

TONAL AMBIGUITY IN DEBUSSY'S PIANO WORKS

by

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Claude Debussy lived at a special point in the history of Music: the turning point from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. As many of his contemporaries did, he tried to free himself from all the limitations of functional harmony and tonality. Instead of using extreme chromaticism, he employed medieval church modes, whole-tone and pentatonic scales, planing, stepwise root movement, and harmonies built on intervals other than the third. All these factors tend to reject local tonal hierarchies and help to achieve tonal ambiguity.

This study traces the gradual shift from clarity of tonality towards tonal ambiguity in Debussy's piano music and examines a variety of compositional techniques that he applied to achieve tonal ambiguity in each work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In tracing Debussy's piano works from his early to late years, we can see many changes in his compositional technique. One of them is the gradual shift from clarity of tonality towards tonal ambiguity. Debussy has enriched the musical language by various means, such as use of medieval modes, whole-tone and pentatonic scales, planing, stepwise root movement, and harmonies built on intervals other than thirds. His approach to harmony established new principles of consonance and dissonance, and expanded the concept of key. As a result, he freed harmony from the rigidity of traditional tonal functions.

The purpose of this paper is to trace this change by presenting musical analyses and discussing those various features which emphasize or deemphasize tonality. The musical analyses are mainly focused on the way tonality and tonal ambiguity are achieved in individual pieces. Compositions discussed in this paper are limited to those by Debussy for piano solo written between 1888 and 1915.

In his early years, Debussy's compositional style is traditional, even though his teacher, Emile Durand, described Debussy as 'a pupil with a considerable gift for harmony, but

desperately careless"¹ or "a disturbing element in the theory class"² at the Paris Conservatoire. For example, the harmonic materials used in Deux Arabesques (1888) and "Clair de lune" (1890) are quite similar to those in the late Romantic style, and maintain a strong feeling of tonality. However, there can be found several seeds which weaken tonality, such as the use of modality and pentatonic harmony in which the tonal center is in doubt, and there is a tendency to avoid cadences.

The first remarkable change in Debussy's piano literature occurs in Pour le Piano, which was published in 1901. One of its significant characteristics is the way in which Debussy treats tonality. In the first movement, "Prélude," Debussy introduces a large section based on whole-tone harmony in which the tonal center is suspended. He uses two different whole-tone scales alternately in this piece, and he continues this practice in his later works. Roger Nichols discusses "Sarabande," the second movement of Pour le Piano, as follows:

For the first time in Debussy's piano works there are times when tonality is momentarily submerged.³

¹ Roger Nichols, "Debussy, Claude," The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (10th ed., 1990), V, 307.

² Peter S. Hansen, An Introduction to Twentieth Century Music, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), p. 13.

³ Nichols, op. cit., p. 304.

In "Sarabande," there are several factors which weaken tonality. The tonal center is unstable because of the avoidance of diatonic progressions and the lack of leading tone resolutions. Planing is used extensively. Root movement by third is also employed. Unresolved nonharmonic tones and chromatic alterations are also frequently employed in this piece.

Debussy continues in later works to experiment with tonal ambiguity, and both whole-tone harmony and modality are used frequently. There are several works in which whole-tone harmony plays an important role, such as "Cloches à travers les feuilles," from Images Book 1 (1905), and "Voiles," from Préludes Book 1 (1909). In "Voiles," the whole-tone harmony negates the tonality throughout the piece, except for the short middle section based on pentatonic harmony. The use of modality is also expanded. In "Hommage à Rameau," from Images Book 1 (1905) and "Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fût," from Images Book 2 (1907), there is a free use of chromaticism in addition to the modality, which renders tonality ambiguous.

We can see a second remarkable change in the works written in 1913. The harmonic materials presented in "Brouillards," the second piece in Préludes Book 2, go far beyond those presented in the earlier works. The use of bitonality destroys the establishment of a clear tonal center throughout the piece. This bitonal effect reaches maturity

in the last piece of the Préludes, "Feux d'artifice." Here we can see other devices which cause tonal ambiguity, such as the alternate use of the two different whole-tone scales, the conflict between the black keys and white keys, and the use of polychords.

Among the pieces from Etudes, written in 1915, we can see many characteristics that Debussy has already introduced in the earlier works. However, the treatment of tonality is much more radical. Roger Nichols says that "Pour les degrés chromatiques" and "Pour les notes répétées," both from Etudes, stretch tonality beyond the limits of what was generally considered comfortable in 1915.⁴

On the other hand we can still find pieces among the later works which are very diatonic and maintain strong tonality. Examples are "Bruyères," from Préludes Book 2 (1913) and "Pour les cinq doigts," from Etudes (1915).

In conclusion, two different trends in Debussy's piano music can be seen. One is the trend which is experimental in terms of tonal ambiguity, and the other is the trend which retains traditional diatonic harmony. In this thesis I will discuss mainly the first trend, and compare the techniques that Debussy used to weaken tonality from his early to later works.

⁴ Nichols, op. cit., p. 306.

Definitions

The following terms will be used in this study:

Tonality: the organized relationships of tones with reference to a center, the tonic, and generally to a scale of which the tonic is the principal tone.

Atonality: the absence of tonality and the absence of key. It is the antithesis of tonality. In atonal music there is no central tonic or diatonic harmonies functionally relating to it.

Modality: a musical system based on the use of a mode or modes, as distinct from major-minor tonality. It is also often applied to the presence within predominantly tonal works of features describable in terms of the modes or music that is diatonic to significant degree but not clearly an example of major-minor tonality. The term has been applied to aspects of the music of Debussy and of twentieth century composers often termed "neoclassical" in their avoidance of extreme chromaticism.

Diatonic: music based upon any major or pure minor scale or any church mode, as distinct from chromatic.

Chromatic: music which freely employs tones outside of a diatonic context.

Pentatonic: a scale consisting of five pitches or pitch classes, and music based on such a scale. In this paper the

term is only used for a scale made up of the interval cycle as follows: M2-M2-m3-M2-m3 (e.g. C-D-E-G-A-C).

Whole-tone scale: a scale consisting exclusively of whole tones. It includes six pitches in each octave; only two different examples can be constructed from the twelve pitch classes within the octave: C-D-E-F#-G#-A# and C#-D#-F-G-A-B (or their enharmonic equivalents).

CHAPTER II

GENERAL DISCUSSION OF TONALITY IN DEBUSSY'S MUSIC

Robert Schmitz' book, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy⁵ covers all of Debussy's piano solo works. Schmitz presents a historical background and structural analyses of the works, with emphasis on performance interpretation. He also touches on the use of tonality in Debussy's music, referring to bitonality, bi-modality, polytonality, and other harmonic resources. Frank Dawes' Debussy Piano Music⁶ is concise, yet covers many of Debussy's piano works. In the book he says:

Debussy's free-ranging tonal adventures do not imply the destruction of tonality, though they bring about a weakening of the old magnetic poles, which are tonic, dominant, and subdominant. A near-permanent tonal ambiguity gives his music an almost unrivalled flexibility.⁷

Some sources deal primarily with the subject of tonality and tonal ambiguity. In Tonality, Atonality, Pantonality,⁸ Rudolph Reti writes that Debussy built a new positive concept

⁵ E. Robert Schmitz, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1950)

⁶ Frank Dawes, Debussy Piano Music (London: British Broadcasting, 1969)

⁷ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁸ Rudolph Reti, Tonality, Atonality, Pantonality (New York: Macmillan, 1958), p. 30.

of tonality in music which Reti calls "pantonality."
According to Eric Salzman,⁹ Debussy was the first composer to substitute successfully another set of values, a kind of musical thought based on symmetrical patterns and structures with a highly weakened directional motion and thus a very ambiguous sense of tonal organization. Jim Samson¹⁰ says that Debussy evolved a highly personal tonal language in which major-minor elements play a subsidiary role, taking their place beside harmonic phenomena which are disruptive of traditional tonal functions. Peter Hansen¹¹ writes that Debussy made his strongest contributions in the realm of harmony, and his contributions attacked the foundations of tonality. Hansen also writes that Debussy's loosening of the bonds of tonality and free treatment of dissonance opened vistas for composers as disparate as Bartók, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky.¹² In A Study of Twentieth-Century Harmony,¹³

⁹ Eric Salzman, Twentieth-Century Music: An Introduction, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 22.

¹⁰ Jim Samson, Music in Transition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 22-3.

¹¹ Peter S. Hansen, An Introduction to Twentieth Century Music, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), p. 29.

¹² Ibid., p. 32.

¹³ René Lenormand, A Study of Twentieth-Century Harmony (London: Joseph William, 1940), p. x.

René Lenormand calls Debussy the "chief of the new modern school," because of the audacity of Debussy's harmonies.

There are also many writings about Debussy's use of tonality in individual works. With her musical analysis of "Sarabande" from Pour le Piano (1901), Ludmila Ulehla describes many difficulties in determining tonality.¹⁴ David Burge says that "Reflets dans l'eau," from Images Book 2 (1905), demonstrates Debussy's ability to balance tonal and non-tonal writing.¹⁵ John Kenneth Adams writes that "Brouillards" and "Feux d'artifice", both from Préludes Book 2 (1913), are bitonal and veering towards the very edge of tonality.¹⁶ Richard Parks talks about the use of tonality in his article on "Pour les degrés chromatiques," from Etudes (1915), as follows:

Whether Debussy wrote atonal music is a refractory issue which has yet to be addressed systematically. It is possible to contemplate the natures of tonal and atonal contexts, for the moment setting aside the question of whether these contexts encompass entire compositions or only parts. The reader may decide if the "Chromatic Etude" is an atonal piece; regardless, it surely contains atonal contexts.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ludmila Ulehla, Contemporary Harmony (New York: Free Press, 1966), pp. 182-84.

¹⁵ David Burge, "Striking Harmonic Juxtapositions in Debussy's 'Reflets dans l'eau'," Keyboard, XII (1986), 34.

