A Comparative Analysis of Debussy's *Ondine* and Ravel's *Ondine*

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Abstract

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In his formative years, Claude Debussy (1862-1918) experienced the influence of the artistic movement of Impressionism and the literary movement of Symbolism. Both of these movements profoundly influenced Debussy and contributed to the formation of his aesthetics and tastes. Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), under the influence of Debussy, established his style by incorporating classic rules along with his own innovations inspired by Impressionist and Symbolist values. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the differences in style between the two composers through a comparative analysis of Debussy's Prelude *Ondine* and Ravel's *Ondine* from *Gaspard de la nuit.*

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INTRODUCTION

In his formative years, Claude Debussy (1862-1918) witnessed the prosperity of the artistic movement of Impressionism and the literary movement of Symbolism. Both of these movements profoundly influenced Debussy and contributed to the formation of his aesthetics and tastes. Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), under the influence of Debussy, established his style by incorporating classic rules with his own innovations inspired by Impressionist and Symbolist values. Debussy and Ravel received influences from the same sources, which include, among others: their studies at Conservatoire de Paris, the 1889 Exhibition de Paris, and Russian influences of The Mighty Five and the literature. Despite the fact that they are oftentimes slotted into the same category, that of Impressionist composers, their styles are quite distinct from one another. In this paper, Chapter One discusses the cultural events that took place during the time of Debussy and Ravel, as a means to understand the two composers' aesthetic formation. Chapter Two talks about the origin of Ondine, the plot of Fouqué novella *Undine*, and compositions inspired by *Undine*. Chapters three and Four are analyses of Debussy's *Ondine* and Ravel's *Ondine*, respectively. The analyses examine the harmonic languages and structures of the two pieces. Chapter Five is dedicated to comparing the two pieces through the parameters of structure, rhythm and pulse, harmony, and melody. Through the analyses and the comparisons of the two works, one can examine the compositional techniques that Debussy and Ravel used for their works and see that the two compositions are different in many ways.

CHAPTER 1

Debussy's and Ravel's Backgrounds

It is beneficial for the performer to learn about the events and experiences that helped Debussy and Ravel form their aesthetics, because it adds a dimension of thinking when the performer interprets and analyzes the scores. This chapter will discuss the prominent values of Impressionism and Symbolism as well as the two composers' acceptance of these values.

Debussy and Impressionism

The term "Impressionism" first appeared as a derogatory term to deride the painter Claude Monet's painting *Impression, Sunrise. Impression, Sunrise* was painted in 1873 and was displayed in the first exhibition of the eight Impressionist Exhibitions (1874–86). The term "Impressionist" was used to criticize the painting's "lack of tradition and finish."[1] Debussy's earliest known association with Impressionism was when the secretary of the *Académie des Beaux Arts* remarked on Debussy's orchestral work *Printemps:*

> Monsieur Debussy… has a pronounced tendency – too pronounced – towards an exploration of the strange. One has the feeling of musical color exaggerated to the point where it causes the composer to forget the importance of precise construction and form. It is to be strongly hoped that he will guard against this vague impressionism, which is one of the most dangerous enemies of truth in works of arts.[2]

As Impressionism evolved, the negative connotation of the term gradually dropped off and became a more neutral term that referred to the style. Stefan Jarociński effectively summarized the development and acceptance of Impressionism: "Impressionism, which had for long been a

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[1] Jann Pasler, "Impressionism." *Grove Music Online*, 2001, https://doi-org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.50026

[2] Jean Barraqué. *Debussy*. (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 50.

much-disputed subject, banished from the salons and ridiculed, began gradually to penetrate the consciousness of artists and intellectuals, and ended by making a breach in their ways and habits of thinking." [3] In any case, Debussy disliked being labeled as either an Impressionist or a Symbolist and considered both terms as "useful terms of abuse."[4] After examining Debussy's dislike of the Impressionist label and the relevant historical background, one cannot help but ask why Debussy is still called an Impressionist composer today. The inference, which is drawn from both Debussy's words and historians' examination, is that Debussy shared similar values with the Impressionist painters.

The technique that distinguished Impressionist painters from Realist painters is the innovative use of color. Previously, the most dominant technique used by the Realist painters was chiaroscuro, which is a painting style that predominantly uses "black-and-white or dark brown and white and represents only the light and shade, and not various colors."[5] The Impressionist painters freed themselves from the constraint of brownish hues and explored the use of a wide variety of colors.

A counterpart of this innovation in the use of various colors can be found in Debussy's compositions. First of all, among the various qualities that create the distinctive "Debussy sound," harmony is the one that contributes the most. The "colors" that Debussy used to render the distinctive sounds are ninth chords, medieval modal scales, exotic scales, parallel harmonies, and gamelan-like bass lines.

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[3] Stefan Jarociński. *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism*, trans. Rollo H. Myers. (London: Eddenburg, 1981), 63.

[4] Barraqué, 48.

[5] *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. "Chiaroscuro."

Secondly, prior to the Impressionist movement, the subjects of paintings were mainly inanimate objects and people. Moreover, most of the paintings were performed in indoor studio settings. In contrast, the most popular subjects of Impressionist paintings were natural landscapes. Debussy, as a person who was very fond of nature, named a lot of his works after natural scenes, such as *La Mer, Reflets dans l'eau,* and *Printemps.* Debussy's views on presenting nature in music are in line with some of the essential concepts of Symbolism, which will be elaborated upon later in this chapter.

Thirdly, the tendency to loosen the restraints of conventional rules, as was criticized by the secretary of the *Académie des Beaux Arts*, is another value that Debussy and the Impressionist painters shared. One of the foremost Impressionist painters, Camille Pissarro, advised his students not to paint "according to rules and principles" but to paint for "what you observe and feel." He also suggested that one ought to "paint generously and unhesitatingly, for it is best not to lose the first impression."[6] Some of Debussy's statements about forms and theories show agreement with Pissarro. Debussy was asked about what direction young composers should follow. In his response, he wrote:

> People put too much stress on the methods of writing music, on formulae and on craftsmanship! People look for ideas in themselves, whereas they should seek them outside of themselves. We don't pay enough attention to the thousand noises of nature around us; we don't listen out for this music which is so varied, which she offers us so generously...This, according to me, is the new path.[7]

When he was told that his work was "theoretically absurd," he replied "There is no theory. You

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[6] John Rewald. *The History of Impressionism.* (New York: Museum of Modern Arts, 1973), 458.

[7] Caroline Potter, "Debussy and Nature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 137.

merely have to listen. Pleasure is the law."[8] Debussy added: "Everything which can be perceived by a fine ear in the rhythm of the surrounding world can be represented musically. Some people want most of all to conform to the rules; I, on the other hand, want only to render what I hear."[9]

The preceding quotes by Pissarro and Debussy point to another important aspect of Impressionism – spontaneity. Pissarro's emphasis on the immediate grasp of the first impression and Debussy's belief in the instant pleasure of hearing, echoes David Hume's definition of Impression in *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748). In Hume's writing, an impression suggests the immediate effect of hearing, seeing, and feeling on the mind. After seeing the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874, the art critic Jules Castagnary defined the Impressionist painters as the artists who "render not a landscape but the sensation produced by a landscape."[10] In a similar way, Debussy wrote:

> I would always rather deal with something where the passage of events is to some extent subordinated to a thorough and extended portrayal of human feelings. That way, I think music can become more personal, more true to life, you can refine your means of expressions.[11]

Another indicator showing Debussy's appreciation of spontaneity is his interests in the arabesque. In *Grove Music Online*, Maurice J.E. Brown defines arabesque as "A term, apparently introduced into Europe during the Moorish conquest of Spain, first applied to architecture and painting to describe an ornamental frieze or border, whose elaborations, foliate and curlicued,

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[8] Edward Lockspeiser. *Debussy: His Life and Mind.* Vol. 1. (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 207.

[9] Potter, 138.

[10] Rewald, 330.

[11] Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, ed. Roger Nichols and François Lesure, trans. François Lesure (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 8.

have their counterparts in music in ornamentation and complex figuration."[12] A few hundred years later, the arabesque achieved its renaissance in the artistic movement called "Art Nouveau" that occurred roughly between 1890 and 1910. Debussy was a close follower of this artistic movement. He not only decorated his apartment in rue Cardinet in the style of Art Nouveau, but also applied the theories of the arabesque in his compositions. Edward Lockspeiser commented on the association between Debussy and the arabesque in 1890s. He wrote: "We have much evidence showing that Debussy's musical and artistic sensibility at this stage was a reflection of the theories of the Art Nouveau movement. His conception of melody as an "arabesque" was the direct musical counterpart of these theories."[13]

An arabesque in music, can be "the contrapuntal decoration of a basic theme," "an elaboration by gruppetti," or "a rapidly changing series of harmonies that decorate, without furthering, a point in the progress of a composition."[14] Debussy's *Deux arabesques* are a great example of a musical counterpart to the arabesque in other arts. The first *Arabesque* imitates the shapes of plants' twining vines, which was a commonly used pattern in the Moorish arabesque. The second *Arabesque* presents the decorative features in the arabesque by the application of ornaments.

Debussy's remarks on the arabesque in a critical response to J. S. Bach offered another aspect of his understanding of the arabesque. He linked Bach's music with nature and believed

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[12] Maurice J.E. Brown, "Arabesque (i)." *Grove Music Online*, 2001, https://doi-org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.01137.

[13] Potter. 143.

[14] Brown.

that instead of using the "formulas harmoniques," Bach lived in an era "where 'the adorable arabesque' flourished."[15] Debussy elaborated this idea in another critic:

> The primitives, Palestrina, Vittoria, Orlando di Lasso, made use of that divine "arabesque." They discovered the principle in Gregorian chant and supported its delicate intertwinings with firm counterpoint. When Bach took over the arabesque, he made it more supple and fluid and, despite the severe discipline that great master imposed on beauty, it was able to move with that free, ever fresh fantasy which still amazes us today.[16]

In Bach's compositions, the "arabesque" that Debussy was referring to, may contain a different meaning from the superficial shape of the contrapuntal lines. It is possible that Debussy was acquainted with French mathematician Charles Henry's ideas on the arabesque. Henry's theories of color and shape influenced artists including Paul Signac, Georges Seurat, Paul Gauguin, and Maurice Denis – some of whom were friends of Debussy. Henry's idea of the arabesque was "continual autogenesis." José Argüelles, a commentator on Henry's writings, defined an arabesque (whether musical or visual) as a decorative motive that is "often intricate, repetitive, self-reproductive, and, ideally, self-mutative."[17] According to the definition on *Oxford English Dictionary,* autogenesis means "self-generation and origination with no external causes."[18] Therefore, if the traditional musical forms are the "external causes" that provide the driving forces, such as modulations, phrases, and structures, for the development of a composition, autogenesis can be likened as a motive or a theme that continuously generates another identical or mutative version of the original. The arabesque, with its dual functions of decorating and self-

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[15] Potter, 143.

[16] Roger Nichols, *The Life of Debussy.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 101.

[17] Jann Pasler, "Timbre, Voice-Leading, Musical Arabesque," in *Debussy in Performance*, ed. James R. Briscoe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 226.

[18] *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. "Autogenesis."

generating, is particularly intriguing because it offers a different angle to perceive and analyze Debussy's compositions.

Debussy and Symbolism

Symbolism first appeared as a literary movement under the leadership of the French poets Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine. In 1886, the Greek writer Jean Moréas published *Le Symbolisme (The Symbolist Manifesto)* in the French newspaper *Le Figaro.* In the publication, Moréas defined Symbolism: "In this art, scenes from nature, human activities, and all other real world phenomena will not be described for their own sake; here, they are perceptible surfaces created to represent their esoteric affinities with the primordial ideals."[19] In the book *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy,* Paul Roberts defines the essence of Symbolism and its embodiment in all fields – the "external nature and the internal imagination of the artist (whether painter, poet, or musician) combine to form the work of art – that the artist in some way alters, even distorts reality to find a higher truth."[20]

As the Symbolism matured, it stimulated responses from both visual artists and musicians. Debussy actively engaged in the movement. Every Tuesday, in Mallarmé's apartment in the Rue de Rome, "Les Mardistes" gathered and discussed philosophy, art, and literature together. Debussy was one of the members of this gathering along with Symbolist poets such as Paul Verlaine, Paul Valéry, and W. B. Yeats, to name a few. Debussy realized Symbolist concepts so well in his music that the painter Maurice Denis expressed his admiration for Debussy's

[19] Jean Moréas, "Le Symbolisme," *Le Figaro*, September 18, 1886.

[20] Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 2001), 23.

music, writing:

> His music kindled strange resonances within us, awakened a need at the deepest level for a lyricism that only he could satisfy. What the Symbolist generation was searching for with such passion and anxiety – light, sonority, and color, the expression of the soul, and the frisson of mystery – was realized by him unerringly; almost, it seemed to us then, without effort…. We perceived that here was something new.[21]

The most well-known example of Debussy's link with Symbolist poems is the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, which was inspired by Mallarmé's prose poem *L'après-midi d'un faune*. Additionally, Debussy set a number of the poems of Charles Baudelaire and Mallarmé to his song cycles and wrote a piano prelude named after Verlaine's poem *Clair de lune.*

In Symbolist poems, through metaphors, poets give objects symbolic meanings, thereby indirectly suggesting a feeling or an image. Debussy indicated his favor for this method of expression by describing music as "a dream from which the veils have been lifted," and suggested one ought to have "the courage to go on living in one's dream, and the energy to go on searching for the Inexpressible, which is the ideal of all art."[22] This statement is symbolic per se, due to the use of the words, "veil" and "dream." It implies that Debussy agreed with Symbolist poets' pursuit of the "Inexpressible" and their expressions in suggestive manners. He further expressed his favor of "suggesting" not "describing" in his remarks on *Prélude à l'après midi d'un faune:*

> The music of this Prelude is a very free illustration of the beautiful poem by Mallarmé. It is not merely a synthesis of the poem. It is rather successions of scenery through which the desires and dreams of the fawn are developing in the afternoon heat. Then, tired of pursuing the frightened fleeing 'nymphs" and "naiads," he lets himself slip into joyful sleep, filled with dreams that are finally

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[21] Roberts, 19.

[22] Debussy, 41-42.

realized, of complete possession of all nature.[23]

Debussy's views on depicting nature in his music also indicate his agreement with Symbolism. Debussy expressed that he "wanted music to have a freedom that she perhaps has more than any other art, as it is not restricted to a more or less exact reproduction of nature, but instead deals with the mysterious correspondence between Nature and the Imagination."[24] Namely, instead of a direct imitation of the sounds of nature, in his music, Debussy aspired to capture, as described by Potter, "an imaginative emotional response to what is invisible in nature."[25]

The indirectness of Symbolism allows artists (painters, poets, and musicians) to inspire each other and borrow elements from one another – symbolist poets frequently embrace musical elements, such as musical instruments and modes, in their poems; the painter James McNeil Whistler named his paintings using titles taken from music, such as *Symphony in White* and *Nocturne in Pink and Gray*; being a highly visual person, Debussy borrowed elements from visual arts as his good friend René Peter remarked: "To judge by his work, and by their titles, he is a painter and that is what he wanted to be; he calls his compositions pictures, sketches, prints, arabesques, masques, studies in black and white. Plainly it is his delight to paint in music."[26]

Ravel and Impressionism

[23] Arthur Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 151.

[24] Potter, 139.

[25] Ibid.,140.

[26] Oscar Thompson, *Debussy: Man and Artist* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), 19.

Earlier in his career, Ravel, along with his fellow artists from "Les Apaches," was an enthusiastic supporter of Debussy's music. The Impressionist features in Debussy's compositions had a profound effect upon Ravel. While Ravel also refused to be labeled an Impressionist, there are some elements in his compositions that represent Impressionist values. Firstly, Ravel's innovative use of harmonies, which resulted in unique musical colors, was in line with Impressionists painters' innovative use of visual colors. Like Debussy, Ravel also applied parallel harmonies, ninth chords, and moral scales including whole-tone scales, pentatonic scales, and medieval modal scales to render unique sonorities in his works. Furthermore, Ravel used non-chord tones to portray the subtle nuance of color changes, which resembles the blended colors and overlapping brush strokes in Impressionist paintings.

Secondly, Ravel's innovation of placing the accompaniment above the melodies in high registers in piano works, such as *Jeux d'eau* and *Ondine,* is another example of Impressionism. This innovative arrangement allows an extended use of the damper pedal, by which the vibration of the piano strings is consequently amplified. As a result, "rather than distinct notes," it will "give the blurred impressions of vibrations in the air,"[27] as described by Ravel's good friend and the first interpreter of most of his piano works, Ricardo Viñes.

In contrast to Debussy's and the Impressionist painters' rejection of the classic rules, Ravel, as he developed his personal style, maintained ties with these rules. In an interview with the musicologist David Ewen for the music journal *Étude*, Ravel said:

> I am not a modern composer in the strictest sense of the word, because my music is an evolution, not revolution. While I have always been receptive to new ideas in music, I have never tried to throw the laws of harmony and composition into discard. On the contrary, I have always drawn inspiration generously from the masters. I have never stopped studying, Mozart. To the

[27] Maurice Ravel et al., *Ravel According to Ravel* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1988), 7.

> greatest extent possible my music is built up on the traditions of the past and grows out of them. [28]

One of the classic traditions that Ravel followed closely is forms. A substantial amount of Ravel's piano works is in dance forms, and notable examples include: *Minuet Antique, Pavane pour une infante défunte, Le tombeau de Couperin,* and *Mouvement de Menuet* from *Sonatine.* Sonata form is another classic form that Ravel frequently used. For instance, *Jeux d'eau* and *Sonatine* are in sonata form.

Ravel was also at odds with the Impressionists' emphasis on spontaneity. Ravel placed emphasis on a compositional process with clarity, deliberation, calculated planning, and logic. Igor Stravinsky called Ravel the "Swiss clockmaker" (in fact, Ravel's father was a Swiss-born watchmaker) for his meticulous craftsmanship. Ravel expressed his pursuit of technical mastery and craftsmanship by saying:

> I am sometimes credited with opinions which appear very paradoxical concerning the falsity of art and the dangers of sincerity. The fact is I refuse simply and absolutely to confound the conscience of an artist, which is one thing, with his sincerity, which is another. Sincerity is of no value unless one's conscience helps to make it apparent. This conscience compels us to turn ourselves into good craftsmen. My objective, therefore, is technical perfection. I can strive unceasingly to this end, since I am certain of never being able to attain it. The important thing is to get nearer to it all the time.[29]

In his good friend Émile Vuillermoz's description of the working Ravel, Vuillermoz likened Ravel to a mechanic and expressed approval of Ravel's aspiration for accuracy and precision:

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[28] Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Co., 1968), 224.

