Analysis and Interpretation: Musical Analysis as a Technique for Performance Decisions in Selected Preludes by Claude Debussy.

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ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION: MUSICAL ANALYSIS AS A TECHNIQUE FOR PERFORMANCE DECISIONS IN SELECTED PRELUDES BY CLAUDE DEBUSSY

A Monograph

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in The School of Music

by

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B.M., Auburn University, 1979
M.M., Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, 1981
August 1997

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To Mom and Dad
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ABSTRACT

Thorough analysis will serve the performer as a valuable tool for making effective performance decisions. This study follows two guidelines: 1) analysis must include the examination of all elements of musical structure and 2) the performer must view the music from as many perspectives as possible, for example, as listener and analyst, as well as performer. In serving the second of these two guidelines, the study examines performance tradition as it pertains to Debussy's piano music, including historical performances of his contemporaries as well as Debussy's own recorded performances. A larger part of the study analyzes the structure of "Des pas sur la neige" and "Le vent dans la plaine" to develop suggestions for such pianistic devices as rhythmic nuance, phrasing, dynamic articulation, voicing, pedaling, and the execution of technical difficulties.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Analysis can be a valuable tool for the performer who is seeking solutions to performance problems. The primary purpose of this study is to examine various ways in which analysis can provide solutions to problems that may arise in the performance of Debussy's Preludes for piano. This study, through thorough analysis, provides pianists with insights into analytically-based problem-solving techniques by examining passages in which analysis can provide assistance in solving specific performance problems.

The Analytical Approach

It is beyond the scope of this study to make an in-depth exploration into all aspects of the relationship between analysis and performance. The performer who turns to analysis to solve performance problems should be aware that there are many complex issues involved in that relationship. The manner in which those issues are addressed may well affect the way the performer thinks, not only about analysis and performance, but about the nature of music itself. For example, Roger Sessions,
in one of a series of lectures, put forth the idea that musical rhythm is a manifestation of basic human impulses such as breathing and walking.¹ Edward Cone expanded that idea convincingly to produce the argument that rhythm is the most basic and fundamental element of musical form. Cone recommends that, as performers, "... we must first discover the rhythmic shape of a piece—which is what is meant by its form—and then try to make it as clear as possible to our listeners."² His study is invaluable reading for musicians who are exploring analytically-based performance solutions; however, in a later article he warns of the dangers of generalization about the nature of music and an "uncritical reliance on systematization." Emphasizing the point that no systematic codification can do justice to the unique individual quality of a composition, Cone says that "... the most useful systems are the most flexible."³

The analytical approach in this study has been developed with respect to two basic guidelines. The first requires that analysis must include the examination of


all elements of musical structure. As Cone suggests, performers may find that their understanding of the formal function of rhythm has many possible expressions in performance. There are still many instances where that particular aspect of structure may not offer a complete view of structure itself. It may be argued that musical form cannot exist without rhythm, but it is also true that the extent to which rhythmic impulse is explicit in the character of a composition or passage is a matter of degree. The same can be said of other elements of musical structure; the extent to which harmony, texture, tonality, etc., are each readily apparent or explicit in their cofunctioning definition of form is basic to the character of a specific passage or composition, or even to the style of a composer's music.

It is only through analysis of all aspects of musical structure that a reasonable estimation of the intrinsic quality of the music may be made. As Wallace Berry has noted:

> When reasonable concepts of structure can be numerous and divergent, and when a given structure may point to several possible realizations in performance, it is only in detailed analysis that the performer is able to delineate priorities among elements made apparent in analysis.

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In following a second important guideline, a piece of music must be viewed from as many perspectives as possible. "When the musician functions as analyst or listener, he has the opportunity simultaneously to enjoy several modes of perceiving the work of art." Cone notes the numerous ways that a piece of music may be perceived by alluding to the possibility of two or more simultaneous forms in a single composition. He says those various forms may be experienced, one by the listener, another by the performer, and still another of which only the composer is aware. His concept of multiple form is connected with musical style:

This concept of multiple form may also explain those passages where Schumann's syncopations are so persistent that the listener cannot perceive the metrical background; such sections may present different, but equally intelligible, forms to performer and to audience. The same concept may explain similar difficulties in twentieth-century music, including, for example, Webern's cross-rhythms and his extraordinary notation . . .

The various musical activities of performer, analyst, and listener are often separated, and each is valued by the nature of its respective focus and possibilities. By achieving a synthesis of all of these views, however, the performer will be closer to what Cone referred to

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as "synoptic comprehension" of the music. Such comprehension is a force in creating effective, satisfying performances by allowing the performer the opportunity to realize an understanding of musical style and processes in those performances. It is also logical to conclude that analysis will allow the performer to engage in a process of learning, memorizing, and performing a piece with greater confidence and success.

How this Study Proceeds

In following the two guidelines stated above, this study proceeds as follows. Chapter two addresses performance preparation through the study of written and recorded materials. Performance tradition as it pertains to Debussy's piano music is examined so as to point out the types of information that can be gained from the

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Ibid., 88-98. Webster's Third New World Dictionary defines "synoptic" as: "affording a general view of a whole." Cone uses the term in referring to the comprehensive understanding of the objective elements of a musical work, that work thereby being perceived as a complete, single and unified object. He contrasts synoptic comprehension with "immediate apprehension," the second of his two modes of aesthetic perception. The latter refers to the more immediately sensuous aesthetic qualities that may be perceived without the awareness of any specific unity or structural relationships. He says that synoptic comprehension is not absolutely necessary for immediate apprehension, but that it is an important contributing factor to a more satisfying experience. "The ideal hearing of a composition is one that enjoys both modes simultaneously, that savors each detail all the more for realizing its role in the form of the whole."
research of music historians, and from a study of the recordings and writings of pianists who knew or studied with Debussy. The composer's own recordings of several preludes are examined as well, in particular his performance of "Le vent dans la plaine" ("The wind in the plain").