¹⁶ John Kenneth Adams, "Debussy: Sketches, Manuscripts, the Préludes and Etudes," The Piano Quarterly, CXXIX (1987), 41.

¹⁷ Richard Parks, "Tonal Analogues as Atonal Resources and Their Relation to Form in Debussy's Chromatic Etude," Journal of Music Theory, XXIX (1985), 33.

Dean Elder, in his article on "Pour les huit doigts," also from Etudes takes a more conservative viewpoint:

Debussy's tonalities have been described as free, but he never lost sight of a basic tonal organization of a piece, even in his later works.¹⁸

Furthermore, Robert W. Ottman¹⁹ describes the treatment of tonality in Debussy's music as follows:

There is no break with tonality in the music of Debussy. A key feeling is maintained though it is often vague, and at times missing for short periods by devices to be presented shortly (but never by the traditional series of diminished seventh chords). Frequent use of long pedal points on the tonic against more or less established progressions in the upper voices maintain tonal stability.

According to the literature mentioned above, there are different ways of approaching Debussy's use of tonality. A point of focus in this study is: "What factors determine tonality, or tonal ambiguity?" Mark DeVoto describes the term "tonality" as follows:

A particular tonality or key is defined and reinforced by the presence of a tonal center, embodied harmonically in the tonic triad; by harmonic progressions pointing to the tonic, especially by strong cadences; by pedal points and ostinato basses, and by essential diatonicism as opposed to chromaticism. Avoidance of the tonic, whether by direct deemphasis of the tonic triad itself, by suppression of the dominant harmony that points to it, or by deceptive cadence, may weaken the sense of key or divert it toward another center. So may emphasis on chromatic chords, on chords with many dissonant pitches,

¹⁸ Dean Elder, "Stewart Gordon on the Debussy Etudes," Clavier, XXVII (1988), 12.

¹⁹ Robert W. Ottman, Advanced Harmony, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984), p. 316.

or contrapuntal writing. Continuous modulation involving many chromatic chords may suspend the sense of key entirely for a time.²⁰

In his article on "Harmony," Mark DeVoto describes the characteristics of harmony in twentieth century music, as opposed to classical diatonic harmony:

The liberation of diatonic harmony can be said to have arisen through two means: the elimination of classical functions and voice leading, and the invention of new chord forms "for their own sake." The first of these meant above all the weakening of the dominant function and an increase in modal, third-related progression, tendencies first evident in the nineteenth-century nationalists but carried further by Chabrier, Fauré, and Debussy. The dominant function was weakened by lowering the leading tone in the dominant chord, by adding unresolved nonharmonic tones, and by substituting other chords for the dominant in cadences. Classical voice leading was replaced by a generalized stepwise connection, making possible a freely parallel harmony in fourths, fifths, seconds, complete triads, or even major ninth chords. Debussy's works abound in parallel chord formations of all types, guided in each case only by the melodic lines that they sustain.

A whole roster of chord types can be demonstrated during the approximate period 1890-1920, including unresolved major ninths, elevenths, and thirteenth, or any of these with chromatic alterations, chords of stacked seconds (tone clusters); combinations of these with unresolved or simultaneously resolved appoggiaturas; and many different kinds of polychords. Debussy's modal harmony arises in part from the frequent but constantly changing use of different modal and pentatonic scales; the whole-tone scales, generating augmented triads, also appear frequently, sometimes completely dominating the harmony.²¹

²⁰ Mark DeVoto, "Tonality," The New Harvard Dictionary of Music. Edited by Michael Randal (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 862.

²¹ DeVoto, "Harmony," The New Harvard Dictionary of Music, p. 368.

Factors which affect the tonal ambiguity in Debussy's music can be divided into three categories: (1) the vertical dimension: chords and simultaneities, (2) harmonic relationship and tonality, and (3) the melodic dimension: scales and pitch collections. The specific factors which belong to these three groups are the following:

The Vertical Dimension

1. Extended dominants (ninths, elevenths, and thirteenths)
2. Tone clusters
3. Polychords
4. Chords with added tones
5. Quartal and quintal chords
6. Whole-tone chords (including augmented triads)

Harmonic Relationship and Tonality

1. Modal harmony
2. Third related progressions
3. Unorthodox resolution of dominants
4. Root progressions by step
5. Planing
6. Polytonality
7. Polymodality
8. Modal cadences

The Melodic Dimension

1. Unresolved nonharmonic tones
2. Modal scales
3. Whole-tone scales
4. Chromatic scales
5. Pentatonic scales
6. Gapped scales (for example, C-Db-E-F-G-Ab-B-C)

The following chapter will analyze particular piano works to discover the use of these factors and trace the gradual change from strong tonality to increased tonal ambiguity.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSES

Several pieces representing Debussy's developing style are analyzed here with respect to their use of tonality. In addition, pieces which share the traits encountered will also be briefly described and compared.

Clair de lune, from Suite Bergamasque (1890).

The harmonic materials presented in this piece resemble those of the late Romantic style. Among the four pieces in Suite Bergamasque ("Prélude," "Menuet," "Clair de lune," and "Passepied"), "Clair de lune" is the only piece in which Debussy did not apply modal harmony. Basically the piece is diatonic, and includes some use of pentatonic harmonies. The beginning of the first theme in mm. 1 to 3 suggests a pentatonic scale, $D\flat-E\flat-F-A\flat-B\flat$, and the tonal center, $D\flat$ is clearly established (Ex. 1).

Ex. 1. Clair de lune, mm. 1-3.

The musical score for the first three measures of "Clair de lune" is presented in a grand staff. The right-hand part (treble clef) features a melodic line with a pentatonic scale: $D\flat$ (quarter), $E\flat$ (quarter), F (quarter), $A\flat$ (quarter), $B\flat$ (quarter), and $D\flat$ (quarter). The left-hand part (bass clef) provides harmonic support with chords: $D\flat$ (quarter), $E\flat$ (quarter), F (quarter), $A\flat$ (quarter), and $B\flat$ (quarter). The score includes dynamic markings *pp* and *con sordina*. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. Measure numbers 15, 34, 21, and 43 are marked above the staff.

Triads with added sixth are also frequently employed. In Ex. 2, Debussy uses this type of chord successively (Ex. 2).

Ex. 2. Clair de lune, mm. 57-58.

The harmonic materials in the "First Arabesque," which was written two years earlier than "Clair de lune," are very similar to those in "Clair de lune." Both are quite diatonic, and include frequent use of pentatonic harmonies, many extended dominants and triads with added sixth. One augmented triad can be found in each of the pieces.

The resolutions of nonharmonic tones are very traditional in "Clair de lune". Various types of cadences are employed in the piece, such as authentic, deceptive, and cadences using third relations. The last cadence in the piece is quite interesting: The final V-I is followed by seven measures using the chord progressions I-iii- \flat III6, which ends with \flat III6-I (Ex. 3).

Ex. 3. Clair de lune, mm. 66-72.

66 *pp* *morendo jusqu'à la fin*

68

70

In summary, "Clair de lune" presents some characteristics of the late Romantic style such as extended dominants and third related progressions, but also includes some materials which remain as Debussy's own harmonic language in his later years, such as pentatonic scales and triads with added sixth.

Prélude, from Pour le Piano (1901)

Pour le Piano, written between 1886 and 1901, is a set of three pieces: "Prélude," "Sarabande," and "Tocatta."

Although the three titles sound traditional, we can see

various experiments that Debussy tried in them, in terms of the treatment of tonality.

In "Prélude," there are contrasts between sections with clear tonality and tonal ambiguity. The piece consists of three sections: A (mm. 1-42), B (mm. 43-96), and A' (mm. 97-163). The A section sustains a relatively clear tonal center throughout; on the other hand, the tonal center is occasionally in doubt in the B section, through the use of whole-tone scales, planing, and free root movement. Before this "Prélude," Debussy had never used large sections which totally consist of the whole-tone scales in his piano works.

The A section is basically written in A Aeolian mode, and presents two themes, A (mm. 1-5) and B (mm. 6-13) (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4. Prélude, mm. 1-13.

1. *non legato*

4 *dim.* *un peu retardé.*

7 *peu à peu reprendre le mouvt.*

10.

13

Tension is created in mm. 15 to 23 by successive diminished seventh chords and tritones, but the resolutions of these dissonances are traditional, and the pedal on A establishes a tonal center.

Debussy shifts from A Aeolian to C major in m. 43, using part of the C major scale in mm. 41 to 42. The B section begins in m. 43, using Theme A with planing. All chords employed in planing in mm. 43 to 46 are augmented triads, except for C major triads in m. 43 (Ex. 5).

Ex. 5. Prélude, mm. 43-46.

43

8

ff

sf gliss.

Debussy employs chromatic contrary motion between the chords and the bass notes in the succession of augmented triads, in mm. 54 to 56 (Ex. 6).

Ex. 6. Prélude, mm. 54-56.

The successive augmented triads here prepare the next section which consists mostly of whole-tone scales. The whole-tone scale C20²² is employed from m. 57, with A \flat as a tonal center (Ex. 7).

22 In this paper the system devised by George Perle in The Operas of Alban Berg/Lulu, Vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) to identify tone sequences or scales will be used. In this system "C" stands for "Cycle." The following number represents interval class where "1" designates half steps and "2" designates whole steps. The next number represents a pitch class as the beginning of the cycle where "0" represents the pitch C, 1 represents C#, etc. Thus the expression "C20" represents a series of whole tones beginning on C. "C21" represents a series of whole tones beginning on C# or D \flat .

Ex. 7. Prélude, mm. 57-58.

Debussy adds chromatic alterations to Theme A in m. 61 to 66, and the theme moves up by semitone in the bass. The tremolo in the treble also moves up chromatically with the theme (Ex. 8).

Ex. 8. Prélude, mm. 61-64.

The two whole-tone scales C20 and C21 are employed alternately in mm. 65 to 70. The feeling of tonality is

obscured here since no note stands out as a tonal center (Ex. 9).

Ex. 9. Prélude, mm. 65-70.

