaniment

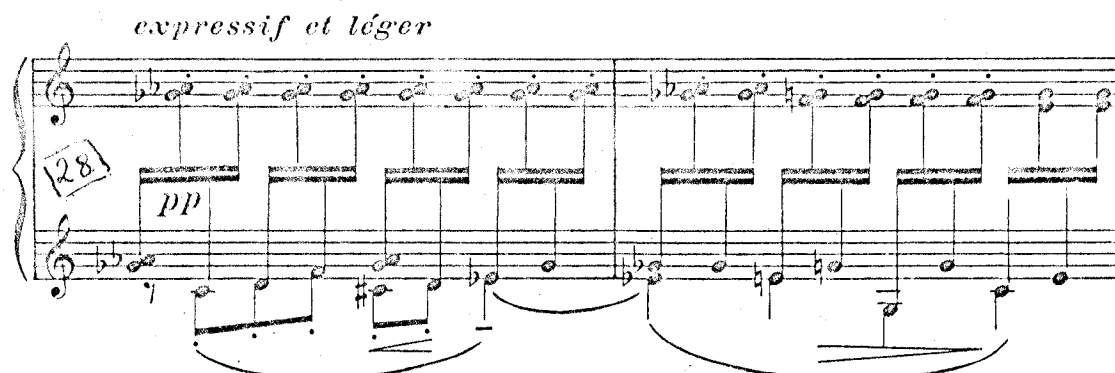
uses tritones, single pitches, and seventh chords. In meas. 22 and 23 there is a subsidiary motive, also one measure in length, which is clearly based on the division of the G major scale into its two tritones. This motive is therefore the melodic synthesis of the underlying harmonic structure of the etude.

Sections one and two are discontinuous in style. The materials used are fragmentary and are immediately juxtaposed to contrasting materials. The overall cohesive effect of the two sections is achieved in several ways: Debussy consistently uses the techniques of repetition and varied repetition; all the motivic material is derived mainly from combinations of seconds and tritones; and, finally, the tonal structure of both sections is clearly centered around the C-sharp to G major axis.

Section three includes meas. 28 to 46. Its first half, meas. 28 to 38, in contrast to the previous two sections, is flowing and continuous in character. It opens with the C motive, which is quite different from the A and B motives. It is two measures in length, has clear V to I implications, and is generally less chromatic (see Example 39). The use of harmonic seconds as the accompaniment pattern is the one factor which relates back to the previous sections. Meas. 30 to 33 are an extension of this melodic line. They in turn lead back to a varied repeat of the C motive itself in meas. 34 to 36.

The second half of the section, meas. 39 to 46, returns to a

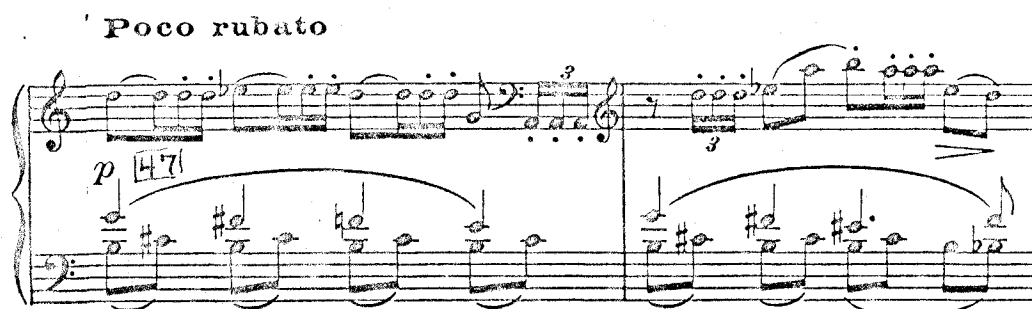
Example 39. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 28-29



discontinuous style of writing. Again measures are juxtaposed which contain contrasting material. Here the principal elements of contrast are texture and dynamics.

The fourth section, meas. 47 to 65, is based on the transformation of material from the first three sections. The opening is clearly a variation of the A and A₂ motives; and, yet, Debussy's subtle manipulations result in what almost appears to be a new motive in its own right (see Example 40). The motive has been transposed up a

Example 40. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 47-48



half step; and both the articulation and accompaniment patterns have been changed. Marked Scherzando in the first section, it is now marked Poco rubato. The result of this combination of factors is that the pitch pattern here, which is almost identical to the original motive, has a totally different character--striking evidence that music is more than just an arrangement of pitches!

The following four measures, 49 to 52, are a variation of meas. 9 to 12. They open with a more straightforward statement of A and A₂. The third measure, 51, is a variation of meas. 11, and meas. 52 is derived from meas. 12. Meas. 53 and 54 are similar in character to meas. 45.

The remainder of the fourth section, meas. 55 to 65, consists of three variations of the C motive. In meas. 55 to 57 it appears on its original pitch level with the accompaniment now in single notes grouped in sextuplets. Meas. 57 is derived from meas. 30, with only minor changes occurring at the end.

The statement of the C motive in meas. 58 to 61 is quite different from any of its previous occurrences. As in the transformation of the A motive in meas. 47 and 48, the pitch pattern of the motive itself remains constant. What changes here is the setting (see Example 41). The clear, open texture and use of extremes of the keyboard are in great contrast to the original statement, in which both melody and accompaniment stay within a small area (see Example 39

Example 41. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 58

in pochettino rubato

58 *pp subito, armonioso*

above). In addition to the change in setting, the motive is also transposed, now centering on E. Meas. 60 and 61 also derive from meas. 30; however, they use only the first three pitches of the melodic line. The one-measure extension in meas. 61 is a result of simple repetition.

In meas. 62 to 65, C returns to its original pitch level and also to its original position below the accompaniment. This time Debussy varies the motive itself, avoiding for the first time the V to I cadence.

In contrast to the highly unified preceding section, the fifth and final section, meas. 66 to 84, returns to a more fragmentary, discontinuous style. It opens with a return of A--the dominating motivic material for the concluding section. In meas. 66 to 69, as in the opening section, the A motive is contrasted with passages in octaves and single notes. Meas. 70 to 74 open with a variation of the

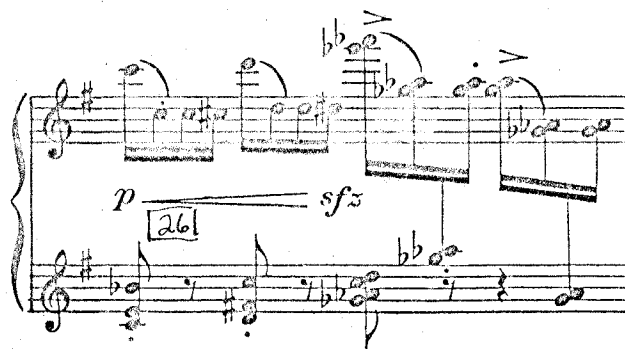
A and A₂ motives. The rest of this subsection is based only on A₂, in conjunction with tritones used as accompaniment.