[29] Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 118.

> One can well see Maurice Ravel leaning on his bench, the loupe in his eye, putting a note in one of his orchestra scores with the same care of a good worker fixing a ruby in the mechanisms of a watch. The precision, that meticulousness, and that dexterity of hand are all to his honor.[30]

Ravel's observance of the classic rules and his calculation before and during the compositional process establish a significant difference between him and Debussy – Debussy intended to instantly write down the response to an impression in musical notation, whereas Ravel would only put down a note with pre-calculation.

Ravel and Symbolism

Ravel's interest in Symbolism can be seen in his fondness for Symbolist poetry. The American poet Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was one of the poets who profoundly influenced Ravel. In *The Poetic Principle,* Poe wrote that music is "most entrancing of the Poetic moods" and by setting poems in music, the music is "perfecting them as poems,"[31] which reveals Poe's adjacency to Symbolism. In response to Poe's view on the relation between music and poems, Ravel described himself as "the little symbolist"[32] and expressed his desire to find correspondence between arts and his hope "to say with music what you say with words…I think and feel in music and I should like to think and feel the same things as you,"[33] as recalled in Jules Renard's *Journal*. Moreover, to "perfect the poems," Ravel set quite a few poems of the Symbolist poets, such as Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Émile Verhaeren, to songs. He

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[30] Émile Vuillermoz et al., *Maurice Ravel* (Paris: Éditions du Tambourinaire, 1939), 13.

[31] Barbara L. Kelly, "History and Homage," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 17.

[32] Roger Nichols, *Ravel Remembered* (London: Faber, 1987), 53.

[33] Ibid., 78.

also named his compositions using titles taken from poetry. *Gaspard de la nuit – Trois poèmes pour piano d'après Aloysius Bertrand* and *La Valse, poème chorégraphique pour orchestre* are two notable examples.

CHAPTER 2

Ondine the Myth

Ondine, or Undine in German, is a water nymph who is the main character in Baron Friedrich Heinrich Karl de La Motte-Fouqué (1777-1843) novella *Undine*. *Undine* was first introduced to the German public in 1811. Because of its popularity, it was soon translated into French and English. The prototype of *Undine* may be the siren from the German legend Lorelei. Lorelei is the name of a large rock on the bank of the Rhine River, which is known for producing an echo. The word Lorelei comes from the old German word lureln, which means murmuring in Rhine dialect. In the legend, Lorelei is a beautiful maiden who threw herself into the Rhine River in despair over a faithless lover, prior to turning into a siren who seduced fishermen and caused their death.

In Fouqué's story, Undine is a water nymph adopted by a fisherman and his wife who lost their daughter. Under the arrangement of Undine's uncle Kuhleborn, Undine meets her future husband, the knight Sir Huldbrand, in the cottage of the fisherman and his wife. The knight falls in love with Undine instantly and marries her shortly after their first meeting. After their wedding, Undine moves into the knight's palace. She transforms from a mischievous and whimsical young girl to an obedient and submissive wife. Everything seems fine until Undine reveals her supernatural origin and Bertalda, who is the fisherman's lost daughter, appears. Huldbrand subsequently falls in love with Bertalda. With the increasing fear and hatred toward Undine because of her supernatural connections, the knight brutally denounces her, which drives her to jump into the water and disappear. After Undine's disappearance, Huldbrand marries Bertalda. On the night of the wedding, as Bertalda's maid unseals a fountain previously sealed

by Kuhleborn, Undine rises through the water and gives the knight a fatal kiss.

The story of Undine was later adapted into numerous plays, operas, poems, and musical pieces. The famous fairy-tale *The Little Mermaid* (1836) by Danish writer Hans Christian Anderson, E.T.A. Hoffman's opera *Undine* (1816), Albert Lorzing's *Undine* (1845) and Anton Dvořák's Rusalka are all works based on Fouqué's novella. Carl Reinecke's Flute Sonata in E-major, Op. 167 (1882) is also titled "*Undine.*"

CHAPTER 3

Analysis of Debussy's *Ondine*

Ondine is the eighth prelude of Debussy's *Préludes, Book II*, which was written between December 1912 and early April 1913. There are 24 preludes in *Préludes,* which are divided into two books of 12 preludes each. Unlike Ravel's *Ondine,* there is no known source of Debussy's inspiration for composing the prelude *Ondine*. Popular speculation among historians is that Debussy was inspired by the colored illustrations of La Motte- Fouqué's novella *Undine* by the English illustrator, Arthur Rackham. It is known that Debussy was very fond of Rackham's illustrations, and he even named several of his preludes after Rackham's captions of the illustrations. The title of the fourth prelude in *Préludes, Book II*, *Les Fées sont d'exquises danseuses* borrows Rackham's caption of an illustration in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan of Kensington Gardens*. Debussy owned the edition of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* with illustrations by Rackham. One of the illustrations is a portrait of the character Puck and is captioned "I Am That Merry Wanderer of the Night." This illustration may be the source of inspiration for the eleventh prelude, *La Danse de Puck* in *Préludes, Book II.*

The structure of Debussy's *Ondine* is multi-sectional. The chart in figure 4.1 demonstrates the structure, key relations, and the layout of the themes and the motives. The upper-case letters indicate the keys. The lower-case letters indicate the motives, and the upper-case roman numerals indicate the themes.

Figure 4.1:

Debussy *Ondine,* Structure

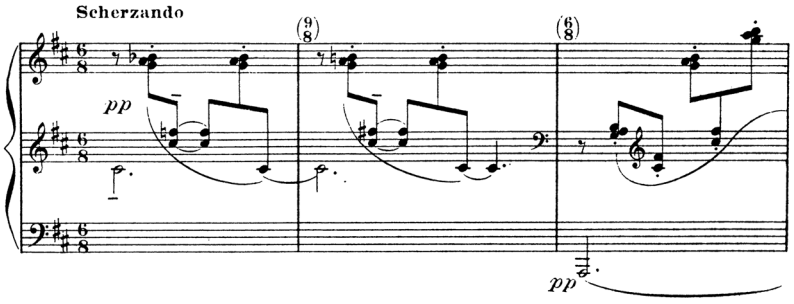
Sections	Introduction	A	B	Coda
Measures	mm. 1-10	mm. 11-31	mm. 32-43 mm. 44-53 mm. 54-64	mm. 65-74
Key Centers	D	D	E^b B D	D
Motives & Themes	*a/b/a/b/c*	*d*/I/I'/I/*d*/II	II/I/II/II/II/*d*	

It is worth noting that minor seconds, augmented fourths/diminished fifths, and repeated notes are the three devices that are frequently used throughout the prelude. It is the two distinctive sounding intervals that contribute to the overall dissonant sonority and grotesque atmosphere. The repeated notes serve as the rhythmic motive that unifies the piece.

The prelude begins with an introduction that consists of three short motives. Motive *a* is comprised of bass drones and improvisatory clusters that move across middle to high registers.

Example 4.1:

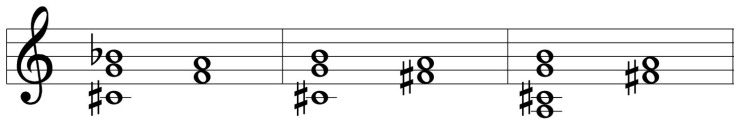
Debussy, *Ondine,* mm.1-3



With the added non-chord tones F, $F^{\#}$, and A, the chord progression of Motive *a* is vii^{o7}/ d minor – $vii^{ø7}$/D Major – V^9/ D Major.

Figure 4.2:

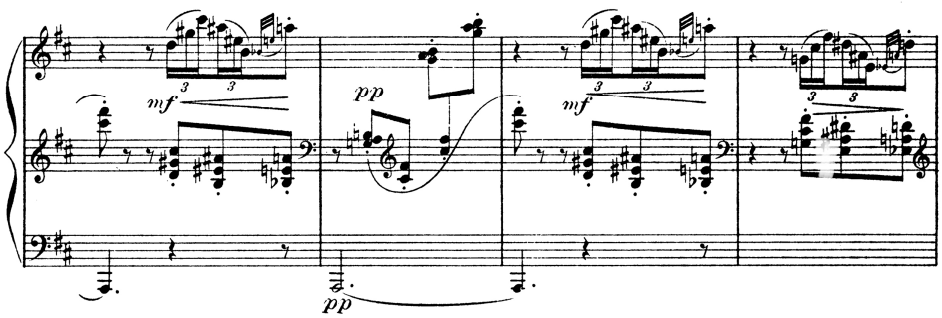
Debussy *Ondine* Motive *a*, chord progression



Motive *b* is comprised of three groups of parallel quartal chords. The fast changes in direction and the quickness of the sixteenth notes in Motive *b* suggest an imagery of ripples created by the erratically swimming nymph in the water. The right hand doubles the left hand an octave above, in the manner of broken chords. The gesture of three parallel quartal chords is stated three times, with an interruption of a fragment of Motive *a.*

Example 4.2:

Ravel *Ondine* mm.4-7, Motive *b*



Each quartal chord is made of an augmented fourth and a perfect fourth. When the gesture appears for the third time, it is transposed to the degree that is a perfect fifth below the original.

Figure 4.3:

Debussy *Ondine* Motive *b*, first and second gestures

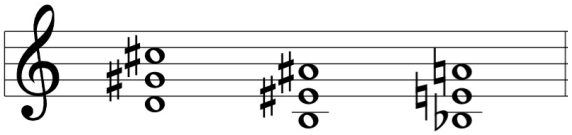
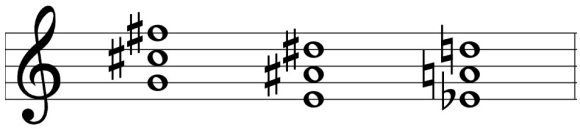


Figure 4.4:

Debussy *Ondine* Motive *b*, third gesture



Motive *c* is made of three gestures. The first two gestures are made of two fast ascending B^b Mixolysian modal scale, with stops on the third and fourth degrees and the passing tone E. The last gesture is generated from the three eighth notes of the previous gesture.

Example 4.3:

Debussy *Ondine*, mm. 8-10

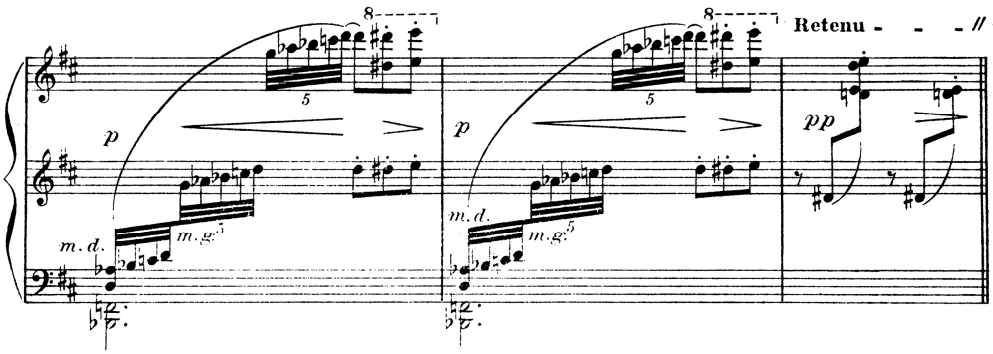
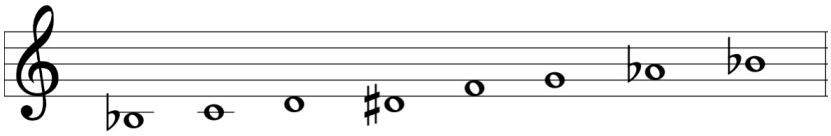


Figure 4.5:

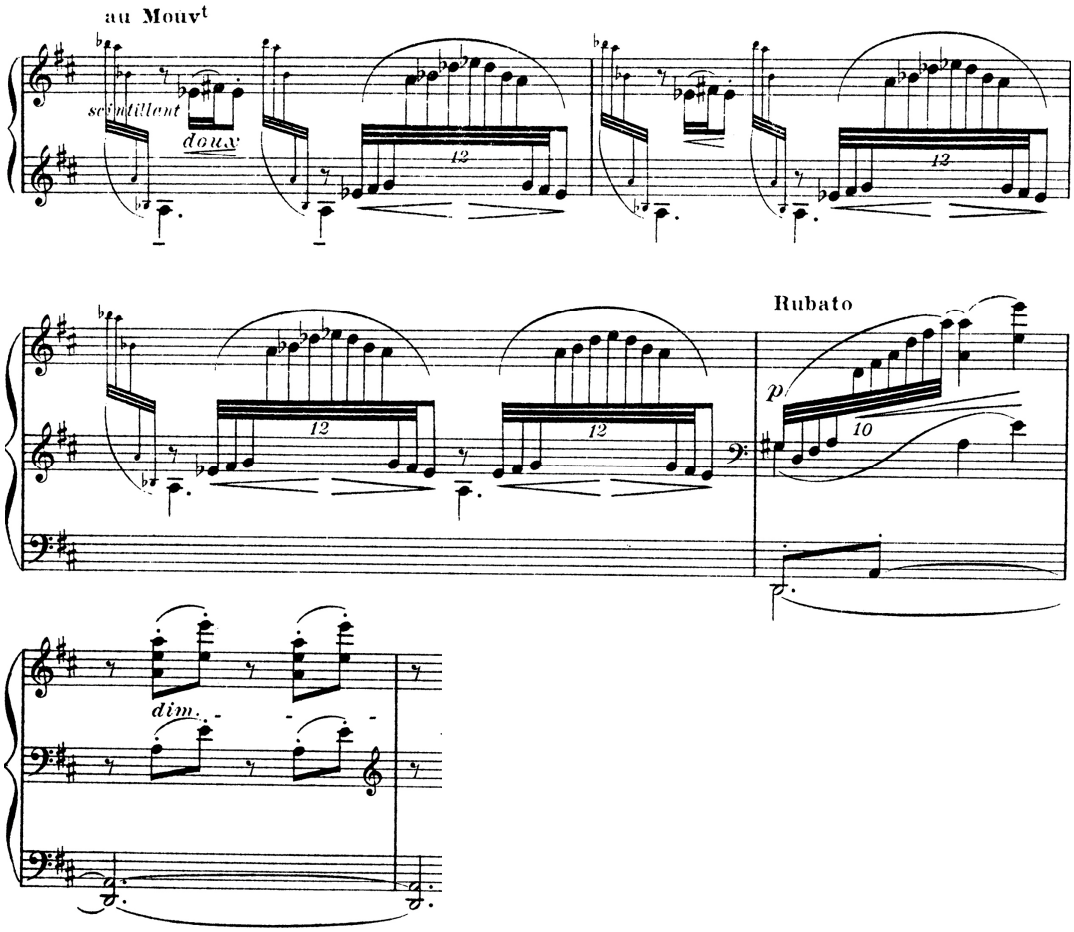
B^b Mixolydian Modal Scale



Section A starts with Motive *d,* which serves as a bridge in between sections and themes throughout the piece.

Example 4.4:

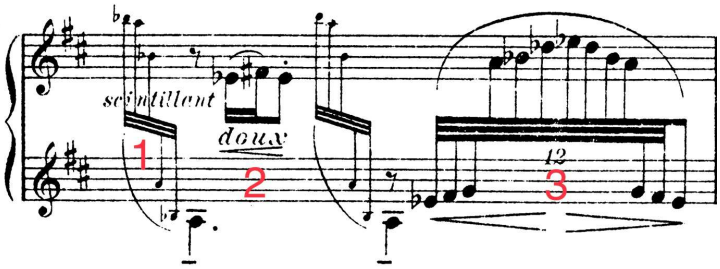
Ravel *Ondine* mm.11-15, Motive *d*



There are two materials in Motive *d.* The first material consists of three gestures.

Example 4.5:

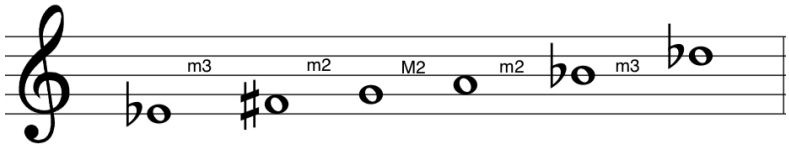
Debussy *Ondine* m.11



The first gesture is made of a pedal point A with chromatic ornaments. The ornament is comprised of a minor second B^b-A and its inversion. Debussy marked *scintillant* (scintillating) here, which suggests an imagery of the reflections and ripples. The second gesture is made of a "*doux"* (sweet) augmented second, as a contrast to the fast and playful ornaments. The third gesture is an extended combination of the first and the second gestures. Starting with a pedal point A with the ornaments, the augmented second of the second gesture is extended to a palindromic scale. This could also be interpreted as an E^b octatonic scale, in which E-natural and C are missing.

