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This document integrates discussions of historical and analytical findings to support a performance practice surrounding Debussy's *Douze Études* (1915). Historical observations are used to build comparative relationships between the compositional techniques and piano techniques used in the *Études* and those established by The French Clavecinistes; Debussy's teachers, mentors and peers at The Paris Conservatory; Frédéric Chopin; and Robert Schumann. These relationships are used to highlight stylistic nuances that are paramount to the interpretation of Debussy's music. While the *Études* provide the lens through which Debussy's piano style is examined, this document is organized by topic, drawing upon individual *étude*s to illustrate various elements of style. These include: French Baroque unmeasured *préludes*, keyboard technique of the French Baroque, keyboard technique of the Paris Conservatory, keyboard technique of Chopin, Chopin's *rubato,* Chopin's rhythmic vernacular, Schumann's explorations in sonority, Schumann's use of repetition, Schumann's use of quotation, and finally, Schumann's use of contrasting characters.

FORGING A PERFORMANCE PRACTICE FOR DEBUSSY'S *DOUZE ÉTUDES*: A HISTORICAL AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation provides a body of knowledge that supports a scholarly performance practice for the *Douze Études* (1915). While the term ‘performance practice’ may ready musicologists for an argument on ‘authenticity,’ my study assumes that a performer of this music strives for an interpretation that celebrates a composer’s musical perspective: for this reason, I have chosen to plunge into the precarious study of influence. Unlike other performance-oriented research regarding this music, my arguments are based solely on the influence of composers and musical institutions that Debussy dealt with extensively during his life: French Clavecinistes, the Paris Conservatory, Chopin, and Schumann. This paper is not an attempt to discredit the findings of others who have uncovered modernist techniques in Debussy’s late style; instead, it offers a different vantage point from which to observe these musical traits.

Roy Howat’s fascinating book, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier*, prompted my investigation into Debussy’s influences. Howat sheds fresh light onto some of Debussy’s well-known precursors such as Chopin and the Clavecinistes, but also makes compelling arguments for more obscure Russian, Romantic, and Eastern influences. As the broad scope of Howat’s book does not allow for detailed observations and analyses concerning the *Études,* a closer consideration of this genre is invited, a purpose that this document aims to fulfill.

Debussy pushed the *étude* in new directions and contributed to the development of a twentieth-century definition for the genre. In her dissertation, "Rethinking Virtuosity in Piano Etudes of the Early Twentieth Century: Case Studies in Claude Debussy's Douze Études for Piano" (2012), Qing Jiang argues that Debussy's *Études* introduce a new way of thinking about virtuosity. In her discussion of the evolution of the term "virtuosity," she shows that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the term came to have physical connotations that still pervade our assumptions about it. She points out that in the twentieth century, *études* became more focused on "compositional virtuosity," an idea that seems to bring the term closer to its earlier meaning. She further argues that Debussy's *Études* played an important part in this redefining of "virtuosity," pointing out that Debussy uses the technical restraints that have traditionally been associated with *études* as compositional "seeds." Her analytical techniques are broad and cover contrapuntal techniques, set theory and use of modal harmonies. She also discusses how gamelan, Baroque and popular music influenced Debussy's "compositional virtuosity." Ms. Jiang's argument for the "compositional virtuosity" included in the *Douze Études* served as a point of departure for my study, which explores historical elements that impacted Debussy's development.

In a related dissertation, "A Performance Analysis for Claude Debussy's *Douze Études Livre II"* (2008), Moonhee Hwang sets out to help those aspiring to learn the *Études,* providing a wealth of specific information involving formal analysis, harmonic analysis, motivic transformation, fingering and technical approach for each of the pieces from the second *livre*. Ms. Hwang's approach to treating performance directions and analysis as disparate elements results in a great deal of measure-by-measure analysis that limits the accessibility of her otherwise admirable work. Rather than discussing each *étude* in order, I have chosen to align this paper using topical sections that bring together historical findings, analyses, and performance ideas with the goal of serving a more diverse range of scholars.

The most ambitious performance/analysis dissertation on the Debussy *Études* to date is Aysegul Durakoglu's "Contrapuntal Lines and Rhythmic Organization in Selected Debussy Piano Etudes: A Structural Analysis with Performance Implications" (1997). Using Messiaen's "Traité de Rhythme, de couleur, et d'Ornithologie" as a basis, Ms. Durakoglu argues that Debussy's rhythmic ideas are derived from Ancient Greek modes, and she shows how these modes are manipulated and interact with other musical elements. To account for the highly variable and segmented rhythmic ideas within each piece she traces patterns through "variation, retrogradation and transformations"[1] that lead to a deeper understanding of the function of individual moments. Each of the six pieces is analyzed using a complex system containing at least six steps. By adapting twentieth-century models to the case of the Debussy *Études,* Ms. Durakoglu's adherence to rhythmic modes limits her access to more meaningful sources of influence. For example, according to her analysis, the opening right hand gesture of "Pour les agréments" is a "generative rhythmic unit," that Debussy carefully transformed throughout the piece. Though Ms. Durakoglu mentions that these opening rhythms are references to Baroque ornaments (*agréments*), her analysis is devoid of the historical circumstances that influenced Debussy's rhythmic and notational choices and therefore distorts the implications of the rhythmic design of the piece. While this is just one example, I believe it represents a significant limitation of her analytical system, which assumes that Debussy was composing in a systematic, analytically consistent way in the absence of any clear evidence of such a system. Ms. Durakoglu attempts to explicate Debussy's creativity with a system that would have been completely foreign to his thinking.

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[1] Aysegul Durakoglu, "Contrapuntal Lines and Rhythmic Organization in Selected Debussy Piano Etudes: A Structural Analysis with Performance Implications" (D.M.A. diss., New York University, 1997), 32.

Unlike related dissertations, my document analyzes the *Études* through a lens that would have been familiar to Debussy by exploring the influences that affected him during his lifetime and especially during the year 1915. During the final years of his life, Debussy looked to the past for inspiration and the following chapter (Chapter 2) provides a rationale for his attraction to established Baroque traditions and shows how these traditions, as understood by Debussy, are manifested in the *Études*. Debussy's strong connection to French tradition was consolidated at the Paris Conservatory; Chapter Three demonstrates how two ideologies of piano technique that were taught at this institution, the "French School" and the "Chopin School," impacted Debussy's piano writing, shaping his expectations for performers' responses to his writing. Fryderyk Chopin (1810–1849), the dedicatee of the *Études*, not only provided a technical model for the *Études,* but was also a rhythmic trailblazer whose ideas provided a scaffolding for

Debussy's own innovations. Chapter Four provides a brief history of *rubato* practices in Western music and presents arguments for reading Debussy's use of the technique as "Chopinesque." The final chapter is dedicated to the influence of Robert Schumann's explorations in sonority upon the sectionalized aesthetic that Debussy championed in the *Études.* Unlike the compositional model exemplified by German masters such as Beethoven and Brahms, these pieces prioritize the beauty or meaning contained within nearly momentary musical experiences above the development of themes or large-scale structural connections.

With regard to each of these topics, its respective chapters provides historical background connecting it with Debussy, cites and discusses exemplar models found in the *études,* and discusses how each influence impacts performance decisions. I attempt to integrate these different elements throughout each section, to support the idea that history, analysis, and interpretation gain the greatest value for performance when fused together.

CHAPTER II

THE FRENCH BAROQUE

> So, what about French music? Where are our old harpsichordists who produced real music in abundance? They held the secret of that graceful profundity, that emotion without epilepsy which we shy away from like ungrateful children…[2]
>
> Claude Debussy in a letter to Robert Godet, October 14, 1915

Debussy's reference to 'our admirable clavecinistes' in the foreword to the *Études* manifests the significant influence that the harpsichordists of the French Baroque, most notably François Couperin (1668–1733) and Jean-Phillip Rameau (1685–1764), had on Debussy during his late period. This foreword, while providing a rationale behind his lack of fingering, shows reverence to a French tradition of artistry:

> Our ancient masters— by which mean in particular "our" admirable clavecinistes— never indicated any fingering, no doubt relying on the ingenuity of their contemporaries. It would be most improper to doubt this same capacity in modern virtuosi.[3]

In a 'progress report' style letter to Durand from August 1915 Debussy asks, "You haven't given me an answer about the dedication: Couperin or Chopin?"[4] Chopin was the eventual dedicatee but Couperin, the most illustrious member of the French Baroque harpsichord school, was certainly a contender. It is important to note that Debussy's interest in these composers was not unique. Even though well over a century separates Couperin's death and Debussy's birth, Debussy and the musical community in France were quite familiar with this 'ancient' music by the *fin de siècle*. Louis Diémer (1843–1919), a French keyboardist and professor at The Conservatory from 1887, "turned Couperin and Daquin in to household names" by performing repertoire from the French Baroque in recitals as early as the 1860s.[5] Diémer was an immensely successful performer and was praised for his ability to switch between Baroque and contemporary repertoire within a performance. During this time Diémer also took up the harpsichord, famously playing a Taskin 1769 instrument at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*.[6] Diémer's legacy was solidified through publishing projects that he began during his tenure at The Conservatory. These included anthologies of eighteenth-century music for Durand under the title *Les clavecinistes francais* in 1887 as well as the complete *Ordres* of Couperin between 1903 and 1905.[7]

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[2] François Lesure and Roger Nichols, *Debussy Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 306.

[3] Debussy's foreword to the *Douze Études.*

[4] Lesure and Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 300.

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[5] Katharine Ellis, *Interpreting the Musical Past: Early Music in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 90.

[6] The 1889 Exposition Universelle was a world's fair in Paris from May-October of 1889. Perhaps the most famous monument from this event is the Eiffel Tower which was built especially for the occasion and served as a grand entrance. It was also at this event that Debussy heard a Javanese gamelan for the first time and this experience impacted his compositions, including some of the *Études,* for the remainder of his career. This event will be further discussed in Chapter 5 in regard to *Pour les quartes.*

[7] Roy Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 146.

The growing interest in past musical traditions was at least partly politically motivated. The historical movement in France parallels tensions with Germany that extended from The Prussian War of 1870 through the Dreyfus Affair and peaked during the culmination of these events, World War I. During The War, Nationalistic tendencies can be read in letters and essays of prominent composers including Debussy, Saint-Säens and even the famously soft-spoken Fauré. Saint-Säens was even an honorary president of The National League for the Defense of French Music that was formed in 1916 by the music critic Charles Tenroc. The National League proposed, among other nationalistic rules, to ban all performances of Austrian and German music in France.[8] As might be expected, Fauré's stance was much less extreme. He outlined his hopes for French composers to return to a "common orientation" that he defined as "the taste for clear thought, for pure and sober form, sincerity, a disdain for big effects."[9] Similarly, in 1915, writing under his pen-name, *Monsieur Croche,* Debussy states:

> For many years now I have not ceased to repeat the fact: we have been unfaithful to the musical tradition of our people for a century and a half…In fact, since Rameau, we no longer have had a distinctly French tradition.[10]

In a letter to Stravinsky from that same year, Debussy referred to the two then-completed sonatas (the *Cello Sonata* and the *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp*) as "pure music…in our old forms" that would not "demand tetralogical efforts from the listener."[11] Through these comments it is evident that Debussy wished to look back to the Baroque for inspiration, essentially attempting to create a new French lineage that bypassed the Austro-Germanic tradition that had dominated Western music throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Debussy's comment about 'tetralogy,' a reference to Wagner's "Ring Cycle," serves to advocate for "pure music" as well as denigrate a hero of Germanic Romanticism. It is interesting that just two years before, in an article entitled "Precursors," Debussy had denounced the use of pre-existing forms:

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[8] Carlo Caballero, "Patriotism or Nationalism? Faure and the Great War," *Journal of the American Musicology Society* 52 no.3 (Autumn 1999), 593, accessed December 21, 2016, RILM Abstracts of Music Literature (1967 to Present only).

[9] Ibid., 606.

[10] Ibid., 605.

> One architect would never dream of reproaching another for having used the same kind of stone as himself. Nonetheless, would he not be shocked to find formal similarities in the work of a colleague? It is evidently not the case in music, where a modern composer can copy the forms of some classical work without anyone turning a hair. He is even congratulated for it! (Respect for tradition manifests itself in some very strange ways).[12]

Like the *Sonatas,* most of the *Études* use 'Classical' forms, showing a quick shift in Debussy's ideology, at least in regard to large scale form. Based on his writings, one can presume that this was the result of nationalistic sentiments. Could it have been Debussy's intention to recapture genres that had been dominated by the 'other side?' Though Chopin and Liszt championed the *étude* genre while residing in Paris, composers of the Austro-Germanic tradition such as Czerny, Cramer and Hummel were the founders. In a letter to Durand in 1915, Debussy shows a self-awareness of his *Études'* place in history: “I’ve invested a lot of passion and faith in the future of the *Études.* I hope you’ll like them, both for the music they contain and for what they denote.”[13] All of this information puts into perspective his almost violent words: “French art needs to take revenge quite as seriously as the French army does…” and supports the assertion that Debussy’s goal was to write music that was innately French.[14]

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[11] Debussy quoted in Lesure and Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 309

[12] Marianne Wheeldon, *Debussy's Late Style* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 12.

While the compositions most relevant to the current study were written during The War, it is important to acknowledge that overt references to the French Baroque are found throughout Debussy’s keyboard *oeuvre,* from the *Suite Bergamasque* (1890)*,* to *Pour Le Piano* (*1901),* to *Hommage á Rameau* from the first book of *Images* (1905). Other composers in France were also referencing the ‘admirable clavecinistes’ to the extent that Debussy’s Baroque style was influenced by his peers and mentors. For example, the *Menuet* from Debussy’s *Petite Suite* for piano four hands (1886–1889) bears significant resemblance to Saint Saëns’ earlier *Menuet* Op. 56 (1878). Another contemporary influence comes from Chabrier whose *Pieces Pittoresque* (1880)*,* a set of ten pieces, prompted Franck to comment: “We have just heard something extraordinary. This music links our era to that of Couperin and Rameau.”[15] Indeed, as remarked by Roy Howat, the fourth piece of the set, *Sous bois,* “reinvents” the baroque *agrément.* Beyond the Baroque-like melodic treatment, the left hand ostinato of *Sous bois* (Ex. 2.1a) makes for a particularly inviting comparison to Debussy’s *Étude Pour les agréments* (Ex. 2.1b).

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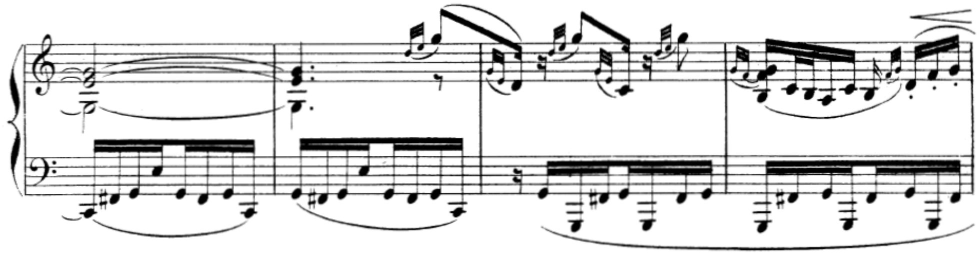
[13] Lesure and Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 300.

[14] Ibid., 293.

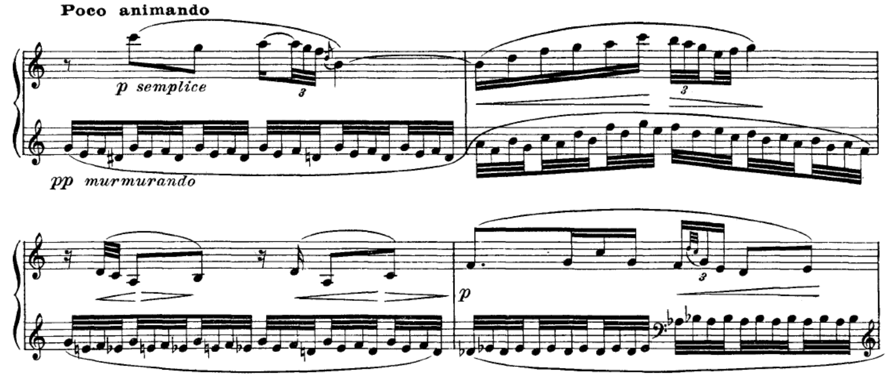
[15] Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier,* 145.

Example 2.1. A Contemporary Baroque Style Comparison

a) Chabrier, *Pièces Pittoresque,* "Sous bois," mm. 9–12.[16]



b) Debussy, *Étude pour les agréments*, mm. 12–15.[17]


Poco animando
p semplice
3
3
pp murmurando
p
3

---

[16] Emmanuel Chabrier, *Pièces Pittoresque* (Paris: Enoch Fres. & Costallat, 1900).

[17] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano,* First Edition (Paris: Durand and Cie., 1916).

Pour les agréments is the most overt reference to the French Baroque within the *Études*. In the working manuscript this piece concluded the set, showing that at one time Debussy wished for it to be his final word on the subject of *études*.[18] This certainly would have been appropriate had the dedicatee been Couperin because, without resorting to pastiche, Debussy manages to capture the essence of an earlier style through references to Baroque ornamentation and rhythm.

Jacques Champion de Chambonniéres (1601–1672), often credited as the founder of the school of French harpsichord playing, began a tradition of writing tables illustrating the performance of *agréments*. This tradition was passed down to Couperin and Rameau from prominent seventeenth-century composers such as Jean-Henri D'Anglebert (1629–1691),[19] Nicolas Lebègue (1631–1702),[20] and Monsieur de Saint-Lambert.[21] Unlike the familiar tradition established by the Bach family, French ornaments were expected to be precisely executed and Couperin expressed his preoccupation with precise execution of agréments in the following quote:

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[18] Roy Howat compiled and published facsimiles of the working manuscripts in 1989 where *Pour les agréments* is labelled number 12. Claude Debussy. *Études pour le Piano: Fac-similé des esquisses autographes* (1915), ed. Roy Howat, (Genève: Editions Minkoff, 1989).

[19] Jean-Henri D'Anglebert, *Pièces de clavecin* (Paris : Chez L'Auteur, n.d.).

[20] Nicolas Lebègue, *Pièces de Clavessin, Livre I* (Paris : Chez L'Auteur, 1677).

[21] Saint Lambert's first name, often falsely cited as 'Michel,' is unknown, as are his exact dates although we know that he was active in the early eighteenth century. Chapters 20-28 of Saint-Lambert's treatise *Les Principes du Clavecin* (1702) are dedicated to demonstrations of *agréments.* Though his compositions are quite modest in comparison to the other *clavecinistes* discussed, this text highlights the French fascination with ornamentation and according to Rebecca Harris-Warrick, *Principes* provides "a useful comparative perspective on the performance practices of his day." Rebecca Harris-Warrick, "Saint Lambert, Monsieur de," *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed December 1, 2016.

> I am always surprised (after the great care I have taken to indicate the proper ornaments for my pieces, which are rather completely explained in my description of my playing method known by the title *L'Art de toucher le clavecin*) to hear of persons who have learned these pieces without following my rules. This is an unpardonable oversight… I affirm that my pieces should be executed exactly as I have marked them, and that they will never make the correct impression on persons of true taste so long as the performer does not observe to the letter all that I have marked, adding and removing nothing.[22]

Through publications by Saint-Saëns, Diémer, and even Brahms who all had made editions of Rameau and Couperin, Debussy was certainly familiar with French Baroque ornamentation practices and understood the importance of scrupulous attention to detail when approaching 'agréments.' Instead of using symbols to notate his ornamental figures, Debussy uses a combination of small note-heads and highly subdivided large note-heads to impart his ideas. Perceiving the flourishes within the first section of *Pour les agréments* as descendants of Baroque ornamentation is essential for a student of this piece. To highlight the connection between Debussy's score and French Baroque *agréments,* Example 2.2 displays the opening measures of the *Pour les agréments* alongside two excerpts from an ornament table included in François Couperin's *Pieces de Clavecin* (1713) and reveals that much of this passage could be rewritten in notational practices used by Couperin with an *arpégement, en descendant* followed by a *pincé*.

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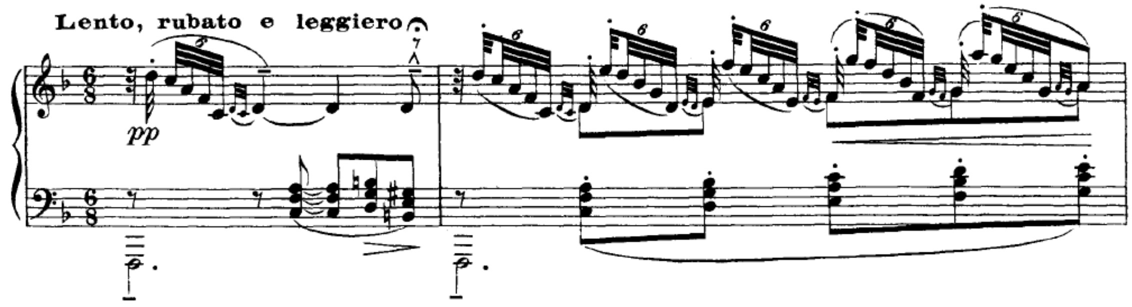
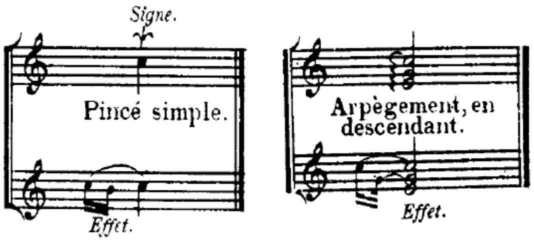
[22] Phillip Beaussant, *François Couperin,* ed. Reinhard Pauly, trans. by Alexandra Land (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1990), 288.