Chapters three and four, which comprise the larger portion of this study, are concerned with practical exercises in forming analytically-based performance solutions. Using "Des pas sur la neige" ("Footprints in the snow") and "Le vent dans la plaine" as models, those two chapters are devoted to examples of musical analysis and related performance executions; as performance problems in specific passages are defined, analysis is used to suggest solutions to those problems.

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8 *Claude Debussy Plays Again in Stereo*, Superscope, Keyboard Immortal Series, Stereo A 005.
CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS THROUGH STUDY OF WRITTEN MATERIALS AND RECORDINGS

Studying the history and the performance tradition surrounding specific works of Debussy can provide much valuable information for present-day performing pianists. Historical and chronological information provides insight into the role of a particular work within a composer's total output, a factor that may influence even the performer's choice of repertoire for performance. The study of performance tradition as it is reflected in significant writings and recordings is also a vast source of information about many aspects involved in the performance of Debussy's piano music.

History and Chronology of the Works Studied

Pianists who perform the works of Debussy stand to benefit significantly by expanding their study of the works beyond a straightforwardly pianistic viewpoint. A more careful examination of the characteristics of the work, the history of its composition, and any literary or visual associations in the title will often yield clues toward a more creative and suitable performance style.
Debussy's Préludes (Book One, 1910, Book Two, 1913) are historically important in the literature for piano, and they demonstrate growth and maturation in the composer's musical style. By composing pieces titled "preludes," Debussy continued a tradition established in large part by Chopin's Préludes, Op. 28, (1836-1839). That Debussy was making a tribute to Chopin is entirely plausible given the great respect that Debussy held for him. Debussy's etudes (1915) are dedicated to Chopin, and his claim of Chopin as his "principal model" is another of many indications that he considered himself an heir to that pianistic tradition.  

In Debussy's early solo piano works, generally those written between 1888-1902, generic titles such as prelude or toccata (see Suite pour le piano, 1894-1901) were used frequently. The next period of about eight years was one in which Debussy dispensed with generic titles, using descriptive ones almost exclusively. Then, beginning with the first and second books of preludes, and continuing with the etudes, he began an apparent departure from the use of descriptive titles, employing again the generic labels. Though the individual preludes bear descriptive titles, the pieces are unique in Debussy's output in that

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the titles are placed at the end of each prelude.\textsuperscript{10}
Debussy's reason for this has been a matter of speculation, the most commonly held theory being that he chose to avoid any preconceived notions on the part of the listener before the music could speak. Regarding the titles, Roy Howat has suggested that the poetic and pictorial titles of earlier works, such as \textit{Estampes} (1903) and \textit{Images} (I-1905, II-1908), had achieved their purpose of creating extra-musical associations, and from that point forward the music had to speak first. He asserts that the preludes are a "halfway stage" to the etudes, in which Debussy releases all of his evocative power using "... laconically pedagogical headings for each piece as a way of dispensing altogether with poetic titles." Howat further notes that some of the preludes "... far outstrip the drama inherent in their titles' sources", citing "Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest" ("What the West Wind Saw") as an example.\textsuperscript{11} Frequently Debussy's titles can inspire the performer's interpretation of the work. "Des pas sur la neige" ("Footprints in the Snow") serves as an example in which the performer strives to recreate a stark, frozen landscape. The title "Le vent dans la plaine" comes from

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\textsuperscript{11} Howat, p. xvi.
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a line by poet Charles-Simon Favart: "... Le vent dans la plaine suspend son haleine" ("The wind in the plain takes one's breath away"). Knowledge of the full line of the poetry makes the mental image of the wind much stronger than the image brought to mind by the partial quote. E. Robert Schmitz's book, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy, is an excellent source of insights into the descriptive titles of the preludes; Schmitz provides interesting discussions of the musical elements that depict the poetic ideas suggested by the titles.

The growth of Debussy's creative style is illustrated by notable differences between the two sets of preludes. In the first book, the scoring never extends beyond the use of two staves, although some of the notational problems may have benefitted from the use of three staves. In the second book, every prelude is either partially or completely notated on three staves. Debussy's use of three staves becomes somewhat fascinating when one considers that the playing time for each book is approximately the same, but in the Durand edition the

12 Howat, p. xvi.
second book takes up half again as many pages as the first book.\textsuperscript{15} Such a disparity indicates not just an increase of figurative detail, but also an expansion of textural and spatial qualities of the music.

Historical information such as this can also be valuable in addressing the practical question of repertoire choices. The performer who understands the stylistic differences between the two collections may choose to highlight one type by performing selections chosen only from book one. On the other hand, choosing from both books may serve to illustrate the musical growth of Debussy's compositional style. Since book two shows an increase in figuration and greater textural expanse, selecting some of those pieces to perform with some from book one would be one way of demonstrating those differences.

Composition of at least three of the pieces in Debussy's first book of preludes was begun as early as 1907. The composer himself provided completion dates in the score of nine of the twelve in that book. The entire set was completed between early December 1909 and early February 1910. "Le vent dans la plaine" and "Des pas sur la neige" are numbers three and six, respectively, although the order in which they appear in the published

set does not necessarily indicate the order of their composition.\textsuperscript{16}

"Le vent dans la plaine" bears the date 11 December, 1909. It was given its first public performance by a friend of Debussy's, pianist Franz Liebich, on 16 January, 1911.\textsuperscript{17} Edward Lockspeiser notes the perpetual-motion, whirlwind character of pieces such as this one and "Les Fees sont d'exquises danseuses" from book two. He further notes that "Le vent dans la plaine" and others like it anticipate the hypnotic rhythms in the early works of Stravinsky, although they are much lighter.\textsuperscript{18} This prelude has a companion in prelude number seven, "Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest," these two being the only "wind" pieces in the two books of preludes. "Le vent dans la plaine" is grouped musically with numbers one and two of the set, "Danseuses de Delphes" and "Voiles," by virtue of their common projection of a strong emphasis on b-flat. This shared tonal quality perhaps suggests that the three may be effectively performed as a group. Selecting two or three or more preludes from the set is a practice of which Debussy would probably have approved, although, according

\textsuperscript{16}Howat, p. xv.
\textsuperscript{17}Howat, p. xv.
\textsuperscript{18}Lockspeiser, p. 235-6.
to David Burge, when an entire set is played, the effect is greater than the sum of its parts.¹⁹

"Des pas sur la neige" is dated 27 December, 1909. Debussy gave its first public performance on 29 March, 1911. It has been suggested that the dragging rhythm of this and other pieces by Debussy represent a preoccupation with stagnation, particularly that of water.²⁰ E. Robert Schmitz described the piece: "It is an appeal to the basic loneliness of all human beings, oft forgotten perhaps, but, like the ostinato, forming a basic undercurrent of our history."²¹ Debussy's instructions in the piece are very descriptive of the preludes's character: "Comme un tendre et triste regret" ("Like a tender and sad regret," m. 28). The music of this piece, along with its title, does have an intimate human quality that exists beyond the wide range of cultural and literary associations that are present among most of the other preludes.