Figure 4.6:

Palindromic Scale

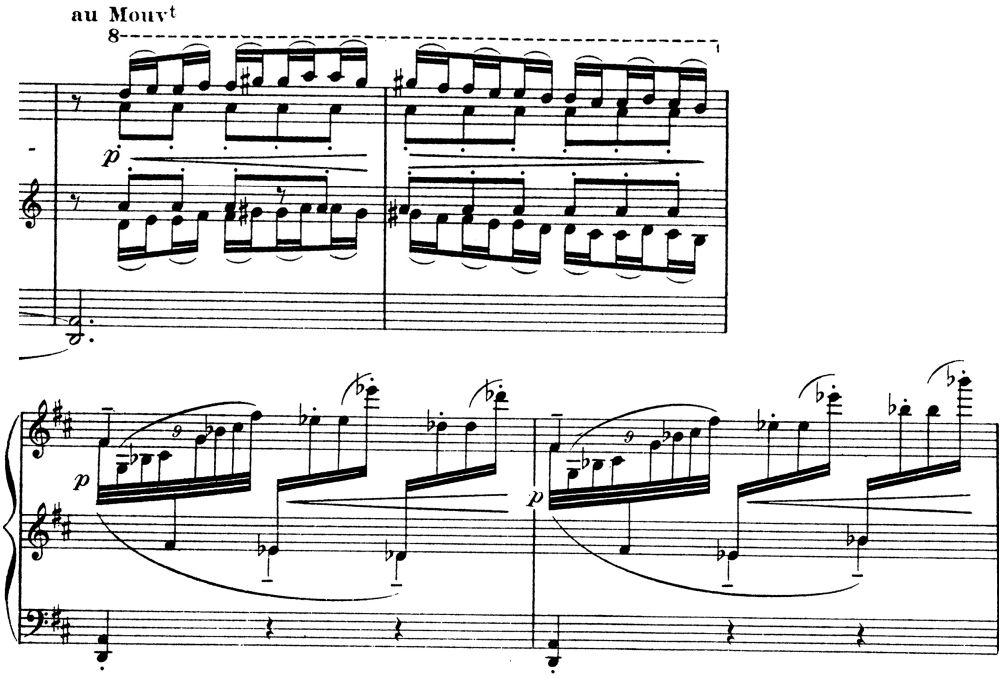


The crescendo and decrescendo along with the palindromic scale's upward and downward motions depict the rising and falling waves.

The dominant pedal point A and the leading tone D^b (enharmonic equivalent of $C^{\#}$) of the first material is resolved to the tonic D in measure 14, where the second material of Motive *d* starts. This is the very first time when the tonic note is introduced as a bass note. It is also from here when a pedal point of the tonic note is created and carries on until the end of the first theme's first appearance. In measure 14, a full tonic chord is also presented for the first time. After the establishment of the tonic chord, the dominant triad (A major triad) without a third ($C^{\#}$) is repeated three times in the upper voices. The incomplete dominant chord then gets resolved to the tonic in measure 16, where the first theme appears.

Example 4.7:

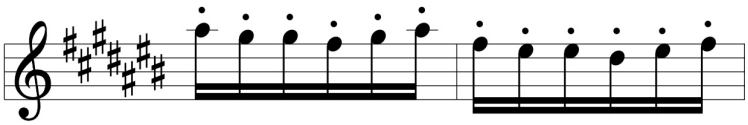
Ravel *Ondine* mm. 16-19, Theme I



The melodic line of the first half of the first theme is in unison between the top and bottom voices and moves in stepwise motion. The repeated A in the middle voice comes from the pedal point A in Motive *d*. The melody reminds one of the glockenspiel melody from the second movement of Debussy's *La Mer*.

Example 4.8:

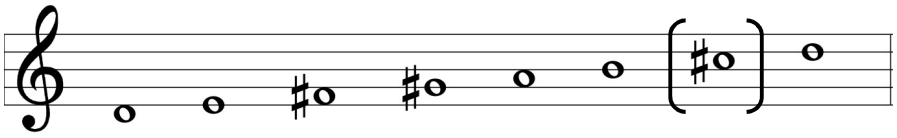
Debussy *La Mer,* second movement mm.26-27



The first half of the first theme is in D Lydian modal scale without the seventh degree.

Figure 4.7:

D Lydian Modal Scale

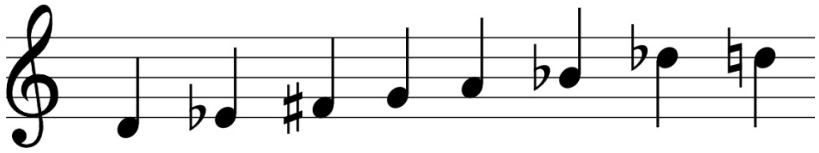


The Lydian modal scale is not unfolded in the order of first to seventh degree. Instead, the melody ascends to the fifth degree from the first degree and descends to the sixth degree, passing the first degree. This arrangement amplifies the interval of the augmented fourth (D-G$^{\#}$).

The second half of the first theme uses a Middle Eastern scale – Arabic Hijaz tetrachords, also known as double harmonic scale in western music theory. The scale is also palindromic.

Figure 4.8:

Arabic Hijaz Tetrachord/D Double Harmonic Scale

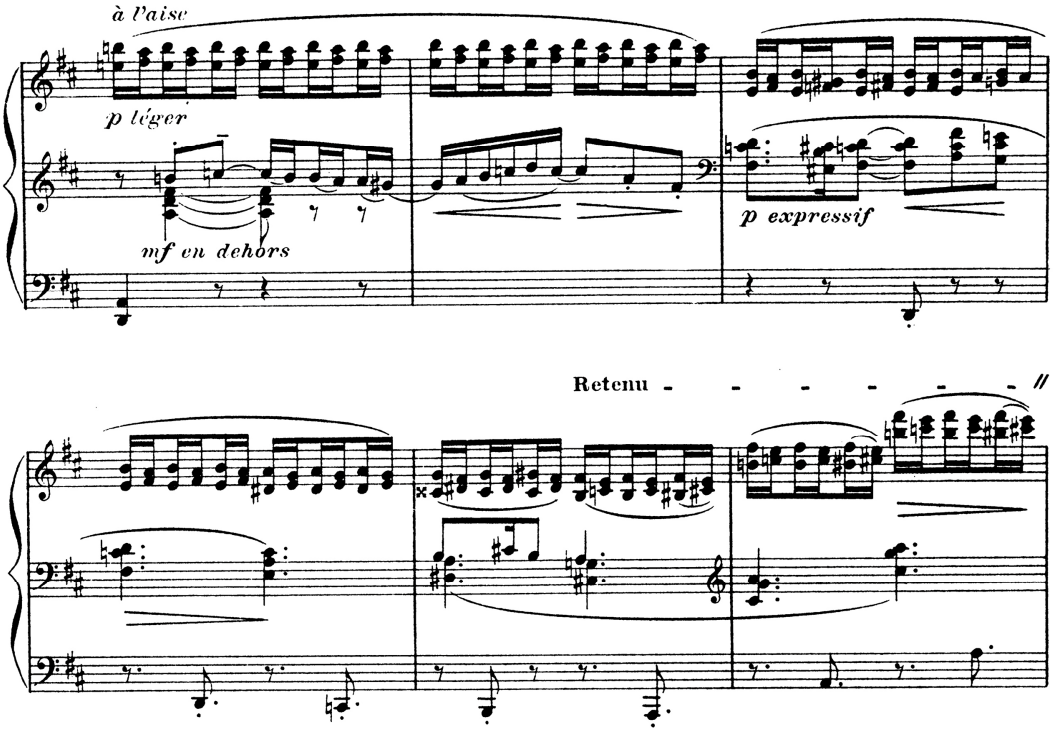


In terms of rhythms and intervals, the second half of the first theme resembles the second material of Motive *d* (example 4.4) by starting the gesture with a fast-ascending scale and proceeding to a pair of broken octaves.

The first half of the first theme is stated again in measure 20 – measure 25, with modifications and developments.

Example 4.9:

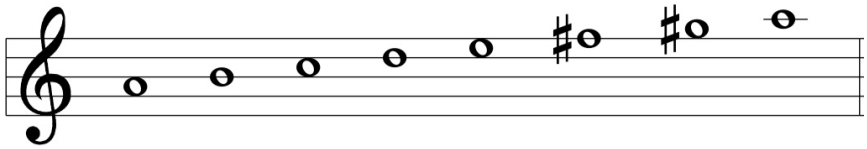
Debussy *Ondine* mm.20-25



The modifications include: (1) the theme is in a new modal scale – A melodic minor scale;

Figure 4.10:

A Melodic Minor Scale

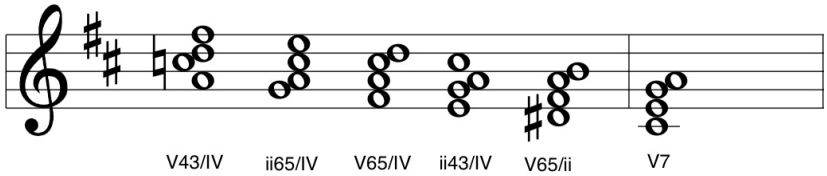


(2) instead of being doubled in the outer two voices, the melody is presented in the middle voice in a single line; (3) the contour of the melody mirrors the original theme; and (4) the repeated A in the original theme is changed into an ostinato of alternating fifths and thirds. In measure 22 – measure 25, a development of the first theme is presented. The development is made of a series

of secondary chords that function as predominant chords that approach the dominant seventh chord of D major. The chord progression is shown in figure 4.11.

Figure 4.11:

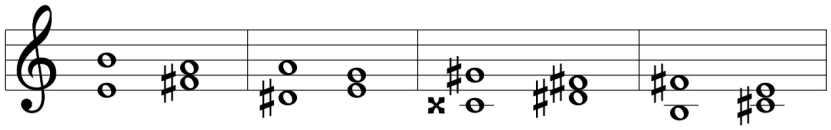
Debussy *Ondine* mm. 22-25, chord progression



Parallel harmony can be another way of analyzing this passage. The right-hand ostinato of alternating fifths and thirds moves downward in parallel motion

Figure 4.12:

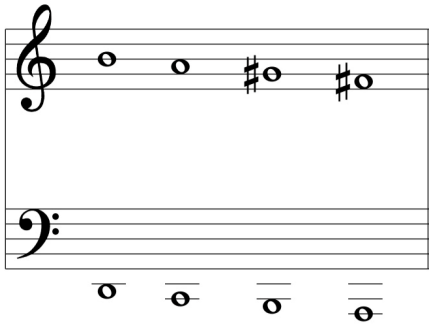
Debussy *Ondine*, mm.22-25 right-hand ostinato



Meanwhile, the highest note of each ostinato forms an interval of sixth with the bass note, which also moves downward in parallel motion.

Figure 4.13:

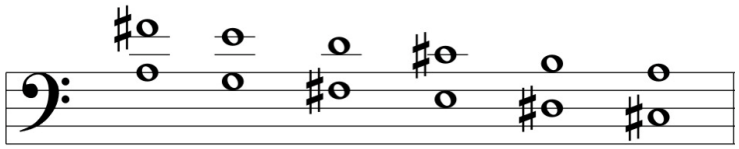
Debussy *Ondine* mm.22-25, top voice and bottom voice



The middle voice consists of a chain of parallel sixths as well.

Figure 4.14:

Debussy *Ondine* mm.22-25, middle voice

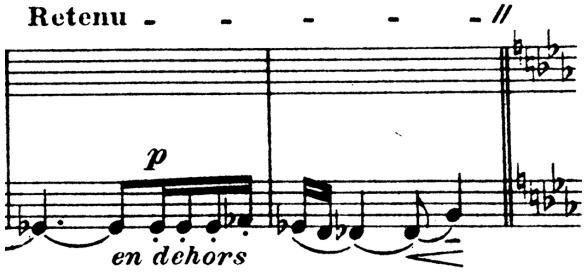


At the end of this thematic area, the D dominant seventh chord is stated three times in a row, which makes the resolution in measure 26 quite satisfying. In measure 26 – measure 27, the first half of the first theme is stated again in its original form, followed by the fragment of Motive *d* in measure 28 – measure 29.

In measure 30 – measure 31, a fragment of the second theme is presented in the middle register.

Example 4.10:

Debussy *Ondine* mm.30-31



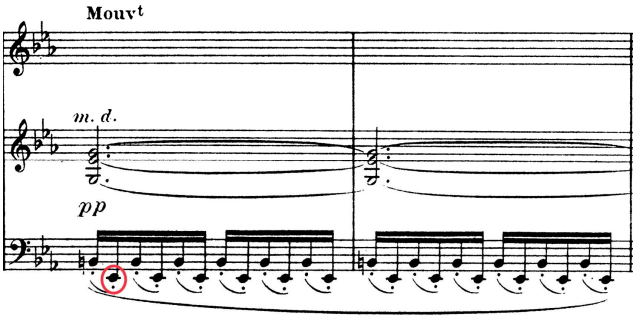
The dynamic mark *p* and the *Retenu* depict the water nymph's murmurs in her monologue. The ascending augmented fourth ($D^{\flat}$-G) at the end suggests a questioning tone, but it seems to be a question that she asks herself with no answers. Prior to this point, the character is playful and whimsical. Here, suddenly, the color is darkened by the consecutive use of the dissonant minor

seconds. The melody brings out a "significant change of mood" that suggests the "longing for 'soul' depicted in this sad, passionate gesture."[34]

The fragment serves as a short transition to Section B, which is in E^b major. It is interesting that the key signature B^b, E^b, and A^b here and the key signature $F^\#$ and $C^\#$ of the previous sections together make up all the black keys. At the very beginning of Section B, the tonic note E^b is introduced as the bass notes.

Example 4.11:

Debussy *Ondine* mm.32-33



Thanks to the transition in measure 30 – measure 31, the sudden key change does not seem abrupt because the notes E^b and G already in the transition foreshadow the first right hand chord of Section B (measure 23). The accompanying ostinato in the left hand is made of diminished fifths with portato. The articulation of the fast-running ostinato suggests Ondine's rapid heartbeats.

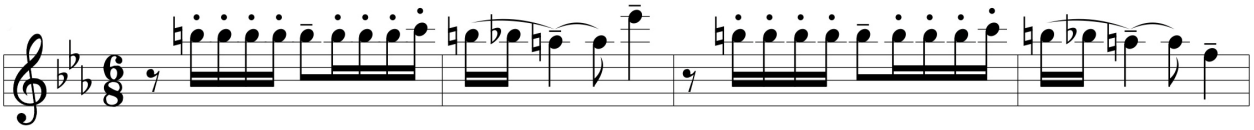
In measure 34 – measure 37, the second theme is fully stated in a higher register than its fragment in measure 30 – measure 31. The contour of the second theme suggests the tone of a question and an answer – the first half of the theme ends with a rising diminished fifth, which

[34] Siglind Bruhn, *Images and Ideas in Modern French Piano Music: the Extra-Musical Subtext in Piano Works by Ravel, Debussy, and Messiaen* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1997), 145.

creates a questioning tone; the second half of the theme basically copies the entire first half, except that it ends with a falling major third, which implies a sense of conclusion.

Figure 4.15:

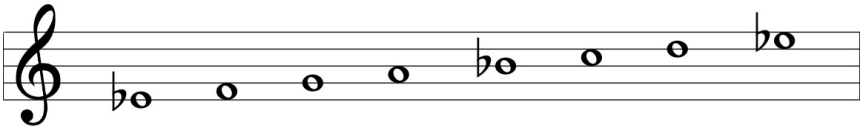
Debussy *Ondine* mm.34-37, melody of Theme II



The second theme is in E^{b} Lydian modal scale.

Figure 4.16:

E^{b} Lydian Modal Scale

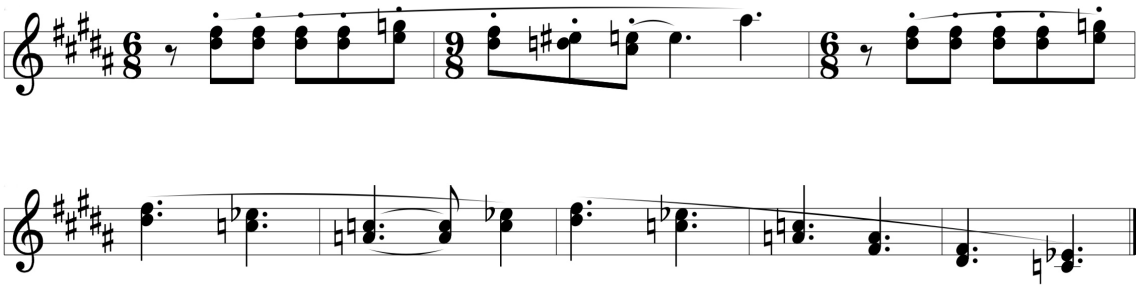


Before the second theme proceeds to its second appearance, the first theme is stated in E^{b} major as an interlude. After the interlude, the fragment of the second theme in measure 30 – measure 31 is repeated in measure 42 – measure 43, as a transition to the second appearance of the second theme. This time, the D^{b} and G of the transition foreshadow the $C^{\#}$ and G, which are the first left hand notes of the next part.

The second appearance of the second theme uses the key signature of B major. The $F^{\#}$, $C^{\#}$, $G^{\#}$, $D^{\#}$, and $A^{\#}$ are the key signature of Section A plus the key signature of Section B. Like the second appearance of the first theme, the second appearance of the second theme is modified.

Example 4.17:

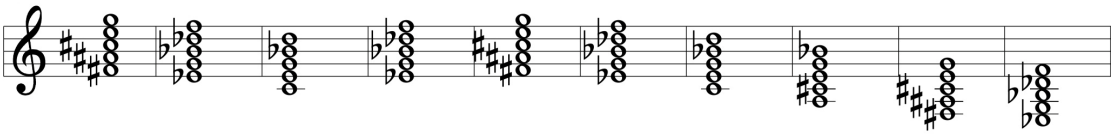
Debussy *Ondine* mm. 44-51, melody of Theme II



Firstly, the first half of the theme is fragmented. It eliminates the first four repeated notes. Secondly, the sixteenth notes of the original are lengthened to eighth notes here as the other note values remain the same as the original. Thirdly, instead of a single voice, the melodic line is now doubled in thirds. Lastly, the second half of the theme is extended by four measures.

During the second appearance of the second theme, Debussy applied a series of parallel ninth chords without resolutions, which ambiguate the tonic center.

Figure 4.18:



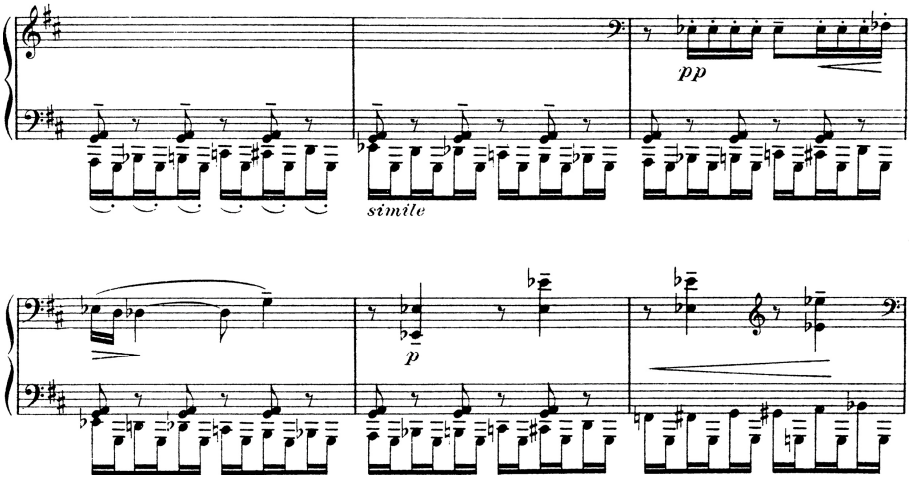
Even though this section uses the key signature of B major, B major is not established as the tonal center. As a matter of fact, the tonic note B does not even appear in the section.