Example 2.2. An Eighteenth-Century Interpretation of *Pour les agréments*

a) Debussy, *Étude Pour les agréments,* mm. 1–2.[23]



b) Excerpts from a Couperin ornamentation table.[24]



Debussy was following the style of notation that Diémer used when editing Couperin's works. Within Diémer's widely known publication of Couperin's *ordres* one can see the way that Debussy visually encountered Couperin's music. In his editions Diémer included a brief "Note pour l'exécution" in which he shows a firm grasp of Baroque 'on the beat' ornamentation practices and translates his own notational system that was itself a reinterpretation of Couperin's. Diémer's demonstration of the arpeggio and mordent figures provides perspective on Debussy's own Baroque-style notation.

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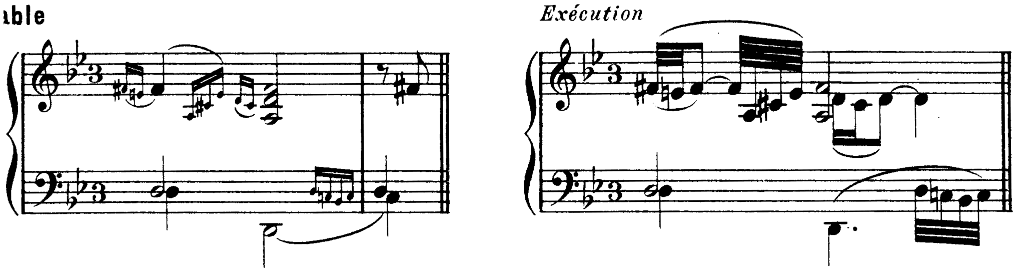
[23] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1916).

[24] François Couperin, Johannes Brahms and Friederich Chrysander, *Complete Keyboard Works Series I* (London: Augener Ltd., 1888), xv.

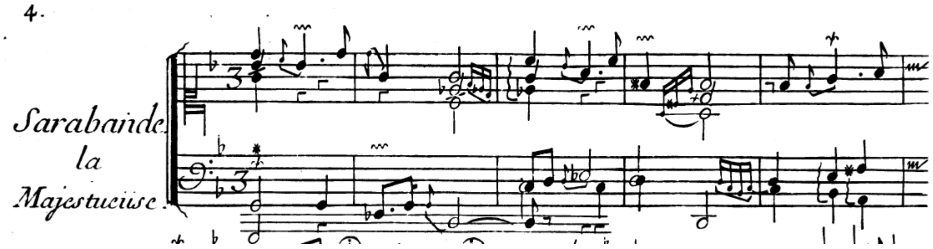
Example 2.3a, taken from Diémer's edition of Couperin's *Pièces De Clavecin: Livre 1*, displays Diémer's notation (on the left) and his explanation of how execute this passage (on the right). Couperin's notation is included in Example 2.3b to show contrast.

Example 2.3 Diémer's Notational Style

a) An ornament table by Diémer.[25]



b) Couperin, *Sarabande la Majesteuse* from *Premier Ordre,* mm. 1–4.[26]



Debussy's knowledge of eighteenth-century practice suggests that he would have expected an 'on the beat' interpretation of the *pincé* in the opening section of *Pour les agréments.* This creates a problem of 'overcrowding' that has the potential to give the passage a rushed or agitated quality. This was not Debussy's intention; in fact, his care to break each beat into two parts by notating separate slurs over the descending *arpégement* and the *pincé,* as well as his use of portato suggest a graceful character.[27] Surrendering to the idea that these unusual groupings of notes are in fact references to eighteenth-century ornaments invites a discussion on *rubato* because to incorporate these slurs into the opening measures of *Pour les agréments,* the performer cannot divide the beat into six equal parts.

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[25] François Couperin, *Pièces De Clavecin: Livre 1,* ed. by Louis Diémer (Paris: Durand n.d.), iv.

[26] François Couperin, *Pièces de Clavecin Livre I,* First Edition, (Paris: Chés l'Auteur, Le Sieur Foucaut, 1713), (1717 printing).

This constraint clarifies Debussy's uncharacteristic use of the word "rubato" in the heading of the piece. As I will argue at greater length in Chapter Four, Debussy primarily applies this term to small chunks of music, often a couple of measures and sometimes shorter than a measure.[28] Clearly the marking at hand is of a different nature because it is applied to an entire piece. In this case, I argue the *rubato* tempo marking gives some license for the performer to make rhythmic 'space' for the ornamental musical surface.

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[27] These notational traits are indebted to Diemer's eighteenth-century notational practice.

[28] See examples 4.2 and 4.3.

Exploring Debussy's 'Unmeasured-Style' Notation
Pour les agréments and *Pour les accords*

The rhythmic freedom that results from Debussy's *rubato* in *Pour les agréments* invites comparison to the French Baroque *prélude*. The *préludes* of François Couperin and Jean-Phillipe Rameau are themselves references to an older practice of the *unmeasured prélude* that was championed by seventeenth-century clavecinistes such as the uncle of François, Louis Couperin (1626–1661), D'Anglebert and Lebègue. The 'unmeasured' tradition was passed down to harpsichordists from seventeenth-century French lutenists and was notated with "slurred and unbarred notes to indicate arpeggiated chords and brief melodic passages," leaving the rhythmic interpretation up to the taste of the performer.[29] Rameau and Couperin use a much more familiar notational system but, as François Couperin notes in "L'art de toucher le clavecin," his *préludes* were still to have the same free rhythmic approach as their predecessors:

> although these preludes are written in measured time, there is, nevertheless, a style, dictated by custom, which must be observed . . . A prelude is a free composition, in which the imagination gives rein to any fancy that may present itself . . . those who have recourse to these non-improvised preludes should play them in a free, easy style, not sticking too closely to the exact time, unless I have expressly indicated this by the word Mesuré.[30]

---

[29] Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 10.

[30] François Couperin, *L'Art de toucher le Clavecin,* First Edition (Paris: Ches 'Auteur, le Sieur Foucant, 1716), 33.

Although the *ordres* had all been published and many individual pieces had been widely performed by Diémer and others, “L’art de toucher le clavecin” was not widely distributed in the nineteenth century. However, Paul Brunold (1875–1948), who had studied with Antoine-François Marmontel (1816–1898) at The Conservatory,[31] published an edition of Couperin’s treatise for *L’echo musical* in 1912. While this was apparently “replete with errors” and was replaced in 1933 by a separate edition by Brunold,[32] it is hard to imagine that Debussy, a lifelong advocate of Couperin, was unaware of this new edition. Beyond this there are certainly parallels between *Pour les agréments* and Couperin’s *Préludes* that suggest Debussy had encountered the pieces. The following three examples display strong connections among common figures in Couperin’s *Préludes* and *Pour les agréments* and suggest possibilities for rhythmic interpretation of the *Étude*. In measure 17 of *Pour les agréments* (Ex. 2.4b) Debussy reinterprets a texture that Couperin used in his *Cinquième Prélude* (Example 2.4a). Both Debussy and Couperin add an ‘extra’ voice in the alto register and employ *agréments* on the beats. These subtle details add harmonic and rhythmic nuance to the respective passages.

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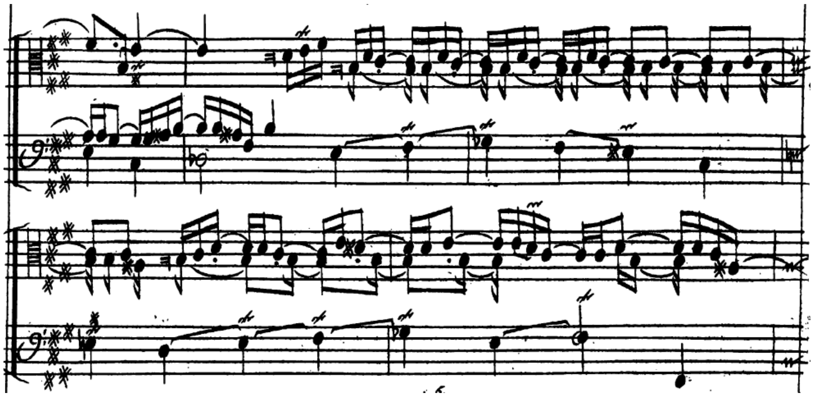
[31] Debussy also studied piano under Marmontel at The Conservatory. His influence on Debussy will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

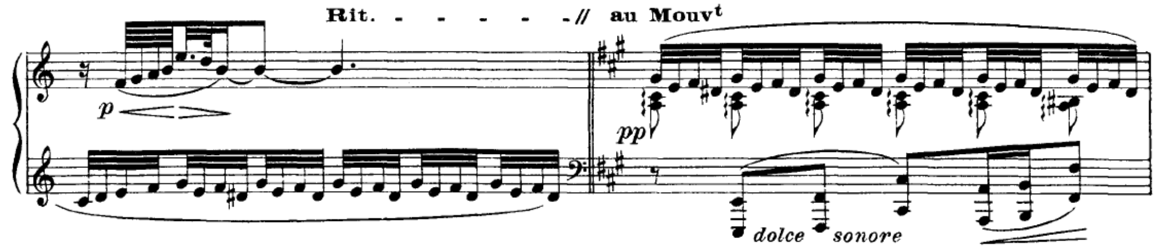
[32] Howard Schott, review of *L’Art de Toucher le Clavecin*, ed. and trans. Margery Halford, *Early Music* 4.1 (1976): 55.

Example 2.4. 'Extra' Alto Voices for Added Rhythmic and Harmonic Nuance

a) Couperin, *Cinquième Prélude,* mm. 15–18.[33]



b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les agréments,* mm.16–17.[34]



Sweeping runs that ornament the melodic lines are found throughout Couperin's melodic pieces, and Debussy's treatment of the melody in measure 16 (also found in Example 2.4b) is quite similar to a passage from Couperin's *Septième Prélude* (Example 2.5). Debussy's use of dotted rhythms instead of appoggiaturas is congruent with the practice of notation that Diémer had begun nearly thirty years prior.

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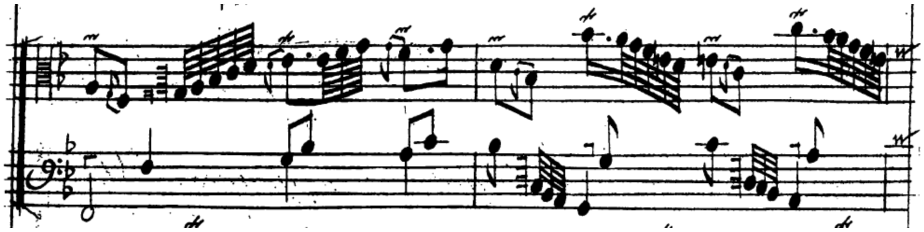
[33] François Couperin, *L'art de toucher l'clavecin*, First Edition (Paris: Chés l'Auteur, le Sieur Foucaut, 1716).

[34] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1916).

Example 2.5. Couperin, “L’art de toucher le clavecin” *Septième Prélude,* mm. 3–4.[35]



The luxurious cadence at the end of the first section of *Pour les agréments,* shown in Example 2.6b, also shares characteristics with Couperin’s *Préludes*. This moment is created by dissonant suspensions that go well beyond the confines of the bar line, leaving space for the listener to hear the resolution of each voice independently. This technique is prevalent in Couperin’s *Préludes*, and Example 2.6a is simply a particularly beautiful moment.

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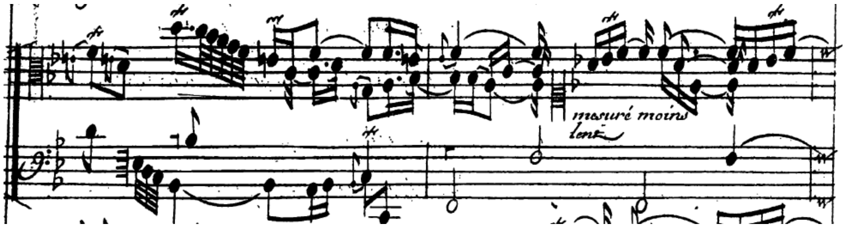
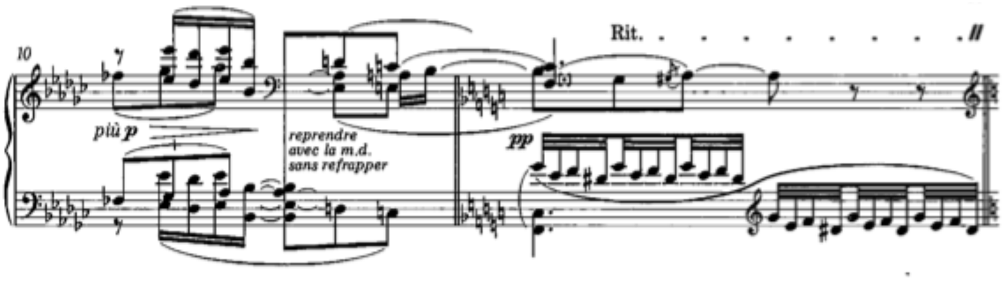
[35] François Couperin, *L’art de toucher l’clavecin*. First Edition (Paris: Chés l'Auteur, le Sieur Foucaut, 1716).

Example 2.6. Luxurious Cadences

a) Couperin, *Septième Prélude,* mm. 5–6.[36]



b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les agréments,* mm. 10–11.[37]



The compelling bass note that begins *Pour les agréments* invites one more comparison to the French Baroque *prélude*. While bass note openings are almost nonexistent in the dances and character pieces of Rameau or Couperin, they are used in six of the eight *Préludes* within Couperin's *L'art de toucher la clavecin* as well as Rameau's *Prélude* from his first book of *Pieces de clavecin.* Debussy had used this type of opening for his *Prélude* from *Suite Bergamasque* (1890)*,* a suite that clearly references the Baroque and shows that Debussy was aware of this association. Debussy's other compositions that make use of this device can be broken into two basic categories: those that begin dance-style pieces like *La Puerto del Vino* (*Préludes* book 2) and *Pour les octaves* (*Études* book 1) and those that provide a fundamental for a less rhythmically and more harmonically motivated piece like the aforementioned *Prélude* or *Reflets dans l'eau* (*Images* book 1). Roy Howat observed that the first section of *Reflets,* headed '*tempo rubato,'* acts as a *prélude* to the section beginning in measure 25 marked *mésuré.* He likens this to the *unmeasured prélude* from Rameau's first book of *Pieces de clavecin.*[38]

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[36] François Couperin, *L'art de toucher l'clavecin*, First Edition (Paris: Chés l'Auteur, le Sieur Foucaut, 1716).

[37] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1916).

Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir (*Préludes* book 1) falls somewhere in between the two categories. Though it clearly refers to a waltz and actually begins with the augmented rhythm of the lively *Pour les octaves,* the meter is constantly undermined. Observation of similar material between *Les sons et les parfums* and *Pour les agréments* suggests that when Debussy was writing the *Étude* he was building on techniques that he had already explored in the *Prélude.* The examples below illustrate Debussy's techniques for notating rhythms that give the perception of rhythmic improvisation.

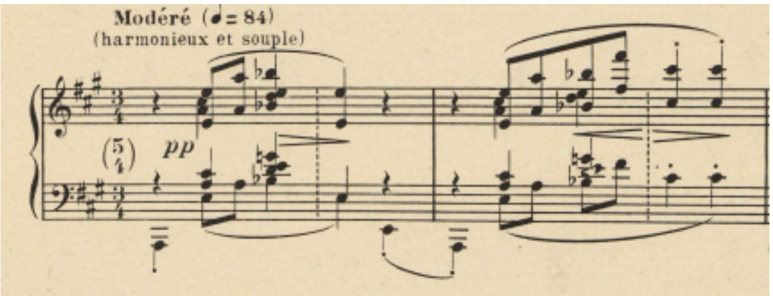
Both pieces begin with metric divisions that go against the expectation of their respective time signatures, leaving the listener without the ability to anticipate where the next strong beat will occur (Ex. 2.7). While the *Prélude* begins with a strong downbeat, the waltz 'feel' is immediately subjugated by two 'extra' beats. The *Étude* obfuscates the 6/8 time signature by emphasizing beats two and six: the fermata over beat six furthers this effect.

---

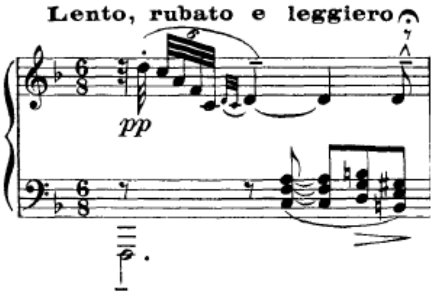
[38] Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier,* 151.

Example 2.7. Extra Beats and Unexpected Accents

a) Debussy, *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir,* mm. 1–2.[39]



b) Debussy, Étude *Pour les agréments,* m.1.[40]



Immediately after disrupting the flow of the pieces, Debussy lures the listener back in to the pulse by using his characteristic planing technique (Ex. 2.8). The lack of harmonic 'tension' in these unresolved chords creates an atmosphere that gives an unmeasured impression because an arrival point cannot be anticipated. The *Prélude* continues to undermine the 3/4 time signature by suggesting a duple meter with the bass notes.

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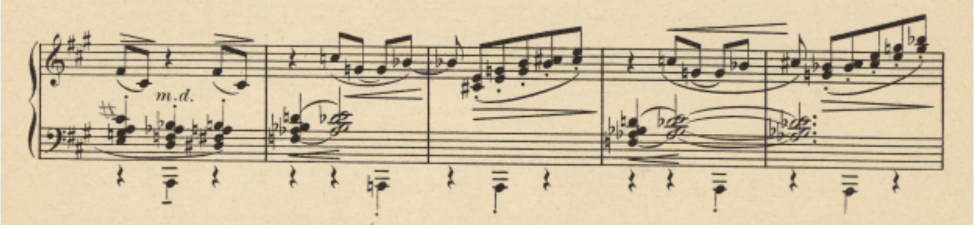
[39] Claude Debussy, *Préludes*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1910).

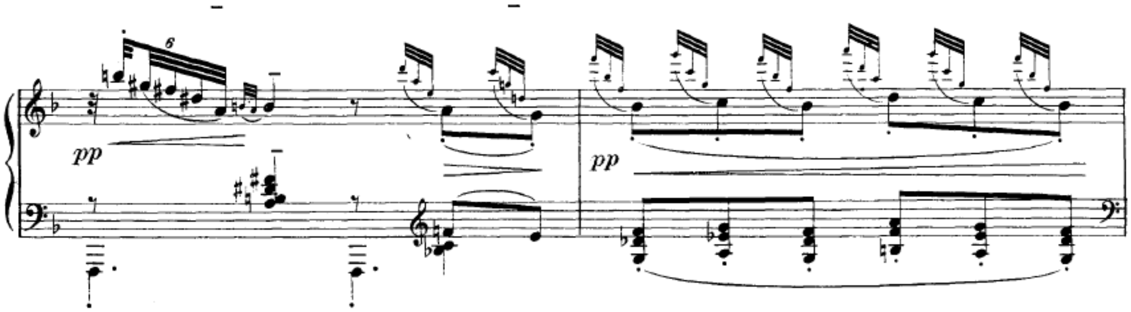
[40] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1916).

Example 2.8. Chordal Planing to Create an Unmeasured Atmosphere

a) Debussy, *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir,* mm. 4–8.[41]



b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les agréments,* mm. 3–4.[42]



The descending figures in Example 2.9 show a separation from the written time signatures of each piece. In the *Étude* (Ex. 2.9b), a held D-flat makes it nearly impossible to hear the preceding descending embellishment as anything but a pickup beat. After the second repetition of this audacious flourish, the sense of the downbeat is completely lost. The corresponding pattern within the *Prélude* seemed to have confused even Debussy. As can be seen in measure 31 of Ex. 2.9a, there are clearly four beats in a 3/4 measure.

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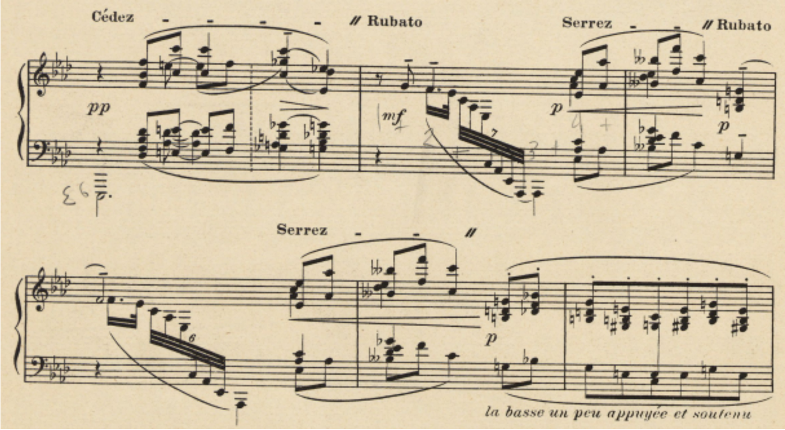
[41] Claude Debussy, *Préludes*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1910).

[42] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1916).

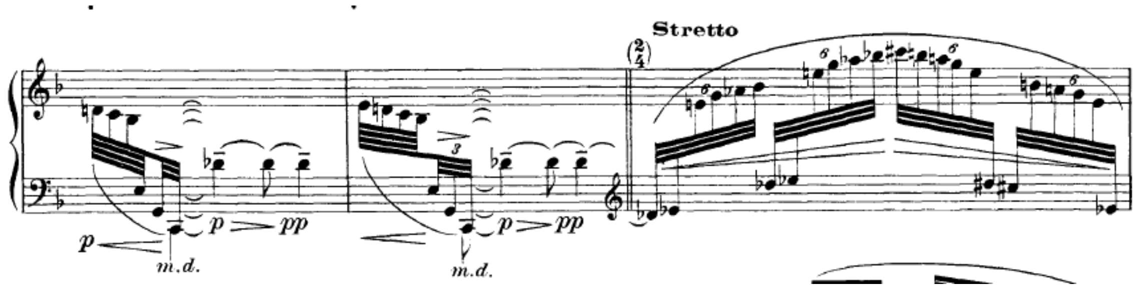
The second entrance of the descending figure continues the metric disorientation by beginning on the downbeat instead of beat two.