Performance Tradition

In the process of studying Debussy's music through listening, there are two important resources that should


²⁰Lockspeiser p. 234. Lockspeiser credits this suggestion to Vladimir Jankelevitch: Debussy et le mystère, Neuchatel, 1949.

²¹Schmitz, p. 147.
be examined. Fortunately, the composer's recorded performance of several of the preludes and the Children's Corner (1906-08) are available. Also of importance are the performances, recorded and live, of those musicians who had first-hand experience as students or close associates of Debussy. Descriptive accounts of those performances and the writings of contemporaries who explored the technical aspects of Debussy's piano music are informative. By examining these resources, pianists can learn of the performance techniques used by Debussy and his students, discover which early, historical recordings may be especially valuable, and determine which modern-day recordings are most relevant when considered in the context of performance tradition.

The accounts of two pianists who knew and studied with Debussy provide insights into the production of varied tone colors in Debussy's music. Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes (1875-1943) was an important promoter and interpreter of Debussy's piano music. He is distinguished as being the only contemporary musician to whom Debussy dedicated a piano piece ("Poisson d'or" from the second set of Images, published in 1908). The dedication is evidence

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of the high regard that Debussy had for Viñes's playing. As a champion of modern French, Spanish, and Russian piano music of the early twentieth century, Viñes is responsible for having introduced to the public almost the entire piano repertory by Debussy. Elaine Brody has noted that Viñes's unique playing style provided a medium through which Debussy was able to communicate a new, emerging style of composition for the piano. She asserts that this is true even to the extent that a change in Debussy's writing style can be noted corresponding with the time he first became familiar with Viñes.

Viñes left a personal journal of four hundred pages. According to that journal, Viñes preferred relaxed wrists when playing and he kept them in a low position, one lower than was customary at that time so that he could touch the notes before playing them and thereby have absolute control over their tone.

Pianist Maurice Dumesnil (1884-1974) provided a first-hand account of Debussy's playing that gives an interesting corroboration of Viñes's comments on hand

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23 Brody, p. 53.
24 Brody, p. 50-51.
26 Brody, p. 55.
position. While coaching Dumesnil on "Hommage a Rameau," Debussy sat down to demonstrate. Dumesnil observes:

I noticed that at times the position of his fingers, particularly in soft chordal passages, was almost flat. He seemed to caress the keys by rubbing them gently downward in an oblique motion instead of pushing them down in a straight line. I tried to imitate him, and apparently he was pleased, for he said bien.

While Dumesnil does not specifically mention the position of Debussy's wrists in this account, a fairly low position would naturally correspond with a flat placement of the fingers on the keys. Dumesnil notes this flat finger position as one used particularly in the soft passages, so it is apparent that hand position was an important technique for the two pianists as they created different tone colors.

As for early recordings of Debussy's piano music, written accounts of pianists and other persons close to Debussy reveal the special value of several recordings. Viñes recorded only two of Debussy's works, the "Poissons d'or" and "Soirée dans Grenade" from Estampes. According to Maurice Dumesnil, Viñes's interpretation of "Poissons d'or" was ideal. Dumesnil compares Viñes's interpretation with Debussy's comments on the piece during a lesson:

With "Poissons d'or" it was indeed difficult to satisfy Debussy. "Jouez plus librement," he would

I thought I did play with great freedom, but it was not enough. Then those initial figures of accompaniment—they had to be lighter, almost immaterial, so one could hear the "two clarinets" up above. Toward the middle he spoke again: "Plus gracieux, plus élégant." But when I complied he said: "Jouez plus simplement." I came to the conclusion that the interpretation of Ricardo Viñes . . . had become inseparable from his own conception; so I took it as a model and subsequently won approval.

Another commentary on Viñes's performance of the piece appears in a letter from Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) to Viñes's niece, Elvira Viñes Soto. Poulenc studied piano with Viñes during the years 1914-1917. Elvira planned to reissue the recordings Viñes made in 1930, and Poulenc wrote to encourage her in the project: "Concerning the records, . . . it is essential that the miraculous recording of "Poissons d'or" should be reissued first and foremost."

Viñes's performance of the piece is especially valuable then as one that met not only with Debussy's approval but was also revered by two musicians of stature, namely Dumesnil and Poulenc. More specifically for pianists, the performance gives a good indication of the degree of rubato and balance of opposing textures that was satisfying to Debussy.

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28 Dumesnil, p. 12.

As for other pianists who were students or close associates of Debussy, several have left recordings. E. Robert Schmitz (1889-1949), pianist, conductor, and early writer on Debussy's piano music, studied with the composer and recorded both books of preludes shortly before his own death. Alfred Cortot (1877-1962), a professor at the Paris Conservatoire from 1907-1917, was widely considered to be one of the world's greatest pianists in his day. He recorded the first book of preludes and the Children's Corner. American pianist George Copeland (1882-1971) made two recordings that include some of the preludes from each book. He was coached by Debussy for four months in 1912, and Debussy found favor with his playing on at least one occasion.

In addition to providing historic performances, several of which apparently met with Debussy's approval, these early recordings serve the listener in illustrating a variety of performance styles. A comparison of those performances not only presents pianists with a range of

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30 See bibliography. The availability of these recordings is discussed on p. 20.