The third appearance of the second theme uses the key signature of the tonic key (D major). The repeated A (with an added G) in the middle voice stems from the repeated A in the middle voice of the first theme. Compared to the previous two statements of the theme, the second theme is conveyed in a low register this time. This change implies the imagery of the darker color of the water as well as the feelings of the more agitated Ondine. The first half of the theme is presented in the same rhythm and intervallic relations as the original second theme. The

second half of the theme is modified by extending the value of repeated E^{b}'s to quarter notes. Also, the E^{b}'s are doubled in octaves and repeated in different registers.

Example 4.18:

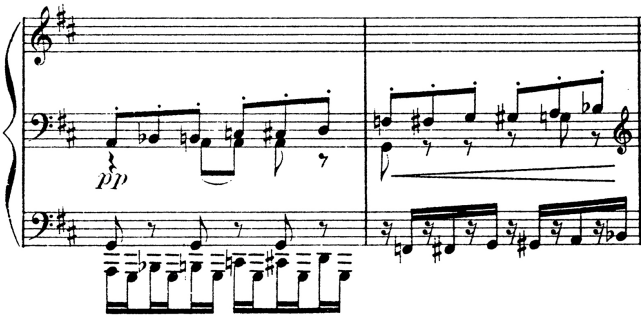
Debussy *Ondine* mm. 54-59, Theme II



The theme concludes with two ascending chromatic scales.

Example 4.19:

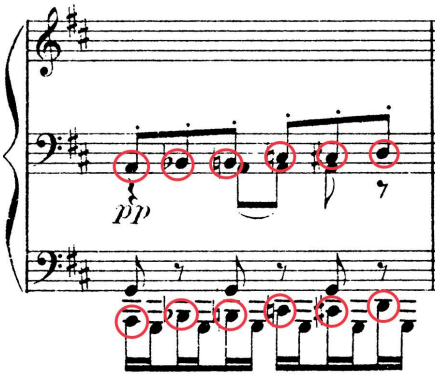
Debussy *Ondine* mm.60-61



The first chromatic scale is derived from the moving line of the accompanying figure. The second chromatic scale can be viewed as a transcription of the first chromatic scale.

Example 4.20:

Debussy *Ondine* m.60

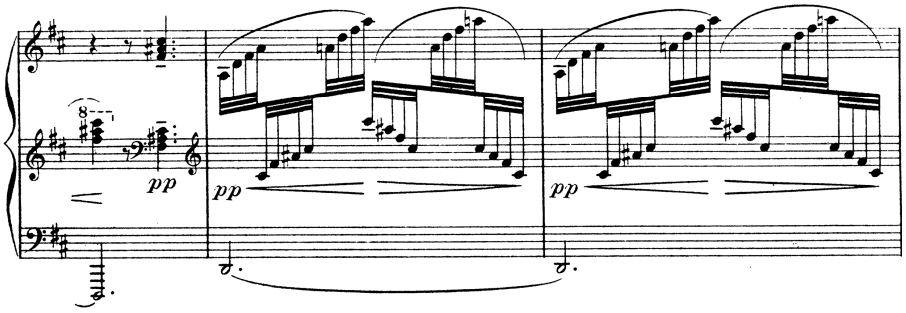


Motive *d* is stated for the last time, as a bridge to the Coda. However, the pedal point is changed from its original version's A to B^{b}, which is another example of using a minor second.

The Coda stands on a long pedal point of the tonic note D. Upon the pedal point, the arpeggiated D major triads and $F^{\#}$ major triads are juxtaposed and ascend alternately. The arpeggios and the dynamic marks correspond with each other – when the arpeggios move upward, the corresponding dynamic mark is crescendo, and vice versa. The contours of the arpeggios along with the assigned dynamic marks depict rippling waves.

Example 4.21:

Debussy *Ondine* mm.68-70



The bigger picture of the dynamic trend goes from *p* to *pp* as if Ondine swims away while the sound of the ripples is getting more and more distant and eventually disappears on an arpeggiated D major triad in *pp*.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of Ravel's *Ondine*

Ondine is just one example of the many titles that both Debussy and Ravel each gave to separate pieces. Ravel's *Ondine* is the first movement of the piano suite *Gaspard de la nuit - Trois poèmes pour piano d'après Aloysius Bertrand,* written in 1908. The piano suite is based on Aloysius Bertrand's (1807-1841) *Gaspard de la nuit: Fantasies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot,* which is a compilation of prose poems. Bertrand was a French poet of Italian descent. His writing style was praised for its verbal virtuosity and high taste. *Gaspard de la nuit* was published posthumously in 1842 and did not gain much popularity until the French poets, Baudelaire and Mallarmé, discovered it a few years later. *Gaspard de la Nuit* then became Bertrand's most famous work and a source of inspiration for many other symbolist poets.

Bertrand's inspiration for writing *Gaspard de la nuit* came from two men. The first one was Jacques Callot (1592 or 1593-1635) from the Duchy of Lorraine. Collot was a baroque artist whose expertise was in printmaking. The artist had a particular genius for caricature and the grotesque. The other man was E.T.A. Hoffman (1776-1882). Hoffman was a German Romantic writer, composer, music critic, and artist. He was known for integrating supernatural and sinister characters into his stories. Bertrand was deeply fascinated by the elements of the grotesque and the supernatural that is found in the two men's works.

In the opening of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Bertrand describes himself as siting on a park bench in Dijon. A man who looks to be miserable and suffering approaches and sits down by him on the bench. The two have a discussion about the nature of art. When the man gets up to leave, he offers Bertrand a manuscript entitled *Gaspard de la Nuit: Fantasies à la manière de*

Rembrandt et de Callot. The next day, Bertrand returns to the same place, hoping to see the man and return the manuscript to him. However, instead of meeting the man, he meets a wine grower with a hunchback who tells him that Gaspard de la Nuit is the devil and should be in hell. Bertrand replies "If Gaspard de la Nuit is in Hell, I hope he roasts there! I am going to have his book printed."[35] Ravel made a remark on the opening of *Gaspard de la nuit* in his letter to Ida Godebska in July of 1908: "As for Gaspard, the devil has had a hand in it. No wonder, for the devil himself indeed is the author of the poems."[36]

It was Ravel's good friend and first interpreter of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Ricardo Viñes who introduced *Gaspard de la Nuit* to Ravel. In Viñes' diary of September 25, 1896, he wrote: "Ravel stayed till eleven in the evening. We read… Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit,* which I let him take away."[37] Ravel was instantly impressed by the refinement, virtuosity, and romanticism of the poems, but he did not compose the suite that shares the same title until 1908. He eventually picked three poems from *Gaspard de la Nuit,* which consists of six *fantasies* and thirteen *Pièces Détachées* (independent pieces) at the end. The first one was *Ondine*, from the third *fantasie,* entitled *La Nuit et ses préstiges* (The Night and its Magic Spells). The second one *Le Gibet* and the third one *Scarbo*, were from *Pièces Détachées.*

In addition to his appreciation for the poems, he had other motivations that also contributed to the writing of the suite. Ravel told his student Maurice Delage that he intended to compose a piece of transcendental virtuosity and would surpass the technical difficulty of

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[35] Louis Aloysius Bertrand and John T. Wright, *Louis "Aloysius" Bertrand's Gaspard De La Nuit Fantasies in the Manner of Rembrandt and Callot*, trans. John T. Wright (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 13.

[36] Stuckenschmidt, 111.

[37] Nichols (1987), 6.

Balakirev's *Islamey.* In this regard, Roland-Manuel wrote: "Transcendental: the word must be interpreted strictly since here virtuosity transcends its medium and turns *Gaspard de la nuit* into one of Ravel's most personal successes, one of the peaks of his art."[38] Indeed, the suite is considered not only technically, but also musically, one of the most challenging pieces of piano literature. Alfred Cortot remarked: "These three poems enrich the piano repertory of our time by one of the most astonishing examples of instrumental ingenuity ever contrived by the industry of composers."[39] Among the three pieces in the suite, *Ondine* is the most exquisite and beautiful. It demands a high level of technical ability and sensibility from the performer.

In contrast to the multi-sectional form of Debussy's *Ondine*, Ravel's *Ondine* is in ternary form. The chart in figure 3.1 demonstrates the structure, key relations, and the layout of the themes. The upper-case letters indicated the keys. The lower-case letters indicate the transitions, and the numbers indicate the themes.

Figure 3.1: Ravel *Ondine* Structure

Ternary Form	Section A	Section B	Section A'	Coda
Measures	mm.1-45	mm.46-80	mm.81-88	mm.89-92
Key Centers	$C^{\#}$ - $G^{\#}$ - $D^{\#}$	C - $F^{\#}$ - B (III of $G^{\#}$)	$G^{\#}$ - d	C – $C^{\#}$
Themes	1/*a*/*b*/2/1	3/1/3/2/3/2/*c*	1/2	

Ravel's *Ondine* can be viewed as a musical narrative of the poem *Ondine*. Corresponding depictions of the plot of the poem can be found. In the poem, there are two characters – Ondine

[38] Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, trans. Cynthia Jolly (London: D. Dobson, 1947), 54.

[39] Ibid.

and the nameless man who Ondine attempts to take as her husband. Ondine describes her and her family's activities in the underwater world through her singing. Both Theme 1 and Theme 2 in *Ondine* represent Ondine's singing.

Figure 3.2:

Ravel *Ondine* Theme 1

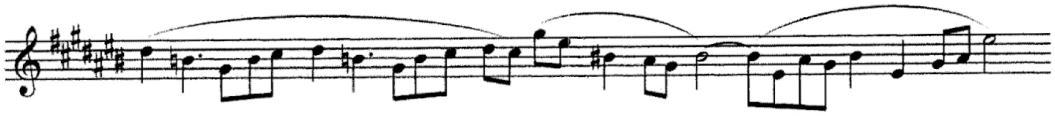
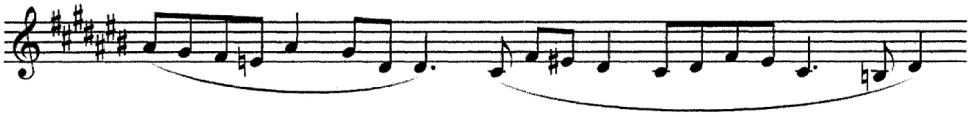


Figure 3.3:

Ravel *Ondine* Theme 2



The two themes are presented in the typical texture of a song – a clear melodic line with accompaniments. Ravel's innovation in *Ondine* is that the left hand plays the melodic line in a relatively high register as the right hand plays the accompaniment of the thirty-second-note tremolos in a higher register. This is the opposite of conventional piano works where the right hand plays the melodic line, usually in the top voice, as the left hand plays the accompaniment in low registers and is in charge of carrying out harmonic progressions. With this innovation, both hands are able to stay in high registers, so the damper pedal can be held down for a longer period of time and will "give the blurred impressions of vibrations in the air, rather than distinct notes."[40]

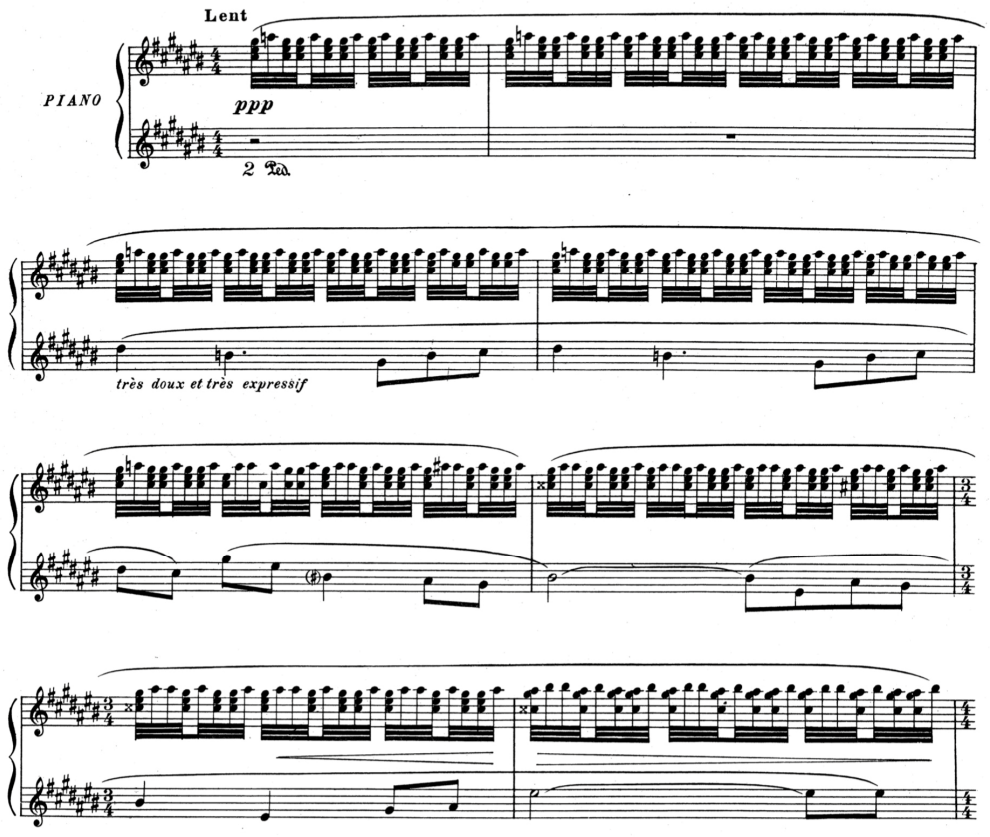
At the beginning of the piece, before the first theme enters, there is a short introduction of thirty-second-note tremolos with a dynamic mark *ppp*. The soft tremolos correspond to the line

[40] Ravel, et al., 7.

of "*Le beau lac endormi*" (the lovely sleeping lake) in the poem.[41]

Example 3.1:

Ravel *Ondine* mm.1-8

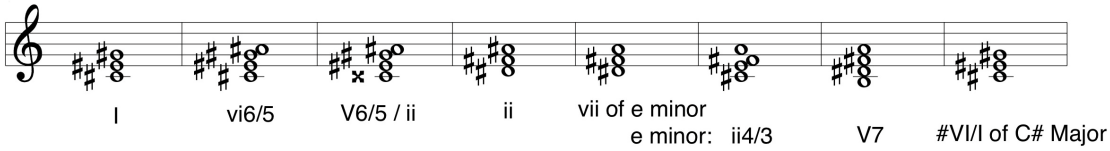


Ondine's singing (first theme) subsequently enters in measure 3, marked *très doux et très expressif* (very sweet and very expressive). Ravel's choice of register and the expression mark suggest that Ondine's tone is sweet and calm at first, but as the story unfolds, Ravel made her tone become increasingly sensual and agitated by placing the themes in lower registers. The sonority of the $g^{\#}$ minor chords in the melody renders the atmosphere of "les mornes rayons de la lune" (the gloomy rays of the moon). The theme is stated twice in succession. The first time uses the notes of a $C^{\#}$ dominant ninth chord with an added minor sixth. The second time uses the notes

[41] Bertrand and Wright, 61.

of a D# minor seventh chord with an added minor sixth. The chord progression of the first theme's two appearances (measure 3 – measure 14) is shown in figure 3.4.

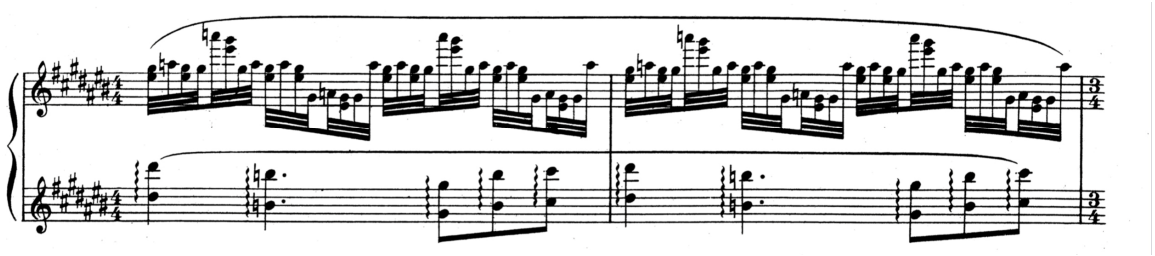
Figure 3.4:



After the two appearances of the first theme, in measure 15 – measure 16, a fragment of the first theme returns in its original degrees. The melodic line is presented in arpeggiated double octaves this time. In this fragment, the range of the right-hand accompaniment changes from one octave to the span of three octaves. The increased activity in the accompaniment, which presents the lake, depicts the streams in Ondine's description that "Chaque flot est un ondin qui nage dans le courant, chaque courant est un sentier qui serpente vers mon palais" (Each wave is a water sprite swimming in the stream, each stream is a footpath that winds towards my palace).[42]

Example 3.2:

Ravel *Ondine* mm.15-16



The fragment proceeds to the first transition of the piece – Transition *a.* In Transition *a* (measure 17 – measure 30), the left hand and the right hand switch roles – the right hand now plays the melodic line, and the left hand plays the accompaniment. In measure 17 to measure 22, a new accompanying figure is introduced. The new figure is in the manner of fast ascending and

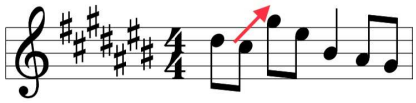
[42] Bertrand and Wright, 61.

descending scales, which again suggests the imagery of waves that rise and fall, and wind towards Ondine's palace. In measure 24, the accompanying figure of thirty-second-note tremolos returns, though the tremolos are split between the two hands.