Example 2.9. ‘Unmeasured’ Embellishments

a) Debussy, *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir,* mm. 30–35.[43]


Cédez
// Rubato
Serrez
// Rubato
pp
mf
p
p
Serrez
//
p
la basse un peu appuyée et soutenu

b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les agréments,* mm. 5–7.[44]


Stretto
p
p
pp
m.d.
p
pp
m.d.

---

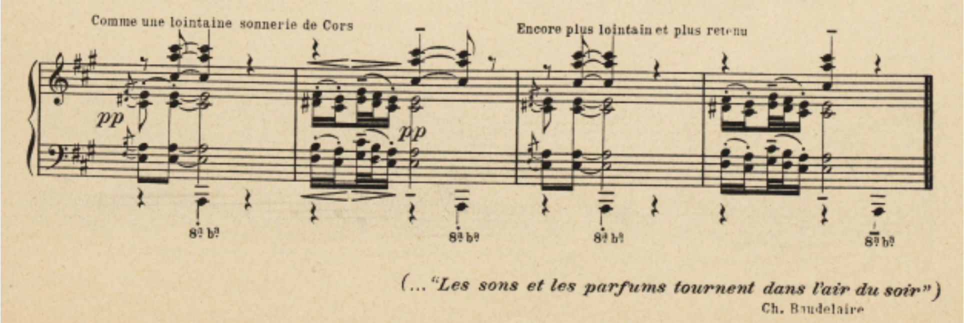
[43] Claude Debussy, *Préludes,* First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1910).

[44] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1916).

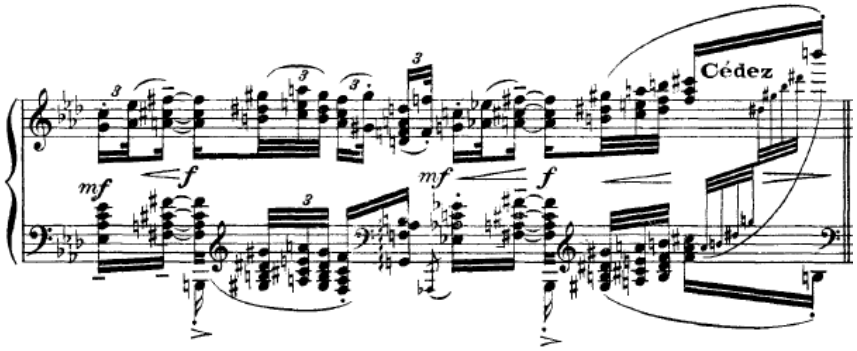
During the coda of *Les sons et les parfums* (Example 2.10a)*,* Debussy reintroduces the duple bass rhythm that was shown in Example 2.8, again subverting the 3/4 time signature and confusing the audience's sense of meter. In this instance, the entry of the bass voice is preceded by a held triad in the higher range of the keyboard. A very similar relationship between harmony and bass is established during the climax of *Pour les agréments* (Example 2.10b)*,* suggesting another reference to the *Prélude*. While Debussy does not superimpose a duple meter in the *Étude*, he certainly veils the written meter by emphasizing offbeats (the 'and' of beats one and four with F-sharp minor triads) and weak beats (beats two and five with low Bs). In both excerpts he furthers the metric ambiguity by saturating the respective measures with parallel triad movement written with complex subdivisions and short slurs in such a way that the performer is forced to stretch the beats in order to 'fit in' all of the nuance. Just as with the *rubato* in *Pour les agréments,* Debussy's direction *Plus retenu* in measure 49 allows the performer time to incorporate the nuances.

Example 2.10. Notation and Nuances that Require *Rubato*

a) *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir,* mm. 50–53.[45]


Comme une lointaine sonnerie de Cors
pp
pp
Encore plus lointain et plus retenu
8va b
(..."Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir")
Ch. Baudelaire

b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les agréments,* m. 38.[46]


3
3
3
3
Cédez
mf
f
mf
f
3

Example 2.10 exhibits a connection to the only other instance within the *études* where the term *rubato* is used within a tempo heading: the middle section of *Pour les Accords.* In this section, shown in Example 2.11, the combination of an extremely slow pulse, long rests and held notes makes it difficult to detect a meter and gives the impression of an *unmeasured prélude*.

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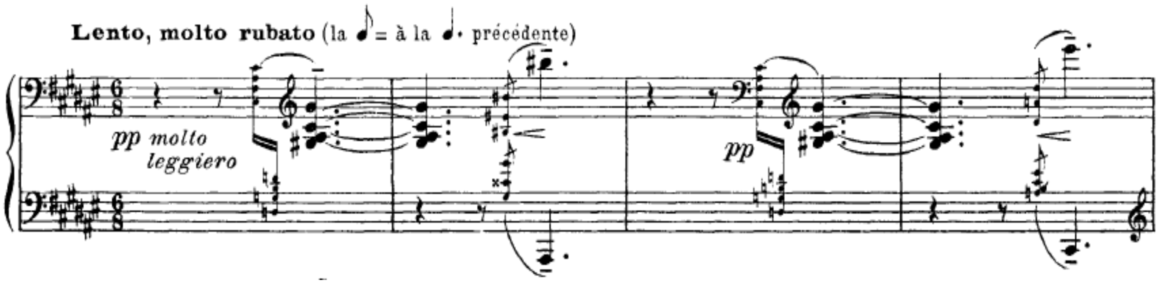
[45] Claude Debussy, *Préludes,* First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1910).

[46] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1916).

Example 2.11. Debussy, *Étude Pour les Accords,* mm. 80–83.[47]



The gestural similarities and use of rhythmic notation shown in the examples above demonstrate Debussy's development of 'improvisatory' rhythmic techniques. His inspiration for this style of composition came from a variety of sources including the Baroque *prélude*, Diémer's late nineteenth-century performances and editorial work, contemporary composers' clavecinist-style pieces, and from his own previous compositions. The amalgamation of these sources, filtered through Debussy's uniquely resourceful imagination led to the creation of a style that is at once connected to past traditions and innovative.

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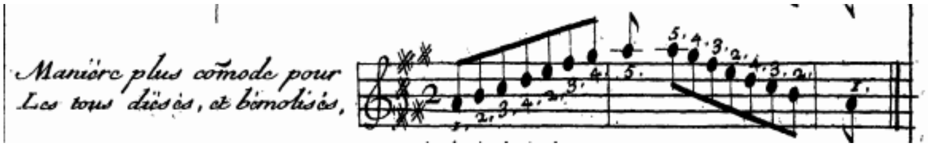
[47] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

Clavecinist Technique At The Piano
Pour les huit doigts

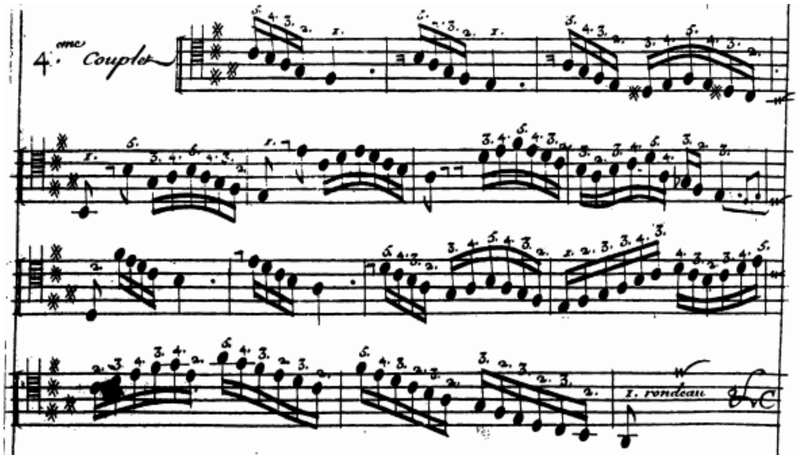
Pour les huit doigts, the final work in the first book of études, is an even more audacious example of Baroque techniques appearing in a twentieth-century atmosphere. In the footnote to this piece, Debussy clarified the title (and contradicted his preface) by calling for the use of the thumbs to be restricted throughout this piece, leaving just four fingers on each hand. This strange request provides even more evidence for Debussy's interest and knowledge of Couperin's *L'art de toucher le clavecin*. As demonstrated in Example 2.12, Couperin advocates for scale and passagework fingerings that use the thumb exceedingly sparingly, at least from the perspective of anyone trained after Czerny, whose thumb-oriented five-finger exercise is mocked at the beginning of the first page of Debussy's *Études*. It is quite possible to read the first *livre* as a progression from a tired, 'Austro-Germanic' technique, to a fresh, French approach.

Example 2.12. Couperin’s Fingering Ideas

a) Couperin, *L’art de toucher le clavecin,* pg. 29.[48]



b) Couperin, *L’art de toucher le clavecin,* pg. 50.[49]



In *Pour les huit doigts*, Debussy found new possibilities for this approach to fingering: throughout the piece a tetrachord structure is used to juxtapose sharply contrasting tonalities. The idiomatic nature of the black-key and white-key figurations shown in Example 2.13 seem to be born from the technical constraints and give insight to Debussy’s compositional process. By using octave displacement Debussy builds brilliant scales from the rudiment established in the first four measures.

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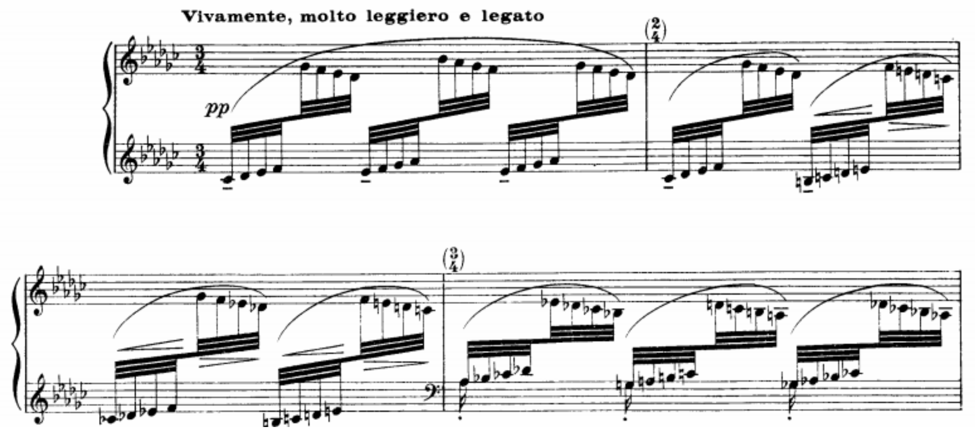
[48] François Couperin, *L’art de toucher l’clavecin*, First Edition (Paris: Chés l'Auteur, le Sieur Foucaut, 1716).

[49] Ibid.

Example 2.13. Debussy, *Étude Pour les huit doigts,* mm. 1–4.[50]



In this extremely tightly constructed piece, Debussy discovers endless possibilities within a novel idea: eight-note scales and patterns can effortlessly span the keyboard without the hindrance of the thumb by simply crossing the hands over one another. During the coda, the juxtaposition of contrasting keys is condensed into bitonality as white-key and black-key patterns are played simultaneously. Though the piece comes to a dramatic culmination, Debussy's ironic wit has the last word as two lonely pianissimo G-flats close the piece.

As with in the relationship between *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir* and *Pour les agréments,* a number of earlier pieces foreshadow the *étude* at hand. Edward Lockspeiser acknowledged the predecessors to this piece to be *Mouvement* (*Images* I) and *Le vent dans la plaine* (*Préludes I*)[51] though I argue that a much more convincing comparison is to *Feux d'artifice* (*Préludes II*). The opening measures contain a very similar 32nd-note texture that highlights an even more pronounced white-key and black-key polarity than *Pour les huit doigts* (Ex. 2.14a). The textural scales in the high register of the piece occur in patterns of ten instead of eight and therefore require the use of the thumb (Ex. 2.14b), but nevertheless contains the hand-crossing technique that was recycled in the later *étude*.

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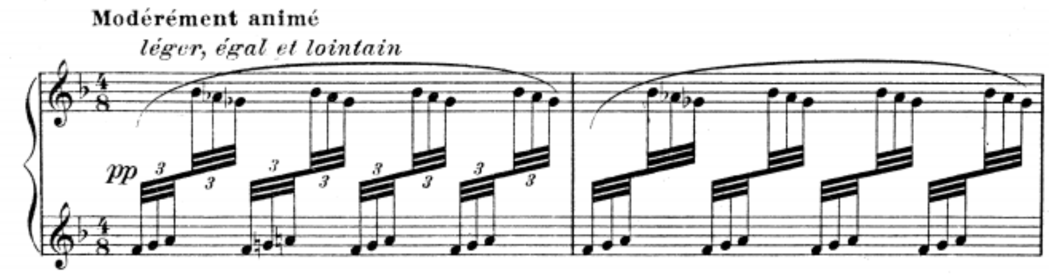
[50] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano,* First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

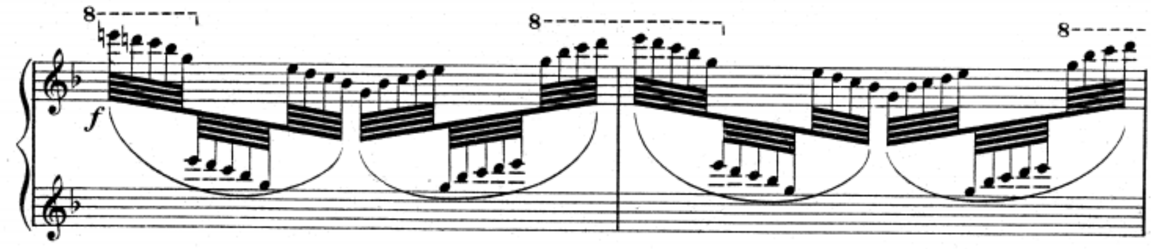
[51] Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 161.

Example 2.14. *Pour les huit doigts* Technique In *Feux d'artifice*

a) Debussy, *Feux d'artifice,* mm. 1–2.[52]



b) Debussy, *Feux d'artifice,* mm. 25–26.[53]



Debussy's complicated relationship with The French Baroque Clavecinist tradition was forged from his experiences reading from heavily edited scores, hearing ancient works performed by his contemporaries, and experiencing other composers' compositions that were influenced by the tradition. Tracing Debussy's contact with each of these aspects provides a frame of reference from which to understand his perspective. It is clear through his correspondence with Robert Godet and others that Debussy intended for the *Études* to be a contribution to the War against the Germans— honoring and elevating past French traditions by constructing new ideas based upon the aesthetics that Debussy poetically summarized as a "*graceful profundity*."

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[52] Claude Debussy, *Préludes,* First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1910).

[53] Ibid.

CHAPTER III

DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM PIANO TECHNIQUE

> …I'll see you again and be able to play you these Études which are giving your fingers such a fright…I may say there are passages which sometimes bring mine to a halt too. Then I have to get my breath back as though I'd been climbing a flight of stairs…In truth, this music wheels above the peaks of performance! It'll be fertile ground for establishing records.[54]
>
> Claude Debussy in a letter to Jacques Durand, September 1, 1915

Scholars rarely give enough credit to the influence of the Paris Conservatory on Debussy's pianism. Perhaps this is because Debussy did not excel to the highest ranks of performance during his tenure there, shifting his focus instead to composition after failing to secure the grand prize in performance. Beyond this, Debussy preferred to associate himself with the Chopin tradition through his childhood piano teacher Madame Mauté rather than through the renowned Antoine-François Marmontel (1816–1898), with whom he studied with for eight years at The Conservatory. Despite all of this, The Conservatory had an important influence on Debussy's relationship with the piano throughout his career and therefore deserves particular attention in connection with the technique-oriented études.

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[54] Lesure and Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 301.

The ‘French’ Approach To Technique
Pour les huit doigts and *Pour les degrés chromatiques*

Although the technical ideas found in Debussy’s *Études* are certainly his own, there is no doubt that he was influenced by the technical styles that were passed down to him and his collaborators at The Conservatory. In order to get an understanding of the technical ‘climate’ in France during Debussy’s lifetime it is helpful to look back to a couple of generations earlier. According to Charles Timbrell, “Frederich Kalkbrenner was, along with Henri Herz, the most important pianist in Paris before Liszt and Chopin.”[55] Frédéric Kalkbrenner (1785–1849) was a proponent of a ‘pure’ finger technique and advocated for the use of a “device known as the *Guide-Mains,* consisting of a rod attached to the keyboard on which the arm rested so that the fingers alone could work on touch and tone production.”[56] Though this contraption may be alarming to a modern pianist, Kalkbrenner’s teaching produced many fine pianists including Camille Stamaty, George Mathias, Louise Mattmann, Marie Pleyel, and Sigismond Thalberg, all of whom shaped the direction of the French approach to piano playing. According to Timbrell, “it is to him [Kalkbrenner] that we can trace the French style of playing known as the *jeu perlé:* rapid, clean, even passage work in which each note is bright and perfectly formed, like each pearl on a necklace.”[57] This tradition of finger training was passed down at the French Conservatory from the early generations of the nineteenth century all the way to Marguerite Long, who collaborated and studied with Debussy from 1914–1917 and was an early champion of the *Études.* Timbrell finds that "An examination of French keyboard exercises and methods from Michel de Saint-Lambert (1702)[58] to Marguerite Long 250 years later confirms that the French have been preoccupied with 'pure' finger technique to a greater extent than pedagogues of any other country."[59]

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[55] Charles Timbrell, *French Pianism: A Historical Perspective* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1999), 37.

[56] Ibid., 38.

[57] Ibid., 38.

Long is a notable figure not only because of her close contact with Debussy near the end of his life but also because she passed down her ideas on piano technique to students at the Paris Conservatory during her extensive tenure which lasted from 1906 to 1940. In interviews with her students, one can find candid remarks on Long's technical ideas and gain an understanding of the prevailing opinions on French piano playing during the last years of Debussy's life. Among the seven interviews with Long's students included in Timbrell's book *French Pianism: A Historical Perspective*, all noted her emphasis on clarity and finger training. Gaby Casadesus stated that "scales were played with just the fingers, never with any wrist movement."[60] Nicole Henriot-Schweitzer wrote:

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[58] Timbrell is probably referring to Saint-Lambert's *Les Prinicipes du Clavecin* (1702) that was discussed in footnote 21 on page 12.

[59] Timbrell, *French Pianism: A Historical Perspective*, 36.

[60] Ibid., 93.

> Madame Long's playing exemplified the *jeu perlé,* and she passed it on to her students— though perhaps not consciously. The *jeu perlé,* however, is really just a mirage, not a technique. Yes, in certain passages in Mozart, and above all in Saint-Saëns, one must play fast-fingered work very close to the keys, so that a series of equally sounded notes reminds us of uniformly shaped pearls on a string. But I can't think of an entire piece that requires this technique from beginning to end, even among the French showpieces.[61]

Similar accounts are heard from other students and highlight the significance of this technique in France. Unlike Madame Henriot-Schweitzer, I can think of at least two pieces that would benefit from this technique 'from beginning to end.'

In *Pour les huit doigts* and *Pour les degrés chromatiques,* Debussy betrays a keen interest on the so-called 'pearly' technique. Throughout the brief sixty-eight measures of *Pour les huit doigts* Debussy rarely strays from an unaccompanied line of scalar thirty-second notes. This is an extremely rare texture to be used throughout an entire piece, and the fact that this study closes the first book of *études* suggests a possible reference to the finale of Chopin's *Second Piano Sonata*. However, *Pour les huit doigts*, places much less emphasis on arpeggiation, and therefore contains different technical requirements. Debussy focuses almost exclusively on scalar passage work, suggesting that the clarity and finger dexterity of the *jeu perlé* style of playing must have been Debussy's intention when writing the performance instructions '*vivamente, molto leggiero e legato*.' Considering Long's mastery of *jeu perlé*, it is not surprising that after Debussy heard her interpretation of the piece, "the composer could only applaud."[62] Beyond containing similar technical requirements as the previous *étude, Pour les degrés chromatiques* is the only other study that contains just a single texture. Unlike the Chopin *Études,* where the mono-textural approach is the standard, this approach to texture is the exception in Debussy's *études.* Whereas piano techniques get only passing notice in most of the studies, Debussy's particularly keen interest in *jeu-perlé* is shown by his focused exploration of the technique in two *études.*

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[61] Ibid., 94.

Chopin's Technique
Pour les sixtes, Pour les arpèges composés, Pour les tierces

Undoubtedly, Debussy's piano music requires a diverse technical palette. While the *jeu perlé* style of playing was fundamental to Debussy's development as a pianist and an expected component of his collaborators' techniques, he was—along with his mentors, teachers and peers at the Conservatory—greatly influenced by Chopin's technical approach. While my intention in this section is in part to draw a distinction between the traditional French technical approach described above and Chopin's technique, it is first necessary to acknowledge a similarity. Debussy's famous penchant for 'kneading' or 'massaging' the keys was a tradition developed by Kalkbrenner and the French School. Kalkbrenner outlines this idea in his *Méthode* of 1830 and several of Chopin's students observed this in their teacher's playing.[63] While some overlap exists with the French finger school, fragments from Chopin's own attempt at a *Méthode* show a fundamental difference. Chopin emphasized that the "the wrist, the forearm, the arm, everything will follow the hand," a belief system that stands firmly against the pure finger technique advocated by Kalkbrenner.[64] The three pieces discussed below exhibit techniques that can be observed in Chopin's own compositions and that cannot be played with a "pure" finger technique.