32 Banowetz, p. 43.

33 Roger Nichols, Debussy Remembered (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 165.
possibilities to consider for their own interpretation, but also provides a basis for comparing present-day recordings. Joseph Banowetz has made a comparison between the more rigid, intellectual approach of Schmitz and Robert Casadesus (1895-1972), wherein a "dry clarity" is used "as a tool in illuminating structure and intellectual organization," and the playing of Cortot and Walter Gieseking (1895-1956), whom he equates with Viñes in their ability to create an enormous variety of tone color and their mastery of pedal technique.  

The contributions of Cortot are significant because of his close association with Debussy, and because of his emphasis on pedagogical endeavors, including his production of editions of Chopin's music that included technical exercises and discussions. Because of his interest in teaching, the recordings of his students are significant. Cortot and his student Gina Bachauer (1913-1976) have demonstrated at least one possible example of an "unbroken tradition of correct interpretation" of Debussy's piano music. In spite of the problems of meter in "La cathédrale engloutie," they both provide an accurate performance in comparison with Debussy's recording.

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34 Banowetz, p. 42-43.

35 Charles Burkhart, "Debussy Plays 'La cathédrale engloutie' and Solves Metrical Mystery," Piano Quarterly 65 (Fall 1968): 16.
The availability of older recordings varies. Some of them, those of Cortot and Gieseking for example, are available on the commercial market. Copies of the recordings made by Vines and other pianists, such as Schmitz, who are also significant in the Debussy tradition, can be obtained from the International Piano Archives at the University of Maryland, College Park.

A valuable discography, one that focuses on French-trained pianists, is that found in Charles Timbrell's book French Pianism (1992). Timbrell's book is a study of piano performance tradition in France from the early nineteenth century to the present. Using Timbrell's book, one can trace the teacher-student lineage from, for example, Chopin through Cortot, then from Cortot and his students down to present-day, active performing pianists. His study is reinforced by interviews with pianists of the present, as well as those from earlier generations. The most extensive discography is that of Margaret Cobb. Her general discography is updated regularly in the journal Cahiers Debussy, Nouvelle série.


37 Timbrell p. 31.

38 Margaret G. Cobb, Discographie de l'oeuvre de Claude Debussy, Publications du Centre de documentation Claude
Debussy and Performance Directions

The writings of two of Debussy's students are valuable resources for developing a clearer understanding of the composer's performance directions. Maurice Dumesnil, in his book *How to Teach and Play Debussy* (1932), addresses some of these concerns from a technical standpoint.39 Marguerite Long (1878-1966), a pianist whose playing Debussy admired, and whom he invited to study with him, later addressed some of the problems of Debussy's directions in her book *At the Piano with Debussy* (1960).40

Debussy normally provided detailed directions and articulation markings in his scores. The problem that pianists must confront is that the directions in the composer's music sometimes seem ambiguous, and, occasionally even contradictory. For example, Debussy's articulation markings are used in unconventional ways. The portato marking (\(\text{-.-}\)), used frequently, has been interpreted traditionally to mean a combination between staccato and legato wherein small breaks are heard in a semi-legato line. Dumesnil explained that in Debussy's

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piano music this mark signifies an "indirect, caressing attack," and he provided a diagram of the hand motion:

![Diagram of a portato attack](image)

Figure 1: Dumesnil's diagram of a *portato* attack

In her 1979 dissertation, Betty Parker Mallard addresses the issue of Debussy's directions in the preludes and etudes. She notes that since the hand will lift away from the keyboard, legato passages marked *portato* should be connected by the pedal. Indeed the *portato* marking may at times indicate, or at least correspond with, a point where the pedal should be down. Figure 2 (p. 23) shows how the portato notes on the fourth beat of measure 33 can be executed as Dumesnil describes only when the pedal is depressed. Figure 3 (p. 23) shows a passage from "Feuilles mortes" where the pedal would have to be


42 Betty Parker Mallard, "Performance Instructions in the Preludes and Etudes of Claude Debussy" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas, 1979), 93.
depressed to sustain the chords while the right hand plays the portato notes and the left hand plays the low octave.

Mallard uses the writings of Dumesnil and Long to conclude that Debussy's articulation markings refer to a type of key stroke, including the speed of attack and
release and the weight of attack. According to Long, the tenuto or dash (−) above or below a note or chord refers to a weighted, direct attack on the key resulting in a "change of sonority." Long further states that notes thus marked, whether melodic pitches or vertical sonorities, should be given a "clear penetrating sound." Referring again to figure 3, it can be noted that the tenuto marks on the chords indicate a more direct and weighted attack, giving them greater resonance in a soft dynamic level.

After taking an inventory of the many articulation markings in Debussy's preludes and etudes, Mallard concludes that Debussy uses articulation markings in combination so that he is able to indicate various tone colors. For example, she asserts that the accent mark combined with the staccato (? or ▲) indicates that a note is stressed and released. In combination with the dash (≥ or ▲), the note is stressed and held. She also maintains that the mark (>) involves a weight accent and the mark (∧) indicates a more percussive attack.

By learning to execute these key-stroke motions of direction and weight, the pianist can develop means of

43 Mallard, p. 84.
44 Long, p. 20.
45 Mallard p. 108.
producing the variety of tone colors and nuances that are feasible within the limited dynamic range that Debussy so often requires.

**Debussy's Own Recordings**

Paul Jacobs has noted some of the limitations of Debussy's own recordings as a primary source, but there is still much to be gained from listening to his performances carefully. For example, the tempos that Debussy used have been accurately reproduced by the Welte-Mignon piano roll device. As far as rhythmic proportion, musical pulse, and ritards and accelerations are concerned, the performances are, according to Charles Burkhart, a "completely valid document." Debussy's tempo in "Le vent dans la plaine" is very close to the metronome mark of $J = 126$ that appears in the autograph score. Debussy seems to have chosen the tempo of his ideal in spite of the considerable difficulties in the piece, some of which he does not manage to execute with complete accuracy.