Measures 75 to 84 are an extended cadential pattern based on the bass progression d-flat, e-flat, f, f-sharp, d, ₁G. They are the final statement of the underlying harmonic structure of the piece-- C-sharp (or, enharmonically, D-flat) to G. The first four measures, 75 to 78, begin on the rocking pattern derived from meas. 12. The progression reaches f-sharp but turns back on itself to start the pattern over again in meas. 79. We reach G in meas. 82 after an interpolated c-sharp to d, functioning as a V/V. Immediately Debussy juxtaposes the two strummed chords in meas. 82 and 83, which are a combination of all the important pitches and intervals in the etude (these relationships are made clearer if the a-sharp is spelled as its enharmonic equivalent, b-flat). The piece concludes on the plucked G's in meas. 84--the only time in the entire etude that a motive or cadence has ended on a strong beat!

For all its grace and improvisatory character, this etude is a very carefully worked out study of the various possible uses of repeated notes. The opening motive uses repetition between the hands. The following passage through meas. 8 combines this alternation between the hands with the use of different articulations.

There are, of course, numerous examples of simple repetitions on a single note for one hand. Example 42 shows the use of

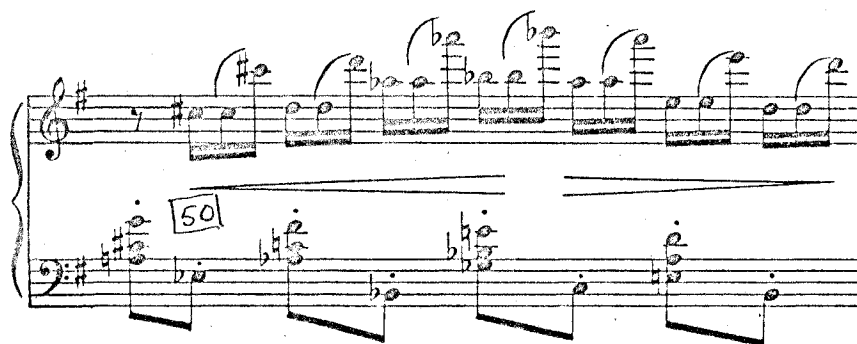
Example 42. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 26



repeated single notes, or harmonic seconds, combined with octave displacement. This pattern demands exact use of weight and touch so that there will be no unwarranted accents caused by octave leaps.

Example 43 shows a variation of this octave/single note pattern which

Example 43. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 50

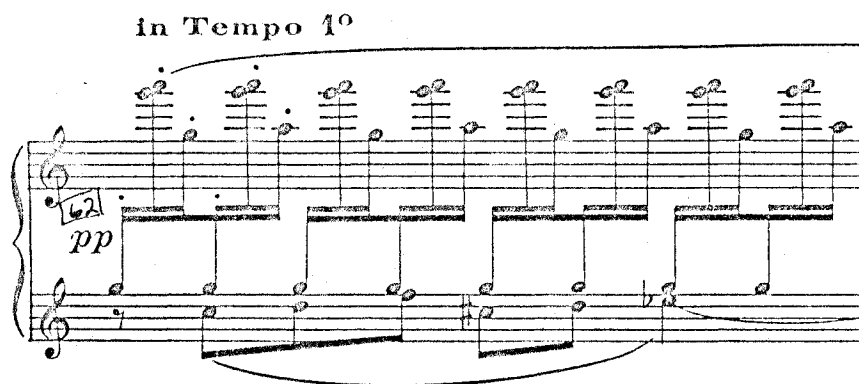


is considerably more difficult than the preceding example. Because the higher pitch occurs at the top of the octave in this pattern, the first note of the triplet presents a difficult fingering problem. Either the

repeated notes are both played with the thumb, generally a cumbersome fingering, or the first note must be taken with the second finger -- creating a stretch of a seventh between several of the triplet groups, which must then be taken with the fingering of five to two. Either way, the passage will be a difficult one to control.

Repeated harmonic seconds occur frequently as the accompaniment to the C motive. Often they are used in alternation with a single note taken from the unit of the second (see Example 39 above). In meas. 62 to 65 the pattern is further varied by a change to triplets. The seconds alternating with single notes are played with just one hand (see Example 44). The passages illustrated in Examples 39 and 42

Example 44. "Pour les notes répétées," meas. 62



above, in addition to presenting the technical problem of repeated notes, require the balance of a legato, expressive melody with a clear, light accompaniment.

The passage occurring in meas. 58 to 61 (see Example 41

above) is one of the most difficult in the etude. Here the repeated notes and melody occur in the same hand. The repeated notes, which occur on the second and third notes of the triplet figure, will probably be taken by the thumb, unless the pianist has rather large hands and can easily handle the extension which would result if the third note of the triplet were taken with the second finger. In any case, even, light repeated notes will be difficult to achieve. In addition, the entire texture must be clear and light, with the differing levels of material well-balanced tonally.

This etude is an amalgam of many of Debussy's stylistic traits. It exemplifies his improvisatory style, which is actually based on a highly organized technique of motivic transformation. It provides many instances of his highly coloristic approach to the instrument. Pianistically, it is an outstanding example of his toccata style. Its technical requirements certainly place it in the category of "virtuoso" music, although the virtuosity is never used simply for display. All this technical writing skill, both compositional and pianistic, could have resulted in a dry, scholarly study; but Debussy transforms it into music of pure whim and fantasy.

X. "Pour les sonorités opposées"

The title of this etude is the key to the work itself. The entire etude is based on the manipulation of texture and register and their interrelationships. This creates the effect of a three-dimensional shape in space which is constantly expanding and contracting with an inner life of its own.

It opens with a six-measure introduction. The first three measures consist of only two pitches: G-sharp and A. The texture is thin, and the use of the whole range of the keyboard creates a feeling of openness and space (see Example 45). The second three measures

Example 45. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 1-3

Modéré, sans lenteur

introduce a melodic fragment in the middle register, which uses mainly minor seconds--a characteristic of much of the motivic material of the piece.

In contrast to the introduction, the first section, meas. 7 to

14, has a very rich, dark sound. This is largely due to Debussy's use of the lower and fuller registers of the instrument; it is not until meas. 12 that he uses a pitch over a-flat¹ (see Example 46). An additional

Example 46. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 7-8



factor in the creation of this sound quality is the nature of the melodic line itself. It extends in an unbroken line from meas. 7 to 13. The fact that it is written in octaves adds resonance; but, in addition, the line moves only in minor seconds and has a compass of just a minor sixth. The combination of these two factors gives the line a feeling of density and weight.

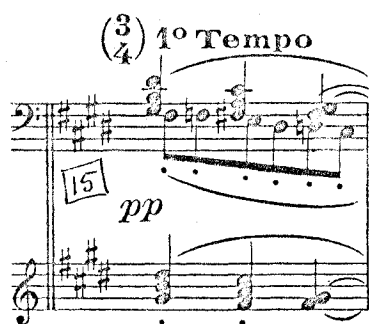
As can be seen in the preceding Example 46, the key signature has changed from E/c-sharp to C/a, although the music itself has tonal implications of F minor moving to B-flat major. The first five measures of this section are enclosed between two outer pedal points: ₁F and the octave a-flat to a-flat¹. They act as two poles around which the music slowly revolves. The pedal points stop in meas. 12,

where the texture lightens and opens up. The end of the section, meas. 14, is very similar to the end of the introduction in meas. 6.

The second section, meas. 15 to 30, returns to the opening key signature of E/c-sharp, but introduces the meter signature of three/four. The texture is now lighter than in the preceding section but not so sparse as in the introduction. The section consists mainly of parallel streams of triads. The two hands have the same basic chordal progression, but the right hand has, in addition, a continuous chromatic scale which creates added sixth chords. There are also a few harmonic seconds and seventh chords.