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[62] Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1996), 310.

Pour les sixtes

Many have remarked on the similarities between Chopin's A-flat major *Nouvelle Étude* and Debussy *Pour Les Sixtes*. This observation is supported by Marguerite Long's assertion that Debussy had played Chopin's 'new' *étude* so much that he had "worn down his fingers."[65] The A-Flat *Nouvelle Étude* is a unique study in executing a repeated chordal texture with as much legato as possible— Chopin makes his intentions quite clear by placing one long, unbroken slur over the entire right hand. Similarly, the second section of *Pour les sixtes* contains a similar texture with repeated-note double sixths under long slurs. Debussy's use of portato and slurs-within-slurs suggests that he may have been attempting to provide a more practical notation to the reader, conceding that a true legato is not possible, and offering a solution. In editing the *Nouvelle Étude* for Durand in 1915 Debussy considered including similar 'slurs-within-slurs.' In 1915 he wrote to Durand:

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[63] Jonathan Bellman, "Chopin's Pianism and the Reconstruction of the Ineffable," *Keyboard Perspectives Yearbook of the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies* 3 (2010), 12, accessed December 21, 2016, RILM Abstracts of Music Literature (1967 to Present only).

[64] Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher As Seen by His Pupils* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 29.

[65] Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier,* 75.

> I've just finished revising the Études and they're ready for you to take away. In the Trois Études, for M[oscheles's] method, I think we should remove the slurs in the third one (in fact, the second) …[66]

In Debussy's version, he does include Chopin's long slur, but takes out the inner slurs that had been incorporated in the *Breitkopf* edition. From the modern 'urtext' perspective we are grateful that Debussy thought better of the extra slurs, but it is worth noting that Debussy thought highly enough of the idea to include it in the notation of his own *étude.* Excerpts a and b of Example 3.1 highlight the contrast between the notation from the first edition of the A-flat *Nouvelle Étude* with the *Breitkopf* (1879) edition that Durand's *edition classique* was replacing. Example 3.1c highlights the similarity between the notation of *Pour les sixtes* and *Breitkopf* (1879).

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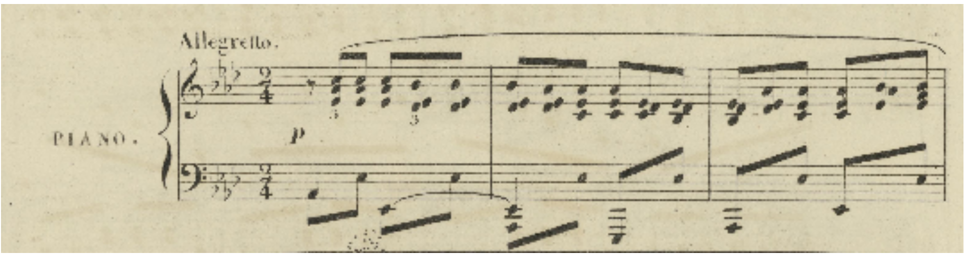
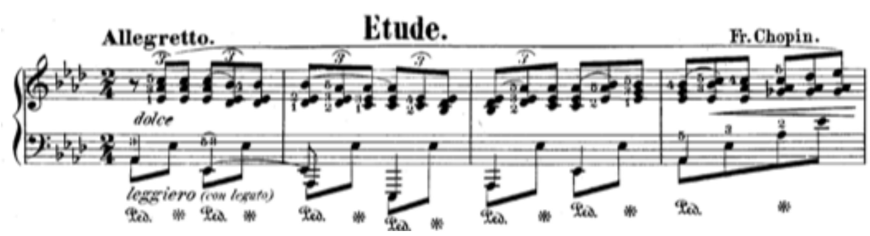
[66] Lesure and Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 296.

Example 3.1. Notating a Chopinesque Technique

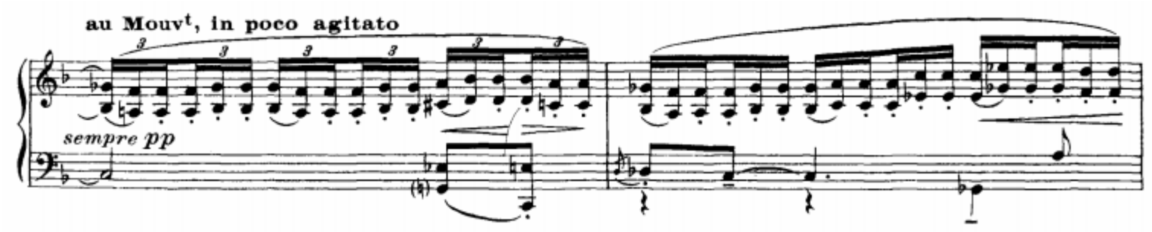
a) First edition of Chopin's *Nouvelle Étude in A-flat major*, mm. 1–3.[67]


Allegretto.
PIANO.
p
3

b) *Breitkopf* 1879 edition of Chopin's *Nouvelle Étude in A-flat major,* mm. 1–4.[68]


Allegretto.
Etude.
Fr. Chopin.
dolce
leggiero (con legato)

c) Debussy, *Étude Pour les sixtes,* mm. 21–22.[69]


au Mouvt, in poco agitato
sempre pp

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[67] Frédéric Chopin, *Trois Nouvelles Études,* First Edition (Paris: Maurice Schlesinger, n.d. [1844]).

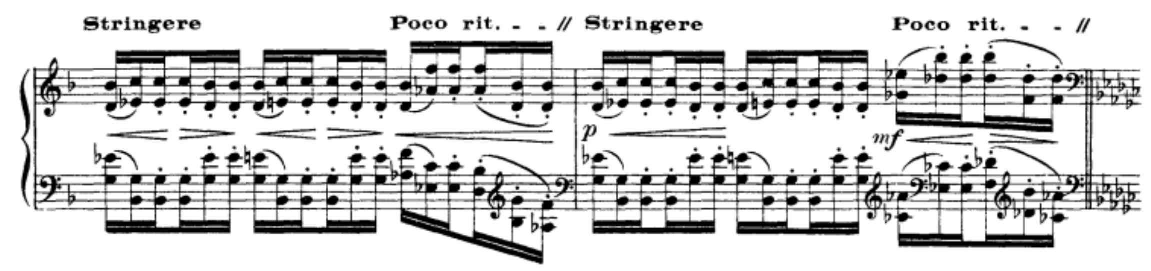
[68] Frédéric Chopin, *Trois Nouvelles Études*, ed. Carl Reinecke (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1879).

[69] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1916).

Debussy's 'sixths' *étude* combines elements of the *Nouvelle Étude* and Chopin's *Étude in A flat, Op. 25 no. 8*. Indeed, Debussy 'sixths' *étude* begins with the same pitches in the same register as Chopin's. A more subtle reference is found in the inner voice resolutions buried in the top of the left hand of measures 25 and 26 (Ex. 3.2), which, if brought out, bring some Chopinesque charm in to the middle section. In a letter to Durand Debussy indicates that attractive details like the one below are of central importance:

> I'm sure you'll agree with me that there's no need to make technical exercises over-sombre just to appear more serious; a little charm never spoilt anything. Chopin proved it and makes this desire of mine seem somewhat overweening, I know.[70]

Example 3.2. Debussy, *Étude Pour les sixtes,* mm. 25–26.[71]



The demanding left hand patterns of Chopin's 'sixths' *étude* (3.3b) are mirrored in measures 28, 30, 35 and 37 of Debussy's (3.3a). In these passages, it is especially beneficial to heed Gieseking's succinct advice: "often the pedal sign in Debussy is the bass note."[72] At least part of the reason Debussy could proceed without specifying pedal markings was that Chopin's scrupulous attention to detail had crystallized a pedaling tradition. In this case it is safe to assume that Debussy intended a Chopinesque rhythmic pedaling as notated in *Op. 25 no. 8*.

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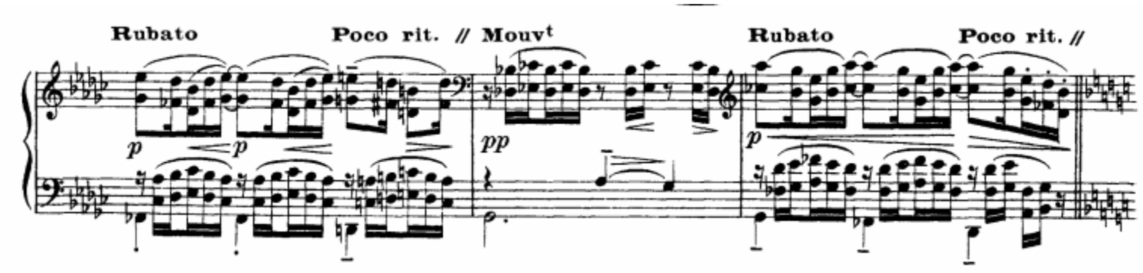
[70] Lesure and Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 300.

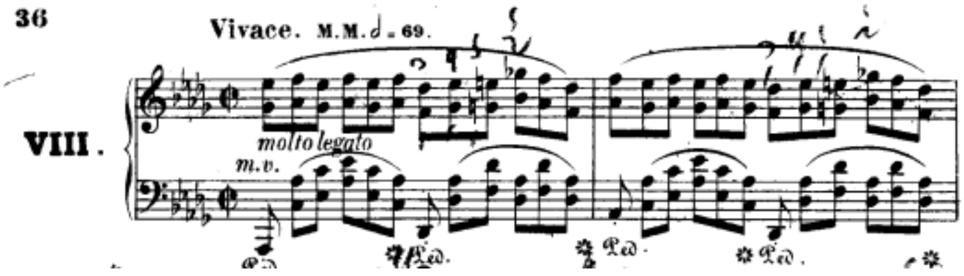
[71] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1916).

Example 3.3. Relying on Chopin's Pedaling Practices

a) Debussy, *Étude Pour les sixtes,* mm. 35–37.[73]



b) Chopin, *Étude in D-flat major Op. 25 no. 8,* mm. 1–2.[74]



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[72] Richard L. Smith, *Debussy Studies,* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 95.

[73] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1916).

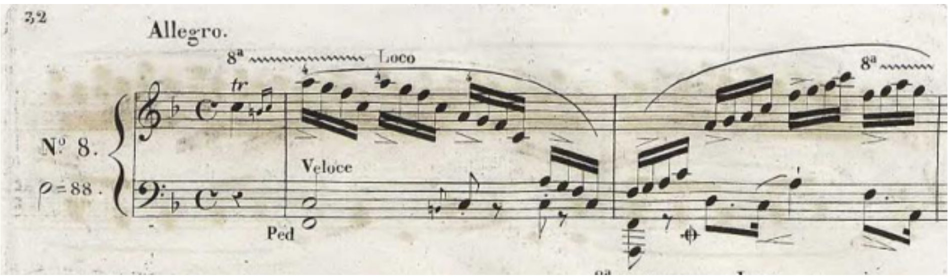
[74] Frédéric Chopin, *Études Pour Le Piano Op. 25,* (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel. n.d.).

Pour les arpèges composés

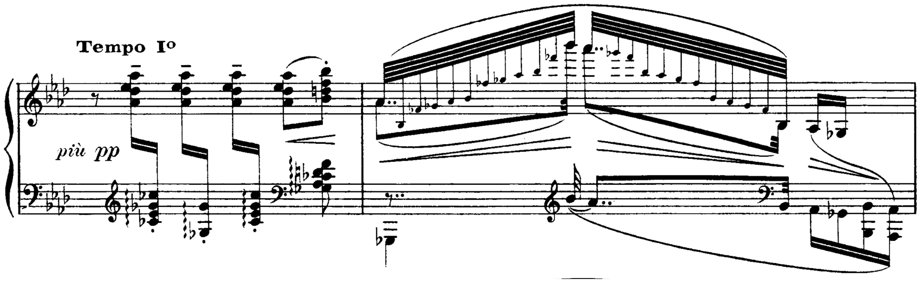
Further affirmation of Chopin's technical legacy is found in *Pour les arpèges composés*. Most apparent is Debussy's use of a right hand pattern that was used by Chopin throughout his *Étude in F, Op. 10 no. 8* (Ex. 3.4a). This technique creates a particularly beautiful sonority but is not easily mastered because it requires the coordination of a refined finger technique with the supple use of wrist, forearm and arm. Debussy presents variants on this technique throughout *Pour les arpèges composés,* and it is most closely reproduced during the coda (Ex. 3.4 b). This arpeggiated sonority was by no means new to Debussy in 1915 and much earlier examples can be seen in *Pagodes* from *Estampes* (1903) and *Reflets dans l'eau* from the first book of *Images* (1905).

Example 3.4. Chopin's Modified Arpeggio Technique

a) Chopin, *Étude in F Major Op. 10 no. 8,* mm. 1–2.[75]



b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les arpèges composés,* mm. 58–59.[76]



Furthermore, Debussy's 'arpeggio' study opens with a relatively wide repeated motive most easily executed with a circular wrist motion to bring arm weight towards the melodic voice that lies in the middle of the right hand figuration. From a performer's perspective, this motion feels similar to the beginning of Chopin's *Étude in A flat, Op. 25 no. 1.* While Debussy's study has fewer notes per beat, the texture is actually more complex because he places importance on three different elements; the right hand arpeggio, the right hand melodic line, and the left hand portato in duple sixteenth notes.

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[75] Chopin, Frédéric, *Études Pour Le Piano Op.* 10 (Paris: Maurice Schlesinger. n.d. [1833]).

[76] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

With so much detail included in just one measure it is difficult for an interpreter to know which element should be given prominence. Reading this passage as a descendant of Chopin's *Op. 25 no. 1* suggests that the top voice should be the strongest and that the other two serve to create a captivating texture.[77]

Pour les tierces

The middle section of Chopin's *Étude in G-sharp minor, Op. 25 no. 6* was a fruitful resource for Debussy and provided a model for three of Debussy's ideas within *Pour les tierces.* Again, Chopin's method of using double thirds in a non-scalar way requires a refined use of the wrist (Ex. 3.5a). In measures 30–33 of *Pour les tierces* (Ex. 3.5b)*,* Debussy creates an antecedent-consequent relationship between two different variations of Chopin's idea. In the antecedent phrase, Debussy creates a hemiola by slipping an 'extra' third in to the pattern, while the consequent restores the duple division of the beat and allows the right and left hand to participate in the pattern. Yet another variation of the technique is used in measure 42 (Ex. 3.5c), celebrating the connection to Chopin at the brilliant climax of the work.

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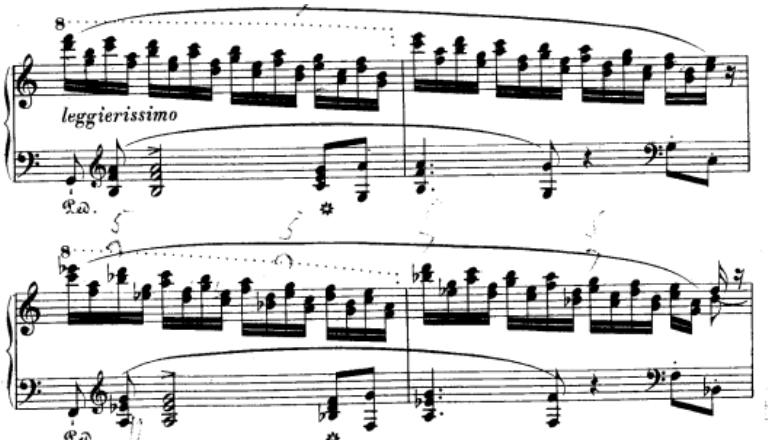
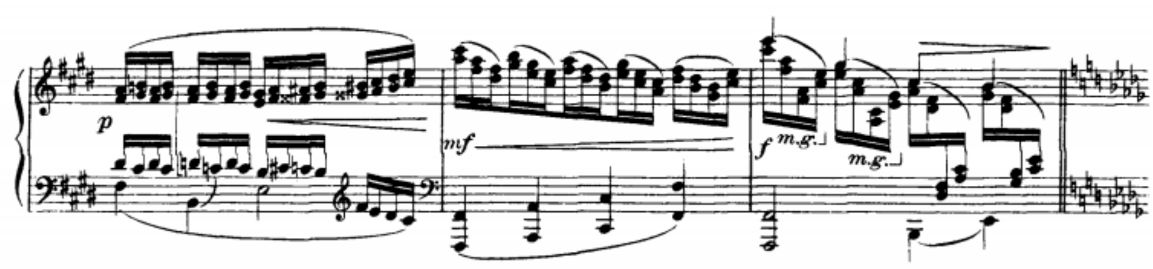
[77] An alternative reading of this passage is discussed in Chapter 5.

Example 3.5. Double Third 'Arpeggios'

a) Chopin, *Étude Op 25 no. 6,* mm. 27–30.[78]



b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les tierces,* mm. 29–31.[79]



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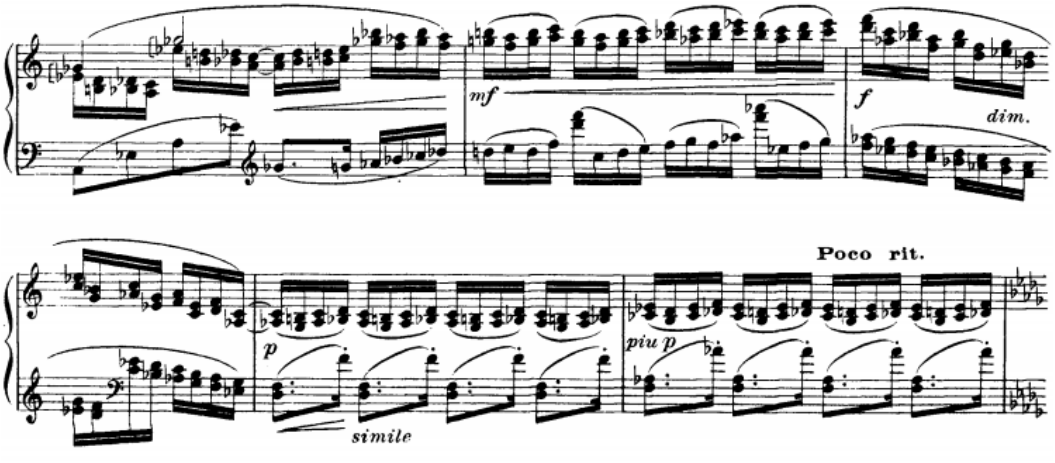
[78] Frédéric Chopin, *Études Pour Le Piano Op. 25* (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel. n.d.).

[79] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

Example 3.5. (continued)

c) Debussy, *Étude Pour les tierces,* mm. 40–44.[80]



As is apparent in the previous examples, Debussy used a wide variety of related technical ideas within each *étude,* and it is for this reason that Robert Godet's 1918 article "Chopin-Debussy" is problematic. Godet (1866–1950) was a longtime friend of Debussy and admirer of his work, and this article offered a flattering contemporary perspective on the *Études.*[81] Within it, Godet created a table which he calls an "Adventurous conjecture," that links each Debussy *Étude* to a single Chopin study. This article has been taken too seriously by some recent scholars because, at best it acknowledges brief similarities that occur in passing throughout the pieces. Godet pairs *Pour les tierces* with *Op. 25 no. 6*, *Pour les sixtes* with *Op. 25 no. 8* and *Pour les arpèges composés* with *Op. 25 no. 1*, all of which I consider justified, though I argue that there are other sources as well. At worst, these pairings superimpose connections that do not exist, as in the comparison of *Pour les cinq doigts* and *Op. 10 no. 4*, or worse still *Pour les accords* and *Op. 10 no. 11*. In general, it is a mistake to boil the techniques used in a Debussy *étude* down to one broad concept because, aside from the two *jeu perlé* studies discussed above, each piece contains a technical exploration that emphasizes the juxtaposition of many different possibilities.

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[80] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

[81] Robert Godet, "Chopin-Debussy," ed. François Lesure, *Cahier Debussy* 3 (1976): 11–13, accessed December 29, 2016, RILM Abstracts of Music Literature (1967 to present only).

Though Debussy's "compositional virtuosity," as defined by Ms. Jiang (see Chapter 1), is on full display in these works, it is also evident that he was fascinated and artistically inspired by technical ideas while composing the *Études* and that his keyboard-oriented mindset provided the rationale behind designating these pieces as 'studies.' Through investigation of Debussy's notation it can be observed that past technical legacies served as a foundation for the *Douze Études* and supported both Debussy's keyboard approach and his musical aesthetics. It is the result of the coalescence of two elements of musicianship that these pieces stand at the pinnacle of virtuosic piano music, where technical and musical artistry are cohesive and interdependent units of musicianship.

CHAPTER IV

RHYTHMIC PRACTICES RELATED TO CHOPIN

> A full sonority, a remarkable delicacy, a perfect mastery of nuance, an impeccable finish, an imperceptible rubato always framed within the beat, an astounding use of pedal: all this was what defined Debussy's playing.[82]
>
> Jacques Durand

As observed by Eigeldinger, Durand's commentary above would be an equally accurate summary of Chopin's playing, prompting the following comparison between these pianist-composers' handling of *rubato*. Both Chopin and Debussy are central figures in the development of *rubato* practice and use of this expressive device was essential to their performance style. Recognizing parallels and points of divergence between their rhythmic techniques produces a historical perspective that demystifies the extraordinary interpretive challenges in Debussy's *Études*. A brief look at the history of *rubato* will set the stage for considering Debussy's perspective on this musical device.