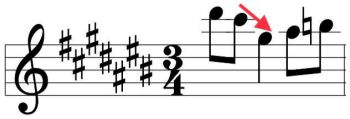
There are inner links between the motives in Transition *a* and the first theme. For example, the motive $D^{\#}$-$C^{\#}$-$G^{\#}$ in measure 17 originates from measure 5. However, here, the $G^{\#}$ is a perfect fourth below the $C^{\#}$, whereas in measure 5, the $G^{\#}$ is a perfect fifth above the $C^{\#}$.

Figure 3.5:

Ravel *Ondine* m.5, left hand



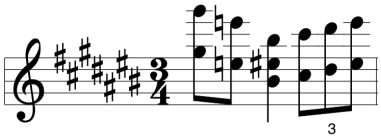
Ravel *Ondine* m.17, right hand



The melodic lines in measure 22, measure 23, and measure 27 also stem from measure 5. The contour of the melodic lines remains the same, though the intervals and rhythms are changed.

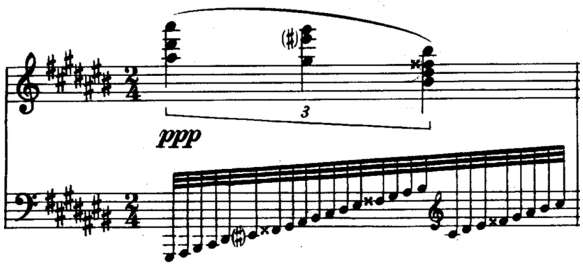
Example 3.3:

Ravel *Ondine* m. 22, right hand



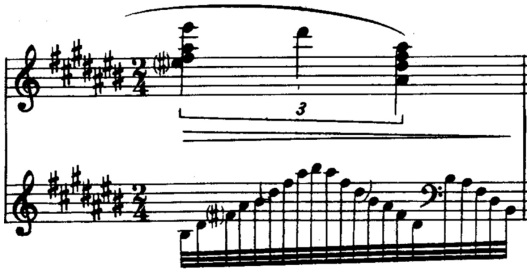
Example 3.4:

Ravel *Ondine* m. 23



Example 3.5:

Ravel *Ondine* m. 27



Transition *a* is comprised of a series of modal scales. In the examples and figures below, each measure (on the left) and its corresponding modal scale (on the right) is put side by side.

Example 3.6:

Ravel *Ondine* m.17

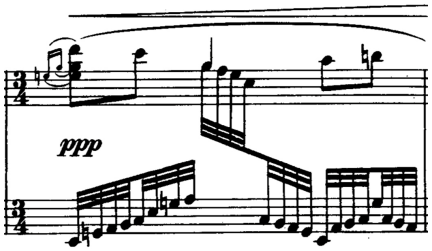
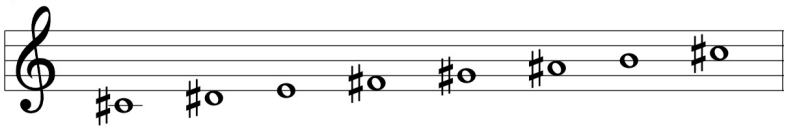


Figure 3.6:

$C^{\#}$ Dorian Modal Scale



Example 3.7:

Ravel *Ondine* m.18

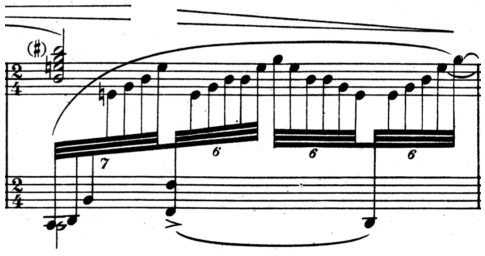
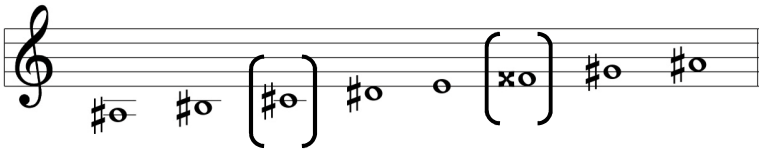


Figure 3.7:

$G^{\#}$ Harmonic Major Scale Beginning on II



Example 3.8:

Ravel *Ondine* m. 19

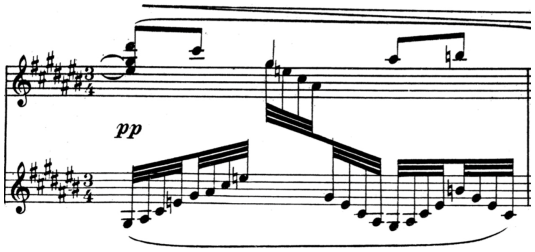
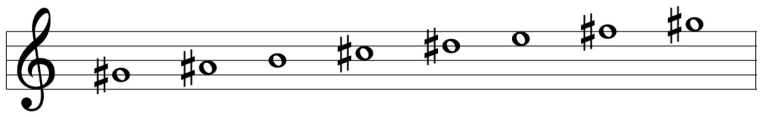


Figure 3.8:

$G^{\#}$ Aeolian (Natural Minor Scale) Modal Scale



Measure 20 and measure 22 are in the same modal scale as measure 18 ($G^{\#}$ Harmonic Major Scale). Measure 21 shares the same modal scale as measure 17 ($C^{\#}$ Dorian modal scale).

Example 3.9:

Ravel *Ondine* m.23

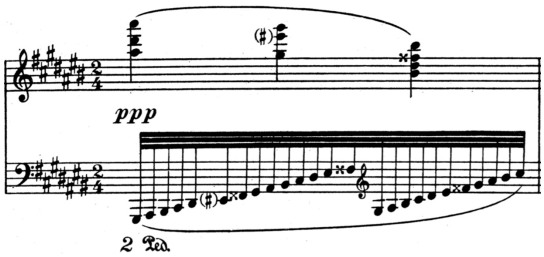
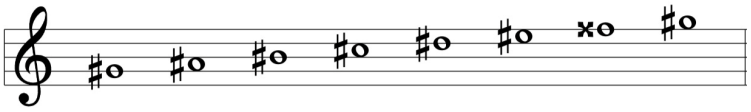


Figure 3.9:

$G^{\#}$ Major Scale



Example 3.10:

Ravel *Ondine* m. 24

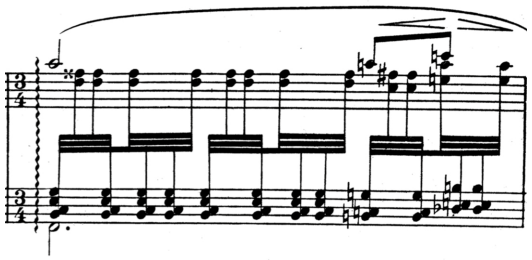
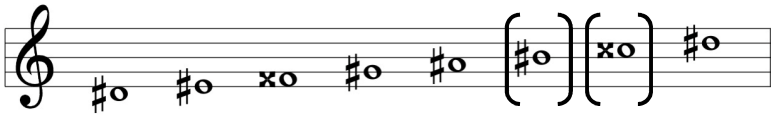


Figure 3.10:

$D^{\#}$ Major Scale



Measure 25 and measure 26 continue to use the modal scale of $G^{\#}$ major scale.

Example 3.11:

Ravel *Ondine* m.27

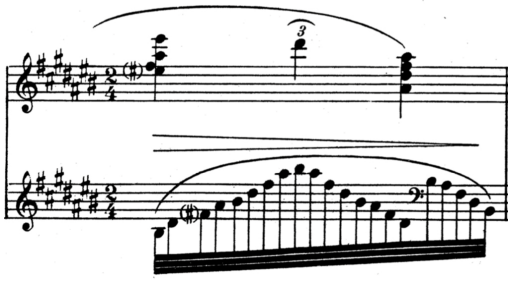
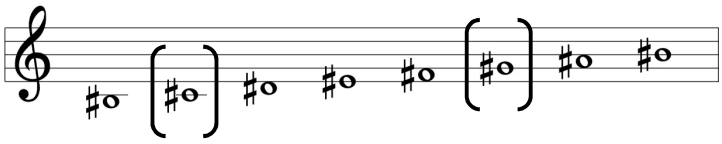


Figure 3.11:

B# Hypophrygian Modal Scale



Example 3.12:

Ravel *Ondine* m.28

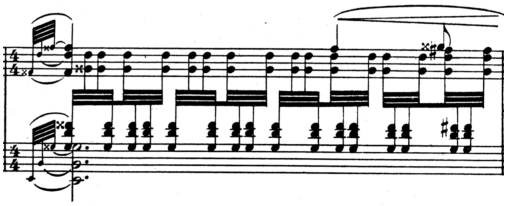
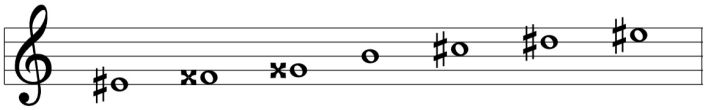


Figure 3.12:

E# Whole-tone Scale



Measure 29 uses the same modal scale as measure 18 (figure 3.7).

Example 3.13:

Ravel *Ondine* m. 30

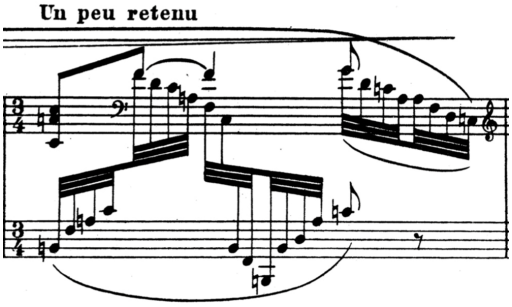
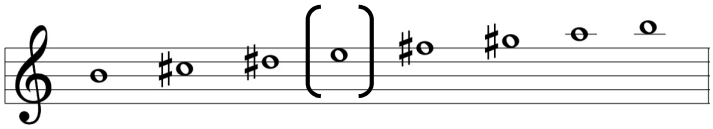


Figure 3.13:

B Mixolydian Modal Scale



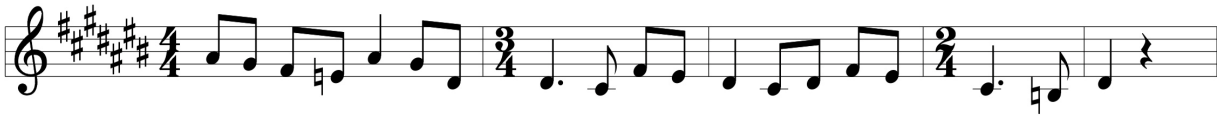
It is easier to understand the harmonic structure of Transition *a* if we divide it into two parts. The first part is measure17 – measure 23, which is the transition to D# major in measure 24. D# major serves as the pivot point: the second degree of the tonic key and the dominant of the next key center, G# major. In the second part (measure 24 – measure 30), a short pedal point of D# is

established and subsequently interrupted by a circle of fifths ($B^{\#}$-$E^{\#}$-$A^{\#}$), which breaks the temporary key center. Ravel puts everything back on track by resolving the diminished fifth ($A^{\#}$-E) in measure 29 to a B major minor seventh chord in measure 30. The B major minor seventh chord functions as the dominant of e minor and leads to the vii^{o}4/2 of e minor, which is resolved to the non-chord tone E in measure 31.

In the second theme, the two hands switch back to the same layout as the first theme – the left hand plays the accompaniment, and the right hand plays the melody. Like the first theme, the second theme is also stated two times in succession (measure 33 – measure 42).

Figure 3.14:

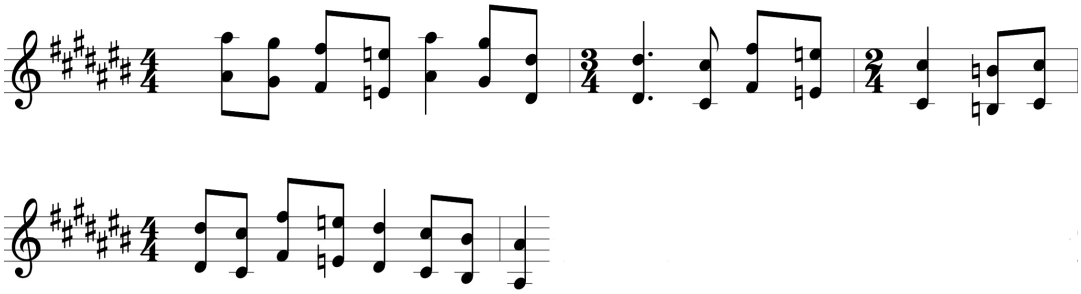
Ravel *Ondine* mm. 33-37, Theme 2, first appearance



In measure 38 – measure 42, the second theme occurs for the second time. The melodic line remains in the same degrees as the first time, but instead of a single line, the melodic line is in double octaves, which reminds one of the fragment of the first theme in measure 15 – measure 16.

Figure 3.15:

Ondine mm. 38-42, Theme 2, second appearance

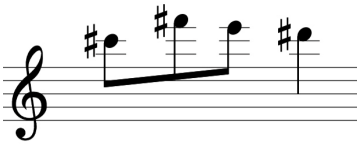


In measure 34 – measure 35, the motive $C^{\#}$-$F^{\#}$-$E^{\#}$ is derived from a fragment of the second

appearance of the first theme in measure 12 – measure 13.

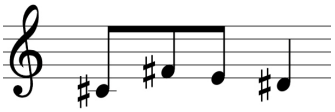
Example 3.14:

Ravel *Ondine* mm.12-13, left hand



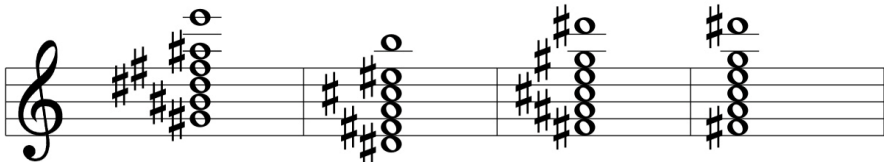
Example 3.15:

Ravel *Ondine* mm.34-35, left hand



The second theme goes through four ninth chords with added non-chord tones. Each non-chord tone is a sixth above the root of the ninth chord.

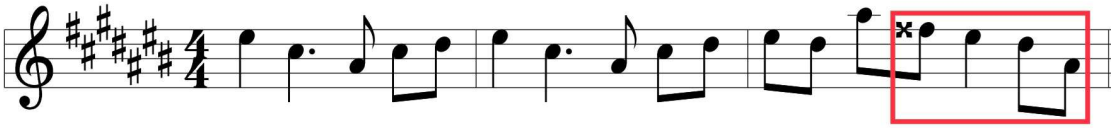
Figure 3.16:



In measure 43, a fragment of the first theme appears and starts on the same degree as the theme's second appearance in measure 9. The part of the melody that creates the sonority of a minor triad is kept, while the rest of the melodic line is modified. In example 3.16, the modification is marked in red.

Example 3.16:

Ravel *Ondine* mm.43-45, left hand

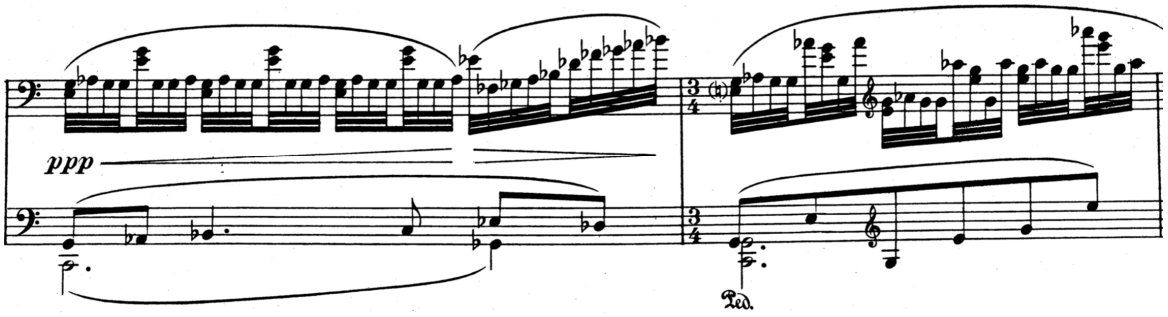


The entrance of the third theme in measure 46 marks the start of Section B. The third theme starts in C major, which is complementary to the C# major of Section A. The theme inherits the two kinds of accompanying figures, which are thirty-second-note tremolos and glissandos, from the previous sections. The difference between the third theme and the previous two themes is that in addition to the melody and the accompaniment figure, a pedal point is added.

Section B consists of five segments. The first segments (measure 46 – measure 51) contains the third theme and a fragment of the first theme.

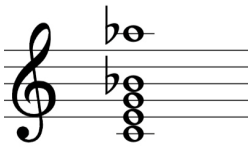
Example 3.17:

Ravel *Ondine* m. 46-47, Theme 3



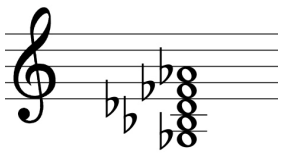
The notes of the first three beats of the theme make a C dominant seventh chord with an added minor sixth (A^b), upon the pedal point C.

Figure 3.17:



The notes of the fourth beat make a G^b dominant ninth chord.