As can be seen in Example 47, Debussy has shifted the

Example 47. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 15



normal position of the hands. He has also indicated that the chordal progression be played with two different types of articulation. The left hand chords, which are played in the higher register, are marked with a staccato and slur. The right hand chords are marked only with a slur, while the chromatic scale is marked with both staccatos and a

slur. Careful attention to these details will result in a clear texture in which all the material will be delineated. The left hand chords will be characterized by a bell-like effect, while the right hand chords will assume a more legato, lyrical character. The chromatic scale, because it is a single line and moves more quickly than the chords, is on yet another level. It should be played with a soft but firm, light touch so that its linear motion does not become subsumed into an overall harmonic texture.

The inversion of the normal position of the hands will help to effect the differences in articulation required in this passage, meas. 15 to 24. Playing the left hand sopra and across the body will of itself tend to lessen the amount of weight applied to the keyboard. The right hand, played underneath, will be in more direct contact with the keyboard, thus enabling the arm weight to be applied smoothly and evenly to the legato chord passage. But, equally important, the eighth-note chromatic line may be taken by the thumb and second finger--a smooth, easy fingering. If the left hand were to take this line it would have to use fingers four and five--not nearly so smooth.

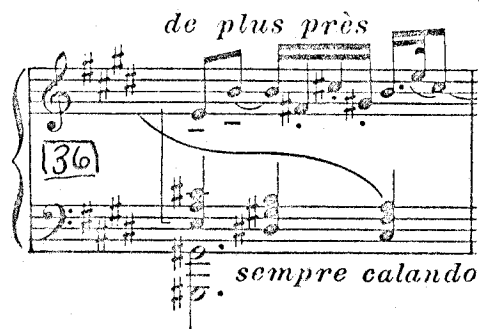
Whereas the first ten measures of this section are consistent in texture, the last six measures use contrasting textures. At meas. 26 the texture is quite dense, using five-note chords in the left hand (now in its usual position relative to the right hand). From this point the texture opens up, with the left hand moving down and away

from the right hand. In meas. 28 and 29 the texture again becomes more dense, but in the last measure of the section, meas. 30, it is reduced to just a single chromatic line.

The third section, meas. 31 to 37, opens with a clear, flute-like melody over a $\text{}^1\text{G}$ -sharp pedal. Debussy marks it to be played lointain, mais clair et joyeux, a decided change in character from the previous two sections. Harmonically the melody is a combination of E major and C-sharp minor with the $\text{}^1\text{G}$ -sharp pedal functioning with equal ease in either key.

In the middle of this section, meas. 34 to 36, there is a chorale passage which, from the third beat of meas. 34, could have been taken straight from a hymnal. It sounds as though it is moving to C major via the G^7 chord at the end of meas. 35, but instead, it returns to the $\text{}^1\text{G}$ -sharp pedal. The parallel triads continue throughout meas. 36, where now the E/c-sharp melodic line returns. As can be seen from Example 48, this is another illustration of Debussy's use of

Example 48. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 36



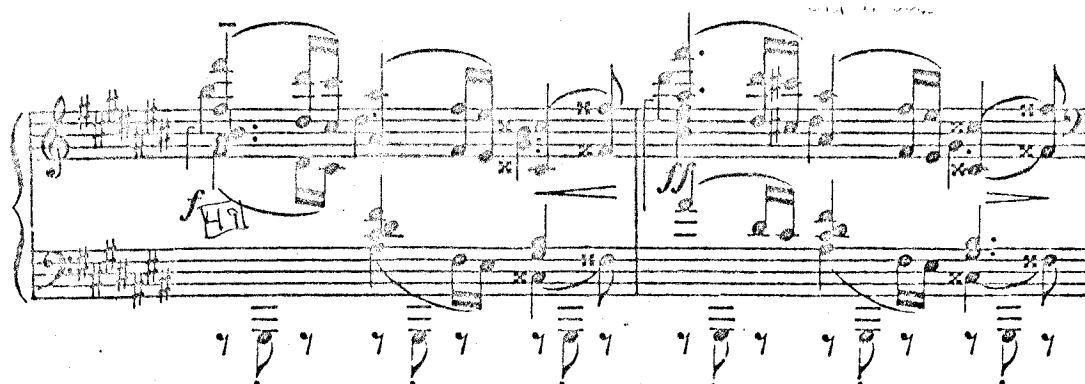
differing materials to create a texture which is both complex and clear.

The fourth section, meas. 38 to 58, is the longest in the etude. It consists of three contrasting subsections. The first subsection, meas. 38 to 43, returns to the nine/eight meter and introduces the key of C-sharp major. The mood, in the first few measures, is subdued, with the only hint of tension supplied by the syncopated $\textstyle\frac{1}{2}$ G-sharp pedal. In meas. 40 the hands reverse their normal position again so that the left hand can take the accompanying chords and $\textstyle\frac{1}{2}$ G-sharp pedal. The melodic line in the right hand is similar to the one in meas. 7 to 13 in that it has a narrow compass and moves only by small intervals--seconds and thirds.

The dramatic climax of the piece is reached in the second subsection, meas. 44 to 50. The hands return to their normal position. The left hand takes the melodic line in octaves, with the right hand supplying full accompanying chords. The momentum toward the climactic point in meas. 50 begins in meas. 47. The melodic line has a wide range, extending over an octave; the texture increases, including chords of seven and eight pitches; the range expands, extending over five octaves; and for the first time the dynamic level goes over piano, reaching fortissimo in meas. 50 (see Example 49).

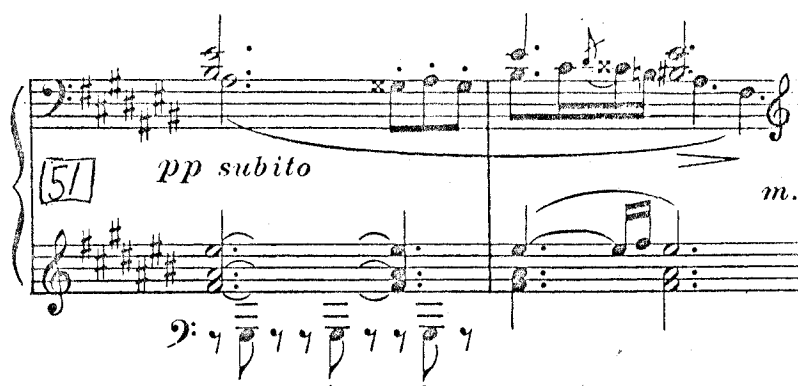
The third subsection, meas. 51 to 58, is a great contrast to the preceding measures. The opening two measures, which are a

Example 49. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 49-50



repeat of meas. 40 and 41, are marked subito pianissimo (see Example 50). All those elements which had been heightened and

Example 50. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 51-52



expanded are immediately muted and contracted--a clear example of formal structure being delineated by changes in sonority.