Two Types of *Rubato*

Juxtaposition of two disparate uses of *rubato* in the nineteenth century demonstrates the ancestry that informed Debussy's concept of the practice. In his *Nocturne in E-flat major, Op. 9 no. 2*, Chopin includes '*poco rubato'* in the middle of a four-measure phrase, suggesting that it be applied to just the beats it was written across. By contrast, Liszt applies a less specific *rubato* to an entire section of his *Hungarian Rhapsody no. 12* headed, '*ritenuto il tempo, sempre rubato.*' These examples represent the two general uses of notated *rubato* during the nineteenth century and have been classified according to their chronological appearance by Richard Hudson as simply 'earlier' and 'later.'[83] However, the 'momentary' (earlier) versus 'continuous' (later) qualities observed above were simply two different Romantic manifestations of an earlier tradition, not the defining qualities of *rubato* itself.

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[82] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher As Seen by His Pupils*, 128.

The 'earlier' practice was first noted in regard to eighteenth-century singers making rhythmic alterations to a melodic line. The term 'rubato,' first introduced in 1743, referred to performers holding notes longer than their written value and 'robbing' time from adjacent notes in order to keep up with a steady accompaniment.[84] Later, Mozart described the more difficult ask of incorporating this technique in to solo keyboard music: "what people cannot grasp is that in *tempo rubato* in an Adagio, the left hand should go on playing in strict time."[85] 'Earlier' *rubato,* derived from the improvisatory practices of instrumentalists and singers that were accompanied by an ensemble, does not involve fluctuation of pulse, but instead involves rhythmic manipulation of the melodic line: when interpreted at the keyboard it involves the 'separation' of the hands.

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[83] Alternative nomenclature applied to these rubato types are respectively: "melodic and structural, borrowed and stolen, contrametric and agogic, or bound and free." Richard Hudson, "Rubato," *Oxford Music Online*, accessed October 4, 2016.

[84] In his *Observations on the Florid Song* (1743), Galliard referred to the 'earlier' *rubato* technique that had been used in late 17th century arias:
"When the bass goes an exactly regular pace, the other part retards or anticipates in a singular manner, for the sake of expression, but after that returns to its exactness, to be guided by the bass." Galliard's quote is actually an explanation Tosi's reference to *rubamento di tempo* that dates back to 1723. Ibid.

[85] Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato,* 113.

It actually wasn't until about fifty years later that there are accounts that related the term *rubato* to a change in pulse, and is thus named 'later' by Hudson.[86] In 1823, Schindler quoted Beethoven as saying that if he tried to notate all of the rhythmic flexibility involved in his performances "confusion might well result from the many indications of *tempo rubato.*"[87] More than eighty years later Josef Hofmann, one of the most prominent pianists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, similarly describes *tempo rubato* as "a wavering, a vacillation of time values…."[88]

As Hofmann's commentary suggests, the 'later' practice was widely accepted among the Romantic virtuosi, many of whom felt they were allowed and expected to take rhythmic liberties within the composer's score. Ironically, the Romantic evolution of this tradition seems to have been influenced by a written tradition. During the nineteenth century, a tradition of indicating '*rubato'* in the heading of a large section or an entire piece, as seen in the *Hungarian Rhapsody no.12,* gave the performer license to make rhythmic adjustments according to what Hofmann called “momentary impulse.”[89]

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[86] According to Hudson, "the first source to link tempo flexibility with tempo rubato seems to be Chrisitian Kalkbrenner's [father of Frédéric] *Theorie der Tonkust*, published at Berlin in 1789." Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato*, 140.

[87] Ibid., 159.

[88] Josef Hofmann, *Piano Playing, with Piano Questions Answered*, intro. Gregor Benko, (New York: Dover Publications, 1976), 101.

Chopin’s students almost unanimously equate Chopin’s *rubato* with the ‘earlier’ type which, as described above by Mozart, can only be portrayed on the piano by creating rhythmic disparity between the melodic line and the accompaniment. Chopin’s love of Italian opera is commonly cited as the source of his understanding of this type of *rubato,* and this is how he transmitted his ideas to Lenz about the *Nocturne Op. 9 no. 2*:

> the bass to be practiced first by itself, divided between the hands— with a full but piano sonority and in strict time, maintaining an absolutely steady allegretto movement without the 12/8 lapsing into triplets, then the left hand can be trusted with the accompaniment played that way and the tenor invited to sing his part in the upper voice.[90]

Validation to Lenz’s account are found in the references to the operatic style, replete with references to portamento (m. 24), fioritura (m. 13), portato (m. 26) and gruppetti (m. 26). The *rubato* in question corresponds with the final two operatic techniques listed and is almost certainly an example where Chopin expected the ‘earlier’ *rubato* to be used. Within the *edition classique,* Debussy’s close adherence to the original *rubato* marking and stylized fingering in this passage highlights his sensitivity to Chopin’s unconventional notation.

Important accounts from Saint-Saëns and Mathias, who both taught at the Conservatory throughout Debussy’s period of study, suggest that Debussy would have associated Chopin with the ‘earlier’ *rubato.* George Mathias (1826–1910), a student of Chopin’s, taught at the Conservatory from 1862 to 1893 and is an important figure in the transmission of lore regarding Chopin’s pianism.[91] In the preface to Isidore Philipp’s *Exercises quotidiens tirés des oeuvres de Chopin* (1897),[92] Mathias distinguishes clearly between ‘early’ and ‘later’ *rubato,* and links Chopin’s art with that of the former.

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[89] Ibid., 102

[90] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher As Seen by His Pupils,* 77.

> Thus rubato is a nuance of movement, involving anticipation and delay, anxiety and indolence, agitation and calm; but what moderation is needed in its use, and how all too often it is abused![…] There was another aspect: Chopin, as Mme Camille Dubois explains so well, often required simultaneously that the left hand, playing the accompaniment, should maintain strict time, while the melodic line should enjoy freedom of expression with fluctuations of speed. This is quite feasible: you can be early, you can be late, the two hands are not in phase; then you make a compensation which re-establishes the ensemble.[93]

Debussy’s use of the term ‘*rubato*’ changed dramatically around the turn of the century. In his nineteenth-century compositions Debussy often included *rubato* in his main tempo heading for entire pieces or large sections, following the practice of the Romantics.[94] However, just after the publication of Philipp’s book, he gradually moved away from this practice by applying the term to smaller sections of music, often notated with very precise endings. While this practice is similar to Chopin's typical notation of *rubato,* there is no evidence that Debussy ever used or advocated the 'unsynchronized' rubato. Perhaps Debussy agreed with Saint-Saëns' scathing account of contemporary performers abusing or clumsily mishandling Chopin's technique:

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[91] Jim Samson, *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin, (*Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 194.

[92] Isidore Phillip (1863–1958) was a renowned performer and pedagogue who taught at the Paris Conservatory from 1903–1934 before moving to the United States to continue his career. He published over one hundred volumes of technical exercises including the one included above. Charles Timbrell, “Philipp, Isidore,” *Grove Music Online*.

[93] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher As Seen by His Pupils,* 49–50.

[94] See *Valse Romantique* (1890), *First Arabesque* (1888), *Ballade* (1890) *Prélude* and *Clair de Lune* from *Suite Bergamasque* (1890), and *Mazurka* (1890), all of which include large sections under the tempo heading ‘*tempo rubato.’*

> Through Mme Viadort […] I learned the true secret of tempo rubato […where] the accompaniment holds its rhythm undisturbed while the melody wavers capriciously, rushes or lingers, sooner or later to fall back upon its axis. This way of playing is very difficult since it requires complete independence of the two hands; and those lacking this give both themselves and others the illusion of it by playing the melody in time and dislocating the accompaniment so that it falls beside the beat; or else-worst of all-content themselves with simply playing one hand after the other. It would be a hundred times better just to play in time, with both hands together.[95]

In any case, Debussy was adapting certain traits of Chopin's *rubato* to suit the needs of his own compositions and the contemporary performance climate. Debussy's *rubato* markings in the *Études* provide evidence of both a revolt against the Romantic performance rubato and a movement toward a more Chopinesque aesthetic. His use of an unprecedented number of *rubato* markings show an attempt to counteract the Romantic performance assumption that *tempo rubato* was a default rhythmic approach. The brief, almost momentary duration of these nuanced fluctuations bear a striking resemblance to Chopin's meticulously placed rubato within *Op. 9 no. 2.*

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[95] Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher As Seen by His Pupils,* 49.

Debussy's Rubato Indications
Pour les cinq doigts, Pour les notes répétées, Pour les octaves, Pour les tierces, Pour les sixtes

Debussy's use of the word *rubato* in the *Études* is extremely unconventional. He included this term "far more frequently than any composer before him" and by Hudson's count, there are "one hundred and two *rubatos* in fifty-seven of his pieces or movements."[96] In the *Études,* he uses the term seventeen times in just twelve brief works. He often writes just the word *rubato,* sometimes *poco rubato* and once *Pochettino rubato,* ostensibly implying that a performer should be able to execute the effect to different degrees. Just as students and audiences noted of Chopin's playing, many of Debussy's contemporaries commented on the unique subtlety with which he applied *rubato*. Marguerite Long observed that it was "confined by a rigorous precision" and noted that his marking of *rubato* "does not mean alteration of line or measure, but of nuance or élan."[97] Long's comments are bolstered by Debussy's 1913 piano roll recording of "La soirée dans Grenade"[98] in which the *tempo rubato* sections show little if any tempo fluctuation but instead display a warmer tone color that is perceptible even through the piano roll medium.[99] His faithful adherence to other marked rhythmic nuances within the score, including the *ritenuto* immediately following the aforementioned *tempo rubato,* suggests that he was presenting the *rubato* marking as he intended. This remarkable recording confirms Long's comment but leaves some questions as to his intentions in using the term.

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[96] Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato*, 342.

[97] Ibid., 347.

[98] "La soirée dans Grenade" is the second movement of *Estampes* (1903). Claude Debussy, *Debussy Plays Debussy: Ravel Plays Ravel* (Russia: Melodiya, 2012).

[99] The measures in question are from measure 23-26, and the corresponding measures 61–64.

Some contrasting insight is provided by Debussy's edition of Chopin's *Nocturne in B flat minor, Opus 9 no. 1* (*Édition classique*), in which he replaces Chopin's *poco rallentando* in measure 23 with '*rubato*' (Ex. 4.1). Debussy's editorial work does not suggest a man who is trying to impose his own ideas onto the scores of another composer. In fact, of all the editing from the summer of 1915 he added just one other *rubato* marking.[100] Furthermore, in a letter to Durand, Debussy talks about his comparisons of Chopin's manuscripts in a way that one would expect from the editor of a modern Urtext.[101] This suggests that Debussy's marking of *rubato* was an attempt at clarifying Chopin's intentions. It seems quite probable that Chopin's delicious half-step modulation captured Debussy's imagination and led him to prescribe a marking that had meaning beyond, but including, *poco rallentando,* suggesting that Debussy thought that *rubato* could include a change of pulse.

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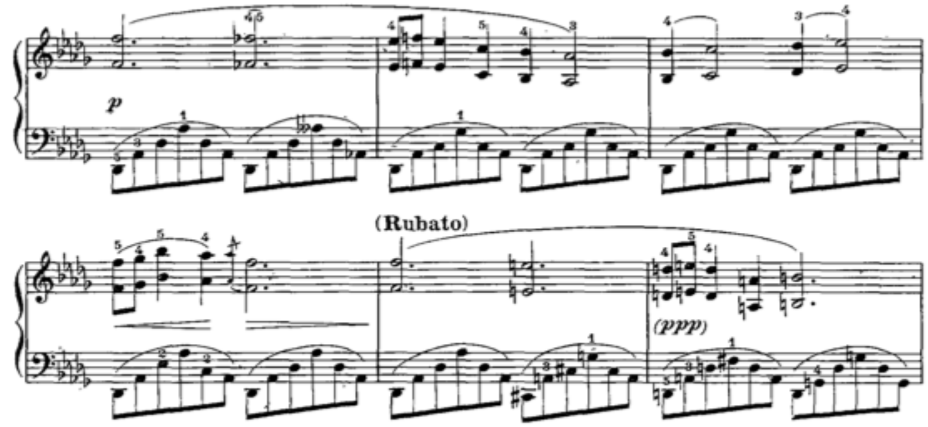
[100] The other is found in the cadential passage in m. 199 of *Allegro de concert.*

[101] "I find the Chopin manuscripts truly terrifying…! How can you expect three manuscripts, certainly not all in Chopin's hand, to agree with each other? Of course, only one can be right…." Lesure and Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 269.

Example 4.1. Chopin, *Nocturne in B-flat Minor Op.9 No.1, Édition classique,* mm. 19–24.[102]



The *Douze Études* offer further evidence that *rubato* implied a change in pulse. In both *Pour les cinq doigts* and *Pour les octaves* (Ex. 4.2) Debussy is compelled to write *mouvt* after a *rubato,* implying that *rubato* had relaxed the pulse.

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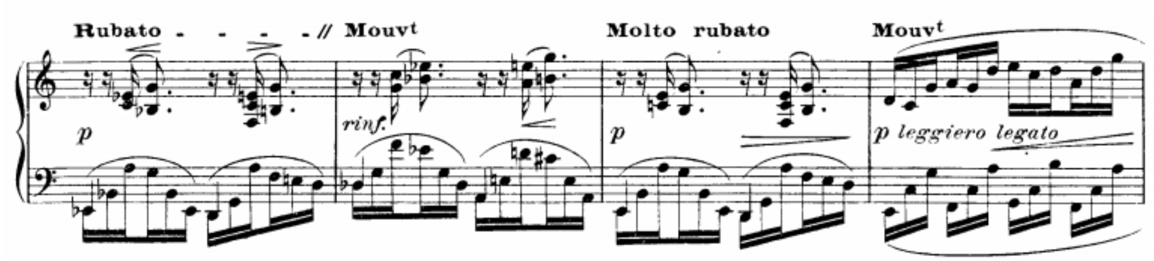
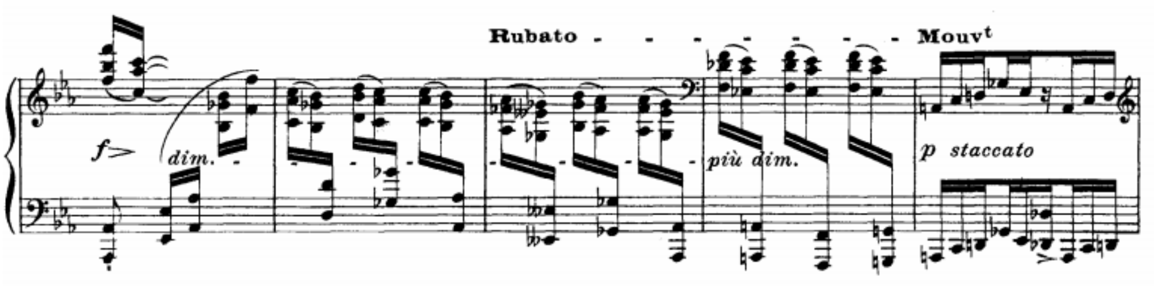
[102] Frédéric Chopin, *Nocturnes*, ed. Claude Debussy (Paris: A. Durand, 1915).

Example 4.2. Returning to the Original Tempo After *Rubato*

a) Debussy, *Étude Pour les cinq doigts,* mm. 32–35.[103]


Rubato - - - - //
Mouvt
Molto rubato
Mouvt
p
rinf.
p
p leggiero legato

b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les octaves,* mm. 39–43.[104]


Rubato - - - - - - - -
Mouvt
f
dim.
più dim.
p staccato

While it is clear that the pulse was altered during these sections of *rubato,* other instances suggest that this term is not synonymous with any of the other standard Italian or French terms for tempo fluctuation. By putting the words in close proximity to one another in the excerpts from *Pour les sixtes, Pour les notes répétées* and *Pour les tierces* (Ex. 4.3)*,* Debussy shows that *rubato* is not synonymous with '*poco rit,*' '*accel*' or ostensibly any other term denoting rhythmic nuance.

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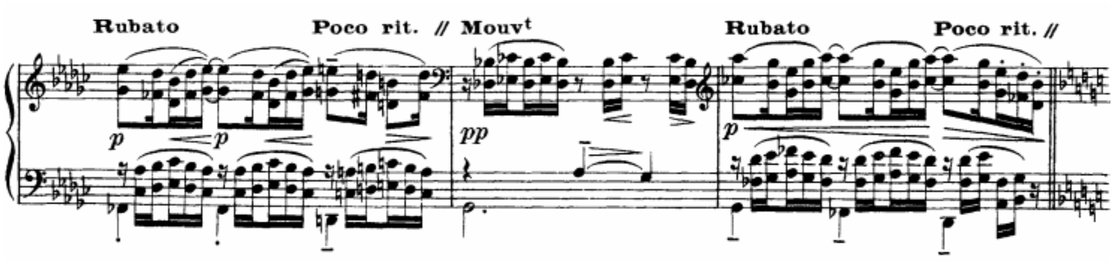
[103] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

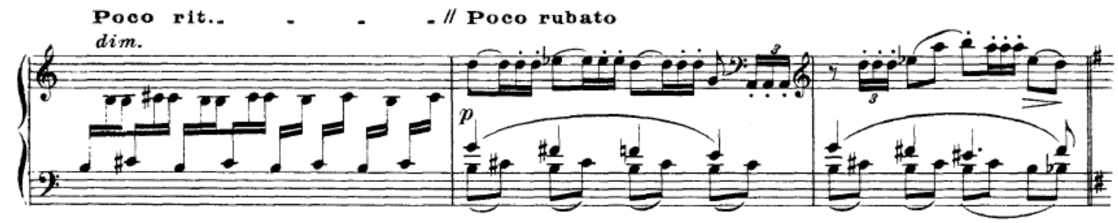
[104] Ibid.

Example 4.3. *Rubato* Indications Surrounded by Other Nuance Terms

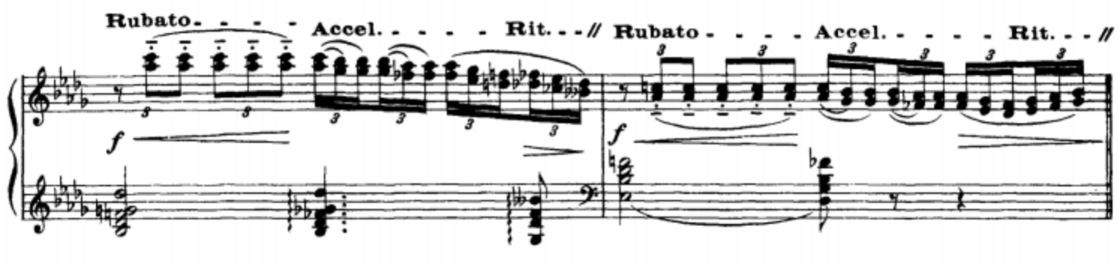
a) Debussy, *Étude Pour les sixtes,* mm. 35–37.[105]


Rubato
Poco rit. //
Mouvt
Rubato
Poco rit. //
p
p
pp
p

b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les notes répétées,* mm. 46–48.[106]


Poco rit.. - - - //
Poco rubato
dim.
p

c) Debussy, *Étude Pour les tierces,* mm. 13–14.[107]


Rubato - - - -
Accel. - - - -
Rit. - - //
Rubato - - - -
Accel. - - - -
Rit. - - //
f
f

---

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

Before perceiving these examples as contradictions to the 'in time' interpretation of the *rubato* from "La soirée dans Grenade," it is crucial to consider that Debussy's definition of *rubato* may have multiple connotations for changes in rhythmic inflection. Daniel Ericourt's imaginative and thought-provoking recording of the *Études* certainly supports this notion.[108] At age nine Ericourt (1903–1998) began his studies at the Conservatory with Jean Roger-Ducasse (1873–1954), a close friend of Debussy's who is noted for giving an early performance of *En blanc et noir* (1915) with the composer in 1916.[109] Ericourt's studies with Roger-Ducasse, along with his successes as a prizewinning student and internationally recognized performer, give him significant authority as an interpreter of Debussy's late works and his renditions of the *rubato* markings shown in the examples above reveal several different interpretive possibilities. In Example 4.2a, from *Pour les cinq doigts,* Ericourt abruptly slows the tempo and brings out the top melodic contour during the marked *rubatos* (mm. 32 and 34) and passionately accelerates through the intermediary measure (m. 33). Ericourt modifies the tempo in the opposite direction in *Pour les sixtes* (Example 4.3a) and *Pour les tierces* (Example 4.3c) by pushing forward through the *rubatos*, toward the *ritenuti.* The other two examples, 4.2b and 4.3b, are played in tempo with a slightly contrasting touch reminiscent of Debussy's recording of *La soirée dans Grenade.* Ericourt's interpretation of these elusive markings illuminates what I take to be Debussy's central intention for *rubato*: to provide a means of creating variation and nuance, with or without momentary rhythmic fluctuations, while keeping the larger pulses intact. Debussy's *rubato* is an important structural building block because it allows for the juxtaposition of small musical units, a topic discussed further in Chapter Five, and is related to Chopin's 'vocal' *rubato* because the phrase-level pulse is unaltered regardless of the fluctuations within each measure. Although Ericourt's rendition transmits the personal decisions of an individual performer, it clarifies the logic inherent in Debussy's notation and serves as an excellent model for future interpretations.

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[108] Daniel Ericourt, *Complete Piano Music Performed by Daniel Ericourt*, Composed By Claude Debussy (New York: Kapp 1950).

[109] Barbara L. Kelly, "Roger-Ducasse, Jean." *Grove Music Online*, accessed on October 4, 2016.