Measures 71 to 96 entirely consist of the whole-tone scale C20, and part of Theme B is presented in a whole-tone harmony. The pedal tone $A\flat$ creates a tonal center here (Ex. 10).

Ex. 10. Prélude, mm. 74-76.

The A' section begins at m. 97. Preceding the return to the Aeolian mode in the measure, there is a descending scale E-D-C-B \flat -A in mm. 95 to 97, giving a feeling of a Phrygian cadence. Debussy uses planing of triads with contrary bass, in mm. 142 to 147.

The cadential section begins at m. 148, in which Debussy uses Aeolian mode on A. The whole-tone and modal scales alternate in mm. 151 to 153, and mm. 154 to 156 consist of a whole-tone scale C₂₁. A variety of chords is employed in mm. 158 to 163: major seventh chord, whole-tone chords, dominant ninth chord, minor ninth chord, and minor triad. The top notes in these measures imply Theme A (A-E-G-G-A) (Ex. 11).

Ex. 11. Prélude, mm. 158-163.

158 Tempo 1^o

There are some interesting features presented in this piece. One of them is its expanded use of the whole-tone scales. Debussy made some use of whole-tone scales in his earlier piano works, but they are treated only as passing scales. Planing of augmented triads and alternate use of whole-tone scales, C₂₀ and C₂₁, are also introduced in this

piece. The tonal center is occasionally obscured through the use of these techniques.

The tonal organization of "Jardins sous la pluie," the third piece of *Estampes* (1903), resembles that of "Prélude". This piece also consists of two contrasting materials; one is on A Aeolian mode and retains strong tonality, and the other uses the whole-tone scales extensively.

Two different whole-tone harmonies alternate with each beat in mm. 64 to 70 in this piece. Chromaticism is employed here in both contrary and parallel motion, and the tonality is ambiguous because of the lack of tonal center (Ex. 12).

Ex. 12. Jardins sous la pluie, mm. 64-70.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano, labeled with measure numbers 64 and 67. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The music is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The notation features complex rhythmic patterns with many beamed notes and rests. In the first system (measures 64-66), the right hand has a melodic line with triplets and slurs, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The second system (measures 67-69) continues this style, showing further chromatic movement and complex harmonic structures. The overall texture is dense and characteristic of Debussy's impressionistic style.



It is interesting to note that Debussy used a very similar technique, the alternation of the two whole-tone scales and chromatic parallel motion, in the middle sections of "Prélude" and "Jardins sous la pluie."

Sarabande, from Pour le Piano (1901).

An earlier version of the "Sarabande" exists as the second piece of Images (oubliées), which is a set of three pieces: "Lent," "Souvenir du Louvre" and "Nous n'irons plus au bois." This set of three pieces was written in 1894 and appeared in 1977 as a posthumous publication of his early work. "Souvenir du Louvre" was published in 1896 by itself.²³

Debussy incorporated about 80 changes in the second version.²⁴ The changes are largely in suppressing excessive chromatic alterations. Texture in the earlier version is thicker and often uses a dense harmonic fabric; The second

²³ Virginia Raad, "Claude Debussy's Sarabande," The American Music Teacher, XXX (1981), 22.

²⁴ Nichols, "Debussy," The New Grove, p. 304.

version, by contrast, makes use of a clearer, less dense texture (Ex. 13, 14).

Ex. 13. Souvenir du Louvre, mm. 1-8.

Musical score for Ex. 13, Souvenir du Louvre, mm. 1-8. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system (measures 1-4) features a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes triplets in both hands. The second system (measures 5-8) starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and the instruction "et très soutenu" (and very sustained), indicating a fermata over the final chord.

Ex. 14. Sarabande, mm. 1-8.

Musical score for Ex. 14, Sarabande, mm. 1-8. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system (measures 1-4) features a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes triplets in both hands. The second system (measures 5-8) starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes fingerings (2, 3, 2, 2, 2, 2, 3) in the bass line. The piece concludes with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic.

In "Sarabande," Debussy avoided functional harmony through the use of modality, free root movement, chromatic alterations, and quartal harmony. The tonal center is occasionally obscured in this piece because of the lack of functional harmony which would indicate a tonic.

The form in "Sarabande" is A B A', where the A section (mm. 1-22) and the A' section (mm. 42-72) use C# as a tonal center. In the B section, the tonal center moves to E. The first four measures emphasize an E major to g# minor chord progression which is repeated, and the tonality can be interpreted as E major or G# Phrygian. However, the following measures indicate the tonality of C# Aeolian, which is the primary tonality of this piece. Root movement in thirds is extensively employed here.

Measures 9 and 10 also consist almost completely of third related progressions. Chromatic alteration of A and A# are employed here (Ex. 15).

Ex. 15. Sarabande, mm. 9-10.

The planing of dominant ninth chords in mm. 11 to 12 moves melodically in the whole-tone scale (Ex. 16).

Ex. 16. Sarabande, mm. 11-12.

11

The chord progression in m. 14 seems to be a half cadence, where the A#m7 to D# major chord progression functions as ii^o7 to V in g# minor, with the F-double sharp as a raised leading tone. However the leading tone does not resolve to G#, and the following section does not establish G# as tonal center (Ex. 17).

Ex. 17. Sarabande, mm. 13-15.

13

After the plagal cadence in the key of C# Aeolian in m. 22, the beginning of the next section (mm. 23-28) consists of planing in quartal harmony with third relations and free use of chromaticism. Each of the five parts of these quartal

chords provides a different quality of mode, which confuses the sense of tonality (Ex. 18).

Ex. 18. Sarabande, mm. 23-26.

Debussy used added-tone chords in planing in mm. 35 to 41. Triads with added sixth and triads with added second are employed here. Phrases in mm. 40 to 41 consist exclusively of added second triads (Ex. 19).

Ex. 19. Sarabande, mm. 40-41.

The opening material returns in m. 42, and the tonality of C# Aeolian is reasserted in m. 46. Debussy modulates to G# Aeolian in m. 56, with a half cadence. In this case, he uses a dominant-tonic relationship of D#-G# in mm. 55 to 56 (Ex. 20).

Ex. 20. Sarabande, mm. 54-56.

A half cadence is employed again in m. 59; however, Debussy does not use a dominant-tonic relationship here. After the dominant chord (D# major) in m. 59, he moves to C# Aeolian, which is not expected from the cadence.

In the closing section Debussy reintroduces the quartal harmony in a third related progression, suspending the tonality until the penultimate measure, where the piece finally settles in the key of C# Aeolian (Ex. 21).

Ex. 21. Sarabande, mm. 67-72.

Ludmila Ulehla²⁵ lists characteristics of modality as follows: (1) lack of the leading tone, (2) triad qualities

²⁵ Ulehla, Contemporary Harmony, p. 171.

belonging to a mode rather than to the diatonic major or minor scale, (3) resolutions of seventh chords in non-traditional ways, and (4) vague sense of key due to the non-diatonic effects. Leon Dallin²⁶ writes that the modes provide a ready means for extending the horizons of tonal organization at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Roger Nichols²⁷ writes that the control of chromaticism in the "Sarabande" is masterly, and there are times when tonality is momentarily submerged for the first time in Debussy's piano works.

Nichols describes "Hommage à Rameau," the second piece in Images Book 2 (1905), as a development in both size and harmonic subtlety of the earlier Sarabande.²⁸ There are some similarities in the two pieces, such as dance rhythm, A B A' form, modality, planing, free chromaticism, and free root movement. Debussy gives the indication to "Hommage à Rameau" as "in the style of a Sarabande, but without rigor." The two pieces are written in triple meter, slow tempo, and the overall dynamic level is very soft, except for the middle sections. These characteristics apply to the early French sarabandes, where composers gave indications such as "grave,"

²⁶ Leon Dallin, Twentieth Century Composition, 3rd ed. (Dubuque: WM. C. Brown, 1974), p. 105.

²⁷ Nichols, "Debussy, " The New Grove, p. 304.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 305.

"lentement," or "tendrement."²⁹ Jean Philippe Rameau, for whom Debussy wrote the piece to show his respect, often marked "doux" or "gracieusement" for his sarabandes for clavecin.³⁰

Both "Sarabande" and "Hommage à Rameau" employ extensive use of modal harmony. Debussy uses much freer chromaticism and a greater variety of harmonies in "Hommage à Rameau."

There are many examples of third related progressions throughout the piece. The use of a chromatic third relationship is not original to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In describing the use of third-related harmonies, Ottman says that this relationship is often used to cause delay in reaching the tonic, or to obscure the progress of the harmonic movement leading to the ultimate cadence.³¹ Tonal relationships become obscured when there are no common tones in third-related chords. Some of the third related progressions in "Hommage à Rameau" have no common tones, which is not the case in "Sarabande." For example, progression of G# major triad to B minor triad in the treble in m. 22 does not include any common tones (Ex. 22).

²⁹ Richard Hudson, "Sarabande," in The New Harvard Dictionary of Music, p. 492.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ottman, Advanced Harmony, pp. 292-3.

Ex. 22. Hommage à Rameau, m. 22

22

Debussy also frequently employs planing in the piece, as was seen in "Sarabande." In the middle section, he uses planing with whole-tone harmonies in mm. 43 to 50, where the last three measures consist exclusively of harmonies from whole-tone scale C21 (Ex. 23).

Ex. 23. Hommage à Rameau, mm. 48-50.

48

50

Planing with whole-tone harmony is found earlier in "Sarabande" in mm. 11 to 12. The use is more expanded in "Hommage à Rameau."

Free use of chromaticism causes harmonic complexity throughout this piece; on the other hand, Debussy uses many dominant-tonic relationships, especially in the cadences. In Ex. 24, the harmonic progression is complex because of the extensive use of chromatic alterations; at the same time, Debussy uses dominant-tonic relationships through the bass notes (Ex. 24).

Ex. 24. Hommage à Rameau, mm. 59-60.