The remaining six measures of the last subsection illustrate both Debussy's magical use of the upper register of the piano to create music of ethereal delicacy and his use of the extreme registers to create the feeling of space (see Example 51). The use of the softest

Example 51. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 53-54

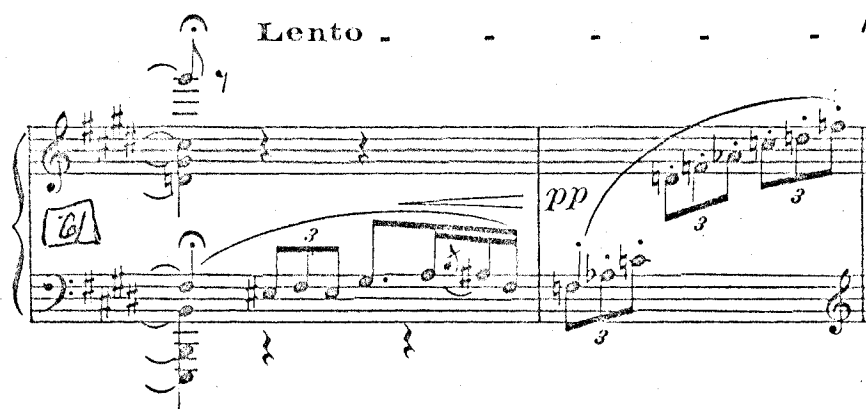
The musical score for Example 51, measures 53-54, is presented. It is for piano and features a 'Calmato' section. The key signature is E major (three sharps). The tempo is marked 'Calmato'. The dynamics are 'p' and 'ppp'. The score shows a complex texture with multiple staves, including a grand staff and several lower staves. A box labeled '53' is present in the piano part.

dynamic level of the piece further heightens the contrast to the preceding section.

The last section, meas. 59 to 75, acts as an epilogue. With the exception of the closing cadence, all the material comes from previous sections. The key signature of E/c-sharp returns; the meter signature of three/four is used for the entire section. The opening measures bring back the E/c-sharp motive from the third section. The tonal ambiguity of this motive is emphasized at the cadence point: the chord seems to center around E, using a minor dominant and an open ${}_1E-{}_1B$ fifth in the bass with a b-sharp³ in the soprano; but the inclusion of c-sharp² means that the chord also contains a full C-sharp minor triad.

As can be seen in Example 52, the texture is reduced to a single line in meas. 61 and 62, the line in meas. 61 being a transposition of the line from the end of meas. 40 and 41. The next subsection,

Example 52. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 61-62

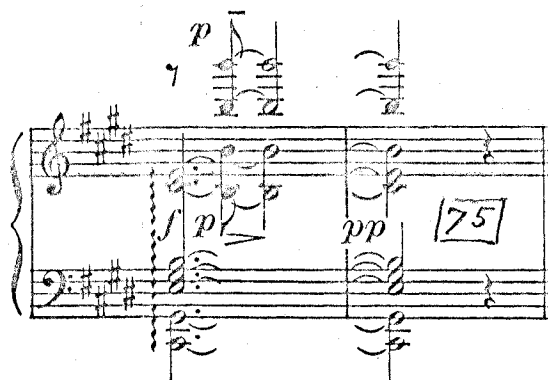


meas. 63 to 67, is a variation of the material in the second section. Here Debussy uses much thicker chords than in the earlier statement of the material, but the arpeggiation of the chords produces a lacy texture.

The E/c-sharp motive briefly returns in meas. 68 to 70, leading into the final cadence, where again Debussy uses the top register to create bell-like effects. The final two measures sum up both the E/c-sharp opposition and the use of the extreme registers (see Example 53).

In this etude, an excellent example of Debussy's orchestral style of piano writing, he uses the various registers of the piano as one would families of instruments within the orchestra. Thus, it serves both as an introduction and as a climax to one of his basic styles of piano writing. In addition, it is an outstanding example of his use of sonority to determine form.

Example 53. "Pour les sonorités opposées," meas. 74-75



Whereas other etudes include the control of touch and dynamics as a part of the total technical demands, this etude focuses on that aspect of pianism. The pianist must have total control over subtle gradations of touch and dynamics as well as the ability to project clearly the use of opposing ranges and textures. While these are not the usual accomplishments demanded of virtuosos, they are a large part of what distinguishes the artist from the technician.

XI. "Pour les arpèges composés"

In this etude, Debussy does not use the more standard single-hand arpeggio figure extended over several octaves that Chopin used so effectively in his Op. 10, Nos. 1 and 8. Rather, what Debussy works with here are the various ways in which a harmonic unit may be broken up with the individual pitches sounding successively. The Chopin etude closest in spirit and approach to this (although limited to only one broken chord pattern) would be the Op. 25, No. 1-- coincidentally also in A-flat major.

As the preceding etude's formal structure was determined by changes in sonority, this etude's structure is defined by changes in figuration and touch. Thus an overall three-part structure is created by the contrast between the more fluid, legato outer sections and the middle section with its use of staccato and quick, snapping chords and figures.

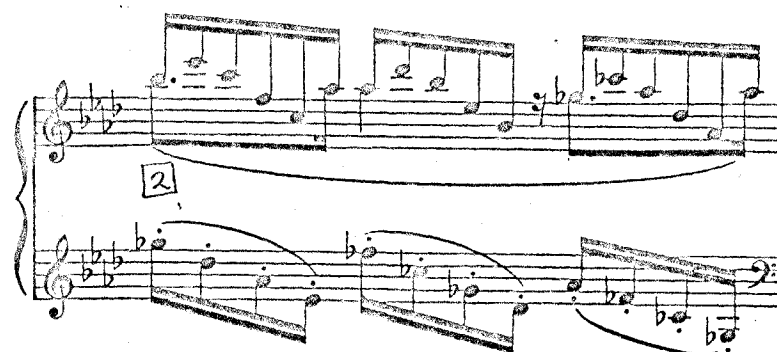
By contrast with the preceding etude, the tonal center of this etude is quite clear: both the opening and closing sections center on A-flat major. The phrase structure is also quite regular, with repetition and varied repetition used throughout the etude, particularly in the opening and closing sections.

Within the overall three-part form there are many smaller sections, each with its own particular motivic/figural material. For purposes of discussion, the Mueller symbology, described in the

analysis of the first etude, will be used.

The opening A material extends for six measures, with meas. 4 to 6 an exact repetition of meas. 1 to 3. The fluidity of the gentle, circular motion of the opening right hand figure is reminiscent of many of Debussy's earlier pieces dealing with water images. The generally downward direction of the next two measures enhances this feeling of flow. The left hand pattern, entering in the second measure, is based on a series of descending fourths, with the exception of one interval (see Example 54). The third measure moves downward over

Example 54. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 2

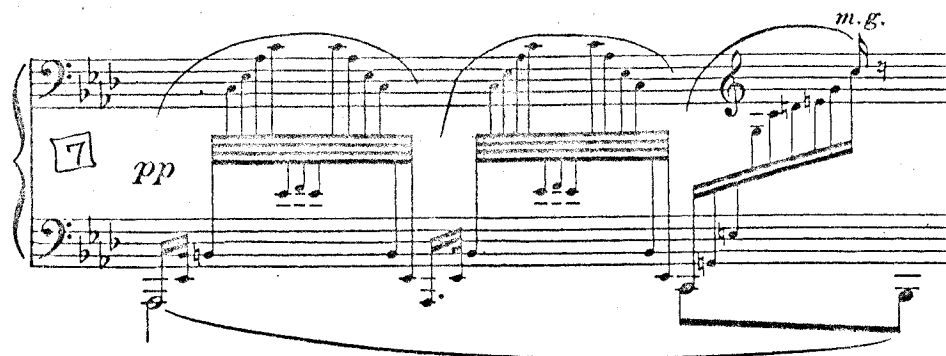


a span of three octaves, ending on a very clear plagal cadence which leads to the repetition in meas. 4 to 6.