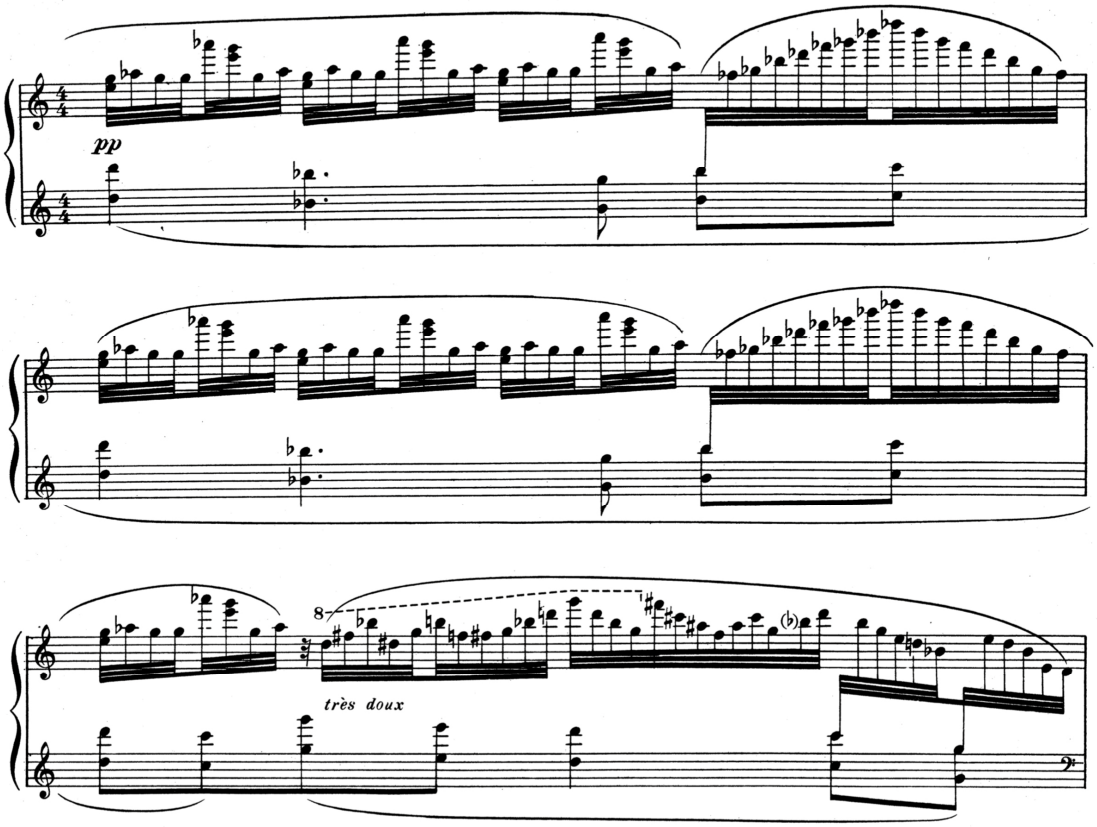
Figure 3.18:



The fragment of the first theme in measure 48 – measure 50 is a transcription of the fragment in measure 43 – measure 45 (see example 3.16).

Example 3.18:

Ravel *Ondine* m. 48-50



The fragment is in the same harmonic rhythm as the third theme – the first three beats use the notes from a C dominant ninth chord with an added minor sixth and the fourth beat switches to the notes from a G^{b} dominant ninth chord.

The second segment is in A major and consists of the third theme and the second theme. As it shifts from C major to A major, the pedal point also shifts to A. The notes of the third theme are derived from an A dominant seventh chord with an added minor sixth (F) and an E^{b} dominant seventh chord.

Figure 3.19:

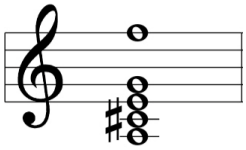
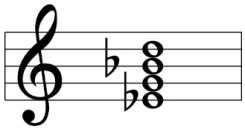


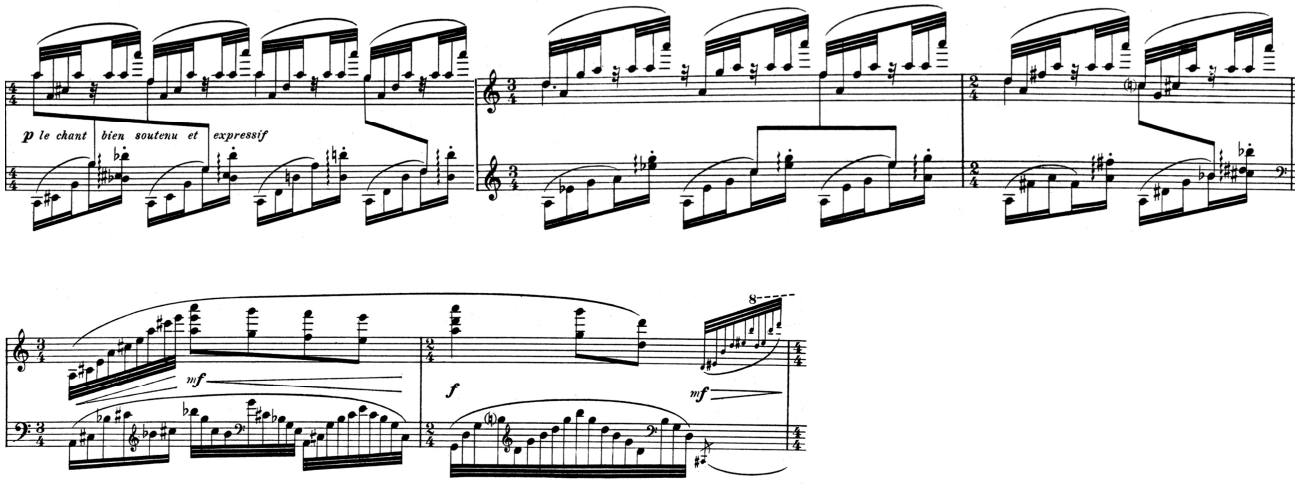
Figure 3.20:



The second theme occurs two times in succession (measure 53 – measure 57). The first time is complete, and the second time is fragmented. A new accompanying figure that combines the arpeggios and the broken octaves is introduced. Due to the change of the accompanying figure, the melodic line is for the first time placed in between the accompaniments.

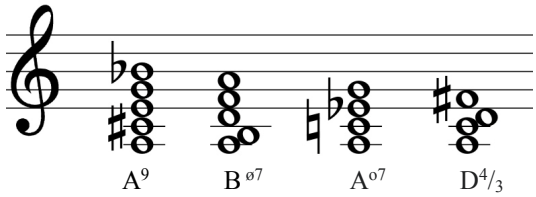
Example 3.19:

Ravel *Ondine* m. 53-57



The chord progression of the complete second theme is shown in figure 3.21.

Figure 3.21:



The $D^4/_3$ chord in measure 55 serves as the dominant chord of G major and does not get resolved until measure 57 – the resolution is interrupted by a fragment of the second theme in measure 56, using the notes of an A dominant ninth chord.

The third segment (measure 58 – measure 65) contains five occurrences and one development of the third theme. In this segment, the melody of the third theme is in double octaves with added middle voices. Two chords are used for the first three occurrences of the third theme (measure 58 – measure 60). They are a C-sharp dominant seventh chord with an added major sixth ($A^{\#}$) and a G dominant seventh chord with an added major sixth (E).

Figure 3.22:

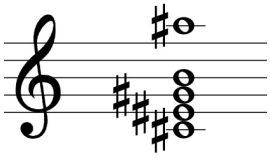
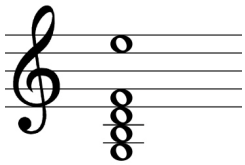


Figure 3.23:



Notice that in measure 60, the time signature is changed from 4/4 to 3/4, which evenly distributes the six notes of the third theme to six eighth notes. The other change in measure 60 is that the order of the last two notes of the melody is reversed. As a result of the order change, the E becomes the last note and makes a smooth transition to the upcoming F minor arpeggios by functioning as the leading tone.

The third theme appears in its original form for the last time in measure 61, on the pedal point of B^{b}. Two ninth chords are used to comprise the notes. They are a B^{b} dominant ninth chord with an added major sixth (G) and an E dominant ninth chord with an added major sixth ($C^{\#}$).

Figure 3.24:

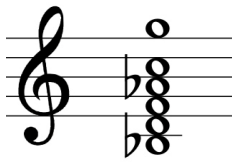
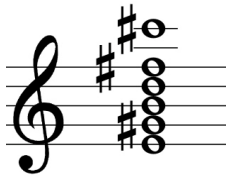


Figure 3.25:

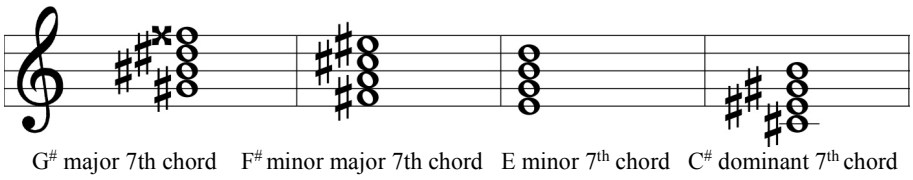


In the accompanying figure of measure 61 – measure 62, the lower voice of the double notes are made of a descending chromatic scale.

A new accompanying figure is introduced in this segment – a series of descending double notes in the right hand, against the left hand's ascending melodic line. This is the very first time when the melody and the accompaniment are in contrary motion. Previously, the two parts are either in oblique motion or parallel motion. Moreover, it is the first time when three staves are applied.

The motives in measure 63 – measure 66 originate from measure 60 where the third theme is in the form of six ascending eighth notes. The motives are stated four times in succession, which renders a long ascending scale that crosses three octaves. The chord progression of the passage is shown in figure 3.26.

Figure 3.26:



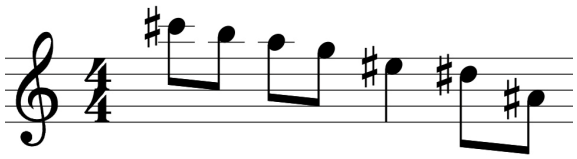
G# major 7th chord F# minor major 7th chord E minor 7th chord C# dominant 7th chord

The melodic line and the accompaniment are still in contrary motion. However, instead of moving towards each other as the original third theme does, the two hands are moving away from each other. While the right hand is ascending, the bass line of the left hand is pushed lower and lower until it reaches the lowest B of the piano. It can be perceived as a depiction of this part in the poem: "Each wave is a water sprite swimming in the stream, each stream is a footpath that winds towards my palace; and my palace is built fluidly, in the depths of the lake, in a triangle of fire, earth, and water."[43] The contour of the left hand's accompanying figure suggests the waves. They "wind towards" to the second lowest note of the piano, which symbolizes Ondine's palace at the bottom of the lake.

The fourth segment (measure 67 – measure 72) contains the climax of the piece. The loudest dynamic mark *ff* appears for the first time. It is also the most technically virtuosic section of the piece. In measure 67, the first gesture of the second theme is stated in a descending whole-tone scale in the right hand, accompanied by arpeggios in the left hand.

Figure 3.27:

Whole-tone scale



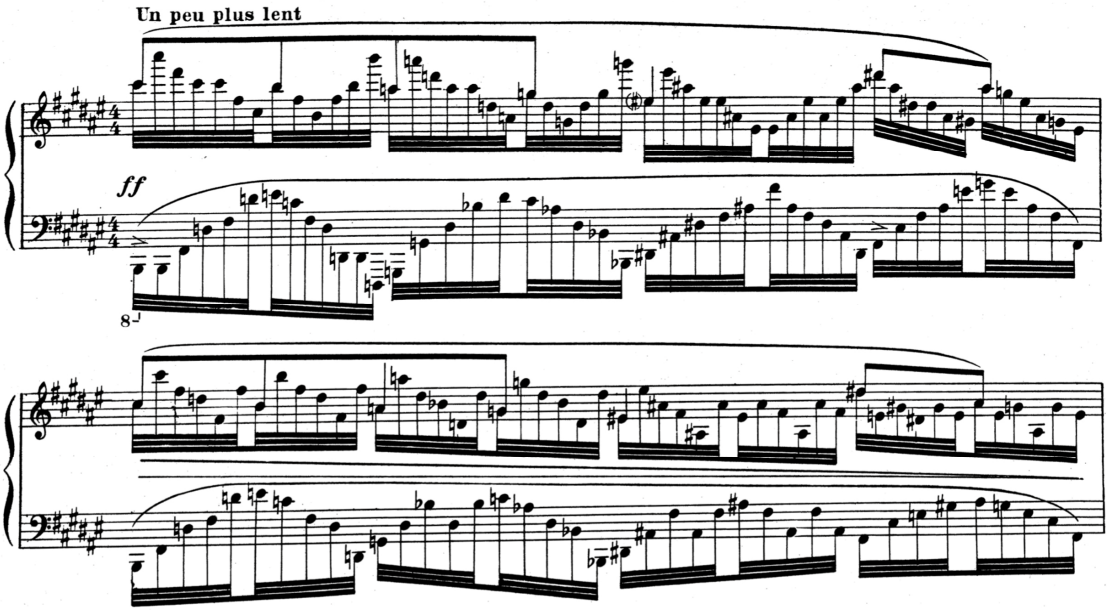
The same material is stated again in measure 68, with the right hand being one octave lower than

[43] Bertrand and Wright, 61.

the first time. As the melodic line descends to a lower register, a diminuendo takes place simultaneously.

Example 3.20:

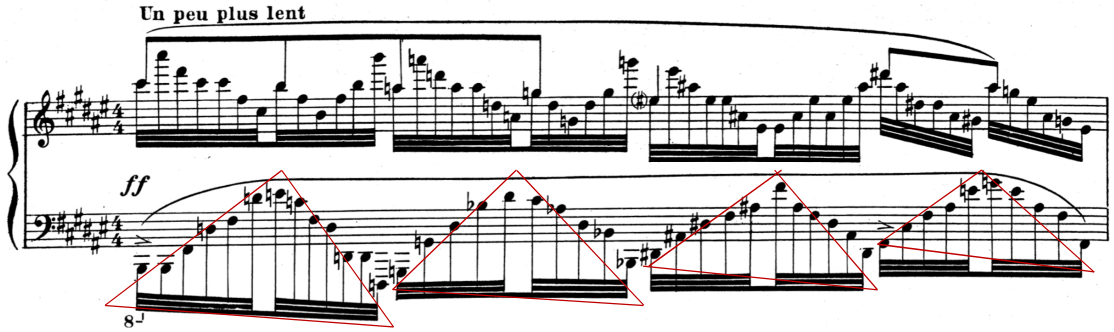
Ravel *Ondine* mm. 67-68



In the poem, Ondine's palace is described as "built fluidly, in the depths of the lake, in a triangle of fire, earth, and water."[44] It might be true that Ravel practiced graphic symbolism here, at the climax of the piece, by writing the left hand's arpeggios in the shape of triangles in measure 67 and measure 68.

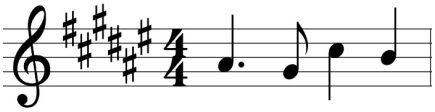
Example 3.21:

Ravel *Ondine* m. 67



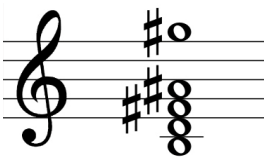
Graphic symbolism is a popular practice with Symbolist artists and poets. For example, one of the most well-known is the French poet Mallarmé, who took the visual impact of his poetry seriously, and would intentionally leave blank space in his poems in order to visualize the rhythms. Painters such as Pierre Bonnard and Walter Crane would include literature in their works and draw arabesques around the text, so a connection between the text and the painting was established. Debussy also valued visual elements. For instance, he put the titles of *Image I* on the upper left corner of each piece, but on the upper right corner in *Image II*. The rest of the fourth section (measure 68 – measure 72) is based on a fragment of the second theme (see figure 3.14).

Figure 3.28:



The fragment is stated three times in succession. Each time, an octave is added above the previous one. The notes used here make a B minor-major seventh chord with an added major sixth ($G^{\#}$).

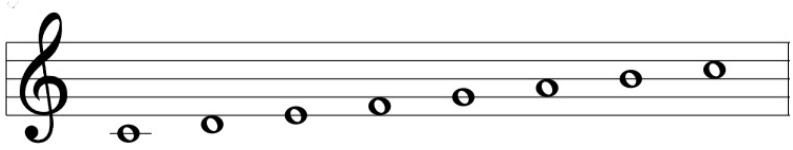
Figure 3.29:



The last segment of Section B (measure 73 – measure 80) serves as the transition to Section A', which is in $G^{\#}$ major. In measure 73 and measure 75, the melodic line in the right hand comes from the motive in measure 23 (see example 3.9). Same as measure 23, the melody is accompanied by a glissando. The glissando forms a C major scale.

Figure 3.30:

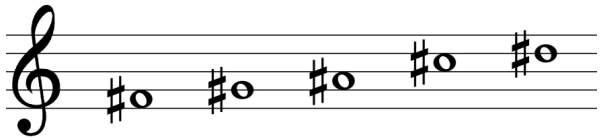
C Major Scale



In measure 75, the motive is transposed to $F^{\#}$ major, accompanied by the glissando of a $F^{\#}$ pentatonic scale.

Figure 3.31:

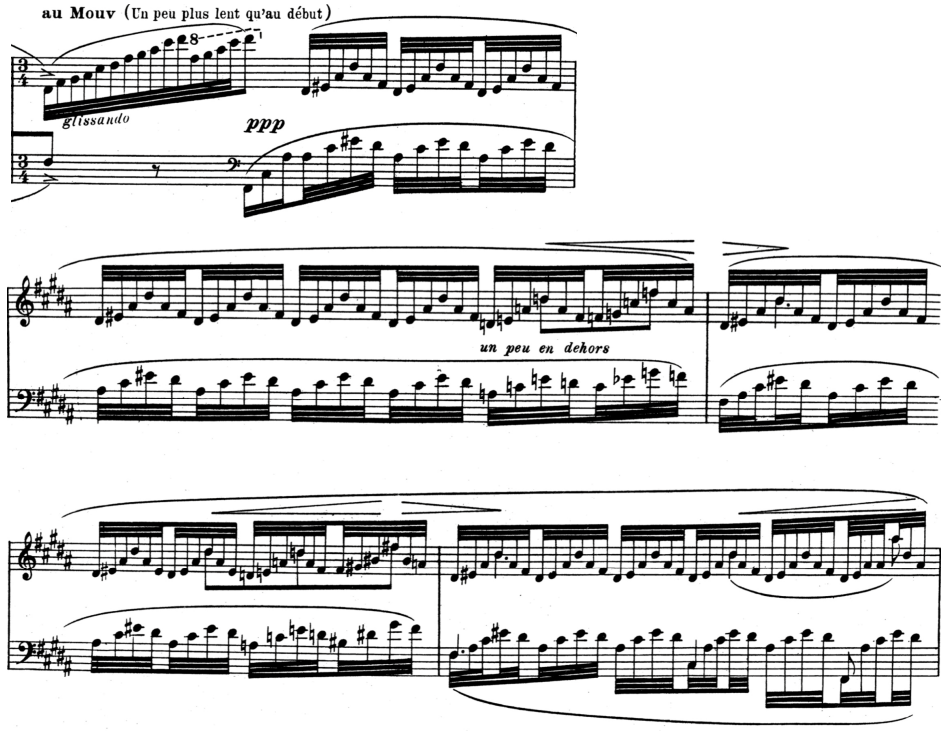
$F^{\#}$ Pentatonic Scale



Afterwards, the section proceeds to the passage with a long pedal point of $F^{\#}$.