The musical score for Ex. 24, Hommage à Rameau, mm. 59-60, is presented in a two-staff format. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece begins at measure 59. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with chromatic alterations and a final cadence. The left hand (bass clef) provides a harmonic accompaniment with chromatic alterations and a final cadence. The score is marked 'pp' (pianissimo) and includes dynamic markings like 'pp' and 'ppp'. The score shows a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with various chromatic alterations and a final cadence marked '||: fine'.

In spite of the free use of chromaticism and a wide variety of harmonies, the feeling of tonal center is maintained throughout. While Debussy uses less chromatic harmony in "Sarabande," the themes do not always suggest a clear tonic, and tonality is in doubt.

"Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fût," the second piece in Images Book 2 (1907), also shares some characteristics with "Sarabande" and "Hommage à Rameau." It

is interesting to find that all three pieces presented here appear as the central movement in each of the sets (Pour le Piano, and Images Books 1 and 2).

The beginning section of "Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fût" consists of planing of various harmonies. Planing in mm. 1 to 4 includes quartal harmony and some whole-tone harmony, and the planing in mm. 6 to 11 includes major, minor, and augmented triads. Third related progressions employed here do not include any common tones (Ex. 25, 26).

Ex. 25. Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fût,
mm. 1-4.

The first system of the musical score for Ex. 25, measures 1-4, is written for piano. It features a treble and bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is characterized by planing, with chords moving in parallel motion. The first measure has a dynamic marking of *p* (piano), and the second measure has *pp* (pianissimo). The score includes a grand staff with three staves: treble, middle, and bass. A large bracket spans across the first two staves, and another bracket spans across the last two staves, indicating the planing of the upper and lower voices respectively.

The second system of the musical score for Ex. 25, measures 4-5, continues the planing from the first system. It is marked with a dynamic of *pp* (pianissimo). The notation shows the continuation of the parallel chordal movement in the grand staff, with a bracket spanning the first two staves.

Ex. 27. Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fût,
mm. 14-15.

There is a variety of harmonic material presented in "Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fût," such as modal and pentatonic harmony, whole-tone harmony, planing, and free use of chromaticism. As was seen in "Prélude" from Pour le Piano (1901) and "Jardins sous la pluie" from Estampes (1903), Debussy uses the two different whole-tone harmonies alternately in mm. 17 to 19 and mm. 35 to 38 (Ex. 28).

Ex. 28. Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fût,
mm. 17-19.

Although tonality is established by the theme, it is sometimes obscured through the use of various harmonic

materials accompanying the theme. For example, tonality in mm. 51 to 55 is ambiguous. The theme retains the tonality of E Dorian; however, the chromatic movement of G-G# in the top notes of the chords and the apparent root of C confuse the sense of tonality (Ex. 29).

Ex. 29. Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fût,
mm. 51-52.

Moreover, in mm. 54 to 55, another chromatic movement from C to C#, accompanied by the alternation of Bb and E pentatonic harmonies, which are a tritone apart, hardly suggest a single tonal center; there are no themes or motives employed here to indicate a tonic (Ex. 30).

Ex. 30. Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fût,
mm. 54-55.

On the whole, the themes employed in this piece project a tonal center, as was seen in "Hommage à Rameau." However, when there are no themes or motives implied in a context, tonality is obscured because of the use of various harmonic materials.

Pagodes, from Estampes (1903)

Estampes, completed in 1903, consists of three movements which represent different landscapes. The first piece, "Pagodes" describes the Far East; the second piece, "La Soirée dans Grenade" is Spanish in flavor; the third piece, "Jardins sous la pluie" depicts Ile-de-France.

It is frequently stated that the initial stimulus for "Pagodes" was Debussy's entranced hearing of the Javanese gamelan orchestras at the Paris World Exhibition in 1889 and 1890. Patricia W. Harpole³² writes that it is quite possible that Debussy had more than a passing acquaintance with gamelan instruments prior to seeing the performances at the Exhibition, since an entire gamelan had been presented to the Paris Conservatoire in 1887 by the Dutch government. Moreover, Albert Lavinac, who was remarkable for his insight into music of the Far East and also Debussy's theory teacher for his first three years at the Conservatoire, might have

³² Patricia W. Harpole, "Debussy and the Javanese Gamelan," The American Music Teacher, XLI (1986), 8.

influenced Debussy by providing exercises including examples of exotic modes.³³

Pentatonic harmony is used extensively in "Pagodes." There are also sections which consist of either one pentatonic harmony, a combination of two different pentatonic harmonies, a chromatic harmony added to pentatonic harmony, a modal harmony, or a combination of modal and pentatonic harmonies. The use of chromatic harmonies is very limited in this piece, as is the case in other works in which pentatonic or whole-tone harmonies are predominant. Harpole says that a complete gamelan usually includes a double set of instruments, one set tuned to the 5-tone "slendro" scale (a pentatonic scale), and the other set tuned to the 7-tone "pelong" scale (a pentatonic scale with additional decorative tones).³⁴ This suggests that there is a combination of two different scales implied in gamelan music.

The first four measures consist of the pentatonic scale, B-C#-D#-F#-G#, and the bass note B serves as a tonal center. Motive a in m. 3 consists of four black notes, G#-C#-D#-F#. Debussy uses many repetitions of the motive with variations throughout the piece (Ex. 31).

³³ Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind. (New York: Macmillan, 1962) Vol. 1, p. 30.

³⁴ Harpole, op. cit., p. 8.

Ex. 33. Pagodes, mm. 15-18.

15

18

After the music returns to a pure pentatonic harmony in m. 19 with a deceptive cadence, C# Mixolydian harmony is introduced in mm. 33 to 36.

The opening materials return in mm. 37 to 77, with some variations. A combination of two different pentatonic harmonies is employed in mm. 80 to 81, where the bass note B added to the motive in the bass clef results in the pentatonic scale B-C#-D#-F#-G#, whereas the background figures in the treble present the complete black-key pentatonic scale (Ex. 34).

Ex. 34. Pagodes, mm. 80-81.

80 **Tempo I**

81

The piece ends on a pure pentatonic scale B-C#-D#-F#-G#. Although there are some harmonic materials added to the pentatonic harmonies, the tonal center B is sustained throughout the piece by bass notes, except for some passing sections using chromatic, quartal, or modal harmonies.

There are also some works which employ extensive use of pentatonic harmonies in Debussy's later piano music. Among them, "Jimbo's Lullaby," from Children's Corner (1909) and "La fille aux cheveux de lin," from Préludes Book 1 (1910) mostly consist of pentatonic harmonies. As in "Pagodes," Debussy uses very few chromatic harmonies in "Jimbo's lullaby." He uses several different pentatonic scales. Whole-tone harmony is also employed in passing sections.

La Soirée dans Grenade, from Estampes (1903).

Although Debussy had never been to Spain,³⁶ he wrote three piano solo works in which he attempted to describe that country. They are "La Soirée dans Grenade" from Estampes (1903), "La Sérénade interrompue" from Préludes Book 1 (1910), and "La Puerta del Vino" from Préludes Book 2 (1913). Marion Bauer³⁷ writes that Debussy had a direct influence on Isaac Albeniz (1860-1909) and an indirect influence on Manuel de Falla (1876-1946). Their music evokes the South of Spain, particularly Andalusia, and includes several features of Spanish folk songs, such as portamentos, guitar-like figurations and scales employing augmented seconds.³⁸ These characteristics are also found in Debussy's Spanish compositions. The Habañera rhythm is employed in "La Soirée dans Grenade" and "La Puerta del Vino," and both are written in duple meter.

In addition to diatonic scales, other scale types such as gapped, modal, and whole-tone are employed in "La Soirée dans Grenade." The piece consists of sections which differ in the

³⁶ In The Piano Works of Debussy, Robert Schmitz writes as follows: "This must be added to the fact that Debussy never visited Spain, as he never penetrated it further than San Sebastian" (p. 86).

³⁷ Marion Bauer, Twentieth Century Music (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1933), p. 145.

³⁸ Virginia Raad, "Debussy and the Magic of Spain," Clavier, XVIII (1979), 13.

use of types of harmony. The pedal tone C# is established in the first 28 measures. It is perceived as a tonic note through the tonic-dominant relationship of C#-G# in the ostinato figure (Ex. 36).

Ex. 36. La Soirée dans Grenade, mm. 1-4.

Mouvement de Habanera
Commencer lentement dans un rythme nonchalant gracieux

PIANO *ppp*

Debussy uses a gapped scale, C#-D-E#-F#-G#-A-B#-C# in the first theme in mm. 7 to 14 (Ex. 37).

Ex. 37. La Soirée dans Grenade, mm. 7-14.

7

pp expressif

11

After the statement of the theme, Debussy uses planing of dominant seventh chords, in which none of the sevenths resolve (Ex. 38).

Ex. 38. La Soirée dans Grenade, mm. 17-18.

17 *Tempo giusto*

After a bridge section using whole-tone harmony C20, the pedal tone shifts from C# to F# in m. 29. The planing in mm. 33 to 36 employs third related progressions, with either one or no common tones (Ex. 39).

Ex. 39. La Soirée dans Grenade, mm. 33-36.

33

The shift of the tonal center in mm. 66 to 67 uses the dominant-tonic relationship of C#-F#. This is the first indication of the primary tonality of this piece: F# major (Ex. 40).

Ex. 40. La Soirée dans Grenade, mm. 66-68.

The first theme is restated in A major in mm. 98 to 106. After the restatement of the theme, modulation from A major to C Mixolydian takes place in m. 109. The pedal tone, E is introduced prior to the statement of C Mixolydian. This pedal tone is a common tone of the tonic triads of A major and C Mixolydian (Ex. 41).

Ex. 41. La Soirée dans Grenade, mm. 106-109.

The original theme using a gapped scale on G# is presented again in mm. 122 to 128. The final return of F# major takes place in m. 130, employing the dominant-tonic relationship of C# and F#.

Debussy uses pedal tones extensively in this piece, and the tonal center is emphasized by these tones; however, the pedal tones float so freely that the primary tonality of this piece, F# major, is established in only a small portion of the entire piece.