The B material, meas. 7 to 15, is characterized by figures in fast grace notes contrasted to longer notes. In meas. 7 to 10 the figure is in rolling chords divided between the hands with the roots of

the chords in longer notes in the bass (see Example 55). Meas. 9 and

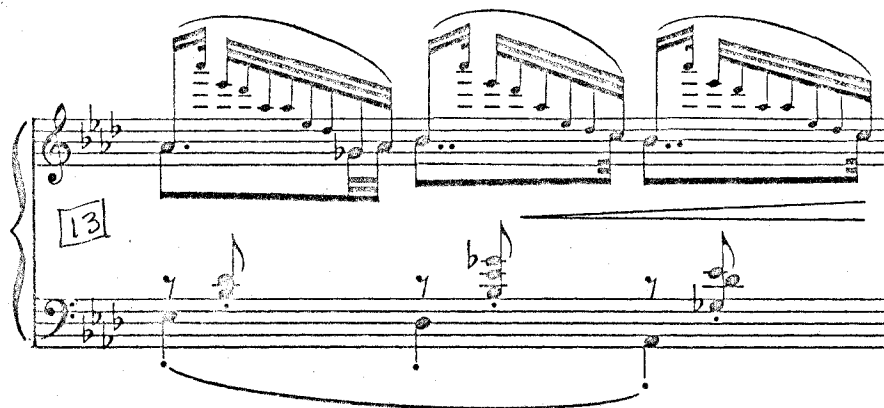
Example 55. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 7



10 are an exact repeat of meas. 7 and 8, with the exception of the last two eighth notes of meas. 10, which lead into meas. 11.

Measure 11 acts as a bridge into B₂, meas. 12 and 13. The fast figure now occurs as a lacy accompaniment above the motive in longer notes, both of which are given to the right hand (see Example 56). This creates a technical problem for the pianist, since

Example 56. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 13



the two levels must be distinguished. The left hand supplies a light, chordal accompaniment in contrast to the fluid arpeggio figure in the right hand.

In B_3 , meas. 14 and 15, the motive is now the top line of the texture. The descending grace note figure, divided between the hands, provides the sole accompaniment (see Example 57). Although this

Example 57. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 15

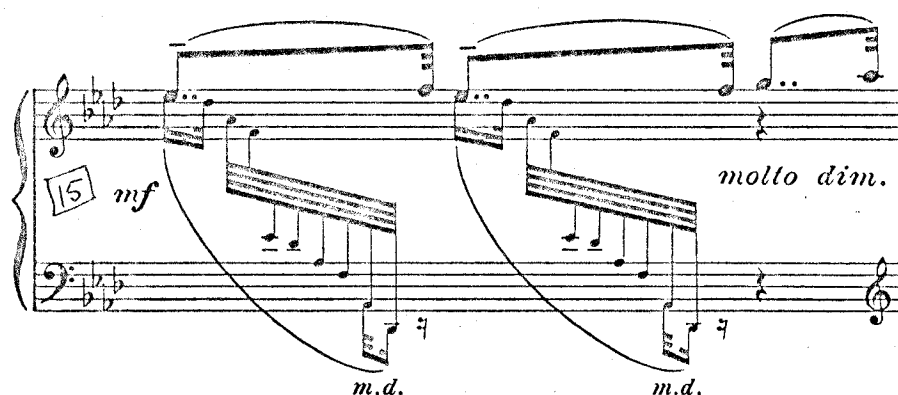


figure is considerably easier than the right hand in B_2 , care must be taken not to accent those melody notes which occur immediately after the low bass notes.

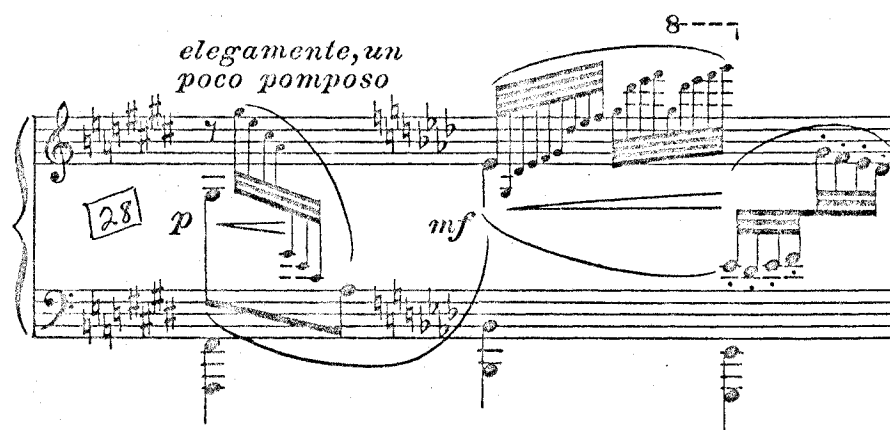
The last nine measures of the first large section, meas. 16 to 24, are composed of A and B material. A returns on its original pitch level in meas. 16 to 19. The right hand figure remains basically the same, but the left hand now consists of a descending melodic motive rather than appearing in its original pattern of descending

fourths. The B material, varied and transposed, returns in meas. 20 to 22. Meas. 23 and 24 act as an extension of the preceding material and as a bridge into the next section.

The middle section opens with C material, meas. 25 to 30. This material, made up of widely contrasting, fragmentary motives, serves as a transition from the opening section to the main body of the middle section. It is also the most dramatic and virtuosic section of the etude, opening with a sweeping fortissimo arpeggio figure. In the second measure Debussy introduces quickly rolled chords (which figure prominently in the next section) accompanied by staccato fourths.

C₂, meas. 27 and 28, is written in the grand style. This is the first use of the standard single-hand arpeggio figure, which is immediately contrasted by a jaunty, staccato figure. In case anyone should fail to note his tongue-in-cheek attitude, Debussy marks the repeat of the measure elegante, un poco pomposo (see Example 58).

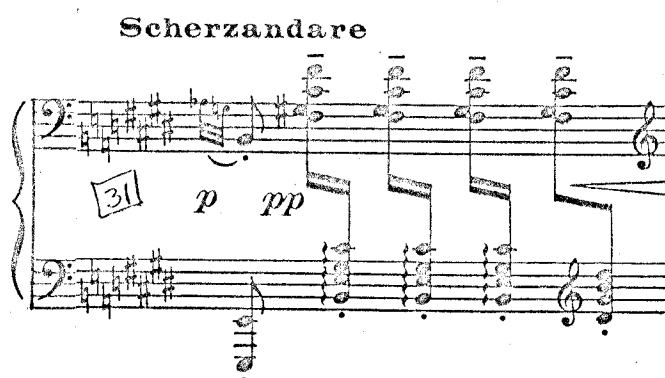
Example 58. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 28



With the C_3 material, meas. 29 and 30, the middle section decisively changes pianistic styles. The use of the staccato and the arpeggio as a quick, light grace-note figure, first introduced here, becomes a characteristic feature of the D material which follows. These new figures are very similar to those in the opening of the Prélude "Minstrels," a piece whose overall mood and pianistic style bears a close resemblance to the middle section of this etude.