The Welte-Mignon device was also able to record details of dynamics, pedaling, and durations for which

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46 Paul Jacobs, "On Playing the Piano Music of Debussy," *Cahiers Debussy* Nouvelle série n3 (1979): 43. Jacobs notes that Debussy was ill at the time he made these recordings (probably 1913, according to Roy Howat) and that he had apparently not practiced.

keys were individually depressed. These elements of Debussy's performances can be studied through detailed examination of the rolls themselves, a task which is beyond the limits of this study. However, there is still much that can be learned from simply listening to the recordings. For example, Debussy begins "Le vent dans la plaine" using no damper pedal; it is not depressed until measure 3 when the melody begins in the lower voice, as shown in figure 4 (p. 27).

In the opening measures, Debussy seems to be presenting the initial figure in a dry, brittle fashion, like wind blowing dry grass, as the title might suggest. After measure three, the damper pedal is used more consistently, even when the initial pattern reappears alone as at the beginning. It can be noted further that the pedalings that make the most obvious breaks in tone and volume occur between sections that are defined by changes in patterns or thematic ideas. A clear and distinct pedaling occurs at measure 7, as the initial pattern returns. Then at measure 18 (figure 5, p. 28), there is again a clear pedaling as the pattern reappears. By pedaling this way, that is, creating obvious breaks of sound that correspond with changes of texture, Debussy

Figure 4: "Le vent dans la plaine," mm. 1-8

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The insertions marked "R" in the Durand/Costallat edition are provided by Howat and are based on his evaluation of the Welte-Mignon recording. After listening to the recording, the author believes that Debussy plays d-flat as the score indicates above (mm. 5-6) and not d-natural.
creates an effect wherein different thematic ideas or sections drop in and out of prominence, forming separate layers of sound. This effect is enhanced by using longer pedals within some sections than with others. For example, passages that contain the melody, such as measures 3-4, seem to be played in their entirety without any perceptible clearing of the pedal, while the passages that contain only the initial figure of measures 1-2 are made drier through what may be a half-pedal or "flutter" pedal effect. Using the una corda pedal in combination with the damper pedal can be helpful in creating these kinds of effects. It is very difficult to determine whether Debussy was using both pedals in these recordings.

Debussy's pedaling in the final measures of the piece provides another interesting feature. He depresses the
damper pedal from the \textit{a tempo} marking in measure 53 (figure 6) and releases it only at the last measure, when the

![Musical notation image]

Figure 6: "Le vent dans la plaine," mm. 53-59
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final note is held with the left hand and allowed to sound alone. The rising triads in this codetta are allowed to blur substantially, and as Debussy plays the right-hand octave in the penultimate measure, there is a lot of tone coming from the piano despite the "ppp" marking. This

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long-held pedal provides a striking contrast with his lack of pedal at the beginning of the piece.

Paul Jacobs presents the idea of coordinating pedaling in Debussy's music with changes in harmony, as opposed to pedaling to accommodate melodic structure. The problem that arises in that approach is that, on one hand, the distinction between harmony and melody is sometimes unclear in Debussy's music, and, on the other hand, shifts in harmony can be difficult to detect. Debussy's performance of "Le vent dans la plaine" demonstrates that texture can be an additional consideration when deciding when and how much damper pedal should be used.

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50 Jacobs, p. 42.
CHAPTER 3

SOLVING PROBLEMS FOUND IN "DES PAS SUR LA NEIGE":
DYNAMIC INFLECTION, RHYTHMIC NUANCE, AND VOICING

Problems of Dynamic Inflection

One of the greatest difficulties that the pianist must face in playing "Des pas sur la neige" is that of creating effective dynamic inflection within the narrow dynamic range that Debussy has indicated. The dynamic markings throughout the piece range from piano to pianissimo, with numerous indications for crescendo and decrescendo. The first measure of the piece presents such a problem of dynamic nuance. Measures 1-4 (figure 7, p. 32) include the initial statement of an ostinato, comprised of two alternating steps, that is present throughout most of the piece. The first part of the pattern is marked with a crescendo and decrescendo. The same dynamic markings appear with the second part of the pattern on beats three and four. The measure is marked pianissimo at the beginning.

The problem of creating the effect that Debussy has specified is especially difficult not only because of the limited dynamic range, but also because there are so few notes to be played. The decrescendo markings are
themselves confusing, since there are no notes to be played for the markings' durations, and can therefore only be effected by the instrument's natural decrescendo through decay of tone.

Debussy's indications for decrescendos at these points may be explained as a reinforcement of the tempo marking that the composer provided in the autograph score. If the performer plays the piece at the marked tempo of $J = 44$, the decrescendo will naturally occur as a result of the dissipation of tone after the "footstep" ostinato is played. The pianist may also need to consider the acoustics of the piano and the recital hall as factors.
in making slight adjustments to the tempo so as to allow a sufficient dissipation of tone at those points.

Understanding the crescendo markings in this measure also requires an examination of the tenuto marks applied to the half-notes on the first and third beats. Marguerite Long recommends a weighted, direct attack and the creation of a "clear penetrating sound" for notes marked this way. 51 Her approach is logical in this case because it reinforces the establishment of the main tonal center on d at the beginning of the piece. Debussy's stemming of the ostinato also suggests the importance of polyphony in this simple motive. Since the half-notes carry the tenuto and the tonal significance, the upward steps from d to e and then e to f should not be simply played louder, but rather the effect of crescendo should be created by playing the notes at a dynamic level that adds to the half-notes but does not compete with them or drown them out. The pianist may create this crescendo effect by first playing the half-notes with the left hand, using the attack that Long recommends. Then, the right hand should play the notes of the upward motion from a position close to the keys so as to have good control over the dynamic level. 52

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51 Long, p. 20. (see chapter two)
52 See Vines's comments on hand position in chapter two.
At the second measure, the dynamic marking changes to a decrescendo only, and it can be played with the left hand alone, thereby leaving the right hand free to play the upper melody. The same attack on the half-notes should be used whenever indicated. The pianist may wish to use a rolling or rotating motion of the wrist toward the thumb in playing the notes of the ostinato softly, as opposed to using a simple finger motion toward the key. This rotation technique may be easier if the fourth and second fingers are used on d and e respectively, and then the thumb on f.