Of the three compositions which describe the land of Spain, "La Sérénade interrompue," from Préludes Book 1 (1910) differs from the other two compositions in terms of its rhythm and meter. The Habañera rhythm is not used, and it is written in triple meter. Debussy gives the indication as "quasi guitarra" in the beginning of the piece, and he employs guitar-like figurations throughout the piece. As seen in "La Soirée dans Grenade," this piece also uses a variety of scales such as modal, gapped, diatonic, and chromatic. Pedal tones are employed throughout the piece.

The first theme is stated in mm. 19 to 24, using B \flat Aeolian mode. The dominant-tonic relationship of F and B \flat is clearly established here. There are some cross relations implied between the theme and the accompanying figure. For example, A \flat and A \natural in m. 19, and E \flat and E \natural in m. 22 make this relation (Ex. 42).

Ex. 42. La Sérénade interrompue, mm. 19-24.

19 *a Tempo*



The second theme is stated in mm. 54 to 60, in which Debussy uses a gapped scale, F-G \flat -A-B \flat -C-E \flat -F (Ex. 43).

Ex. 43. La Sérénade interrompue, mm. 54-60.

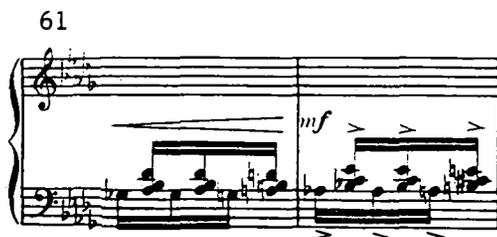
54



60

Quartal harmony is implied in planing in mm. 61 and 62, where the bass notes ascend chromatically (Ex. 44).

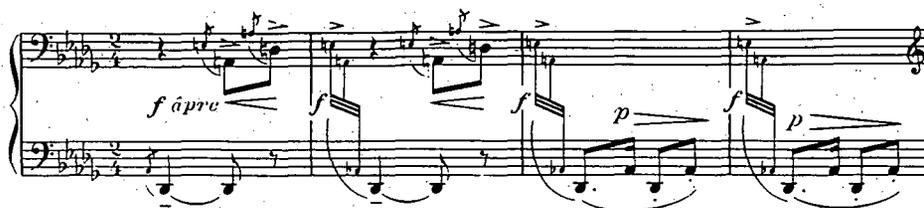
Ex. 44. La Sérénade interrompue, mm. 61-62.



Though the tonic note B \flat is not established in the first 20 measures, the rest of the piece maintains it nearly throughout. Functional harmony is frequently employed, and it makes the tonality quite stable in this piece.

The last example of Debussy's Spanish music, "La Puerta del Vino," from Préludes Book 2 (1913), employs a new harmonic effect which was not found in the earlier two compositions. Prior to the statement of the first theme, the basso ostinato figure D \flat -A \flat gives a feeling of tonal center of D \flat in mm. 1 to 4. Over the figure, the notes D, E, A are employed in the treble. These notes do not agree with the ostinato figure, and this conflict causes a bitonal effect (Ex. 45).

Ex. 45. La Puerta del Vino, mm. 1-4.



The beginning of the first theme consists of a scale, B-C-D-E-F-Ab in mm. 5 to 11, which also causes a bitonal effect with the bass ostinatos, Db-Ab. The remainder of the theme includes many chromatic alterations (Ex. 46).

Ex. 46. La Puerta del Vino, mm. 5-13.

5

p très expressif

11

14

pp *simile*

Debussy uses planing in mm. 35 to 41, which employs some third related progressions lacking any functional relationships. The ostinato figure shifts from Db-Ab to Bb-F in mm. 44, where two different harmonies, a Bb triad and a Bb

augmented triad are employed simultaneously. While the ostinato figure of B \flat -F suggests a tonal center B \flat , the F \sharp in the treble does not agree with this tonic note (Ex. 47).

Ex. 47. La Puerta del Vino, mm. 44-45.



Except for the middle section, the tonal center D \flat is kept throughout the piece by the use of ostinato; however, the harmonic materials do not always agree with the tonic note, which occasionally causes a bitonal effect. Tonality is sometimes obscured by the bitonality employed between the melody and ostinatos in this piece.

Voiles, from Préludes Book 1 (1909)

This prelude consists exclusively of one whole-tone scale, C 20 , except for a short middle section which consists of a pentatonic scale in mm. 42 to 47 and chromatic passing tones in m. 31. The whole-tone scale C 20 (C-D-E-G \flat -A \flat -B \flat) and the pentatonic scale on black keys in mm. 42 to 47 share three common tones: B \flat , G \flat , and A \flat , which make the modulation smooth (Ex. 48).

Ex. 48. Whole-tone scale and pentatonic scale in
"Voiles"



Ordinarily the equal intervals and absence of a leading tone cause the feeling for tonality to be vague or nonexistent in music which mostly consists of whole-tone harmony.³⁹ However, the feeling for the tonality in this piece is provided by the use of pedal tones. There are two notes which are emphasized in the piece: G# and Bb. G# (Ab) is emphasized by the four motives (motives a, b, c, and d), in which G# (Ab) serves as a beginning note (Ex. 49-52).

Ex. 49. Motive a, mm. 1-2.



³⁹ Dallin, Techniques of Twentieth Century Composition, p. 36.

Ex. 50. Motive \flat , mm. 7-8.

7

pp expressif

toujours pp

Ex. 51. Motive \natural , mm. 22-23.

22

pp très souple

toujours pp

Ex. 52. Motive \flat , m. 42.

42 En animant

p

mf

On the other hand, $B\flat$ is sustained by pedal point which is kept throughout the piece except for a few measures. This $B\flat$ pedal point is the lowest note in the piece, and is so frequently repeated that the listener is likely to hear $B\flat$ as a tonal center.

The beginning eight measures of "Cloches à travers les feuilles," the first piece from Images Book 2 (1907), are based mainly on one whole-tone scale C21: C \flat -D \flat -E \flat -F-G-A. There are two passing tones which do not belong to the whole-tone scale C21, in m. 6. These passing tones, both C \sharp , serve as axis tones between D \sharp and A, which are a tritone apart, and divide the interval into equal parts of three semitones each (Ex. 53).

Ex. 53. Cloches à travers les feuilles, m. 6.

The musical score for Example 53 shows measures 6 and 7. Measure 6 contains two passing tones, both C \sharp , which serve as axis tones between D \sharp and A. The piece is marked *pp* and *Cédez*. The score is written for piano and features a whole-tone scale with two passing tones in measure 6.

On the other hand, the passing tones in m. 31 of "Voiles," which are G and D \flat , are chromatic passing tones of the whole-tone intervals (Ex. 54).

Ex. 54. Voiles, m. 31.

The musical score for Example 54 shows measure 31. The piece is marked *p*. The score is written for piano and features chromatic passing tones (G and D \flat) in measure 31.

There are three notes emphasized in mm. 1 to 8 of "Cloches à travers les feuilles ": G, A, and B (Cb). G is emphasized because it is (1) repeated in mm. 1 to 2, as a whole-note, (2) a starting note for figure a, (3) an ending note for figure d, and (4) a starting note for figure e. A is emphasized because it is (1) a starting note for motive a, (2) a starting note and the lowest note for figure b, (3) a starting note for figure c, and (4) a bass note in mm. 3 to 4. B (Cb) is emphasized because it is (1) the lowest note of figure a, and (2) an ending note for motive a which has long value (Ex. 55).

Ex. 55. Cloches à travers les feuilles, mm. 1-7.

The musical score for Ex. 55, "Cloches à travers les feuilles", mm. 1-7, is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 1-3, and the second system covers measures 4-7. The tempo is "Lent (M.M. 92)" and the dynamics are "piano" (pp) and "mezzo-forte" (mf). The score includes annotations for "motive a", "figure a", and "figure b". Measure 1 features a whole note G in the right hand and a whole note B (Cb) in the left hand. Measure 2 continues with a whole note G in the right hand and a whole note A in the left hand. Measure 3 features a whole note A in the right hand and a whole note G in the left hand. Measure 4 features a whole note G in the right hand and a whole note F# in the left hand. Measure 5 features a whole note F# in the right hand and a whole note E in the left hand. Measure 6 features a whole note E in the right hand and a whole note D in the left hand. Measure 7 features a whole note D in the right hand and a whole note C in the left hand. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

6 figure c Cédez au Mouvt

pp

figure d

pp

figure e

It is difficult to say which note is most emphasized in these eight measures. Compared to "Voiles," a tonic note is not clear because no note stands out as the tonal center in the beginning eight measures of "Cloches à travers les feuilles".

Brouillards, from Préludes Book 2 (1913).

In this piece Debussy uses bitonality to describe 'fog.' Black against white key figuration is employed extensively, and two or more tonalities can be perceived simultaneously throughout.

In the first nine measures, the lower and the middle staves use white keys. Although the upper staff consists mostly of all black keys (except F \flat and C \flat), the predominant tonality is C major here. A dominant-tonic relationship of G major triads and C major triads appears in mm. 4 to 5, emphasizing the tonic note, C (Ex. 56).

Ex. 56. Brouillards, mm. 4-5.

The tonal center moves to F# in m. 10, and the pure black key figuration in mm. 10-17 implies an F# pentatonic scale. G major triads in the lower staff accompany the F# pentatonic harmony, causing a bitonal effect. A tonic-dominant relationship of F#-C# appears in the melody in mm. 11-12, followed by an F# major broken chord in mm. 13-14, emphasizing the tonic note, F# (Ex. 57).

Ex. 57. Brouillards, mm. 11-14.

11

13

Motive a is introduced in mm. 18 to 20. It involves a semitonal transposition. The rising melodic fourth relationship of D-G in m. 18 is sequenced up a half step in m. 19 (Ex. 58).

Ex. 58. Brouillards, mm. 18-20.

18 *Mouv^t*

pp un peu en dehors

pp < pp

8^a bassa

After the restatement of the opening materials, the tonal center moves to D, emphasized by the repetition of D major triads in mm. 30 to 33. However, the accompanying figure of D#-G# does not agree with the D major triads, causing a bitonal effect (Ex. 59).