The D material, meas. 31 to 45, opens with three different fragmentary motives. The first one, Example 59, recurs throughout

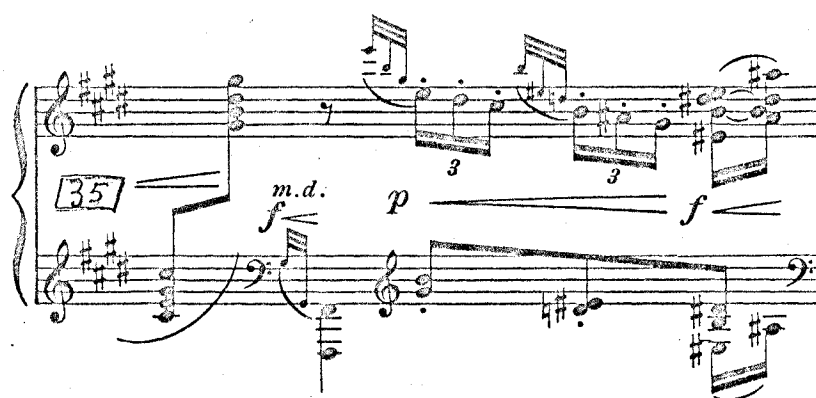
Example 59. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 31



the section and again in the closing section. The right hand chords, built in fourths plus the octave, are to be played in the normal manner, while those in the left hand are arpeggiated. The use of the staccato indicates a quick arpeggiation, giving a plucked or strummed sound quality to the chords. The alternation of the two hands also

creates the melodic motive of a fourth between the top pitches of the two chords.

D_2 , which begins on the second beat of meas. 35, is also made up of three elements, now telescoped into the space of two quarter notes, as against the preceding material, which extended three measures before its varied repetition in meas. 34. The three elements of D_2 are highly contrasted to one another in touch and dynamics (see Example 60). The first element, on beat two of Example 60. "Pour les arpèges composés," meas. 35



meas. 35, is a dramatic variation of the opening figure of the D material. It is immediately contrasted by the staccato, piano figure occurring on the next two eighth notes. Finally, the element of full, rising chords ends the motivic group in an assertive manner. The entire group is immediately repeated in the next measure, followed by fragmentation and extension by varied repetition in meas. 37, closing

with the jaunty, staccato figure from the end of C_2 . The last two measures of the D section, meas. 38 and 39, bring back the more lyrical, graceful mood of the opening section. (There is a one-measure meter change in meas. 39 to four/four which is not indicated by a meter signature. The meter returns to three/four in meas. 40.)

The concluding six measures of the middle section, meas. 40 to 45, are a variation and transposition of the D material from meas. 31. The motive of a fourth is used both in the right hand, between top pitches of the chords, and in the left hand, as the accompaniment figure.

The return of the opening section, meas. 46, begins with a four-measure transition passage. It opens with a variation of the B_2 motive combined with the figural material from meas. 11. This is followed by a variation of the A material, which in turn leads smoothly into the return of A itself.

Measures 50 to 57 consist of two four-measure groups--each of which opens with an exact repetition of meas. 4 to 6 and closes with a measure which acts as a cadential extension. Meas. 58 to 67 are in two two-measure groups. The principle of contrast which determined the overall three-part form of the etude is here exemplified in successive one-measure fragments: D material in meas. 58 and 60 contrasted to B material in meas. 59 and 61.

The final six measures, 62 to 67, are a coda built on the

opening figure of the A material and a lacy, arpeggio figure of the kind used in the B material. The piece closes with an arpeggiated A-flat chord (with an added d-flat fourth) extending over five octaves, marked laissez vibrer--a beautiful example of the use of the pedal combined with the wide range of the piano to create the feeling of l'impression floue.

This is one of the most lyrical, graceful etudes in the set, and, despite its regularity of phrase structure and extensive use of repetition, it is never monotonous. Rather, it is characterized in the A-flat sections by a feeling of flow and movement and in the middle section by a Puckish flavor of fantasy and playfulness.

The technical requirements of the etude are not strenuous, although a few sections require careful tonal balance (for instance, see Example 56 above). The major consideration in the opening section is the creation of smoothly flowing lines, which may mean problems with the even transfer of weight between hands (Example 55 above) or the smooth transition between hand positions, as in meas. 3 or 17 to 19. The middle section basically requires a crisply articulated staccato, including single notes, chords, and quickly arpeggiated chords. So, again, the emphasis is not on the virtuosic element but on the imaginative use of the tonal possibilities of the instrument.

XII. "Pour les accords"

The first eleven etudes were all characterized by the subtlety of their construction and by the refinement of pianistic control required for their successful performance. The stark, powerful nature of the opening and closing sections of this final etude is thus a striking contrast. For the first time the more percussive possibilities of the instrument are exploited. In addition, the dramatic flair and overall bravura of the piece demand much more the element of virtuosity than the highly developed sense of touch and color required by the other etudes.

This etude is in three/eight meter. Within this pattern of three, Debussy uses various combinations of rhythmic groupings to create a feeling of great rhythmic vitality and forward thrust. For instance, the opening four measures and eighth-note upbeat are

grouped:



thus creating cross-accents in the second two measures. The articulation pattern reinforces these cross-accents. All the groups of two eighth notes, with the exception of the last two, are slurred, with the first eighth note accented. This adds a dynamic accent to the hemiola occurring in the third and fourth measures. Debussy also frequently writes long passages in continuous groups of two eighth notes, slurred and with the first eighth note stressed, thus shifting the feeling of

meter from three/eight to six/eight over which a pattern of hemiola

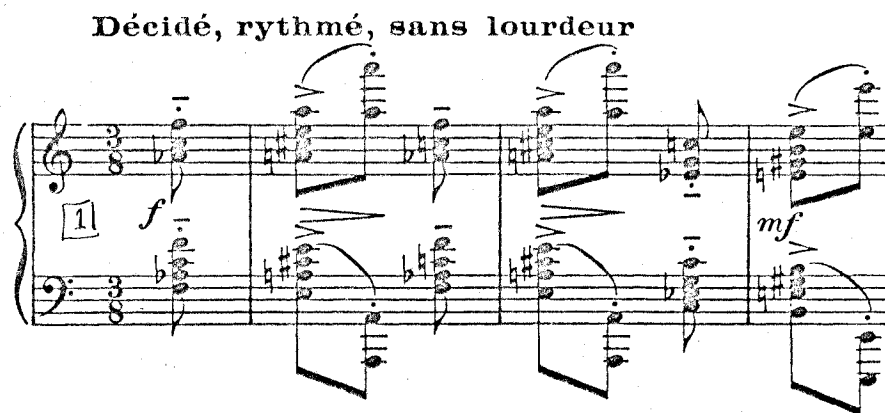


occurs (see meas. 7-18, 21-32, 39-46).

The formal structure of this etude is a clear-cut A B A'.

Harmonically, the A section is structured around third-relations and the connection of chords by the use of minor seconds (see Example 61).

Example 61. "Pour les accords," meas. 1-2, excerpt from meas. 3



All the pitches of the A major chord are approached by half step:

F to E; C to C-sharp; and A-flat to A. In addition to the third-relation, the movement from a minor to a major chord creates the feeling of expansion, thereby adding harmonic accent to the metric and dynamic accents discussed above. The C minor to E major pattern sequences the opening progression.