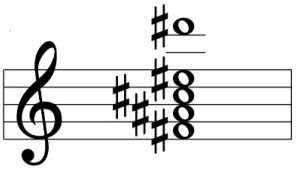
Example 3.22:

Ravel *Ondine* mm.76-79



The left-hand arpeggios make a $F^{\#}$ major seventh chord with an added major sixth ($D^{\#}$).

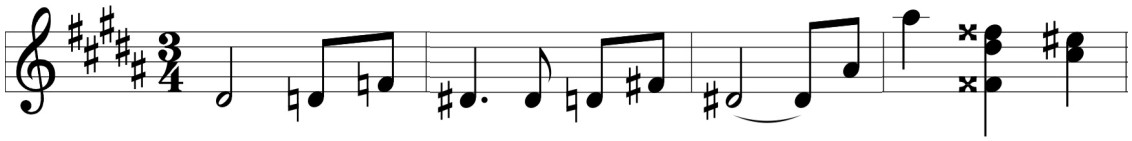
Figure 3.32:



The motive in measure 77 – measure 80 originates from measure 24 – measure 27.

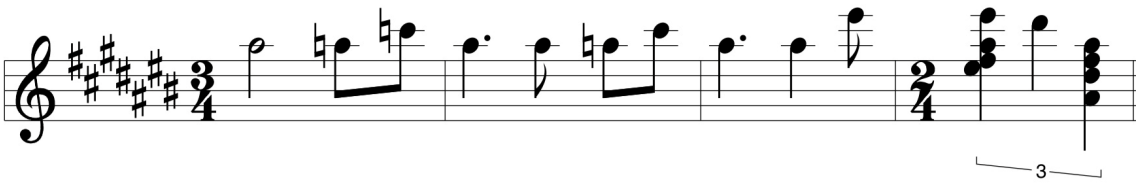
Example 3.23:

Ravel *Ondine* mm.77-80, melody



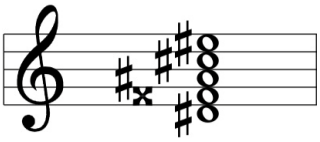
Example 3.24:

Ravel *Ondine* mm.24-27, melody



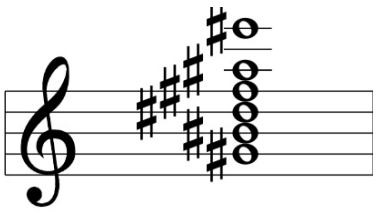
In measure 80, the bass note is shifted from $F^{\#}$ to $D^{\#}$. The notes in measure 80 make a $D^{\#}$ dominant ninth chord, which is resolved to a $G^{\#}$ major triad in measure 81.

Figure 3.33:



In Section A' (measure 81 – measure 88), the first theme is stated for the last time in its entirety. The return of the first theme corresponds to "her song murmured" in the third stanza of the poem. In measure 81 – measure 83, the notes are derived from a $G^{\#}$ dominant ninth chord with an added major sixth ($E^{\#}$).

Figure 3.34:

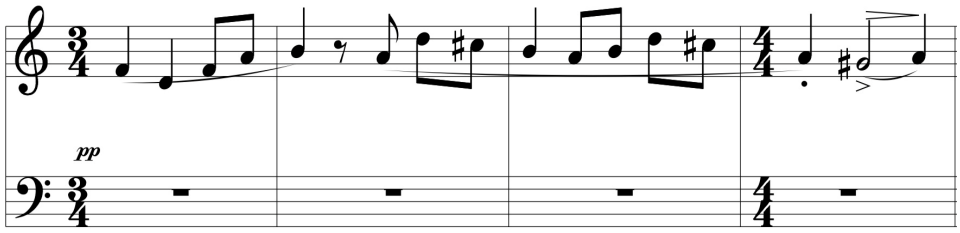


In measure 83, a $D^{\#}$ minor 6/4 chord is established. The $D^{\#}$ 6/4 chord sets up the abrupt change to the D minor 6/4 chord in measure 84.

Ondine's last call is stated measure 85 – measure 88. In her recitative, she begs the man "to receive her ring…and be a husband of an Undine and to visit her palace with her and become the king of the lakes."[45]

Example 3.25:

Ravel *Ondine* mm.85-88



The Coda (measure 89 – the end) is the depiction of the last stanza of the poem: "And as I told her that I loved a mortal, sullen and vexed, she shed a few tears, burst into laughter, and vanished in a sudden shower that streamed white down the length of my blue stained glass."[46] Measure 89 is in extended length, without a time signature assigned. With a crescendo to *ff*, the fast arpeggios in both hands at the beginning of the measure portrays the burst of Ondine's laughter. The right hand plays the arpeggios of a C major triad against the left hand's arpeggios

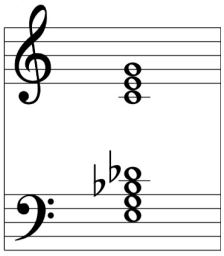
[45] Bertrand and Wright, 61.

[46] Ibid.

of an E^{o7} chord.

Figure 3.35:

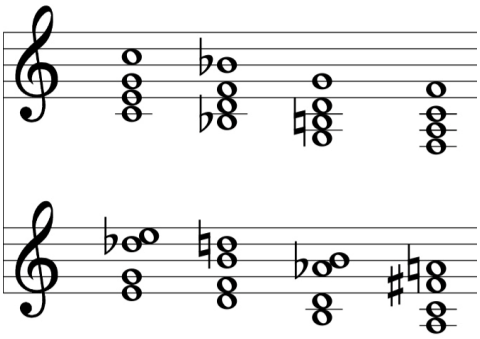
Ravel *Ondine* m.89, first gesture



The next gesture consists of a series of broken chords in both hands, which moves downward in parallel motion.

Figure 3.36:

Ravel *Ondine* m. 89, second gesture

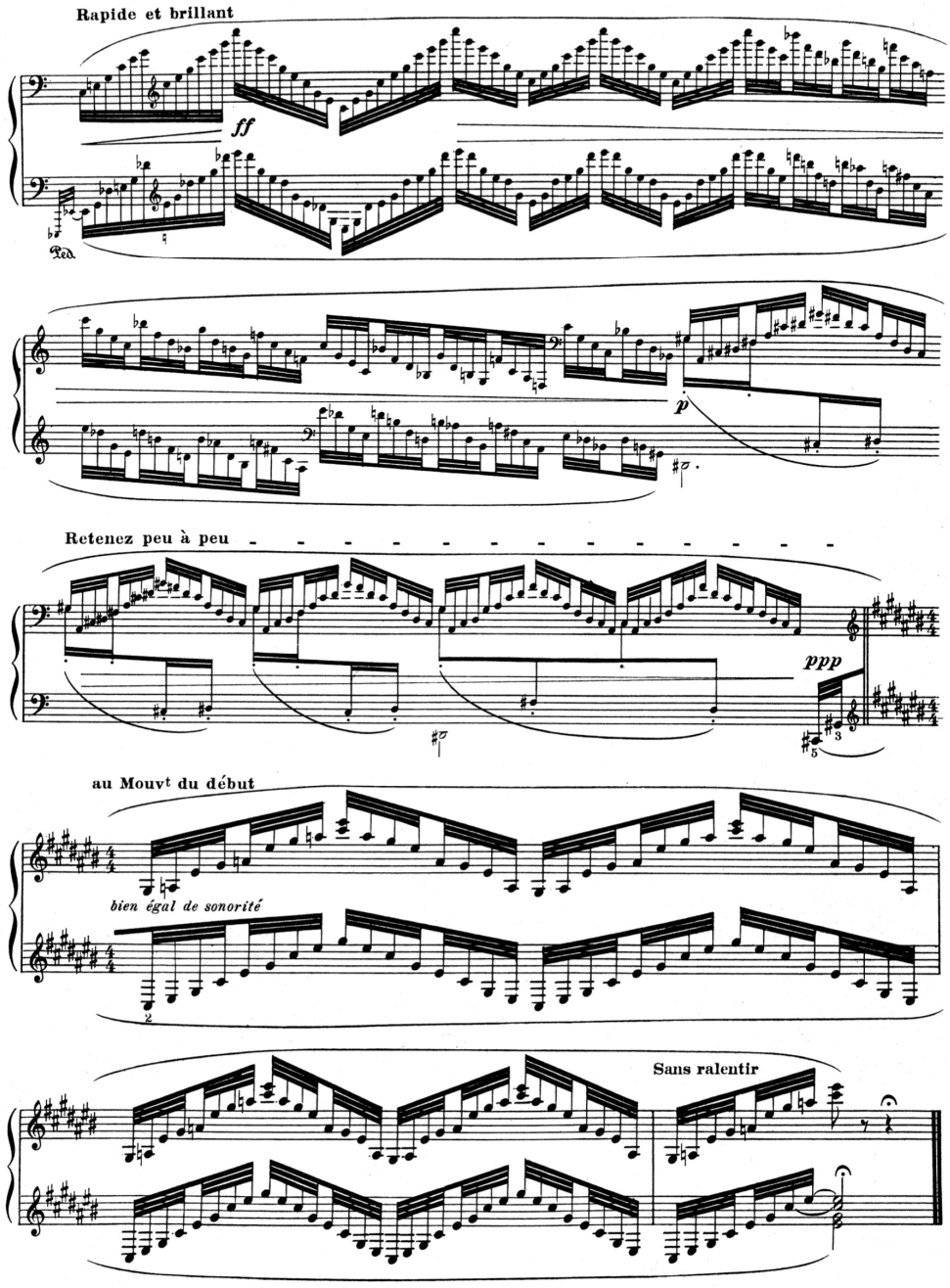


Each chord is the laughter of Ondine. The laughter gradually fades out through an ostinato of $G^{\#}$-$F^{\#}$-$C^{\#}$-$D^{\#}$. The last two measures of the piece return to the tonic key $C^{\#}$ major. The arpeggios are made of a $C^{\#}$ major triad with an added minor sixth, which echoes the beginning of the piece. The undulant arpeggios are the depiction of Ondine, who "vanished in a sudden shower"[47] and streamed white down the length of the man's glass. *Sans ralentir* in the last measure indicates that Ondine disappears without any reluctance.

[47] Bertrand and Wright, 61.

Example 3.26:

Ravel *Ondine* mm.89-92



CHAPTER 5

Comparison of Debussy's *Ondine* and Ravel's *Ondine*

This chapter presents the comparison between Debussy's *Ondine* and Ravel's *Ondine*. Parameters including structure, rhythm and pulse, harmony, and melody will be applied to systematize the comparison.

Structure

Chapter One discusses how Debussy emphasized traditional rules less. One of the rules he tended to "break" was musical forms. During a visit to Debussy's home, Viñes heard Debussy mention that he wanted to "compose music with a form so free as to seem like an improvisation."[48] In a letter, Debussy expressed his views on the relation between music and forms: "Generally speaking, I feel more and more that music, by its very essence, is not something that can flow inside a rigorous, traditional form. It consists of colors and of rhythmicized time…."[49]

The form of the prelude appears to suit Debussy's intention well. Considered as a warm-up piece played before a rigorous fugue, the prelude was given improvisational characteristic by the keyboardists in the Baroque period. Revived by Chopin, the conciseness and the adaptability of the form became the ideal vessel for character pieces, without the necessity to assign titles which might limit the audience's imagination. Cortot commented on the form of the prelude in his book *The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*:

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[48] Roland-Manuel, 41.

[49] Lesure and Nichols, 184.

> Adapted to this new and expressive mode, the "Prelude" with its character of improvisation, the poetic value of its limit, its docility in translating all musical ideas without imposing on them the severity of a pre-established development, was bound to offer to Debussy the recourses of a form especially favorable to the realization of his tendencies. In fact, none of the piano works has reflected more faithfully than the "Preludes" the freshness and diversity of an art whose magic power seems to grow still finer.[50]

In other words, the prelude is a form without a fixed formal design, so it allows composers to have more freedom to unfold their musical ideas and gives the audience more space for reflections.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the formal structure of the prelude *Ondine* is multi-sectional. With the fact that there is no correlation between the key centers of each section and the arbitrary distribution of the themes and the motives, one cannot help but ask what holds the piece together. If we make a hypothesis that Debussy wanted to present "the adorable arabesque" and "autogenesis" as what Bach and the Old Masters of the 16th century did, the answer becomes clear. The melodic arabesque replaces the harmonic progression, which serves as the driving force in classic forms, and unifies the piece with the devices such as immediate repetitions, minor alternations, and fragmentations.

Several motives and themes will be put into instances to illustrate different types of arabesques. In terms of the "self-mutative" and "repetitive"[51] aspects of an arabesque, Motive *a* is a great example. The motive consists of three gestures.

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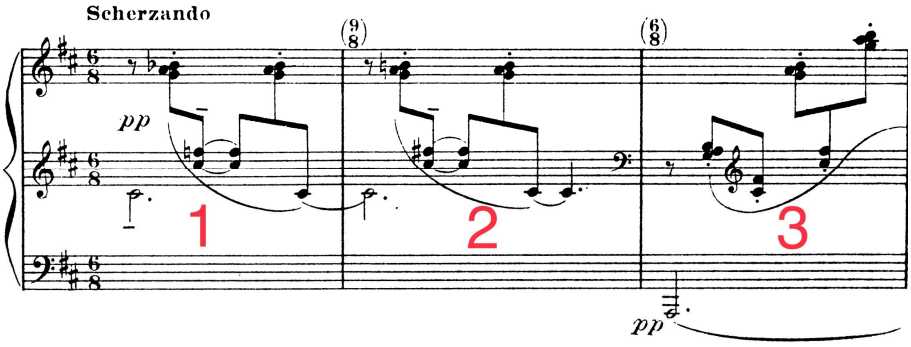
[50] Alfred Cortot, *The Piano Music of Claude Debussy,* trans. Violet Edgell (London: J. & W. Chester Ltd, 1922), 16-17.

[51] Pasler, 226.

Example 5.1:

Debussy *Ondine* mm.1-3



If the first gesture is the "origination," the second gesture is a minor mutation of the first gesture because of the removal of the accidentals in measure 1 ($B^{\flat}$-B and $F^{\natural}$-$F^{\#}$). The third gesture is a self-repetition of the second gesture. Motive *c* (example 4.3), Motive *d* (example 4.4), and Theme 2 (example 3.3) are also great examples of the self-repetition. Motive *a* is also a great example of the self-generation. We can see that Motive *a* generates Motive *b* because the quartal chords of Motive *b* stem from the third gesture of Motive *a*. Moreover, since Motive *a* is closely related Motive *b*, the interruption of Motive *a* in measure 5 does not seem abrupt. Another example of the self-generation lies between Motive *b* and Theme I. If we extract the A, D, and $G^{\#}$ from the right hand of the beginning of the first theme, we can see that the theme comes from Motive *b,* which is where the quartal chords first appear. The decorative function of the arabesque can also be found in *Ondine*. For example, in Motive *d*, the bass note A is decorated by the ornaments and palindromic scales (figure 4.8).

In conclusion, it is the arabesques that link the piece together and create paths of self-similarities that the listeners can follow along.

Ravel, on the other hand, did not share Debussy's views on forms. While Ravel "followed Debussy in the ideal of economy of material," he was "at odds with him (Debussy) in

his respect for forms, as Debussy had shown negligence in regard to form."[52] As mentioned in Chapter Two, Ravel was an advocate of classic forms. Ravel's pursuit of conforming to classic forms stemmed from his study with André Gedalge, who emphasized clarity and classic fundamentals in his teaching. Ravel's admiration for Mozart might have been cultivated from his studies with Gedalge since the teacher utilized Mozart's compositions as models in his teaching.

Ravel's *Ondine* is in ternary form, though during the time when the piece was composed, Ravel had brought out more and more modifications to the form. The less conventional aspects of Ravel's *Ondine* are that: (1) Section A' is short in length, and instead of being stated in the tonic key, it is in the dominant key; (2) V-I relations and modulations are used in the piece; however, the transitioning is not done within conventional harmonic progressions. For example, in Transition *a,* Ravel approached the $D^{\#}$ using the following method: a descending bass line $C^{\#}$-$A^{\#}$-$G^{\#}$-E-$C^{\#}$-$A^{\#}$-$G^{\#}$, which forms a $vii^{ø7}$ chord of $D^{\#}$ major (moving at a pace of one measure) was created; each bass note is the first degree of a modal scale, so as the bass note changes, the modal scale also changes. The changes in modal scales are made smoothly because of the common notes shared with one another. In the next section, changes of modal scales are used again to transition from $D^{\#}$ major to $G^{\#}$ major (V-I), which is the key center of the second theme.

There are also conventional elements of ternary form in Ravel's *Ondine*. Typically, in ternary form, Section B is in a different key (the dominant key or relative key). Section B of *Ondine* does go to a different key, but instead of the dominant key or the relative key, Ravel chose C major, which is rather remote from the tonic key. The piece then modulates to $F^{\#}$ major, which is V of the next key center B major. The B major section makes a smooth transition to

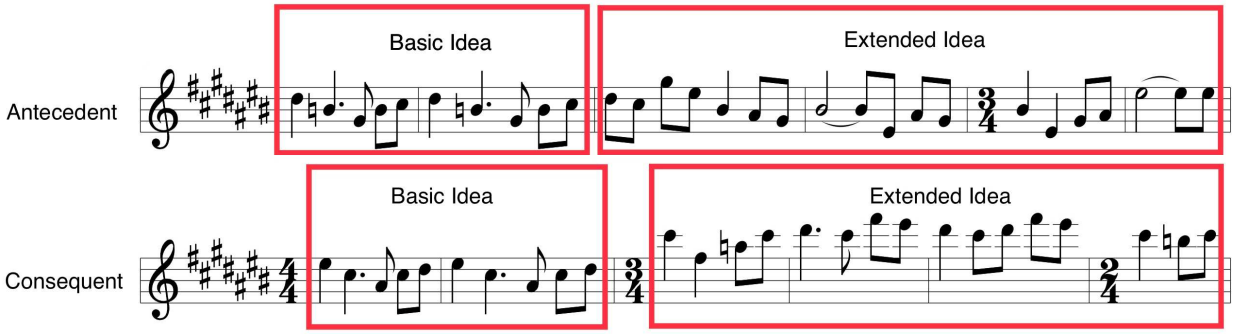
[52] Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews* (New York: Dover Publications, 1990), 421.