Ex. 59. Brouillards, m. 32.

32 *Un peu retenu*

In m. 33, three different harmonies are employed simultaneously. The upper staff suggests G# major or g# minor, while a D major triad is used in the lower staff, and the eighth-note melodic figure consists of a B diminished triad. The tonality is obscured since there is no predominant tonic note here (Ex. 60).

Ex. 60. Brouillards, m. 33.

33

The interesting notation of the chord in m. 38 suggests the enharmonic change of a tonal center from $D\flat$ to $C\sharp$. Motive a is restated in the lower clef in mm. 38 to 40. The alternating black against white key figuration in m. 40 implies a tritone relationship of $C\sharp-G$ (Ex. 61).

Ex. 61. Brouillards, mm. 38-40.

38 Mouv!

pp

pp

8^a bassa

motive a

The tonal center returns to C in m. 43 with the return of the opening material. The end of this piece is quite perplexing. The chord progression of a C major triad to a B diminished triad in the last three measures (which are I to vii^o in C major) obscures any cadential feeling. Finally the piece ends with the impression of the title, "Brouillards" (fog). (Ex. 62)

Ex. 62. Brouillards, mm. 50-52.

Presque plus rien

50

Feux d'artifice, from Préludes Book 2 (1913)

This is the last of the 24 pieces in Préludes Book 1 and 2. As suggested by the title, this is a very brilliant and dramatic piece, employing a variety of harmonic materials. The bitonal effect with which Debussy experimented in "Brouillards" is highly advanced in this piece.

As he has done in some of his earlier works, Debussy uses the two whole-tone scales, C20 and C21 alternately in this piece. The triplet figure in the beginning 16 measures consists of a combination of the two whole-tone scales. Over this figure, the notes D and A \flat leap back and forth; both of these pitches belong to the whole-tone scale C20 (Ex. 63).

Ex. 63. Feux d'artifice, mm. 3-6.

3

5

C21-C20

Debussy uses motive a (Ex. 64), extensively throughout the piece. Various harmonies are applied to the motive, and it is frequently transposed up by half step. The original motive a is in the key of C major, and is first stated in mm. 27 to 29 (Ex. 64).

Ex. 64. Feux d'artifice, motive a

27.

This motive appears in a different harmonic context in mm. 35 to 36. These two measures consist of the whole-tone scale C21, and the perfect fifth relationship of C-G in the original motive is changed to the tritone relationship, F-C \flat , which causes tension (Ex. 65).

Ex. 65. Feux d'artifice, mm. 35-36.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for measures 35 and 36. Each system consists of three staves: a treble clef staff, a grand staff (treble and bass clefs), and a bass clef staff. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat). Measure 35 begins with a forte (f) dynamic in the treble staff, followed by a piano (p) dynamic in the grand staff. The grand staff contains a whole-tone scale in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Measure 36 continues the same texture, with a forte (f) dynamic in the treble staff. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings.

The motive appears again in mm. 42 to 43. This time it is rhythmically altered and accompanied by an A \flat dominant 13th harmony (Ex. 66).

Ex. 66. Feux d'artifice, mm. 42-43.

The image shows two measures of a musical score, numbered 42 and 43. Each measure is written for piano and consists of three staves: a treble clef staff, a grand staff (treble and bass clefs), and a bass clef staff. The key signature is three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab). The right hand plays a melody in C major, while the left hand plays a bass line in Db major. The piece concludes in Db major.

Bitonality is clearly established in the last nine measures of the piece. Over the basso ostinato figure $D\flat-A\flat$, a motive from "La Marseillaise" is presented in the key of C major. Motive a is also employed first in C major, in mm. 93-95. Debussy shifts the tonal center from C to $D\flat$ in m. 96. Finally the piece concludes peacefully in $D\flat$ major (Ex. 67).

Ex. 67. Feux d'artifice, mm. 90-98.

90 *Encore plus lent* *de très loin*

8^{va} bassa
aussi léger et *pp* que possible

95

8^{va} bassa

Bitonality is also implied in the simultaneous use of the two conflicting harmonies, F major triads and A^b dominant sevenths in m. 67 (Ex. 68).

Ex. 68. Feux d'artifice, m. 67.

67

pp *p* *cresc. molto* *f*

8

In m. 87, the simultaneous use of glissandi on the white and black keys causes a dissonant effect (Ex. 69).

Ex. 69. Feux d'artifice, m. 87.

Musical score for Example 69, showing a piano piece with glissandi on white and black keys. The score is in 3/4 time and features a treble and bass clef. The right hand has two staves, with the upper staff marked with a '2' and '8' in parentheses, and the lower staff marked with '8'. Both right-hand staves are marked 'glissando' and 'ff'. The left hand has one staff with a '3' and '8' in parentheses, marked '8^a b^a 1'. The score shows a sequence of notes with glissandi lines, creating a dissonant effect.

Successive use of major seconds is frequently employed in the piece, and most of them imply whole-tone harmonies. The major seconds figure in mm. 53 to 56 consists of the whole-tone scale C21. No pitch stands out as the tonal center (Ex. 70).

Ex. 70. Feux d'artifice, mm. 53-56.

Musical score for Example 70, showing a piano piece with successive major seconds. The score is in 3/4 time and features a treble and bass clef. The right hand has two staves, with the upper staff marked with a '3' and '8' in parentheses, and the lower staff marked with '3'. Both right-hand staves are marked 'f' and 'strident'. The left hand has one staff with a '3' and '8' in parentheses, marked '3 pp (laissez vibrer)'. The score shows a sequence of notes with major seconds, creating a whole-tone scale.

55 Retenu -

Planing is occasionally used without any harmonic context and helps to obscure the tonality. In mm. 61 to 62, C major triads and glissandi on the white keys suggest C major; whereas the following planing does not imply any tonal center (Ex. 71).

Ex. 71. Feux d'artifice, mm. 61-62.

61 Rubato

In summary, tonal ambiguity is effectively achieved by various harmonic materials in this piece, such as the use of whole-tone harmonies without suggesting a tonal center, bitonality, transpositions of the motive, and planing without

harmonic context. The whole-tone harmonies and planing had been frequently used in many of Debussy's earlier piano works; whereas bitonality and motivic transposition are new techniques in these later works. Among the twelve pieces in Etudes which were completed two years later than this prelude there can be found many examples of these new techniques, and the treatment of tonality is much more advanced through their use.

Pour les Degrés Chromatiques, from Etudes (1915).

As mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, some authors consider this etude, "Pour les degrés chromatiques" as "stretching tonality beyond the limits"⁴⁰ or "containing atonal contexts".⁴¹ In this 88-measure piece there is no tonal focus until measure 43, where the pitch A is only suggested through the use of a pedal-point. The final tonality, A Aeolian, is not established until the last six measures. The tonality shifts so rapidly that establishment of any particular tonal center is tenuous.

Chromatic figuration appears in the background throughout the piece. Various harmonies are employed with the chromatic

⁴⁰ Roger Nichols, "Debussy, Claude," The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (10th ed., 1990), V, 306.

⁴¹ Richard Parks, "Tonal Analogues as Atonal Resources and Their Relation to Form in Debussy's Chromatic Etude," Journal of Music Theory, XXVIII (1985), 33.

figure, such as pentatonic, diatonic, and modal harmonies. Pentatonic harmony is implied in the two primary motives (motive a and b), and this harmony plays an important role through the frequent use of these motives.

Motive a appears in m. 7, consisting of the three notes: B \flat , D \flat , and E \flat , which are members of the D \flat pentatonic scale. Octave displacement is also applied in this motive. It appears in sequence in mm. 7 to 9 (Ex. 72).

Ex. 72. Pour les degrés chromatiques, mm. 7-9.

7

One of the important characteristics of motive a is its use of a repeated major seconds with octave displacement. The last 18 measures employ this extensively, as shown in the following example:

Ex. 73. Pour les degrés chromatiques, mm. 74-76.

74 *sa bassa:*

The first statement of motive \flat consists of the notes F, G, A, and D, which are members of the F pentatonic scale. Tritone relationships are implied between the motive and the chromatic figure in the background (Ex. 74).

Ex. 74. Pour les degrés chromatiques, mm. 11-14.

11 *sempre leggerissimo*

pp

dolce espress. *(un peu en dehors)*

13

The second statement of motive \flat appears in mm. 43 to 46. The final tonal center of this piece, A is suggested by the

use of pedal tones. Motive a is also implied among the added chord tones in mm. 43 to 44. The major second, A-B in m. 43 and F in m. 44 closely relate to motive a (Ex. 75).

Ex. 75. Pour les degrés chromatiques, mm. 43-46.

43 *sempre leggerissimo*

45

The final statement of motive b appears in mm. 78 to 81. In this case the tonic note is $A\flat$, and is emphasized by every downbeat of the chromatic figure. The chords in mm. 78 to 80 imply a scale: $A\flat-B\flat-C-D-E\flat-F-G\flat-A\flat$. This scale is frequently used by Bartók. It is called "Lydian-Mixolydian" scale because of its combination of raised fourth and lowered seventh degrees.⁴² In Debussy in Proportion, Roy Howat calls it an "acoustic scale," since it closely corresponds to the

⁴² Roy Howat, Debussy in Proportion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 48.

overtone series.⁴³ In m. 81, Debussy uses $D\flat$ instead of D , which suggests the shift to the $A\flat$ Mixolydian scale (Ex. 76).

Ex. 76. Pour les degrés chromatiques, mm. 78-81.

Dominant seventh and ninth chords are frequently employed, which add a diatonic flavor to the piece. These types of chords often appear in planing. In mm. 35 to 38, Debussy uses planing of the dominant ninth chords, none of which resolves functionally. Root movements here include major and minor second, major third, and tritone relationships, and a tonal center is difficult to perceive (Ex. 77).

⁴³ Ibid.

Ex. 77. Pour les degrés chromatiques, mm. 35-38.