Debussy has marked the ostinato of the first measure in more detail than at any other point of its occurrence in the piece. It is apparent that the initial statement of the pattern carries great significance, whether it is the establishment of mood or otherwise. The composer has also indicated at the first measure of the piece: "Ce rythme doit avoir la valeur sonore d'un fond de paysage triste et glacé" ("This rhythm must have the sonorous value of a sad and frozen landscape"). By giving the opening measure special attention and a detailed execution, the performer is able to create the dynamic nuance that Debussy requires while establishing a sense of the proper tempo.
The next problem is that of producing effective dynamic nuance in the articulation of an entire phrase or a given melodic segment. Measures 2-4 (figure 7, p. 32) present the initial melody as it rises from b-flat to e and then falls back to g, finally resting on a as the d-minor triad sounds at the end of measure 4. Again, the dynamic range is limited. The melody is marked piano at its beginning, and there is a decrescendo as the melody comes to rest. Debussy also provided the direction expressif et douloureux (expressive and sad, mournful). In an attempt to be expressive, the pianist may choose to make a crescendo to the e and then a decrescendo as the melody descends. Such a direct approach seems at first logical, given the shape of the melody, but it still leaves the pianist faced with the question of how much crescendo is possible within the dynamic range. A better way of creating effective dynamic nuance in this passage can be found by first examining its phrase structure and then by noting some important motivic devices.

This initial melodic passage has a definite quality of being a single unit. This effect is created by its arched shape, coupled with the fact that it is presented in the context of a continuous d centricity that is established in the first four measures of the piece. In typically paradoxical fashion, though, Debussy has
placed the slurs over the melody so as to create a 1 plus 2 arrangement. A slight pause or halt is required by a caesura at the end of the first slur. This break in the slurring of the phrase is significant because the piece is constructed in a manner that allows various musical elements, including phrase lengths, to expand as the music progresses. The next phrase (beginning at measure 5) is in fact three measures long, and it is also marked with a caesura at its end. By dividing the initial melodic segment in this way, Debussy has created a subtle melodic gesture that requires an equally subtle dynamic articulation of that phrase division. Simply making a crescendo to the e, as first suggested, is likely to result in a phrase articulation at the caesura that is too abrupt.

Before a plan for dynamic inflection can be developed and applied to this passage, there are two important motivic structures within this initial melody that should be noted. The first is the interval of a third that appears at the end of the melody in measure 4. This interval, usually descending, appears frequently throughout the piece, both alone and as part of larger melodic segments. It is especially prevalent in the latter half of the piece. The other motive noted here involves the tied g at the end of measure 3. Reference to this pitch is a significant tonal event in the piece as a whole.
Debussy has created an interesting juxtaposition of this pitch against the overall d centricity in large part by building on the idea of a descending motive whereby g falls to d. This is done melodically as well as by building a chord on g and then allowing parallel chords to descend to a chord built on d. Figure 7 (p. 32, mm. 5-7) shows the motive as bass notes in descending chords, and then it appears as a melodic segment in the descending bass line at the end of the piece (figure 2, p. 23).

Debussy has made an early, subtle reference to this g-to-d motive where the initial d of measure 4 (figure 7) is heard sounding after the aforementioned g at the end of measure 3. An effective plan for articulating the melody in question can logically be based on the presence of both motives and on the melody's subtle phrase structure.

In playing the first three notes of the melody (figure 7), the pianist should note the tenuto marking that accompanies the b-flat. This note should be given its proper emphasis as described in chapter two. Then, the next two notes, c and d, should be played more softly with the hand close to the keyboard; a rolling of the hand to the right in playing the notes may make this slight decrescendo easier. The phrase delineation can thereby
be created through the decrescendo, and an abrupt break in sound can be avoided.

The next note, e, is also marked with a tenuto. This note should be given emphasis as well, but to a greater degree than on the b-flat, so that a sense of crescendo is heard, not stepwise up to the e but from the b-flat to the e. This can be accomplished by using a more weighted attack on the e than is used on the b-flat, or by using the damper pedal as the note is played so that additional tone can be produced. This execution allows a crescendo while maintaining the articulation of the phrase.

As the descending portion of the melody is played, the dynamic tension should be maintained momentarily; any decrescendo should be avoided as the melody falls back to the tied g. Debussy's marking for a decrescendo clearly falls under the final descending third, and the lessening of tone should be postponed until that point. If the dynamic level is maintained through the third beat of measure 4, two significant motivic devices will be displayed: 1) the tied g of measure 3 will first be heard clearly in juxtaposition with the initial d of measure 4, and 2) the descending third in that same measure will be isolated by its dynamic activity as the decrescendo is played with the final a of the melody at measure 4.
A well planned approach to the dynamics of this melodic passage will help the pianist create effective dynamic nuance within the limited range required by Debussy. The ability to create those nuances will also facilitate the execution of a subtle phrase articulation.

It should be further noted that an examination of a composer's manuscript, whenever practical, can be helpful. The autograph score of Debussy's *Preludes*, Book One, is published by Dover Publications. In the autograph score of "Des pas sur la neige," Debussy placed the initial four measures on the first system of music. It is likely that the composer intended for the melodic passage of measures 2-4 to be viewed intact. Such characteristics of a score cannot always be maintained by publishers and editors, even when there is an attempt to do so. Many of the presently available editions of this piece have only three measures of music in the first system. A comparison of figure 7 (with measure four beginning on the second system) and the same passage as it appears in the autograph score (figure 8, p. 40) illustrates the different visual impression of the decrescendo marking in measure 4 of each of the two examples.

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In creating effective dynamic inflection on a still larger level, the pianist must consider ways of producing contrast and direction through the course of the music and doing so within the narrow dynamic range. If certain parts of the music create climactic tension to a greater degree than other parts, what steps can the pianist take in performance that will reflect the climactic nature that characterizes a given section?