Debussy makes use of two rather long harmonic pedals in the opening section. The first occurs on B, from meas. 15 to 18. B major is functioning, at this point, as a V/V. This is reinforced between

meas. 17 and 18, with the misspelled French sixth chord on F moving to B, setting up the expectation of a "normal" progression: French sixth to V/V to V to I. What we have instead, however, is the V/V followed by a series of third-related chords: D minor, F minor, and A major.

The other pedal is considerably longer, extending from meas. 21 to the second beat of meas. 31. This right hand pedal on G functions as a dominant to C, which arrives at meas. 33 via a relatively normal progression. The only exceptional chord in the IV-V-I progression is the bimodal F major/A minor chord, which functions in the progression as a IV.

The subsection from meas. 39 to 53, following the six-measure cadential extension on C, presents a contrast to the opening material. The first eight measures alternate full major or minor chords with seventh chords whose fifths are unresolved appoggiaturas (see the first two measures of Example 62). The three chords in each

Example 62. "Pour les accords," meas. 45-47



measure of meas. 47 to 50 are all based on one chord: B-flat augmented triad plus the major third of A-flat/C. Although the pitches of all three chords are the same, the effect is of three different chords, an outstanding example of the importance of the relationship of pitch displacement to sonority (see last measure of Example 62 above).

Measures 51 to 53 lead back to a restatement of the opening material. In the present occurrence there is a clear-cut V/V to V cadence from meas. 51 and 52 (see Example 63). This is immediately

Example 63. "Pour les accords," meas. 51-53, excerpt from meas. 54



followed by third-related chords, again cadencing on E major. The last group of four sixteenth-note chords, again all third-related, leads into the A major chord, this time from the third-relation above (spelled enharmonically D-flat rather than C-sharp). This contrasting subsection within the opening A section creates a formal structure of aba' within A itself.

The repetition of the opening material extends only for the first four measures, 54 to 57. The use of moving streams of chords, most of them third-related, dominates the section from meas. 58 to 64. From meas. 64 to 79 the use of a pedal on A is the dominant element, with the bass line moving to G in meas. 74. This sets up another use of the minor second as a lead into the F-sharp middle section.

The B section is in great contrast to the A section. The rhythm is free and improvisatory; the lines are flowing and graceful with delicate ornamentation; the texture ranges from full chords to single pitches and octaves; and the dynamics are soft and muted throughout.

The main harmonic device is the use of unresolved appoggiaturas. The opening motive, which recurs throughout the section, illustrates this technique (see Example 64), especially in meas. 87

Example 64. "Pour les accords," meas. 80-81

Lento, molto rubato (la ♩ = à la ♩ précédente)

pp molto leggiero

and 88, where the full dominant seventh chord in meas. 87 prepares the listener for the F-sharp tonic. At this point the G-sharp in meas. 88 definitely pulls toward the F-sharp--a tendency which is finally resolved in the last occurrence of the motive, meas. 96 to 99.

In contrast to these passages with clear tonal implications, Debussy abruptly juxtaposes chords which have little relationship to one another. This can be seen in meas. 84 and 85 and meas. 90 and 91. He also juxtaposes passages which have totally different harmonic styles. Meas. 92 and 93 are as expressive and lush as anything he wrote in his mature period. They are followed by meas. 94 and 95, where he uses chords with added fourths and unresolved sevenths.

The B section ends with an extension of its opening motive into a melodic line in octaves, with a particularly poignant use of the unresolved appoggiatura on the D-sharp in meas. 101 and 102 over the minor-minor seventh chord. The final cadence of this section, meas. 104, ending on c-sharp to a-sharp, leaves the listener feeling suspended, with no sense of arrival or of tonal center.

The next twenty-two measures, 105 to 126, serve as the connecting link to A'. The right hand centers on the third c/e. The left hand figure is the same as the right hand motive of the opening four measures of the etude. The section concludes with a four-measure crescendo built solely on the F to A opening third relationship, which leads directly into A'.

The first eighteen measures of A', 127 to 144, are exactly the same as the opening eighteen measures. Meas. 145 to 164 duplicate meas. 54 to 73. The concluding eighteen measures are basically cadential extension built on parallel streams of common chords, a four-measure repeat of the a pedal which first occurred in meas. 70 to 74, and a final bravura cadential flourish.

Debussy, then, ends his set of twelve etudes with the only one which could possibly qualify as a "showpiece." Certainly the acrobatic quality of the leaps, constantly changing chords, and powerfully persuasive nature of the A material are virtuosic piano writing: What is even more striking is the high contrast between the monochromatic A material, with its uniform texture and rhythmic drive, and the fragmentary, graceful B material, with its shifting tonalities. Although it was not the last etude written, its energetic, driving quality clearly makes it a natural choice for the conclusion of a set-- just as the tour de force is saved for the end of a recital. One can only wonder, had he lived longer, whether he would have continued to exploit the percussive quality of the instrument as fully as he did its evocative, coloristic quality.

CONCLUSION

In this last work for solo piano, Debussy has brought together all the individual elements which characterize his piano music. The different styles, moods, and nuances of instrumental color of his mature period can all be found here. In addition, he has provided a compendium of the pianistic techniques which make up his highly individual approach to the piano. And most important, far from writing a dry set of technical studies, Debussy has transformed and molded the technical aspect of the work into music of the highest quality--an achievement all the more striking within the framework of his total pianistic output, since here there are no literary or pictorial associations.

With our knowledge of the obvious pianistic and musical merits of these Études as background, the final question must be: why are they not performed more often? Part of the answer lies in the initial negative reaction to Debussy's late works in general. For example, Ernest Newman, in an extensive article about Debussy's music, said:

From one of the most original composers in Europe he degenerated into one of the least original. . . . With all sympathy and with all respect, we can only say that the

works of his last few years showed many signs of something like collapse¹

Later in the same article, Newman referred to the "tortured attitudinizing of the 'Douze Études'."²

One of Debussy's staunchest supporters, G. Jean-Aubrey, felt called upon to defend Debussy from his last works, which Jean-Aubrey felt were the result of the adverse effects of Debussy's last illness:

Assuredly in his last works, in the piano Études, in the Sonate pour violoncelle, we no longer discover those qualities of sensitiveness which lend a charm to the major portion of his works; yet we must remember the malady which was to carry off Claude Debussy . . . no longer allowed him to exercise the self-control which had always been a hallmark of his art.³

From our vantage point in history, it is clear that these negative assessments of Debussy's late works by his contemporaries were caused by their failure to understand his change in style. They had grown accustomed to Debussy's use of extra-musical sources of inspiration for his aural imagery and were not prepared for the more austere, abstract musical language of his last years. More recently, Debussy's late works have been re-evaluated (principally by

¹Ernest Newman, "The Development of Debussy," Musical Times 59 (May 1918): 199.

²Ibid., 59 (August 1918): 346.

³Georges Jean-Aubrey, "Claude Debussy," Musical Quarterly 4 (October 1918): 552.

contemporary composers) and accepted on their own terms rather than viewed as a pale imitation of, or a deterioration from, his earlier works.

Another reason pianists have been so slow to program the Études is that, until recently, pianists' early training has been heavily weighted toward the traditional Baroque, Classical, and Romantic styles. Contemporary music is "saved" until the budding pianists have reached a high level of proficiency. Therefore, most pianists' early experiences are in dealing with tonal music.