35

mf *p m.d.*
dolce, in poco marcato

37

Through the frequent use of motive \underline{b} , F receives considerable emphasis until m. 66. However, the final tonal center of the piece is A, which is first suggested by pedal tones in mm. 43 to 46. The tonality of A Aeolian is only established in the last six measures, following A^b Mixolydian mode in mm. 78 to 82 (Ex. 78).

Ex. 78. Pour les degrés chromatiques, mm. 83-88.

83

smorzando

In addition to the emphases on A and F, three other notes are also highlighted: E, G, and Ab. This multiple emphasis creates further ambiguity of the tonality for the listener.

In summary, the tonality is quite unstable in this piece since the tonal center shifts constantly. Also there are often more than two different harmonies employed simultaneously, which tend to confuse the sense of tonality. The tonality is often suggested by motives a and b, which sustain strong tonality, but when these motives are not present, it is difficult to perceive. Besides the tonal experimentation, the motivic manipulation is quite interesting in this etude, especially when the two motives appear simultaneously with the chromatic figure in the background.

Pour les Notes Répétées, from Etudes (1915)

The last example in this chapter, "Pour les notes répétées," presents the two opposite trends which are mentioned in Chapter I. There are two main motives which have totally opposite characteristics: one is experimental in terms of tonality (motive a), and the other retains traditional harmony (motive b).

The first statement of motive a appears in mm.1 to 2. This motive implies the two whole-tone scales, C20 and C21. The following figure which begins on the fourth beat of m. 2,

functions as an answer to the motive. This answering figure employs the whole-tone scale C21 (Ex. 79).

Ex. 79. Pour les notes répétées, mm. 1-3.

The musical score for Ex. 79 consists of two measures of music in 4/4 time, marked 'Scherzando' and 'pp'. The first measure is labeled 'C20' and the second 'C21'. A bracket above the first measure is labeled 'motive a'. The second measure features a whole-tone scale in the bass line, marked 'p'.

The second statement of the motive appears in mm. 9 to 10, with the second half expanded. It is harmonized with the two whole-tone harmonies alternately (Ex. 80).

Ex. 80. Pour les notes répétées, mm. 9-10.

The musical score for Ex. 80 consists of two measures of music in 4/4 time, marked 'pp'. The first measure is labeled '9' and the second '10'. The music is harmonized with two whole-tone harmonies alternately.

In mm. 47 to 48, the motive is restated in a different harmonic context, and the final interval has been changed from the tritone to a perfect fifth. Texture here is contrapuntal, and each of the three lines implies different scales. The motive in the treble consists of five notes: G,

A, B, D, Eb. The middle voice implies a chromatic scale, and the lower voice, B-C#, implies whole-tone scale C21 except for Bb in m. 48 (Ex. 81).

Ex. 81. Pour les notes répétées, mm. 47-48.

47 *Poco rubato*

The last statement of motive a appears in mm. 70 to 71. The descending perfect fifth is again used here. Debussy uses whole-tone chords in planing for the accompanying figure, which implies the two whole-tone harmonies alternately (Ex. 82).

Ex. 82. Pour les notes répétées, mm. 70-71.

70 *molto staccato*

Motive b consists of a combination of diatonic and chromatic scales. The first statement of the motive appears in the lowest line of mm. 28 to 29, with a repeated major

seconds figure in the background. C major tonality is suggested from the second beat in m. 29 by E-G-C in the bass; However, the repeated major seconds figure of G \flat -A \flat in the treble imply the whole-tone harmony C20, and obscure the tonality in m. 28 to the first beat of m. 29 (Ex. 83).

Ex. 83. Pour les notes répétées, mm. 28-29.

28

expressif et léger

pp

motive b

The second half of the motive is expanded in mm. 35 to 36. The falling fifth relationship of G-C is repeated in m. 36. This measure implies the pentatonic harmony on C (Ex. 84).

Ex. 84. Pour les notes répétées, mm. 34-36.

34

p

motive b

Texture in mm. 58 to 59 is quite interesting. Motive b is accompanied by triplet figures and planing. Even though

the tonality of E major is clearly indicated in the beginning and end of these two measures, harmonic effects are occasionally perplexing, due to planing (Ex. 85).

Ex. 85. Pour les notes répétées, mm. 58-59.

Tritone relationships appear frequently throughout the piece. For example, the first four notes of motive *a*, C#-D-C#-F#, include this relationship. It is employed in sequence in m. 67 (Ex. 86).

Ex. 86. Pour les notes répétées, mm. 66-67.

The two-note figure in the bass in mm. 72 and 73 also consists of this relationship (Ex. 87).

Ex. 87 Pour les notes répétées, mm. 72-73.

72

There is a conflict between three tonal centers in this piece. The note C# is emphasized in motive a by repetition in m. 13. The note C is the tonic note of motive b, and appears frequently in dominant-tonic relationships of G-C. However, the final tonal center in this piece is G. This tonic note is quite foreign to motive a, in which C# serves as a tonic note. The note G is not even included in this motive, and is a tritone away from C#. In motive b, G appears as a dominant to C.

This conflict of tonal centers appears in the last four measures, 81 to 84. Over a g minor triad, C# is emphasized by repetition in m. 81. G is emphasized by its repetition and the dominant-tonic relationship of D-G in the first beat of m. 82. The chords in mm. 82 to 83 consist of five notes, G, A#, B#, C# and D, which create a perplexing harmony. G, D, and A# create a g minor triad, in which A# is an enharmonic equivalent of Bb. B# is the enharmonic spelling of C, which is a tonal center of motive b. C# is emphasized by motive a. This conflict is sustained until the

penultimate measure. The final measure indicates the triumph of the note G, over C and C# (Ex. 88).

Ex. 88. Pour les notes répétées, mm. 81-84.

81

pp doux et rapide

à peine

There are several similarities between this etude and "Pour les degrés chromatiques." First of all, both of them employ two main motives in various harmonic contexts. The contrast between the two motives is more remarkable in "Pour les notes répétées." Secondly, the final tonality is established very late in both pieces. Combinations of more than two different harmonic materials are employed exclusively, which tend to obscure the feeling of the tonality. Functional harmony appears more frequently in "Pour les notes répétées" than in "Pour les degrés chromatiques." Dominant-tonic relationships often sound fresh to the ear since the overall harmonic context is complex and ambiguous in terms of tonality. In summary, tonal experimentation is highly advanced in these two etudes, while functional harmony appears occasionally, creating contrast between strong tonality and tonal ambiguity.

CHAPTER IV

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

Several compositional techniques in Debussy's piano works are discussed in Chapter III. Some of these techniques are found mainly in one period, while others are found throughout his piano works. This chapter will summarize the latter.

Diatonicism

Debussy never completely abandoned diatonicism and music based on traditional functional harmony. There are several works which establish the key at the very beginning of the piece, works which use more triads than extended dominant chords and employ many dominant-tonic progressions. Examples are "Movement," from Images Book 1 (1905), "Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum," from Children's Corner (1909), "La Cathédrale engloutie," from Préludes Book 1 (1910), and "Pour les cinq doigts," from Etudes (1915). All of these examples are written in C major; it is interesting to find that Debussy employed this particular key for his more classical, diatonic pieces.

There are also other pieces which are basically diatonic but employ more extended dominant chords than triads and include a greater variety of harmonies: Deux Arabesques (1888), "Prélude" and "Clair de lune" from Suite Bergamasque

(1890), "Bruyères" from Préludes Book 2 (1913), and "Pour les octaves," from Etudes (1915).

Pentatonic Melody and Harmony

Pentatonic materials are frequently used in early as well as later works. Debussy employed pentatonic scales mainly in three different ways: (1) as the sole basis of melody and harmony, (2) in combination with diatonic scales, and (3) in combination with modal scales. In his early works such as Deux Arabesques or Suite Bergamasque, pentatonic scales are frequently implied in a diatonic context. It was not until 1903 that Debussy wrote a piece which uses pentatonic scales exclusively: "Pagodes," from Estampes (1903). In "Pagodes," he suggests the Far East by the extensive use of pentatonic scales. Other works which consist mostly of pentatonic materials are "Jimbo's lullaby," from Children's Corner (1909) and "La fille aux cheveux de lin," from Préludes Book 1 (1910). In these pieces the tonal center is usually suggested by the use of pedal tones or dominant-tonic relationships; when there is no note which is emphasized as a tonic, tonality becomes ambiguous, since any note in a pentatonic scale can be heard as a tonal center.

There are some examples in which pentatonic scales are employed in a modal context. In the first two measures of "Pour les quartes," from Etudes (1915), pentatonic scale

A-C-D-E-G is implied in planing of fourths, with the tonality of A Aeolian mode (Ex. 89).

Ex. 89. Pour les quartes, mm. 1-2.



Whole-tone Melody and Harmony

An early example of the use of whole-tone materials in Debussy's piano works is found in "Menuet," from Suite Bergamasque (1890). In Ex. 90, part of the whole-tone scale C20 is employed here as a passing scale (Ex. 90).

Ex. 90. Menuet, from Suite Bergamasque, m. 10.



It is in "Prélude" from Pour le Piano (1901) that Debussy first wrote a large section totally based on whole-tone scales in his piano works. He also introduced the alternate use of two different whole-tone scales in this piece.

Debussy continued this practice in the following pieces:

"Jardins sous la pluie," from Estampes (1903), "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest," from Préludes Book 1 (1910), "Feux d'artifice," from Préludes Book 2 (1913), and "Pour les notes répétées," from Etudes (1915).

Debussy often employs both C20 and C21 in a single piece. "Voiles," from Préludes Book 1 (1909) is an exception where a single whole-tone scale, C20 is used exclusively. Sections using pentatonic scales often alternate with sections using whole-tone scales. Examples of this are "Voiles," from Préludes Book 1 (1909) and "Pour les notes répétées," from Etudes (1915), where the main sections use whole-tone materials. "Jimbo's lullaby," from Children's Corner (1909) is an opposite case, in which whole-tone harmony is employed between pentatonic sections.