Debussy's Rhythmic Vernacular
Pour les cinq doigts, Pour les octaves, Pour les quartes, Pour les agréments

Ritardando vs. *Cédez*

Beyond *rubato*, other components of Debussy's musical vocabulary show further influences of Chopin. Charles Rosen observed that Chopin's vernacular includes two distinct terms for a slowing of tempo and that "the distinction between *rallent.* and *ritenuto* in Chopin is precisely that in Beethoven; that is, *ritenuto* or *ritenente* is immediate and expressive."[110] Hudson clarifies this further by stating that the classical use of *rallentando* and sometimes *ritardando,* denotes a dissipation of energy after a section, suggesting a structural role, while *ritenuto* enhances the expressive quality of a passage.[111]

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[110] Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato,* 180.

While editing for the *Édition classique,* Debussy was sensitive to this distinction and Chopin's *Étude in F minor, Op 10 no. 9* is an exceptionally clear model from which Debussy would have experienced Chopin's meticulously crafted language. The *portati* called for in Example 4.4a are typical of Chopin's *ritenuto* markings, which often appear in conjunction with expressive nuances in touch: *portato, tenuto,* and *accent.* The *rallentando* in Example 4.4b lacks expressive nuances and is intended for the structural purpose of preparing the return of the opening material.[112]

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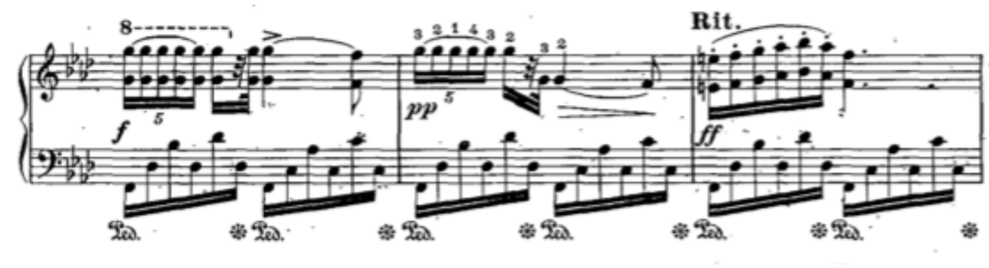
[111] Ibid., 180.

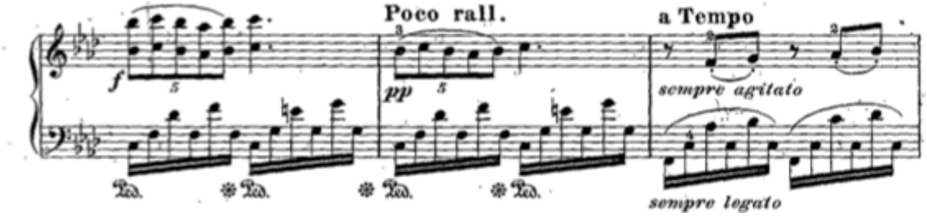
[112] Debussy fell into the same snare as Paderewski and abbreviates both *ritardando* and *ritenuto* with *rit.,* and thus Chopin's intended *ritardando* in measure 8 contains the same indication as the previously discussed *ritenuto.* While it is possible that Debussy was unaware of the distinction between these two terms, he undoubtedly noticed the difference between *rallentando* which is the more common term in Chopin.

Example 4.4. Chopin's Differentiation Between *Rit.* and *Rall.*

a) Chopin, *Étude in F minor, Op. 10 no. 9, Edition classique,* mm. 61–63.[113]



b) Chopin*, Étude in F minor, Op. 10 no. 9, Édition classique,* mm. 35–37.[114]



In Debussy's own *Etudes,* a similar correlation exists between *cédez* and *rit.*[115] The most cogent argument for this relationship is found in *Pour les agréments* where Debussy calls for *rit….//* and *cédez….//* in two separate statements of similar music (Ex. 4.5). Aside from the nuanced language, the only differences between measures 16 and measure 26 are the added slur and a redistribution of notes between the two staves. These subtle differences encourage the performer to approach the second passage more expressively: the altered rhythmic vocabulary reflects and reaffirms this approach. Debussy's consistently uses *rit.* to facilitate structural transitions as shown in Example 4.5a and therefore will not be considered any further in this section. Instead, the remainder of this discussion will be devoted to unravelling Debussy's enigmatic use of *cédez.*

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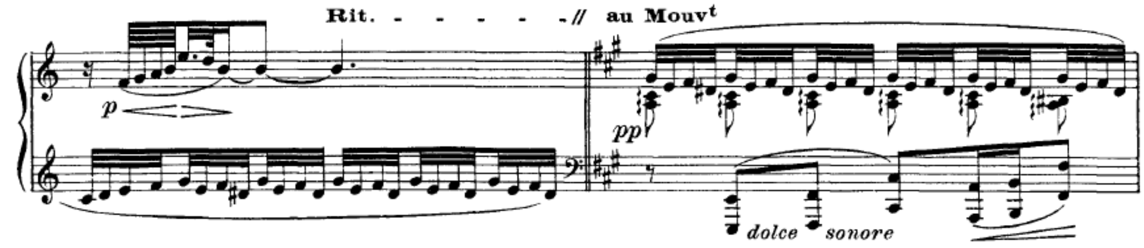
[113] Frédéric Chopin. *Études*, ed. Claude Debussy (Paris: A. Durand, 1915).

[114] Ibid.

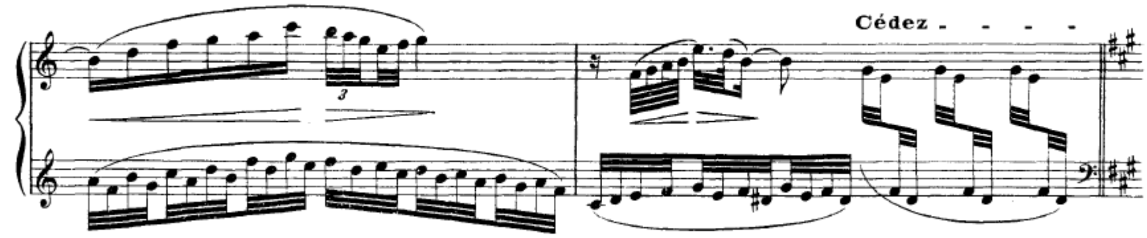
[115] This is presumably *retenu*, because although he never writes the full word in the *études,* he seems to use the abbreviation *rit.* interchangeably with *retenu* in the *préludes.*

Example 4.5. Debussy's Differentiation Between *Rit.* and *Cédez*

a) Debussy, *Étude Pour les agréments,* mm. 16–17.[116]



b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les agréments,* mm. 25–26.[117]



The two other occurrences of *cédez* within the *Études* inhabit musical landscapes that encourage expressive rhythmic inflection from the performer. The *cédez* in the fourth section of *Pour les cinq doigts,* shown in Example 4.6b, is found within one of the few polyrhythmic passages in the *études* (two against three in m. 78) and suggests that Debussy opted for the more expressive slowing term because the passage mimicked a Chopinesque 'unsynchronized *rubato*.' There are many instances of 'composed' *rubato* in Chopin's oeuvre and at least two *études* dedicated to the refinement of this technique.[118] In the F minor *Nouvelle Étude* Chopin creates a three against four polyrhythm between the melodic line (written quarter note triplets) and the accompaniment (written in eight notes). The single slur that encompasses the right hand throughout the entire piece and Chopin's previously discussed vocal influence suggest that he treated the melody like a rhythmically flexible vocal line and strengthens the argument for hearing this as a 'composed *rubato*.' This practice is seen at its most complex in the Fourth Ballade, Op. 52 in which Chopin creates a 5 against 12 texture by placing the melodic notes on every four triplets within a 6/8 meter.[119]

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[116] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

[117] Ibid.

Debussy applied this technique throughout his career and often describes the effect in the score by including a *rubato* marking. For example, the rich, chordal section of the Debussy's *L'isle Joyeuse* (1904) (Ex. 4.6a) is indebted to Chopin's rhythmic explorations and conspicuously contains the heading '*un peu cédé, molto rubato.'*[120] In this instance, Debussy's *rubato* marking is a verbal depiction of the 'unsynchronized

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[118] *Étude in F minor, Op. 25 no.2* and *Nouvelle Étude in F minor.*

[119] The passage can be found in measures 175 and 176 of Chopin *Ballade Op. 52 in F minor.*

[120] *cédé* and *cédez* are both conjugations of the verb *céder*- to yield.

rubato' that is produced by the three against five polyrhythm. Debussy's use of *cédé* in the heading exposes a similarity between *L'isle Joyeuse* and *Pour les cinq doigts.* Debussy's omission of the descriptive *rubato* marking in *Pour les cinq doigts* may be because the effect is so brief in the *étude,* or perhaps simply reflects a change in taste over the course of a decade.[121] Regardless, these excerpts support a correlation between Debussy's use of *cédez* (instead of *rit*) and *rubato* and encourages an expressive rather than structural slowing.

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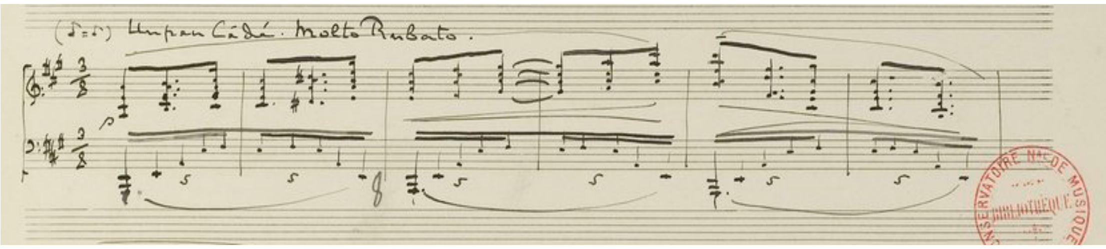
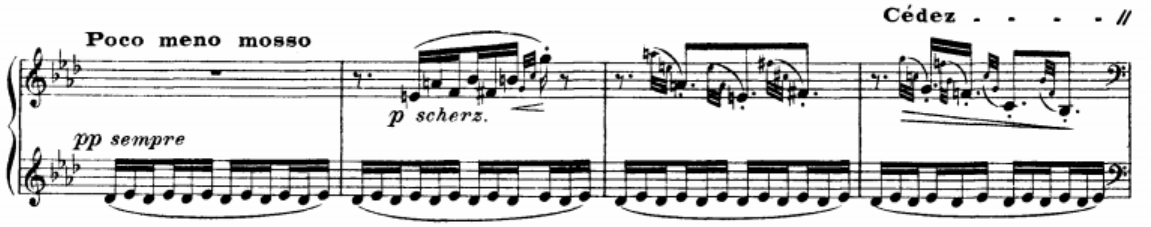
[121] See page 55.

Example 4.6. An Association Between *Rubato* and *Cédez*

a) Debussy, *L'isle Joyeuse,* mm. 67–72.[122]



b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les cinq doigts,* mm. 75–78.[123]



Debussy's use of *cédez* is not limited to passages under the influence of 'unsynchronized *rubato*' and the momentary *cédez* markings over the downbeats throughout the second section of *Pour les octaves* evoke Chopin's *mazurka rubato*. In his dissertation on aspects of the performance practice of Chopin's music, Zvi Meniker dissects this elusive performance practice. He begins his discussion with firsthand accounts of Chopin's renditions of his own *Mazurkas*:

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[122] Claude Debussy, *L'isle Joyeuse,* Holograph Manuscript, 1904.

[123] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

> I once ventured to observe to him that most of his mazurkas…, when played by himself [Chopin], appeared to be written, not in 3/4, but in 4/4 time, the result of his dwelling so much longer on the first note in the bar. He denied it strenuously, until I made him play one of them and counted audibly four in the bar, which fitted perfectly. Then he laughed and explained that it was the national character of the dance which created the oddity.[124]

Several other accounts suggest Chopin altered the values of different parts of the measure, but all agree that he did not play three even beats. Meniker's investigation goes far beyond the scope of this dissertation but he concludes that Chopin's idiosyncratic rhythmic practices were a central part of his *mazurka* playing that he passed along to his students and contemporaries. This is pertinent to the current study because it means that Debussy, who had close ties to Chopin's students (see chapter 3), would have been exposed to this idea.

Pour les octaves contains a manifestation of this *rubato* technique and Debussy uses *cédez* to convey his intentions. What at first seems to be a dichotomy produced by the heavily subdivided downbeats under the influence of the *cédez* in measure 35 (Example 4.7) is actually an ingenious solution to notating a mazurka-like *rubato*. The performer's only option in this instance is to extend the value of the downbeat: perceiving this notation as a means of notating Chopinesque mazurka *rubato* invites a lively, dance-inspired performance of this piece.

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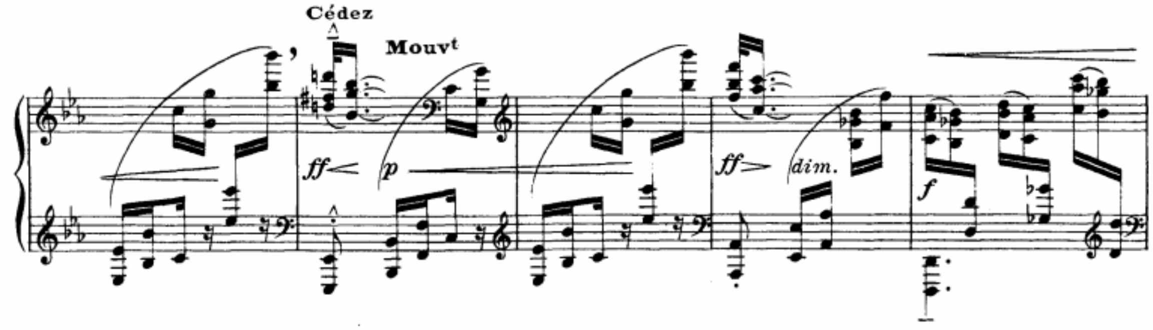
[124] Zvi Meniker, "Aspects of Performance Practice in Frédéric Chopin's Piano Works: Slurs Pedalling Mazurka Rhythm" (D.M.A diss., Cornell University, 2001), 94.

Example 4.7 Debussy, *Étude Pour les octaves,* mm. 34–38.[125]



Whereas Debussy uses *rit* as a conventional means of relaxing the pulse, he uses *cédez* markings to convey nuances that can be traced back to Chopin's legendary approach to performance. Recognizing this correlation pushes the performer to search for subtle nuances in passages that are under the influence of *cédez.*

Accelerando vs. *Stretto*

Debussy was also sensitive to the language that Chopin used to push tempo forward; generally using the same terms, *accelerando* and *stretto,* as his predecessor. In his *Scherzo in C Sharp minor Op. 39*, Chopin clearly delineates between the two expressions by using them in succession while building up to the powerful octave theme of the development section. In this instance, *stretto* is used in conjunction with uneven phrase lengths, which are relatively rare in Chopin's music and represents a passionate "boiling over" of energy. While editing Chopin's music, Debussy confronted passages like the one shown in Example 4.8 and would have had to deal with the different connotations of the two terms.

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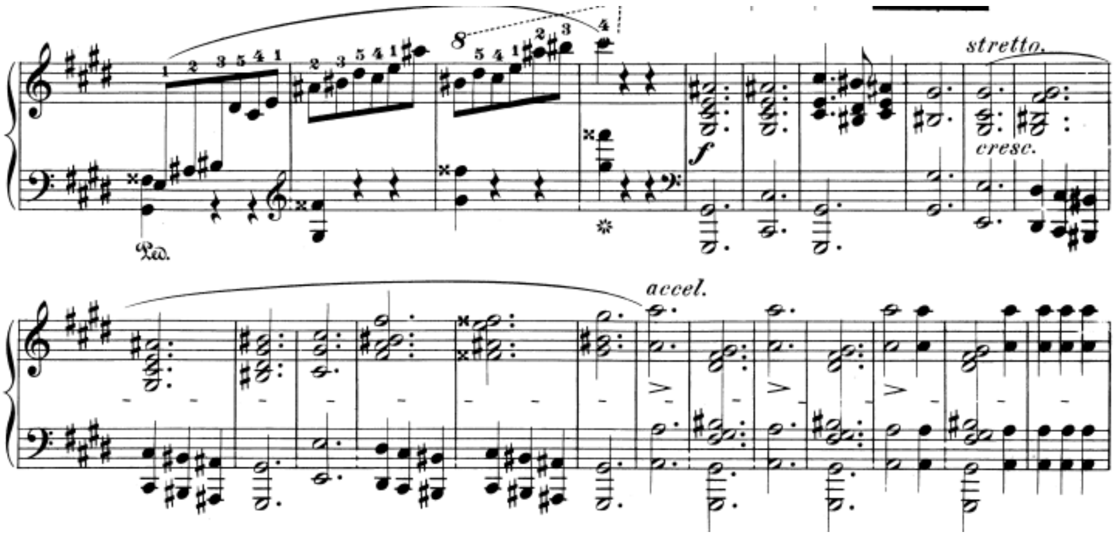
[125] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

Example 4.8. Chopin, *Scherzo in C-Sharp minor Op. 39,* mm. 342–367.[126]



Debussy's locution implies an even more pronounced difference between *stretto* and *accelerando.* His use of *accelerando,* like *rit,* corresponds with classical usage and appears in places that require a prolonged and gradual increase in tempo: it is almost always preceded by '*poco a poco*.' The two instances of *stretto* within the *Études* however, contain rhythmic notation that suggest an instantaneous shift in tempo. The *martelé* passages in *Pour les quartes,* as displayed in Example 4.9a, evoke the hammered sounds of a *gamelan* and introduce an unexpected new character into the piece. Similarly, the flourish that concludes the first section of *Pour les agréments* (Ex.4.9b) introduces a completely new sonority to the music and changes the audience's perspective of the piece in one quick flourish.

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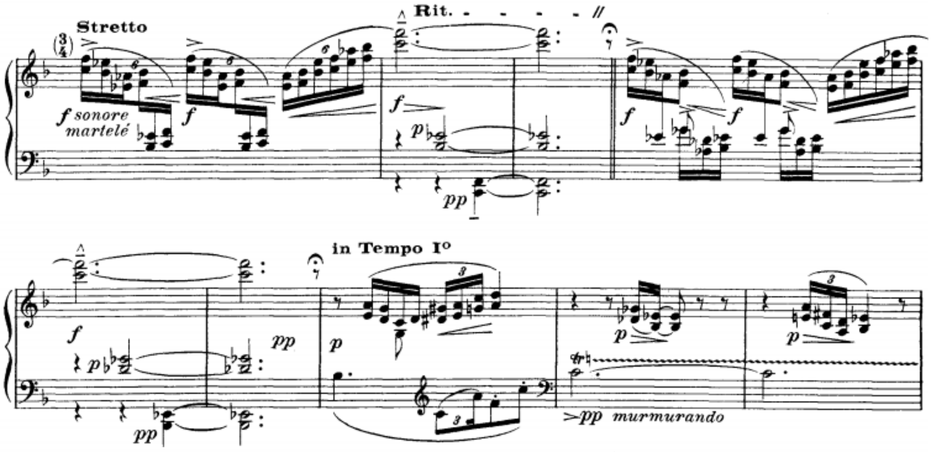
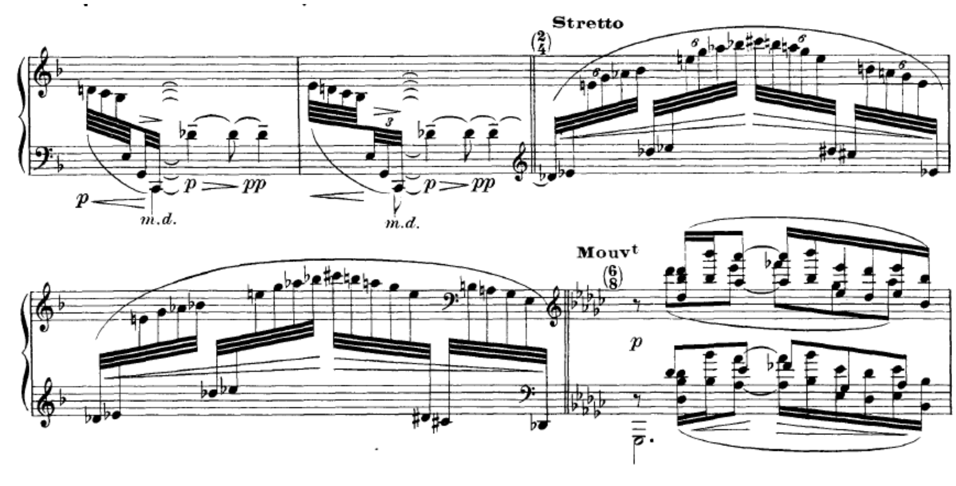
[126] Frédéric Chopin, *Complete Works for the Piano Volume 6,* ed. Carl Mikuli (New York: G. Schirmer, 1895).

Example 4.9. *Stretto* Indicating an Immediate Tempo Shift

a) Debussy, *Étude Pour les quartes* mm. 7–15.[127]


Stretto
Rit.
f sonore martelé
f
pp
in Tempo I°
p
pp murmurando

b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les agréments,* mm. 5–9.[128]


Stretto
p
pp
m.d.
Mouvt
p

---

[127] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano,* First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

[128] Ibid.

In both cases, Debussy's *stretto* enhances the contrast between musical ideas, an effect entirely unlike the gradual blending of ideas associated with *accelerando*. Debussy uses *stretto* and *cédez* to transmit some of his most imaginative ideas to create diverse musical landscapes in compact pieces.