Arnold Whittall describes the form of "Des pas sur la neige" as one in which "a subtle use of variation is the most prominent element." He points out that the piece "consists of seven phrases, all variants of the first, arranged in a binary-type form."\(^{54}\)

The opening passage (figure 7, p. 32) presents the basic ideas of the piece in relatively simple fashion.

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Immediately apparent is the ostinato that struggles to step forward throughout most of the piece. Then there is the floating melody that is motivic in nature; it is made up of small motivic cells that are like fragments of a potential would-be melody, segments of which appear at various points throughout the piece. This initial melodic passage evolves and expands as the music progresses. Another version of it can be seen in measures 12-15 (figure 9) as the first half of the piece approaches its close in measure 15.

This process of expansion of musical elements continues to a great degree in the second half of the piece. There are two phrases in the second half of the prelude that demonstrate the process of expansion, in part by their changing register and texture, and by their length (figure 10, p. 42). The two phrases, which begin at measures 20 and 26, respectively, also present a new version of the melody noted at measure 12. The two
Figure 10: "Des pas sur la neige," mm. 19-32
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statements of the melody create separate, important
climactic points in succession through the course of this
half of the piece. The melody, beginning at measures
21 and 28 separately, climbs to a peak and then falls
through a series of descending thirds, an interval that is a familiar motive at this point.

Several factors point to the second of these two phrases as having a greater climactic quality. The second appearance of the melody climbs to a higher pitch, c-flat, than the a-flat of the first statement. Also in the second phrase, the ostinato is suspended as the melody builds to a point of tension that directly precedes the profound final statement of the ostinato at measure 32. The second of the two phrases builds on the relatively lesser climactic nature of the first, thereby providing an increase in climactic tension through this latter half of the piece.

The formal structure of "Des pas sur la neige" suggests that the performer must create a sense of continuing growth and expansion as the music progresses, especially in the second half of the piece. The effect of increased tension in the melody as it reappears at measure 28 can be created by thoughtful use of the pedals. A practical approach to pedaling in these two phrases requires the use of the damper pedal for legato and for sustaining notes that must be released to allow the playing of other notes, as in measures 21-24. However, if the \textit{una corda} is also used for the phrase beginning at measure 20, pianists will meet with several advantages. They
will be better able to distinguish the two phrases in the latter half of the piece so that the second statement of the melody has a greater climactic quality— not as a result of more volume, but because of greater resonance from the piano. Additionally, the use of the *una corda* in the first of the two phrases will aid in keeping the chords in the bass quiet enough to isolate and project the melody.

In his own recorded performance of "Le vent dans la plaine," Debussy used a noticeably different style of pedaling for passages containing a prominent melody than for other parts of the piece (see chapter two). A similar effect can be created in "Des pas sur la neige" so that this melody is associated with a richer tone than other parts of the prelude. For example, in measures 21-23, a long pedal can be used to correspond with the tied half-notes in the bass. At points where some pedaling is desired for shifts in harmony, such as in measures 23-24, a half-pedal may be used so that a depth of tone is still created without excessive blurring of harmonic shifts. The same pedal technique may be required for the inverted parallel triads in measures 29-31 to allow the necessary legato and depth of tone again without too much blurring of the harmonies. By varying the type and length of pedaling this way, and by using the pedals in
combination, the effect of dynamic contrast and musical growth can be enhanced within the narrow dynamic range.

Problems of Rhythmic Nuance

Giving "Des pas sur la neige" an appropriate rhythmic character requires the performer's control of a very slow tempo, and the creation of rhythmic nuance must occur in the context of relatively low-level rhythmic activity. Pianists who do not have an acute sense of rhythm may find that attempts to create effective rhythmic nuances, especially ritards, results in a loss of their sense of a basic pulse. A poor sense of phrasing for the piece may result as well.

Such problems as creating the correct proportion for a ritard, and maintaining a steady tempo where required, can be addressed by further noting some aspects of the overall form of the piece. This includes an examination of how Debussy's tempo markings fit into, and help project, the formal process in the music.

If rhythmic character and musical form reflect one another, as Cone suggests, then this piece can be cited as an example of that process. There are two opposing rhythmic forces in this prelude, one gradually giving way to the other. The ostinato, with its steady and persistent footstep motion, is established and continues in the opening half of the piece. Tempo markings are
sparse in this section, consisting only of the Cédez
(rallentando, gradually slow the speed) and Retenu (held
back, retained) at the last three measures. The first
half is also largely expository in nature.

By contrast, the second half of the piece takes
elements of the first—musical texture, phrase length,
etc.—and expands them to a great degree. In this section,
there are numerous ritards at phrase endings, some followed
by returns to a tempo, creating repeated interruptions
in the steady, forward stepping of the ostinato. Also
in the second half, the ostinato is suspended
temporarily, beginning at measure 28 (figure 10, p. 42),
only to reappear in the final phrase in octaves and in
an upper register. The rhythmic process in the latter
half of the piece, with its gradual dissolution of the
steady ostinato, could easily represent the weary
traveler's approaching demise as the bitter landscape
leads him toward a surreal world of frozen sleep.

The pianist's task is one of balancing the steady
determination of the ostinato in the first half with the
inevitable unravelling of forward progress that takes
place in the second half. Following Debussy's tempo
markings carefully and accurately will help in
accomplishing such a balance. Playing that respects the
composer's directions requires good control of the basic
tempo. This is important, not only initially and through the first half of the piece, but it is also essential throughout the second half that returns to a tempo be made as accurately as possible so that the basic pulse is not lost.

In rehearsal, the pianist may find it helpful to separate all sections marked a tempo from the rest of the piece and rehearse them in order, beginning with the opening five or six measures of the piece. The proper tempo will then be associated with those sections as a matter of habit. As a result, the pianist will be less likely to lose the basic pulse, and the ritards that Debussy has indicated will be more effective as well.

Given the rhythmic contrast between the two halves of the piece, it is logical and effective for the performer to avoid using excessive ritards at phrase endings in the first half of the piece. The exception to this is of course where Debussy has called for a slowing of tempo as the first half dissolves into whole-tone harmony at its close. Up to that point, a performance of the piece should create a sense of being propelled steadily forward so that the second half can provide a contrast to that effect.