Debussy frequently employs pedal tones to maintain a tonal center in a whole-tone harmonic context. When these pedal tones are absent, the tonality tends to become ambiguous.

Modality

Use of medieval church modes is one of the techniques which is most frequently found in Debussy's piano music. In fact, it is difficult to find pieces which do not employ modality. There are pieces in which tonality is clear in a modal harmonic context; however, in the other works, tonality

is occasionally obscured by the use of non-functional harmony. The use of chromatic alterations, planing, and free root movement employed in modality also help to deemphasize a tonal focus. In "Sarabande," from Pour le Piano, Debussy succeeded in creating tonal ambiguity by skillfully employing these techniques.

Bitonality and Polytonality

In Debussy's later piano works, it is often difficult to distinguish between consonance and dissonance due to the use of chords built on unorthodox intervals and unresolved nonharmonic tones. Dissonant harmonies are often produced by the use of polychords. A bichordal effect is found in Ex. 91, in which two conflicting harmonies, G major and F# dominant seventh, are employed simultaneously, causing a dissonant effect (Ex. 91).

Ex. 91. Movement, from Images Book 1 (1905), m. 63.



Debussy used this bitonal effect extensively in "Brouillards." In the last eight measures of "Feux d'artifice," a clear example of bitonality can be seen, in

which C major and D \flat major are employed simultaneously. Another clear example of bitonality can be found in Berceuse Héroïque, which was written in 1914. As he quoted "La Marseillaise" in the bitonal section in "Feux d'artifice," Debussy used a quotation from "La Belgium" in this piece. The quotation appears in F major in the upper staff, over E \flat minor seventh chords in the middle staff in mm. 60 to 63. The theme reappears in a figure consisting of major seconds in mm. 64 to 66. This time the lower staff becomes E \flat major, while the middle staff uses quintal harmony built on F (F-C-G). E \flat is added to the quintal harmony in m. 66. The total effect of these three staves in mm. 64 to 67 is a pentatonic harmony: E \flat , F, G, B \flat , C (Ex. 92).

Ex. 92. Berceuse Héroïque, mm. 60-67.

60

The musical score for Ex. 92, Berceuse Héroïque, mm. 60-67, is presented in three staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat major). It contains a melodic line with triplets and is marked "lontain" and "plus lointain". The middle staff is in bass clef with a key signature of two flats (E-flat major). It contains a harmonic line with octaves and is marked "m. g.". The bottom staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat major). It contains a harmonic line with octaves and is marked "pp". The score shows measures 60, 61, and 62.

63

Lent

ppp

8

Planing

Planing is also extensively employed in Debussy's piano works. Planing may involve a single interval or complex chords. It may be either diatonic or chromatic, tonal or real. Since chords employed in planing usually do not have a functional relationship, this technique can serve to weaken the feeling of tonality. Free use of root movement and chromatic alteration also tend to deemphasize tonality.

Others

(1) Gapped scales

As discussed in Chapter III, a gapped scale is often used in the works which describe the land of Spain. In these works, the scale is employed in a modal harmony, including some chromatic alterations.

(2) Chromatic scales

Generally, Debussy uses the chromatic scale as "background" or "secondary" material in his piano works. In

"Pour les degrés chromatiques," from *Etudes* (1915), this scale appears as a background figure throughout the piece.

(3) Lydian-Mixolydian scale

"Lydian-Mixolydian" scale is exclusively employed in "L'isle joyeuse," which was written in 1904. For example, a motive in the treble in m. 9 of this piece uses the scale on A: A-B-C#-D#-E-F#-G-A (Ex. 93).

Ex. 93. L'isle joyeuse, m. 9.



(4) Added tone chords

Triads with added sixths (e.g.: C E G A) appear frequently in Debussy's piano works. Since all the notes belong to a pentatonic scale, the chords are often found in a pentatonic harmonic context. Ex. 94 shows triads with added sixth employed in a pentatonic harmony (Ex. 94).

Ex. 94. General Lavine, form Préludes Book 2,
mm. 12-13.

12

In Ex. 95, added sixth chord is used as a cadential tonic triad.

Ex. 95. Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest, mm. 69-71.

69

Reteuu
8^{va}

au Mouvt

Added second chords are employed in a whole-tone harmony
in Ex. 96.

Ex. 96. Pour les notes répétées, from Etudes, m. 40.

40

ff strident ff

(5) Sonorities featuring major seconds

Successive use of major seconds are usually found as a background figure in Debussy's piano works. There are many examples of the figure consisting of major seconds, especially in Children's Corner (1909), and Préludes Book 1 and 2 (1910, 1913). The figure is sometimes used in a pentatonic harmony (Ex. 97, 98), and sometimes in a whole-tone harmony (Ex. 99, 100). The effect is intentionally humorous.

Ex. 97. Minstrels, from Préludes Book 1, mm. 9-10.

9

Mouv^t (Un peu plus allant)

p

(très détaché)

Ex. 98. Jimbo's lullaby, from Children's Corner,
mm. 19-22.

19 *un peu en dehors*

pp *pp* *sempre pp*

Ex. 99. Jimbo's lullaby, mm. 9-14.

9

pp

Ex. 100. Pour les notes répétées, mm. 75-76.

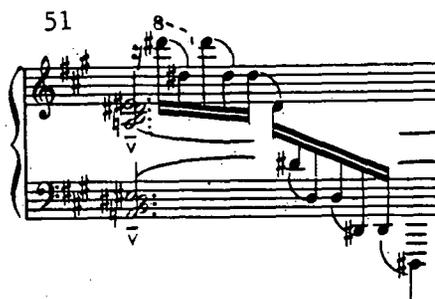
75

p *p* *p* *p*

As seen in Chapter III, major seconds are employed in a motive with octave displacement in "Pour les degrés chromatiques" (1915) (See Ex. 73).

In Ex. 101, two different major seconds, A-B and D#-E# are employed simultaneously, which can be considered as a cluster. The effect is rather dissonant, and all the notes belong to the whole-tone harmony C20 (Ex. 101).

Ex. 101. Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest, m. 51.



Ex. 102. "Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses," mm. 1-2.



Measures 91 to 96 in "Pour les cinq doigts," from Etudes (1915), consist exclusively of the alternating use of the white and black keys tonalities (L.H.: G \flat and D \flat major; R.H.: G major and D minor) (Ex. 103).

Ex. 103. Pour les cinq doigts, mm. 91-92.

Simultaneous use appears in "Pour les huit doigts," from Etudes. (1915) (Ex. 104).

Ex. 104. Pour les huit doigts, mm. 40-41.

40

Both alternating and simultaneous uses of the white and black keys are frequently employed in "Feux d'artifice." The alternating use of the white and black keys gives a perplexing impression, whereas the simultaneous use causes a dissonant effect. These techniques occasionally obscure the tonality, where there is no tonic note implied in the context.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Even while a student at the Paris Conservatoire, Debussy's first priority was always originality. He did not want to be a successor; instead, he wished to become an innovator. For him there was no theory, and pleasure was a law.⁴⁴ He tried to be free from all the limitations of functional harmony and tonality.

Although he tried to free himself from the traditional rules and invent his own methods of composition, his early works nonetheless show a mastery of Romantic style. However, experimentation continued to be important to him throughout his life. His works became more and more experimental in terms of tonality as time went on. The way he freed himself from classical tonality was different from other composers of the time, who employed extreme chromaticism to obscure tonality. As an alternative to major or minor scales, he used pentatonic, whole-tone, and modal scales. Lacking the half-step leading tone between scale degrees 7 and 8, these scales tend to lack functional diatonic relationships and weaken the sense of tonal focus. He also invented chords built on unorthodox intervals, and a clear distinction

⁴⁴ Roger Nichols, "Debussy, Claude," The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (10th ed., 1990), V, 306.

between consonance and dissonance disappeared in his music. Moreover, he introduced polychordal effects in his later works. In terms of harmonic progression, there is no need of resolution for dissonant chords. Root movements became free, and through the use of planing, harmonies ceased to have a functional relationship. All these factors tend to reject local tonal hierarchies. Bitonality and polytonality are also employed in his later works. In these works, Debussy had almost reached the boundary between tonality and atonality. Even in his most adventurous works, however, he never completely abandoned tonality. He always used key signatures, and always returned to the indicated key at the end of each work. When the harmonic context was too complex to sustain tonality, he employed pedal points or ostinatos to give a sense of tonal gravity. In summary, a clear change from strong tonal focus to tonal ambiguity can be seen in his piano works.

As has been stated earlier, Debussy never completely abandoned diatonic writing. Even in his latest works such as Etudes, there are some pieces which are very diatonic and sustain a strong sense of tonality throughout. Pentatonic harmony is often employed in a diatonic harmonic context, especially in works intended to be humorous.

His works can be divided into three categories, in terms of style characteristics. The first category includes works which are strongly impressionistic, evoking a mood or an

atomsphere, rather than making a direct, clear statement. These works often depict nature, and they are descriptive and sensitive in their character. Harmonic vocabulary is often complex, and the sense of tonality is often ambiguous in these works. The second category shows little or no trace of impressionism. Works are not descriptive; rather, they are classical, or absolute. Examples which belong to this category are Pour le piano, "Hommage à Rameau" and "Movement" from Images Book 1, and Etudes. The third category can be called exotic. Debussy had a great interest in foreign lands such as the Far and Near East, and Spain. He employs pentatonic and quartal harmonies to describe the Orient, occasionally using the effect of the Javanese gamelan which impressed him at the Paris Exhibition. His compositions in the Spanish style evoke the atomsphere of Spain. Though he borrowed some techniques from Spanish composers whom he knew, the tonal experimentation which occurs in these works sets them apart.

In conclusion, Debussy's innovative expansion of tonality is remarkable. He employed great freedom in terms of harmony and tonality. He created a new harmonic vocabulary, freeing dissonance from the need for resolution. Debussy opened new territory for later composers, and in this sense contributed greatly to the history of music.

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