Chopin's influence surrounded Debussy throughout his life, and the celebrated rhythmic innovations within the *Études* contain overt references to the practices of the Polish master. Debussy's precise language of nuance was developed through his lifelong exposure to and appreciation of Chopin's music as well as by his conscientious editing of Chopin's piano music during the summer of 1915. Particularly in the *Études,* Debussy pioneered new avenues in *rubato* practice by placing the term in the score with greater precision and more frequency than any previous composer. Despite being part of vanguard for twentieth-century rhythmic practices, Debussy's approach to *rubato* was indebted to the 'momentary' quality of Chopin's *rubato* practice in which very brief portions of music are modified but larger units are left intact. Debussy, like Chopin, had a propensity for subtlety and treats indications of *rubato, cédez,* and *stretto* as if they were *agréments,* adorning the music with an exquisite level of detail. These subtle nuances are paramount to discovering and conveying Debussy's art in performance.

CHAPTER V

SCHUMANN: A MODEL FOR SONORITY AND FORM

> One must learn to play Debussy's music as he played it himself, striking each note as though it were a bell, listening always for the hovering clusters of vibrating overtones above and below it.[129]
>
> Roger Nichols

The closing passage of "Canope" (Ex. 5.1) demonstrates Debussy's exploration of sonority, his passion for paradox and his appreciation for the innovations of Robert Schumann. The final descending scale does not reach the expected resolution from E to D but despite this, remnants of the D can still be heard as a fading overtone from the soft chord played four beats earlier; this leads the listener to wonder if the resolution they hear is real or imagined. Debussy leaves this resolution, as well as the tonality of the piece, up to the imagination of the audience, and it is in these ambiguities that we can hear echoes of Schumann. Schumann experimented with similar ideas in places like the *pianississimo* (*ppp*) dominant chord in "Paganini" from *Carnaval*, or the decrescendos created by taking notes away one by one at the end of *Papillons* and the *Abegg Variations*. Beyond 'special effects,' there are further similarities between these two composers that show that Debussy had a great understanding and appreciation for Schumann's compositional style.

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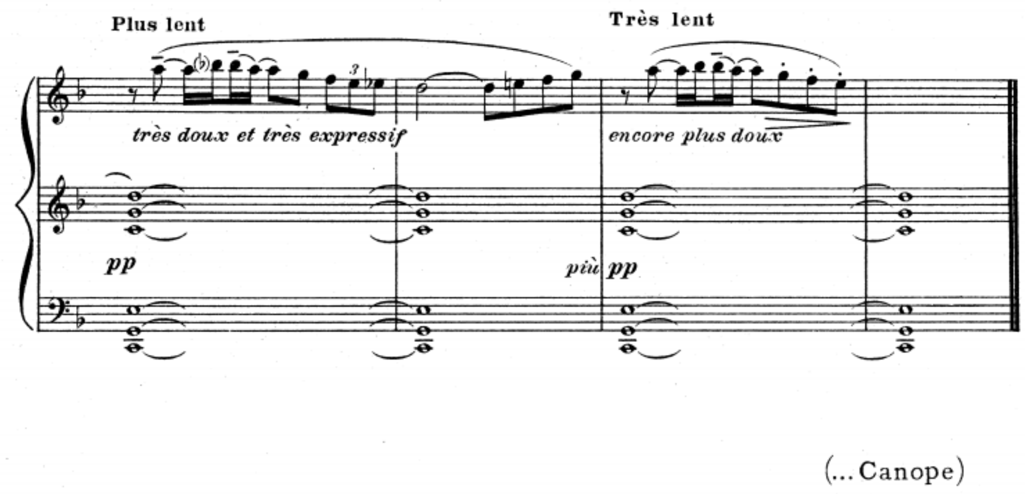
[129] Roger Nichols, *Debussy Remembered* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1992), 191.

Example 5.1. Debussy, "Canope" from *Préludes livre I,* mm. 30–33.[130]



Debussy earned a reputation as a highly capable interpreter of Schumann's music; his only real success in the Conservatory piano competition came in 1877, when he won the second prize with a performance of the first movement of Schumann's *Piano Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22*.[131] Further, Roy Howat cites a number of sources that attest to Debussy's expertise and passion for Schumann's music throughout his life.[132] Beyond this, Debussy's limited transcription output includes versions of Schumann's *Six Studies in Canon Form for Pedal Piano or Organ Op. 56* for two pianos and solo piano.

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[130] Claude Debussy, *Préludes*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et cie. 1910).

[131] Jane Fulcher, *Debussy and His World* (Princeton, NJ. : Princeton Univ. Press), 356.

[132] Howat *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier,* 160.

Additional evidence of Schumann's influence is a statement in which Debussy invites comparison between his compositions and those of Chopin and Schumann:

> Have you played the *Images*…? Without false vanity, I think that these three pieces work well and will take their place in piano literature…(as Chevillard would say), to the left of Schumann or to the right of Chopin…as you like it.[133]

Thus it is reasonable to infer that the *Études,* though dedicated to Chopin, are at least equally indebted to the influence of Schumann.

Exploring Sonority

Pour les arpèges composes

One of Schumann's most profound discoveries in sonority was revisited by Debussy in his *Études*. In the second movement of the *Humoreske Op. 20,* Schumann composed what he labeled an *Innere Stimme* between the two staves. The middle staff of Example 5.2 is not to be played but rather shows a melody that is buried within the right-hand texture and is used as an element of a sonority. Rosen poetically summarizes the melody's effect: "It has its being within the mind and its existence only through its echo."[134]

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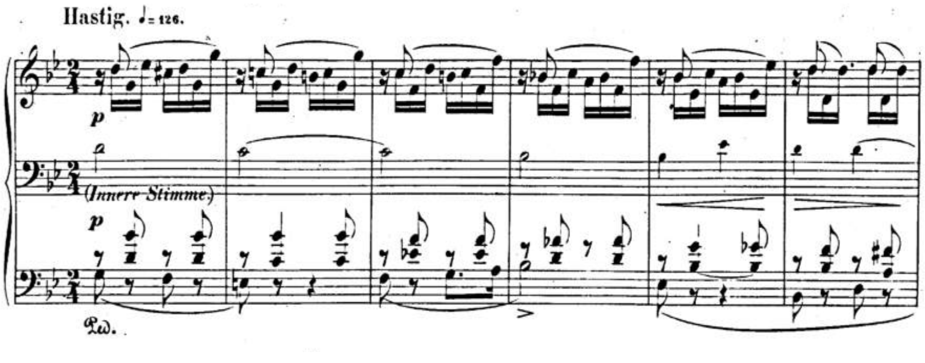
[133] Lesure and Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 158.

[134] Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 9.

Example 5.2. Schumann, *Humoreske* mvt. II *Hastig,* mm. 1–6.[135]



Just as in the *Humoreske*, a tenuous melodic line is embedded into the opening of Debussy's *Pour les arpèges composés.* Debussy's approach in this passage shows as much similarity with Schumann's *Humoreske* as with Chopin's Op. 25 no. 1 which is the more common comparison.[136] In Op. 25 no. 1 Chopin went to some trouble to notate a melodic/textural hierarchy within the score by indicating the texture in smaller note-heads than the melodic line.[137] In these passages from *Pour les arpèges* and the *Humoreske,* melodic lines are not supported by the texture, but instead serve as just one component of the texture. The opening of *Pour les arpèges composés* demonstrates that instead of a fully formed, continuous melody, Debussy introduces a brief, two measure melodic line that is notated with double-stems. The discontinuity of this line is increased in measure three when Debussy abandons melody only to suddenly reintroduce it two octaves lower (Ex. 5.3b).

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[135] Robert Schumann, and Clara Schumann, *Robert Schumann's Werke, Serie VIIL Für Pianoforte zu zwei Händen* (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1887).

[136] See Godet comparison in Chapter 3 pg. 49.

[137] This practice was utilized by Debussy within this piece but it is conspicuously missing from this passage.

In comparing different drafts of this piece it becomes clear that the melodic line was conceived late in the compositional process. In an early manuscript Debussy experimented with double-stemming the tenor voice instead of the upper line (Ex. 5.3a). In the working manuscript, in which he had already decided to use the upper line, we still see inconsistency: the down beat of measure three does not belong to the melodic line of measure two. Even in the in the first edition and the *Oeuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy*, stems are missing from melodic notes during reiterations of the primary material: comparison of Example 5.3b to Example 5.3c displays this distinction. A similar variation is found in measure seventeen of the *Humoreske* where Schumann suddenly leaves out the *Innere Stimme.* Rosen says of this: "the empty bar is a poetic joke, a reminder of the impossibility of conceiving the nature of the unspecified sonority of which the music we hear is an echo."[138] The reason for Debussy's altered notation is not to provide two different versions of the phrase, but instead to provide clues for the nature of his own *"innere Stimme."* Through facsimiles of his drafts, we can observe that Debussy heard several different melodic possibilities for this section, all of which are present to different degrees regardless how the passage is notated: Debussy's varied notation invites the interpreter to engage in this exploration.

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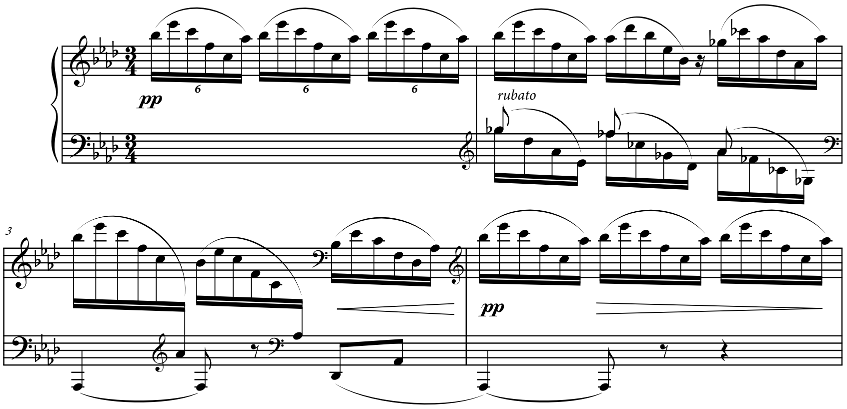
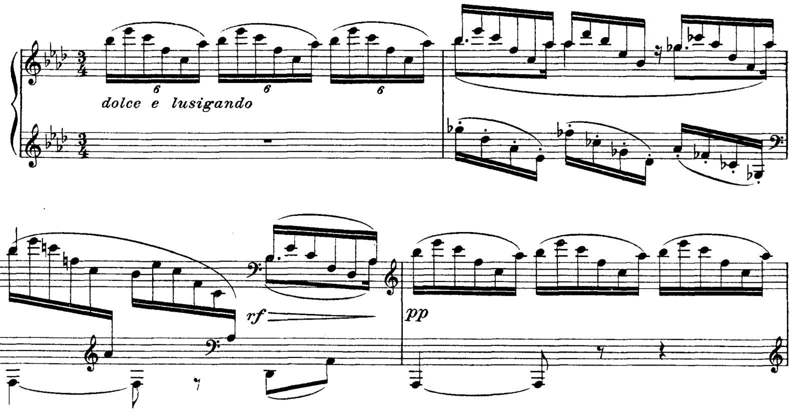
[138] Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 9.

Example 5.3. Melodic Lines Within a Texture

a) A typeset rendition of mm. 1–4 of an early draft of *Pour les arpèges composés.* [139]



b) *Pour les arpèges composés,* mm. 1–4.[140]



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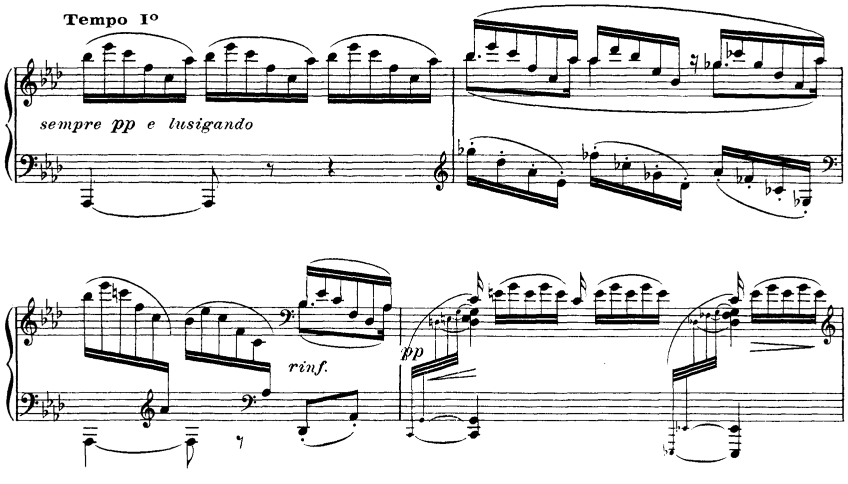
[139] Thanks to Robin Morace for providing the typeset of the facsimile which could not be photographically reproduced. Though the double stems in the left hand are clear, other details are more difficult to decipher including: the rubato marking in measure 2, the rest in measure 2 beat 2, and the heading (excluded from the example). I encourage readers to consult the facsimile published by Durand-Costallat. Claude Debussy, *Œuvres Complétes de Claude Debussy Ser. 1 Vol. 6* (Paris : Durand-Costallat, 1991).

[140] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

Example 5.3. (continued)

c) *Pour les arpèges composés,* mm. 54–57.[141]



The Art Of Repetition
Pour les tierces

The closing pages of Schumann's *Papillons* Op. 2 show that early on in his compositional career, Schumann understood the power of a melodic fragment. In this piece, Schumann juxtaposes his famous *Papillons* theme with the *Grossvatertanz,* a common German celebratory dance theme that dates back to the seventeenth century.[142] In the end of the piece both themes are deconstructed to fragments of the original: The *Grossvatertanz* is reduced to a two-bar oscillating harmonic pattern, V–I; the *Papillons* theme is reduced to a scale that is shortened with every repetition in alternation with a single high A. Before long, the scale is obliterated, creating a silence, and all that is left is a single melodic note, shown in Example 5.4a, accompanied by the most fundamental of all harmonic progressions: V-I. The repetition of the single high A invites the listener to reflect on the *Papillons* theme by repeatedly suggesting its presence.[143]

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[141] Ibid.

[142] Schumann used this same them in "March des "Davidsbündler" contre les Philistins" from *Carnaval* Op. 9, labeling it "17th century theme."

Just as Schumann uses repetition to summarize an entire theme, Debussy uses the repetition of a single note to emphasize a passage in *Pour les tierces*. In the midst of a thirteen-measure pedal point, the arpeggiated melodic figure from Example 5.4b shines through a dense texture of double thirds. When the melodic high point is reached, the music stops moving forward and circles around as if to reflect on the pinnacle of the melodic passage. Through repetition, he elevates the importance of a melodic line made from rising *tierces.* Debussy's insistence on the importance of this line provides the scaffolding for later melodic references to the defining interval of the piece. Comparing this passage to Schumann's referential use of sonority clarifies the musical intentions of repetitive passages that might otherwise be misunderstood as harmonic 'vamping.' Both of these passages engage the audience's memory and imagination by using repetition to invoke reflection.

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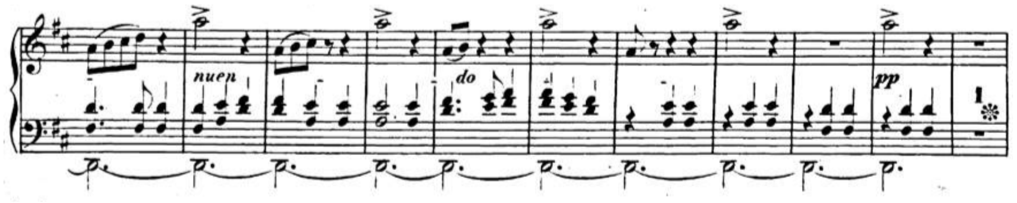
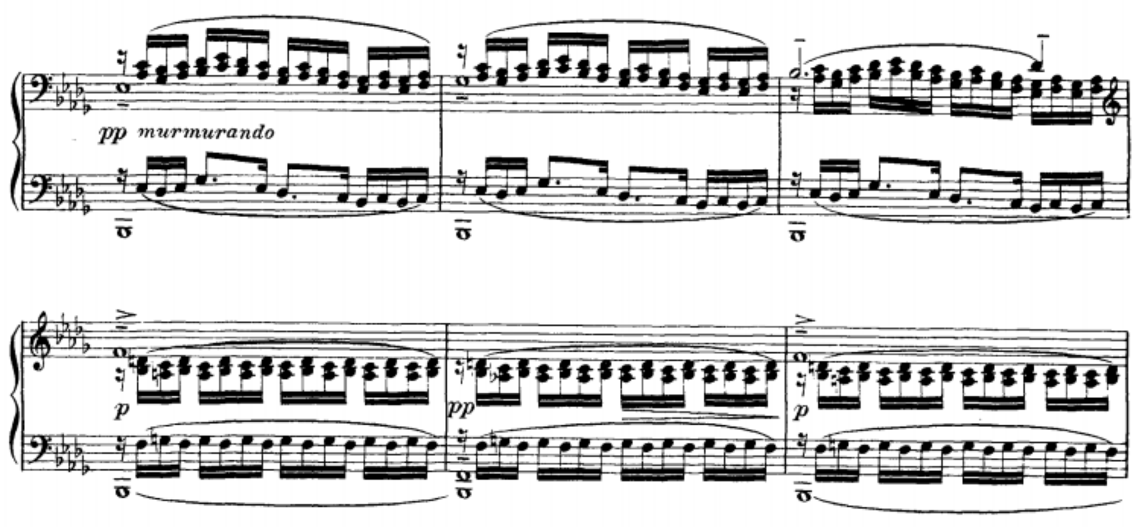
[143] This effect is generally considered to represent the chiming of a clock.

Example 5.4. Repetition Used To Engage The Imagination

a) Schumann, *Papillons Op. 2,* "Finale," mm. 59–69.[144]



b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les tierces,* mm. 18–23.[145]



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[144] Robert Schumann, *Klavierwerke*, ed. Clara Schumann and Wilhelm Kempff (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1900).

[145] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

Quotations And Fragments
Pour les sonorités opposées, Pour les cinq doigts d'après Monsieur Czerny

Perhaps the most famous quotation in Schumann's *oeuvre* is his reference to *Papillons* within *Florestan* from *Carnaval, Op. 9*. After a dramatic opening worthy of the extroverted side of Schumann's personality, the second phrase of *Florestan* is interrupted by a delicate memory of *Op. 2* that lasts just two measures before reverting the original material. The first entrance is so brief that the connection is hardly revealed to the listener, but upon a second and more complete entrance in measures 19–22, the entire first gesture of the *Papillons* theme is heard: to make himself especially clear, Schumann includes "(Papillons?)" in the score. Rosen believes this curious musical gesture to be an experiment in "representing musically the sensation of a memory" that is at first only "half remembered."[146]

Debussy uses a similar technique in *Pour les sonorités opposées,* but instead evokes the experience of a how a memory changes over time. In between the second and third sections of this enigmatic *étude,* Debussy introduces an indelible melodic section marked *lointain, mais clair et joyeux* (Ex. 5.5a). Just as with Schumann's *Papillon* quotation, this melody comes from outside of the piece: the open fifths, *modéré* tempo marking, and articulation markings of this melody are reminiscent of the opening of *Les collines d'Anacapri* (Ex. 5.5b). This distant melody lasts just one measure but is heard twice within a brief seven-measure section, each time accompanied by a low G-sharp that implies an E major tonality.

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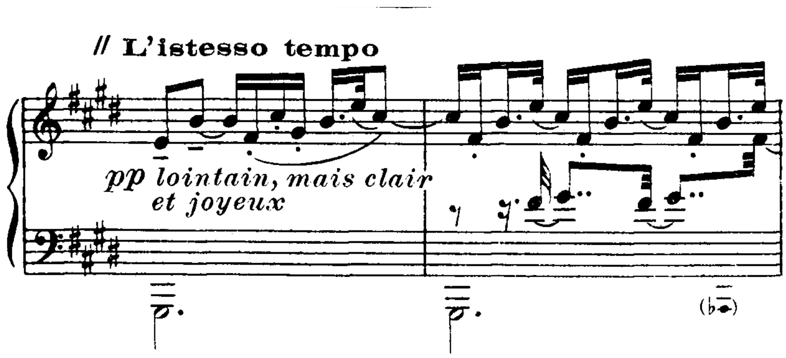
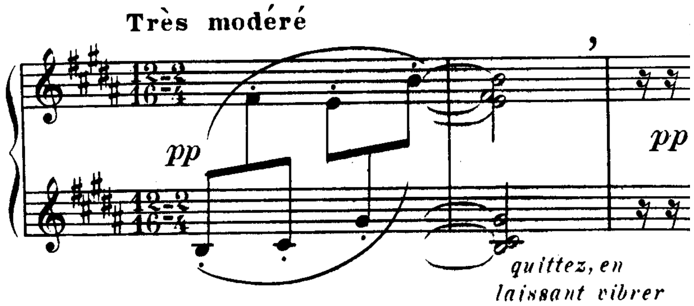
[146] Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* 100.

Example 5.5. A Comparison of *Les collines d'Anacapri* and *Pour les sonorités opposées*

a) Debussy, *Étude Pour les sonorités opposées,* mm. 31–32.[147]


// L'istesso tempo
pp lointain, mais clair et joyeux

b) Debussy, *Les collines d'Anacapri* from *Préludes Livre I,* mm.1–2.[148]


Très modéré
pp
pp
quittez, en laissant vibrer

The quotation is heard two more times throughout the piece, each time re-harmonized with different bass notes that provide new perspectives on the melodic idea. In the second occurrence, the G-sharp is no longer treated as a steady fundamental but instead acts an intermediary between an F-sharp and B. Though the melodic line is the foregrounded material, the bass notes are the driving force that control the emotional affect of the passage. The third and most distant rendition of the complete melody is heard over a low C-sharp, implying a C-sharp minor tonality, giving the passage a more solemn and grounded ambience (Ex. 5.6b). The final measures of the piece summarize the exploration of the fragment by distilling it to its most basic component: the rising fifth from E to B (Ex. 5.6b). The closing harmony also has a retrospective, and recapitulatory quality by implying both C-sharp minor and E major tonalities in the form of a C-sharp minor-seventh chord in root position. Debussy's use of quotation, which at first fragmented the musical surface by taking the listener outside of the preexisting musical environment, ultimately serves as an element of large-scale structural coherency.