Since the students' basic repertoire centers on these three traditional styles, it follows that the focus on technical work will also be geared to these styles. Consequently, students are exposed to the traditional technical literature. Beginning with Czerny and Clementi, they progress to Chopin, Schumann, and, if virtuosic ability is present, Liszt. At this point, students who have been traditionally trained have a thoroughly developed, classically trained piano technique, but little or no experience with the wide variety of twentieth-century music and piano technique.

Frequently, the introduction to twentieth-century music is approached chronologically, with Debussy the obvious starting point. Since the bulk of his piano music was written between 1903 and 1913, this is the logical period of concentration for an investigation of his style. Since the Études are not typical of the style of this period, there is no

natural succession which would culminate in the learning of these pieces. Students (and most teachers) are satisfied that Debussy's style and pianistic contributions have been enough explored if the major works of the middle period have been investigated.

From here, students will probably go on to study Ravel (unless he has preceded Debussy); then, such accepted "modern" composers as Prokofieff, Bartók, and Stravinsky; and perhaps some contemporary composers. In any case, the Études of Debussy will probably be bypassed--in many cases students may not even know they exist.

A further reason for their neglect lies in the nature of the Études themselves and the general effect they create. As has been shown in the preceding analysis, the music is complex and subtle, and the technical requirements are demanding. In order to perform effectively these works, the pianist must have a virtuoso technique as a basis but--and this is crucial--that is not enough. In addition, there must be a refinement of touch and absolute control of pedaling, combined with an imaginative ear. These have not been, for most traditionally trained pianists, as important considerations as the development of finger facility, dexterity and strength.

One might remonstrate that these technical accomplishments are also required for Debussy's mature works, and they are frequently performed. This may be answered by looking at the

disparity, in the Études, between the difficulty of the music and the effect it creates on the listener. It has been said before: these are not showpieces. The effect on the audience will be in no way proportional to the amount of technical effort required of the pianist. There are many Debussy works (for instance, "Poissons d'or," "Mouvement," "Jardins sous la pluie," "Feux d'artifice"), to say nothing of the concert-etude literature as a whole, which are more rewarding for the pianist in terms of audience appreciation.

So, the Études, then, have been in an awkward position, both in terms of their position in Debussy's total output, and in terms of the outward recognition they afford the pianist in the form of audience approval.

This situation is changing, however slowly. Now the early training of pianists more and more often includes contemporary music from the beginning. Piano technique is expanding its horizons to include not only the matters of tonal nuance and pedal effects but also the more adventurous, nontraditional techniques which do not even involve the keyboard. With these changes, both pianists and audiences are becoming more sophisticated and more open to explorations of the unfamiliar, both the avant garde and the less well-known music by recognized composers.

All this bodes well for the future acceptance and more frequent performance of the Études. It has taken longer than Debussy

anticipated, but eventually his prophecy will be borne out: "I am glad to have successfully completed a work which, I may say without vanity, will occupy a special place of its own."¹

¹Leon Vallas, Claude Debussy: His Life and Works, trans. by Maire & Grace O'Brien (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 259.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Cooper, Martin. French Music from the Death of Berlioz to the Death of Fauré. London: Oxford University Press, 1951.
- Cortot, Alfred. The Piano Music of Claude Debussy. Translated by Violet Edgell. London: J. & W. Chester, 1922.
- Dawes, Francis. Debussy Piano Music. London: B. B. Corp., 1969.
- Debussy, Claude. Douze Études Pour le Piano. livre I and II. Paris: Durand, 1916.
- _____. Monsieur Croche the Dilettante Hater. Translated by B. N. Langdon Davies. New York: Lear, 1948.
- Harvard Dictionary of Music. 2nd ed. (1969).
- Kirby, F. E. A Short History of Keyboard Music. New York: The Free Press, 1966.
- Lockspeiser, Edward. Debussy. 3rd ed. New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1949.
- _____. Debussy: His Life and Mind. 2 vols. London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1965.
- Long, Marguerite. At the Piano with Debussy. Translated by Olive Senior-Ellis. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1972.
- Schmitz, Elie Robert. The Piano Works of Claude Debussy. Edited by Merle Armitage. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1950.
- Vallas, Leon. The Theories of Claude Debussy. Translated by Maire O'Brien. London: Oxford University Press, 1929.

_____. Claude Debussy: His Life and Works. Translated by Maire & Grace O'Brien. London: Oxford University Press, 1933.

Periodicals

Cross, Anthony. "Debussy and Bartók." Musical Times 108 (February 1967): 125-31.

Dent, Edward. "The Pianoforte and Its Influence in Modern Music." Musical Quarterly 2 (1916): 271-94.

DeVoto, Mark. Review of "The Evolution of Tonal Thinking in the Works of Claude Debussy," by L. D. Berman. Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1965. Current Musicology 8 (1969): 200-208.

Dumesnil, Maurice. "Debussy's Principles in Pianoforte Playing." Etude 56 (1938): 153-54.

_____. "Coaching with Debussy." Piano Teacher 5 (September-October 1962): 10-13.

Gatti, Guido. "The Piano Works of Claude Debussy." Musical Quarterly 7 (1921): 418-60.

Jean-Aubrey, Georges. "Claude Debussy." Musical Quarterly 4 (October 1918): 542-54.

Laloy, Louis. "Claude Debussy et le Debussysme." Translated by Ruth Caldwell. La Revue S.I.M. 6 (August-September 1910): 507-19.

Lesure, François. "Claude Debussy After His Centenary." Musical Quarterly 49 (July 1963): 277-88.

Lockspeiser, Edward. "Ansermet and the Moderns." High Fidelity 9 (March 1959): 41-43.

_____. "Debussy in Perspective." Musical Times 109 (October 1968): 904-906.

_____. "New Literature on Debussy." Music & Letters 40 (April 1959): 140-49.

- Mellers, W. H. "The Final Works of Claude Debussy." Music & Letters 20 (1939): 168-76.
- Newman, Ernest. "The Development of Debussy." Musical Times 59 (May 1918): 199-203; (August 1918): 343-46.
- Prud'homme, J. G. "Claude Achille Debussy." Musical Quarterly 4 (October 1918): 555-71.
- Rosen, Charles. "Where Ravel Ends and Debussy Begins." High Fidelity 9 (May 1959): 42-44, 117-21.
- Smalley, Roger. "Debussy and Messiaen." Musical Times 108 (February 1968): 128-31.
- Tollefson, A. R. "Debussy's Pedaling." Clavier 9 (October 1970): 22-33.
- Wagner, Edyth. "History of the Piano Etude." American Music Teacher 9 (September-October 1959): 12-13, 28-29.
- Whittall, A. "After Webern, Wagner--Reflections on the Past and Future of Pierre Boulez." Music Review 28 (1967): 135-38.

Other

- Aitken, Webster. "Debussy's Piano Music: A Pianist Discusses Position of Études in the Composer's Output." New York Times. February 22, 1942, sec. 8, p. 6.
- Debussy and Ravel Perform Their Own Compositions in 1913. Welte Legacy of Piano Treasures. Hollywood, California: Recorded Treasures Inc., 1963. No. 663.
- Ganz, Peter. "The Development of the Etude for Pianoforte." D.M.A. thesis, Northwestern University, 1960.
- Mueller, Robert E. "The Concept of Tonality in Impressionist Music, Based on the Works of Debussy and Ravel." Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1954.