Section A', which is in g# minor, because B major and g# minor are relative keys. Ravel pushed back the return of the tonic key until the Coda.

The other classic model Ravel followed is periods and sentences, but with modifications. The rules such as equal length between the two segments and the presence of cadences are dropped. For example, in Section A where the themes are in their original forms, the first two appearances of the first theme can be combined and viewed as a period.

Figure 5.1:

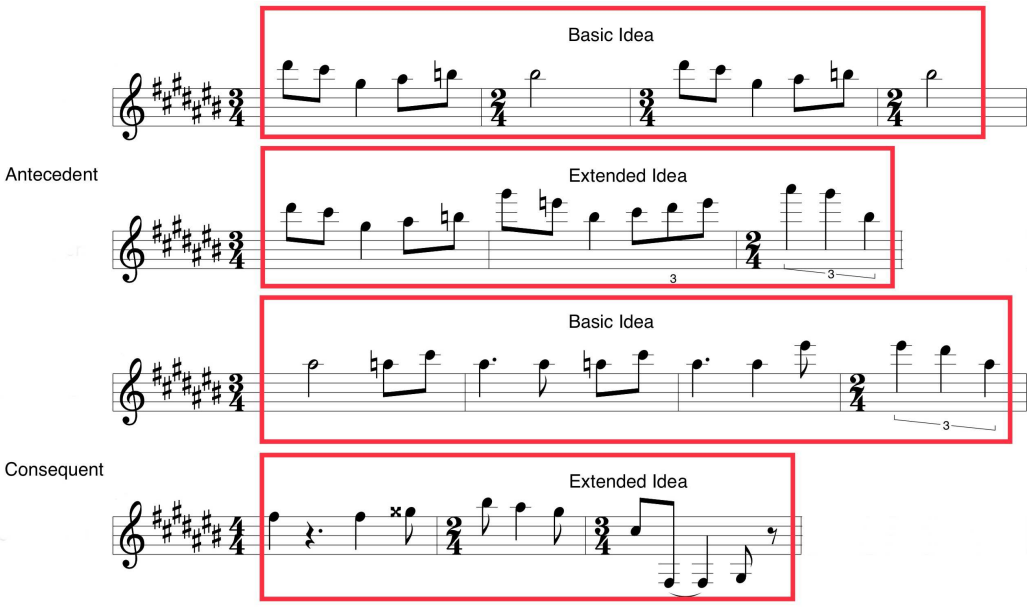
Ravel *Ondine* mm. 3-13



The Transition *a* can be viewed as a period, too, while the Antecedent itself can be a sentence.

Figure 5.2:

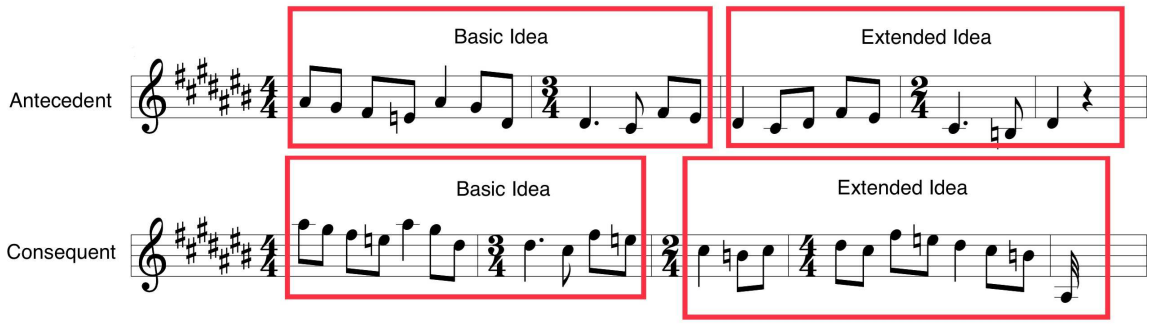
Ravel *Ondine* mm. 17-30



The second theme is also a period.

Figure 5.3:

Ravel *Ondine* mm.33-42



In Section B, sentences and periods continue to be used as units to organize the phrases, however, there are more interruptions and extensions added within or in between each phrase.

In conclusion, the structure in Ravel's *Ondine* is conventional because it is done according to the classic "norms".

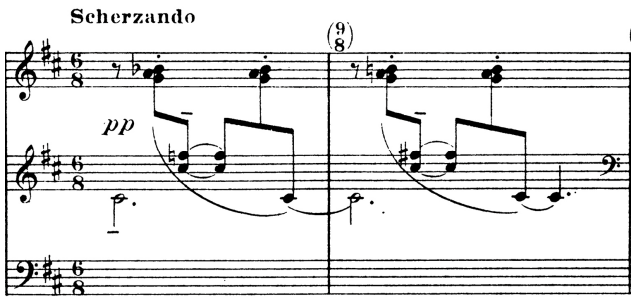
Rhythm and Pulse

When it comes to rhythms in Debussy's music, one cannot get by without the influence of the Javanese gamelan. When Debussy first heard the ensemble at the 1889 Exhibition de Paris, he was so fascinated and inspired by the ensemble's rhythmic complexity. As a result, polyrhythms became one of the characteristics of Debussy's music. Another characteristic of Debussy's rhythm is its disregard of bar lines and meters. Debussy once gave a comment on rhythms: "Rhythms are stifling. Rhythms cannot be contained within bars. It is nonsense to speak of "simple" or "compound" time. There should be an interminable flow of them both without seeking to bury the rhythmic patterns."[53]

Ondine is a great example to illustrate Debussy's viewpoints on rhythms. In the piece, there are several places that indicate Debussy's disregard of bar lines. Both of the first theme and the second theme start on the second beat of the beginning measure and finish on the first beat of the ending measure. Debussy's frequent use of tied notes especially when they are tied over bar lines shows that bar lines might be in the way of the rhythmic flow he pursued. Example 5.2 and example 5.3 exemplify this point.

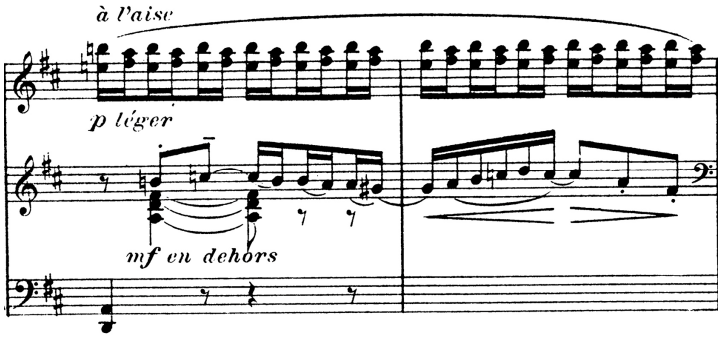
Example 5.2:

Debussy *Ondine* mm.1-2



Example 5.3:

Ravel *Ondine* mm. 21-22



There are examples that convey the "interminable flow of" both the simple and compound meters in Debussy's *Ondine* using hemiolas. The first example of hemiola is in measure 14 (example 4.4), where the grouping of the beats shifts to three. The same kind of hemiola can be found in measure 8 – measure 9 and measure 30 – measure 31.

The most rhythmically interesting passage in Debussy's *Ondine* takes place within the last appearance of the second theme (example 4.18), for it superposes three of the four points mentioned above, which are Debussy's disregard of bar lines, an "interminable flow" of the simple and compound meters (hemiola), and the polyrhythm. There are three voices in this passage. The lowest voice, being neutral, presents the consistent sixteenth notes. The middle voice, being the three of the hemiola, presents the repeated major seconds on the 1st, 3rd, and 5th beats. However, the top voice, being the two of the hemiola, doesn't line up its 1st beat with the middle voice's 1st beat.

The irregular pulses in *Ondine* represent another rhythmic characteristic of Debussy. There are a few factors to this trait. The first one and the most apparent one is that all phrases are unequal in length. Secondly, the uses of tempo markings such as *rubato* and *retenu* further obscure the pulses. It seems that Debussy intentionally tried to destroy a nearly established pulse by placing a tempo marking. For example, in Motive *d* (example 4.4), the steady pulse of two is

established by the bass notes for the very first time since the start. Instead of letting the regularity continue, Debussy placed a rubato as well as a hemiola to make the listeners forget the previous pulse and the tempo. Another similar example is in measure 28 – measure 31, where the fragment of Motive *d* is followed by a *retenu*. Thirdly, the timing when the themes and motives starts creates "false downbeats" that overthrow the listeners' anticipation. For example, in the meter of 6/8, the first gesture of the first theme starts on the second beat of the measure and has eleven beats. Approached by a rubato, the entrance of the gesture gives the effect of a downbeat. As a result of both the odd number of beats and the false downbeat effect, when the second gesture enters on an actual downbeat, it sounds like an interruption and feels like a beat is missed.

Unlike in Debussy's *Ondine*, rhythms do not serve as a means to add complexity to the piece in Ravel's *Ondine*. Quite the reverse, rhythms are used to manifest clarity and unify the piece. Rhythms in Ravel's *Ondine* are simple and straightforward. As a matter of fact, the rhythmic components in the first theme, which are comprised of thirty-second notes, eighth notes, quarter notes, and half notes, compose almost all the other rhythmic patterns that are used later in the piece. There are a few places when sixteenth notes are used, but they are oftentimes in the accompaniment, thus they do not contribute to the overall rhythmic structure.

The pluses in Ravel's *Ondine* are also more regular and expectable than the pulses in Debussy's *Ondine*. First, the continuous thirty-second-note accompaniments throughout the piece do not allow much room for irregularity, for it offers a steady and consistent pulse at the pace of the smallest subdivision. Along with the thirty-second notes, each of the melodic lines reinforces the steady pulses by always entering on the downbeats and self-repeating.

To sum up, there is more rhythmic irregularity and complexity in Debussy's *Ondine*, resulting in a less traditional sounding of the piece due to its unpredictability in pulses, whereas

the rhythmic clarity in Ravel's *Ondine* contributes to the recognition of the themes.

Harmony

Harmony endows Debussy and Ravel's compositions with their distinct colors. Their distinct colors distinguish Debussy and Ravel from one another as well as their predecessors. Debussy and Ravel both applied the devices such as parallel harmonies and modal scales to bring out unique colors. However, they used those devices for different purposes – Debussy used parallel harmonies and modal scales to ambiguate and avoid harmonic progressions, whereas Ravel used them to approach subsequent harmonies.

The first difference of harmony between Debussy's *Ondine* and Ravel's *Ondine* is reflected in harmonic pacing. In comparison to Ravel, the harmonic progression of Debussy's *Ondine* moves at a slower pace. One of the contributing factors is Debussy's use of long pedal points. For example, in Debussy*'s Ondine*, the bass notes usually change when the piece proceeds to the next motive or theme. In other words, there is barely harmonic progressions within a theme, or a motive, and the bass notes are not used as devices to advance the harmonic progressions throughout the piece. Therefore, the harmony of Debussy's *Ondine* appears to progress at a slow pace.

Nevertheless, it is not Debussy's defect that he was not able to create functional harmonic progressions. On the contrary, it is a conventional musical quality that Debussy intended to disregard, and this disregard became one of the features of his personal style. In his *Ondine,* there are quite a few places that exemplify this feature. Firstly, the tonality is not clearly stated at the beginning of the piece. The first appearance of the tonic note is not presented until in measure 14. The piece stays in the tonic key only temporarily and does not return to the tonic until the Coda. Secondly, in most of Debussy's compositions, including *Ondine*, there are

passages that stay in the same harmony for an extended period of time. Debussy used melodic arabesques to manifest contrasts and developments, so the "expansive thematic-presentational areas" can carry on "without (necessarily) the component of harmonic progression."[54] A typical example of this trait in *Ondine* can be found in the first appearance of the second theme (example 4.15), where the low voices set up a sustaining augmented triad as the top voice presents a chromatic arabesque. The fluidity and the versatility of chromaticism enables the melody to be directed to anywhere, thus there is no need for an external force to move along the development of the melody.

Another device Debussy used to ambiguate harmonic progressions is parallel chords, particularly ninth chords. A lot of the times, each resolution of a ninth chords are taken "as read" and replaced "with the next questioning ninth chord."[55] Moreover, the consecutive parallel chords not only just meander, but also destabilize the harmony. The example of parallel chords in *Ondine* is through the second appearance of the second theme, where the theme undergoes a chain of dominant ninth chords. As described above, each ninth chord is left unresolved and proceeds to the next ninth chord. This chain of ninth chords does not contribute to propelling the harmonic progression, instead, it further ambiguates the key center of the section.

In contrast, the harmony in Ravel's *Ondine* is progressive and moves at a regular pace. There are no long pedal points. The bass notes are constantly changing, which indicates the ongoing evolution of the harmony. As mentioned earlier, V-I relations and modulations are present in Ravel's *Ondine*, though unconventionally, the transition is done via changes of modal

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[54] Boyd Pomeroy, "Debussy's Tonality: A Formal Perspective," in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8.

[55] Roy Howat, "Ravel and the Piano," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6.

scales, led by the progression of the bass notes.

Same as Debussy, Ravel applied parallel chords as a means to deliver distinct musical colors. In fact, it is the ninth chords that render the overall musical color of Ravel's *Ondine,* for the notes used in all three themes are derived from ninth chords. Unlike Debussy, Ravel used parallel chords as a transportation that took the piece from one harmony to the next one. For example, right before the climax of the piece, a chain of ninth chords is used (figure 3.26). The roots of the ninth chords form a descending bass line and pave a smooth path from the lowest $G^{\#}$ to the lowest B of the piano.

Both of Debussy and Ravel used modal scales in their *Ondines* for the purpose of adding unique musical colors. Nevertheless, they treated modal scales differently. In Debussy's *Ondine,* on one hand, modal scales appear separately and are used for the convenient access to tritones (see figure 4.7 and figure 4.16). In Ravel's *Ondine*, on the other hand, various modal scales appear in series (figure 3.7 – figure 3.13) and are used to display the snapshots of each modal scale's color.

In sum, Debussy and Ravel used similar devices to bring out innovative harmonies in their works, though their different treatments of the devices make them very different sounding pieces.

Melody

In a comparison of Debussy's *Ondine* and Ravel's *Ondine,* Jules van Ackere "calls attention to the firm melodic line and crystalline clarity of Ravel's *Ondine*, beside which Debussy's appears blurred, fragile, and elusive."[56] Indeed, compared to Ravel's long and

[56] Stuckenschmidt, 112.

singable melodies, the melodies in Debussy's *Ondine* are gestural and fragmented and proceed in segments of two or three measures. Ravel's *Ondine* is in the typical texture of a song – a melodic line with accompaniments. Throughout the piece, the melodic lines remain as the protagonist and keep the same characters, owing to their resemblance in rhythm, contour, and harmony. Additionally, when the theme reoccurs, it remains in its original form or very similar to its original form. In contrast, the themes in Debussy's *Ondine* appear in varied forms. For example, when the first theme appears for the second time (example 4.9), it is placed in the middle voice with modified rhythms. In the second appearance of the second theme (example 4.9), the character of the theme is changed from hurried and upset to expansive and sentimental. When the second theme returns for the last time (example 4.18), it is placed in a much lower register than the original version, so a new character is suggested due to its darker and deeper timbre.

Contrary to the transparent melodies in Ravel's *Ondine,* the melodies in Debussy's *Ondine* are either embedded in thick textures or surrounded by intricate ornaments. The only place where the thematic melody is clearly stated like Ravel's *Ondine* is the first appearance of the second theme (figure 4.15). Here, the thematic melody is presented in a single line and is in a much higher register than the accompaniment, which prevents the melody from blending into the accompaniment. The other trait that renders the fragmented and less singable melodies in Debussy's *Ondine* is the construction of two-bar units, which is one of Debussy's "most readily identifiable stylistic traits."[57] Throughout Debussy's *Ondine*, the thematic melodies come in the segment of two measures and are pieced together to compose the thematic areas.

All in all, Ravel's melodies in *Ondine* are vocal and clear. The melodies in Debussy's *Ondine* possess more varieties. Both portraits make sense because most parts of Ravel's *Ondine*

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[57] Howat, 7.

depict the water nymph's singing and Debussy's *Ondine* captures a gesture, an aspect of the personality, or a mood of the water nymph.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Debussy and Ravel came from very similar backgrounds and both were influenced by the Impressionist and Symbolist movements. Through his work, Debussy conveyed Impressionist values, including the innovative use of colors and disregard for traditions. Ravel, on the other hand, remained tied to traditions while being progressive in exploring musical colors. As for symbolism, Debussy was very much in favor of its suggestive manners and incorporated this way of expression in many of his compositions. Ravel realized symbolism by setting symbolist poems to music, so the poems are perfected,[58] and correspondence between the two arts (music and literature) is established. Their compositional approaches are also quite different. Debussy wanted the compositional process to be spontaneous and freed from the rules, whereas Ravel heavily relied on pre-calculation and deliberation while composing.

Through a comparative analysis of the two *Ondines*, it is evident that the two pieces are rather different, but representative of each composer's personal style. Even though the two *Ondines* are based on the same mythical character, the atmosphere and soundings of the two pieces are tremendously different. In Debussy's *Ondine,* as a result of the fragmented melodies and motives, harmonic ambiguity, complex rhythms, and irregular pulses, the water nymph appears to be whimsical, and the overall sounding is dissonant. In Ravel's *Ondine*, in contrast to Debussy's *Ondine*, Ravel uses devices such as clear melodic lines, progressive harmonies, steady rhythms, and regular pulses to bring out a more elegant Ondine. The resulting sounding of Ravel's *Ondine* is more consonant. The overall atmosphere remains exquisite.

[58] In *The Poetic Principle,* Poe wrote that by setting poems in music, the music is perfecting the poems.

The examination of Debussy's and Ravel's cultural influences shows where the two composers' personal philosophies came from and how their philosophies differ from one another. The comparative analysis of the two *Ondines* provides examples of the differences in compositional techniques between the two composers. Therefore, it can be concluded that Debussy and Ravel's styles are substantially distinct from each other, and the two *Ondines*, which represent the two composers' compositional traits, should be approached with different stylistic orientations.

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