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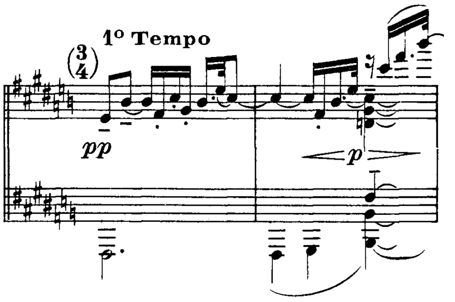
[147] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

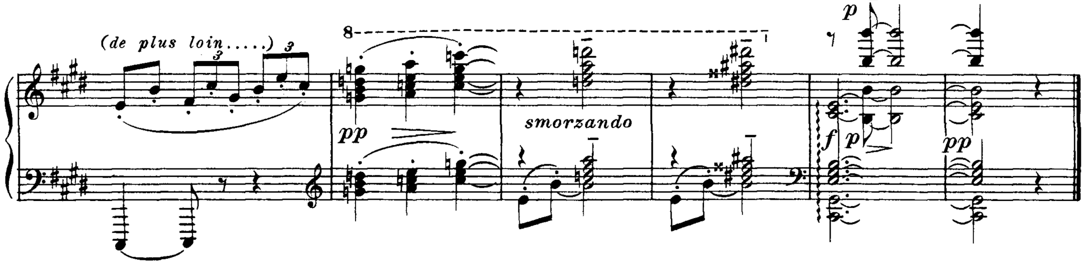
[148] Claude Debussy, *Préludes*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et cie. 1910).

Example 5.6. Bass Notes Changing The Affect Of The Melodic Fragment

a) Debussy, *Étude Pour les sonorités opposées,* mm. 31–32.[149]



b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les sonorités opposées,* mm. 70–75.[150]



Linda Cummins finds that quotation within music can also "add a historicizing dimension: if the listener associates a quotation with a particular historical event or era, the juxtaposition of past and present increases in the awareness of the distance between the two."[151] Cummins' example is Schumann's inclusion of the *Marseillaise* in the first movement of *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*. Within the *Études*, one of Debussy's most overt quotations concerns a five-finger exercise ostensibly 'quoted' from the first exercise from Czerny's *Les Cinq Doigts Op. 777*. The beginning of Debussy's *Pour les Cinq Doigts d'après Monsieur Czerny* (Ex. 5.7) adds an extra dimension because this quotation, though historical, is not drawn from a piece of music, but from an exercise. Of all the quotations referenced in Debussy's music, this fragment is uniquely both a quotation and an allusion to the act of improvising. Interjected A-flats, first used to mock Czerny's pedantic exercise, soon generate a brief reference to a *gigue,* as if a bored piano student were to suddenly lose focus and begin to improvise. Is the performer improvising, or is the opening of the piece simply a *prélude*? If not for Debussy's facetious indication of *sagement* ("wisely"), one might be able to subscribe to the latter assumption. That Debussy began his *Études* with a quotation, and one that asks philosophical questions about performance, indicates the depth of his involvement with musical allusion and highlights his sarcastic rejection of Czerny's mechanistic handling of the *étude* concept.

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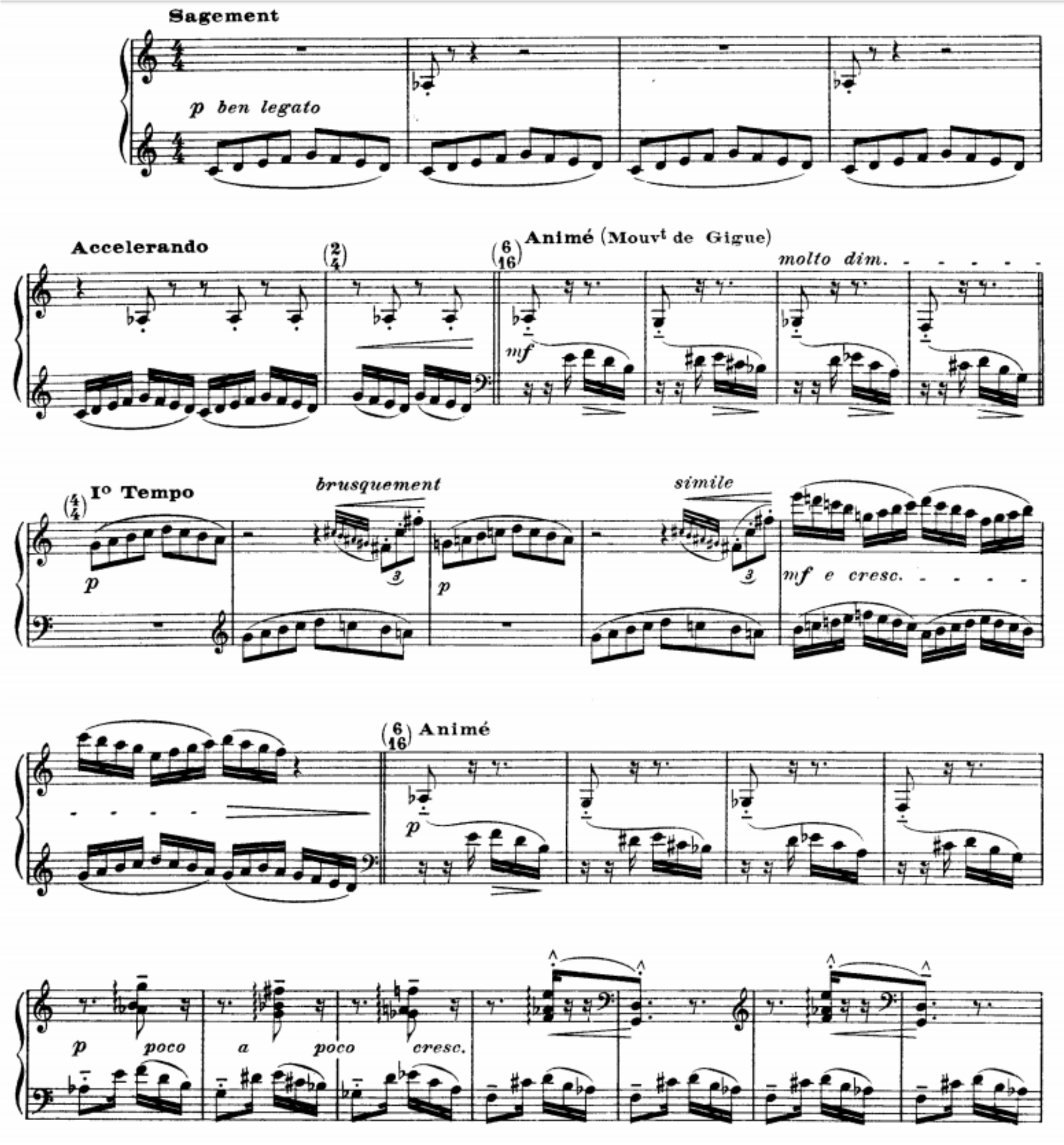
[149] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

[150] Ibid.

[151] Linda Cummins, *Debussy and the Fragment* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 136.

Example 5.7. Debussy, *Étude Pour les Cinq Doigts d'après Monsieur Czerny,* mm. 1–27.[152]


Sagement
p ben legato
Accelerando
(2/4)
(6/16) Animé (Mouvt de Gigue)
molto dim.
mf
(4/4) Io Tempo
brusquement
simile
p
mf e cresc.
(6/16) Animé
p
p poco a poco cresc.

---

[152] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

Juxtaposing Different Characters And Sonorities
Pour les quartes

Schumann had a habit of expressing his personality within a score through verbal annotation. For instance, in the first edition of *Davidsbündlertanze,* Schumann signed each piece with the initials *F, E,* and sometimes *F und E*,[153] leaving no doubt as to which facet of his personality inspired each section.

Changes in Debussy's musical surface are not usually brought on by dramatic shifts in personality but by allusions to contrasting styles or genres. One of the most fascinating styles that Debussy referenced throughout his career was the sonority of the Javanese gamelan[154] that he first heard at the Paris Exhibition of 1889. Debussy was forever influenced by the exotic sonorities the gamelan created through counterpoint and polyphony and claimed that gamelan made the music of "Palestrina seem like child's play."[155] His first effort to imitate this style at the piano is heard in *Pagodes,* from the suite *Estampes* (1903). In *Pour les quartes,* Debussy makes an unmistakable reference to the gamelan by applying the marking *sonore martelé,* or hammered sonority, to the passage of pentatonic double fourths displayed in Examples 5.8a and 5.8b.[156]

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[153] These are references to Florestan and Eusebius.

[154] "Gamelan is a generic term used for various types of Indonesian orchestra. These vary in size, function, musical style and instrumentation, but generally include tuned single bronze gongs, gong-chimes, single- and multi-octave metallophones, drums, flutes, bowed and plucked chordophones, a xylophone, small cymbals and singers." Margaret J. Kartomi and Maria Mendonça. "Gamelan." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Accessed January 20, 2017.

[155] Debussy quoted in Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy,* 156.

It may seem farfetched to compare Debussy's evocation of Southeast Asian sonorities to Schumann's compositional style until one notices the similar ways that these two composers present their (admittedly very different) material to the performer. Roy Howat notes that "In *Jeux* and the piano *Préludes* especially, double bars are usually signposts of surface texture rather than larger structural transitions, requiring no tempo fluctuation except where indicated."[157] Howat's description of double barlines can be extended to *Pour les quartes* in which these "signposts" correspond with sudden changes to stylistic references and provide the performer with similar information as Schumann's 'signatures' in *Davidsbündlertänze Op. 6*. As can be seen in Example 5.6, Debussy uses double barlines to create a visual barrier between *sonorité martelé* passages and surrounding material.

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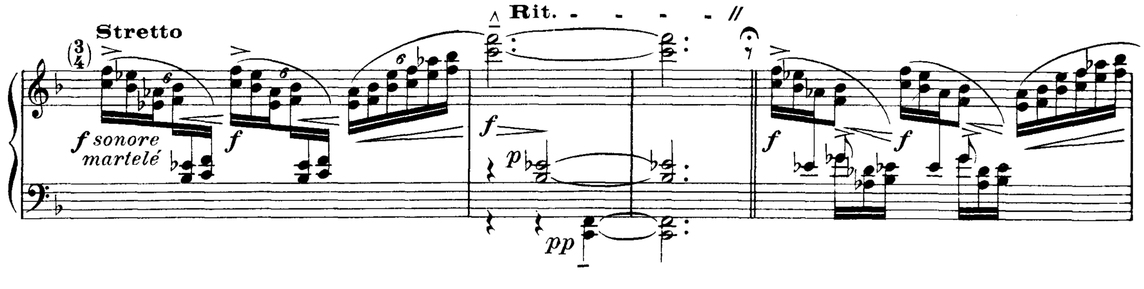
[156] The slendro scale of Javanese gamelan can be roughly translated in to our tuning system as the pentatonic scale. Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier,* 111.

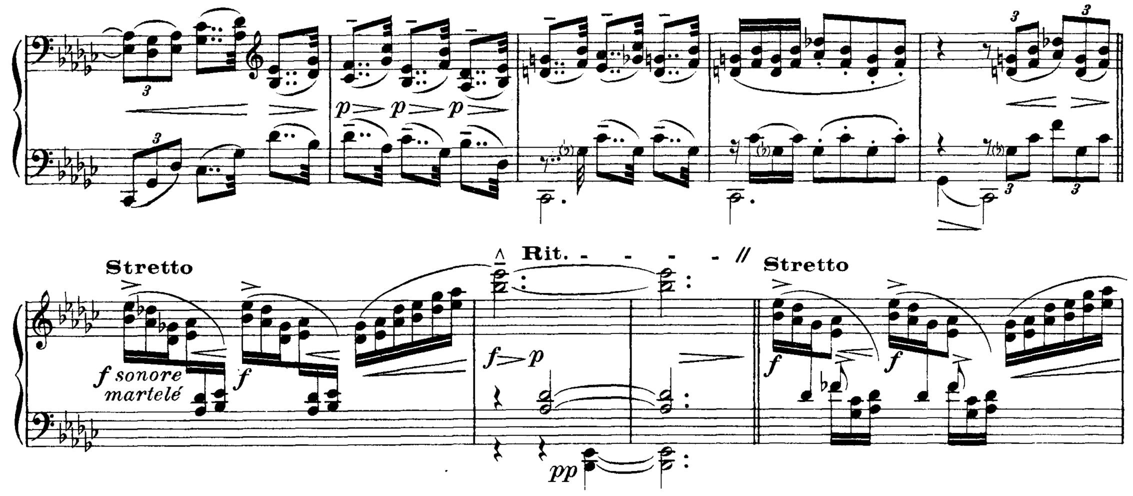
[157] Ibid., 111.

Example 5.8. Examples of Debussy's Use of Double Barlines

a) Debussy, *Étude Pour les quartes,* mm. 7–10.[158]


Stretto
Rit. - - - - - //
f sonore martelé
f
p
pp

b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les quartes,* mm. 32–40.[159]


p
p
p
3
Stretto
Rit. - - - - - //
Stretto
f sonore martelé
f
f>p
pp

Debussy's consistency throughout the beginning of the piece provides the performer with an intrinsic understanding of the music so that when disparate textures are juxtaposed in close proximity (within a single measure), the performer can successfully identify the different parts without the scaffolding provided by the double barlines. For example, we know from context that Debussy's *leggiero* marking in measure 50 (Ex. 5.9) is a *gamelan* reference because it is shown beneath pentatonic double fourths written in highly subdivided note-heads that imitate the *stretto* which, as shown in Example 5.8, has an established association with Debussy's *gamelan* sonority in this piece. Separating this material with a double barline was not an option for Debussy in this instance because the material on beats one and three of measure 50 (Ex 5.9) belong to the *animando* character that was introduced in measure 43 to which the *gamelan* sonority is an interruption: Enclosing the two textures within the double bars would go directly against the effect of an interruption by encouraging an amalgamation of two distinct characters. Though the rhythmic notation and *leggiero* marking alone are not as descriptive as Debussy's earlier *gamelan* references (Ex. 5.8), it is clear through context that Debussy was referencing the same sonority at a lower dynamic level, resting on the foundation of knowledge that he established earlier in the piece.

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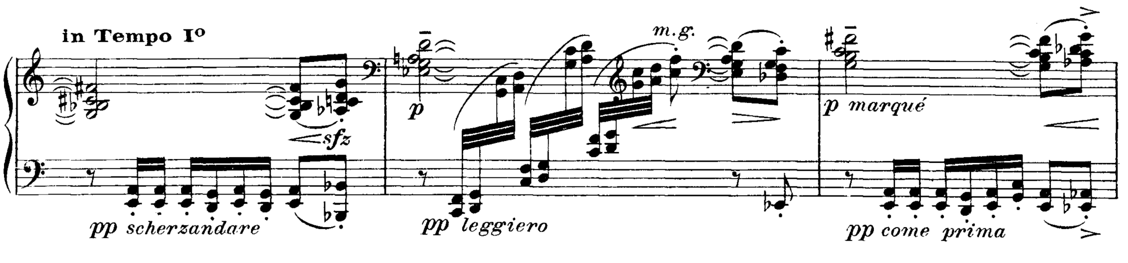
[158] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

[159] Ibid.

Example 5.9. Debussy, *Étude Pour les quartes,* mm. 49–51.[160]



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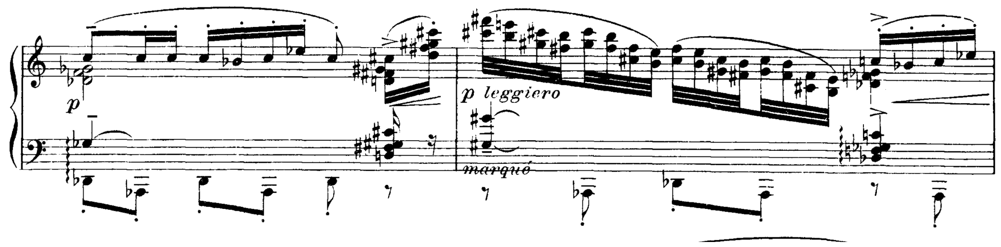
[160] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

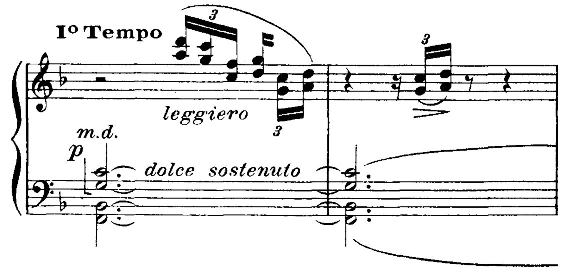
Throughout the remainder of the piece Debussy employs the *leggiero* marking for all references to this 'quieter hammered sonority' (Ex. 5.10) and it is the responsibility of the performer to portray this sonority by giving these passages a sharper, more percussive attack that contrasts the sustained surroundings. Just as Schumann's *Florestan* and *Eusebius* inscriptions are useful interpretive guides, Debussy's detailed approach to differentiating musical material in the early stages of *Pour les quartes* provides the performer with an inherent knowledge of the textures so that subtle but essential decisions about touch and articulation can be made.

Example 5.10. *Gamelan* Sonorities Without Double Barlines

a) Debussy, *Étude Pour les quartes,* mm. 55–56.[161]



b) Debussy, *Étude Pour les quartes,* mm. 65–66.[162]



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[161] Claude Debussy, *Douze Études Pour Piano*, First Edition (Paris: Durand et Cie. 1916).

[162] Ibid.

"One must forget the piano has hammers" was, according to Marguerite Long, "one of [Debussy's] most frequent sayings."[163] Though this quote is often taken to be evidence of Debussy's famous penchant for playing quietly, it may have a more profound meaning. Because these words came from a composer who spent his entire career finding new sonorous potential for whichever medium he was working with, it seems likely that Debussy's 'hammerless' piano allowed him to imagine an expanded color palette at his instrument. Schumann's early piano works also betray a keen interest in sonority and some of his most intrepid ideas were transplanted by Debussy into musical surroundings that could hardly have been imagined in the mid-nineteenth century.

Debussy's explorations in sound are woven into complex formal structures that were catalyzed by the capricious and fragmented formal approach of Schumann. This approach to form provided Debussy with the means to explore the relationships between different musical styles and cultures as well as ideas from his own earlier *oeuvre*. The close contact and interaction among these disparate ideas creates an eclectic musical surface with a wide variety of technical demands for the performer and thus reinvents the *étude.*

. . . .

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[163] Marguerite Long, *At the Piano With Claude Debussy* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1972), 13.

Though the tradition of the *concert étude* as established by Chopin and Liszt had freed the genre from the strictly technical confines it had suffered during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Debussy furthered its liberation by applying new levels of compositional prowess to his *Douze Études,* as can be witnessed in his meticulous approach to notation. Debussy's ability to communicate, adapt, and modulate among the techniques and aesthetics of his influences proves his compositional virtuosity and shows that these pieces are not only technical studies but also studies in composition. By exploring new styles of rhythmic notation and extremely precise nuance language, Debussy was able to communicate his own interpretations of Chopin's elusive rhythmic ideas as well as those of the French Baroque. His innovations in notation extended to his technical writing, in which he used detailed slurring and portati to inform the reader of the physical requirements of certain passages. As one may expect of him, he explored the sonorous potential of his native instrument and developed notational techniques that encourage the reader to do the same. Finally, Debussy developed ingenious techniques to highlight subtle relationships among disparate materials, whose fragmentary juxtaposition uncovers new levels of unification.

Unlike Chopin and Liszt, who both famously championed the *étude* genre as budding virtuoso-composers, Debussy penned his *Études* at the end of his career. Thus, there is a retrospective and historically self-aware quality in these works that can be reflected in modern performances. Studying Debussy's influences and the historical circumstances that surrounded him while composing the *Études* allows us a glimpse into the mind of this perpetually curious creative genius. Although these pieces are indebted to the practices and discoveries of previous composers, they are not rooted in traditions but instead seem to float above, using past ideas to fuel innovation. Debussy's respect for the music and techniques of the French Clavecinistes, The Paris Conservatory, Chopin and Schumann is profound, but in the *Études*, he did not bow with reverence to his musical heroes by fabricating pastiche adaptations of their ideas but instead allowed subtle hints of their aesthetics to add color and dimension to his own thought—fearlessly conceiving new opportunities and adaptations for the techniques of his idols. Accordingly, this study of historical precedence and influence is intended not only to shed light on Debussy's perspective and the motivations behind his musical decisions but also to provide a framework for performing a group of *études* that redefined the genre at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The observations, ideas and arguments presented in this document are intentionally devoid of prescriptive performance advice that provide performers with a set of tenets from which to construct an appropriate rendition of the music—Debussy's propensity for drawing on a wide variety sources for inspiration makes any attempt at establishing a set of statutes for his works futile. Instead, this treatise aims to support thinking that Debussy would have recognized as relevant to his life and work. Though this approach lacks the immediacy of a set of fingerings, a specific technical approach, or 'rules' for phrasing, it points to an aesthetic context from which to face the interpretive challenges presented by the *Douze Études.* By integrating historical, analytical and performance influences that affected the composer, I hope to inspire a performance-oriented viewpoint relevant to musicians with expertise in theory, composition and musicology, in order to encourage performance decisions congruent with Debussy’s historical perspective and the possibilities of his sound world.

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