Smaller, more detailed executions of rhythmic nuance are easier to work into the music of this prelude if they
are developed with respect to the rhythmic and formal plan. The climactic nature of the upper melody as it reaches the c-flat in measure 30 (figure 10, p. 42) has already been noted. The performer may choose to stretch the tempo slightly on the descending third at the end of that measure so that the tension of the melodic peak is enhanced. Care should be taken to return to tempo soon thereafter so that the effect of Debussy's Plus lent at measure 32 is not lost. Since a further slowing is required two measures later in this short coda, this approach will also help the pianist avoid excessive slowing at that point in the music.

The ostinato is one of the most imposing features of this piece. When executed properly, it can provide a sense of rhythmic unity while creating contrast to those fluctuations in tempo described above. The upward, stepwise motion comprising the pattern is marked by a triplet indication in the first measure (figure 7, p. 32). The pianist will also be required to execute another triple division of the beat in the melody at measure 3 and several other similar places. Some pianists may find a consistently accurate execution of those triplets to be difficult, especially at such a slow tempo.

The triplet in measure one indicates a triple division of an eighth-note value as follows:
In perceiving the rhythmic structure this way, the pianist hears a triplet on every eighth-note value, which creates a sense of a quicker pulse than is suitable for the piece. It is also a rhythmic figure that is difficult to reconcile, at least in the performer's mind, with the triplet in the melody as it occurs in measure 3. By using the triple division of the quarter-note as a starting point (m. 3), the pianist can think of the ostinato pattern as a further division of that figure as follows:

By thinking of the rhythm this way, the pianist meets with several advantages. On one hand, thinking of the triplets as a division of a quarter-note results in a
sense of a slower, more sweeping rhythmic character that is appropriate for the piece. On the other hand, the pianist can better reconcile and execute the two separate figures accurately when they occur simultaneously as in measure 3 and elsewhere. Additionally, the pianist will be better able to conceive and maintain in performance a steady basic pulse with rhythmic divisions that have a common denominator that is more easily heard. Proficiency in controlling the rhythmic details of the ostinato can be developed by playing melodic segments, such as measures 2-4 (figure 7, p. 32), or measures 20-24 (figure 10, p. 42) slowly, while mentally counting the rhythm of the ostinato as shown in figure 12.

Once the pianist has firm control of the overall tempo as well as the rhythm of the ostinato, a further device of rhythmic nuance becomes possible. At measure 28 (figure 10), the ostinato is heard for the last time until four measures later when the codetta begins. As the ostinato drops out, the music takes on a different rhythmic character that lacks the incessant footstep pattern. As that last e to f step is taken on the third beat, the rhythm of the ostinato may be slowed somewhat to enhance the effect of coming change in rhythmic character. The ostinato at the third beat should be slowed enough that it is a noticeable change from the previous
d to e step on beat one of the measure. By playing the
ostinato this way, the pianist can create an illusion
of slowing down without actually changing the basic pulse.
This device may be used similarly at other places in the
piece, such as melodic peaks where no actual slowing of
tempo is desired, or at points where a ritard is indicated
and an obvious change in the ostinato will help enhance
the slowing of the tempo. It is nevertheless important
that such rhythmic distortions of the ostinato be used
sparingly so that the overall rhythmic process in the
music is preserved; the effect of rhythmic impetus and
its eventual freezing should be maintained.

Problems of Voicing

One characteristic frequently found in Debussy's
music is a lack of distinction between elements that are
melodic, (and thus should be projected prominently), and
ones that may be called harmonic or accompanimental (which
therefore take a more subordinate role in the musical
texture). Often the pianist must struggle to decide which
part of the music should be subjugated in the texture
to the prominence of some other part. On this subject,
Debussy expressed his dismay with those who too often
hammer out the melody "without attaching sufficient
importance to the whole harmony; harmony that, according
to him, should never be sacrificed to the melodic idea."\(^{55}\) According to Marguerite Long, even when there is an apparent difference in the score between melodic and harmonic parts, performing the music effectively may require a blending of the parts as opposed to prioritizing the two in a more traditional texture of melody and accompaniment.

Ideas about voicing certain parts may be based on observations of factors such as harmonic movement and texture. Irwin Freundlich stated that "Des pas sur la neige" shows "details in textural differences that enabled Debussy to cast endless light on simple materials."\(^{56}\) Voicing, whether harmonic, melodic, or motivic, can be an effective way of producing the tonal and textural colors that this prelude requires. As noted earlier, the initial phrase of the piece (measures 1-4) establishes a firm tonal center on d. Centricity is achieved through the repeated d of the ostinato, the d-aeolian design of the melody, and the fully affirming d triad at the end of measure 4 (figure 7, p. 32). When the next phrase begins in measure 5, departure is first made from the initial


centricity. The most obvious signal of that event is the absence of the repeated, half-note d in the ostinato. There is also a chromatic inflection of the b-flat to b-natural, expressed both harmonically, in the first chord of measure 5, and melodically, in the upper melody of that same measure at beat four.

Since the previous tonal association of the ostinato has been temporarily suspended, it can be allowed to drop slightly to the background. If the initial b-natural of measure 5 receives a slight voicing emphasis, a subtle shift in modality can be projected. Also, the initial b-natural is the first note in a middle voice that moves in parallel tenths with the descending bass line. By slightly projecting those parallel tenths, the shift in registral spacing will be more apparent to the listener, not just in the width of the intervals themselves, but also in their juxtaposition and contrary motion with the rising, syncopated upper voice. In the autograph score, the notes of that same middle voice are grouped by stemming them with the ostinato rather than with the parallel fifths of the bass. The first b-natural also has a double stem in the autograph. Most, if not all, of the available editions preserve the double stem and also provide a bracket around the notes with the m. d. (main droit) indication as in figure 7. Therefore, the grouping of
notes in this phrase indicates the addition of another layer of sound that corresponds with the registral expansion that takes place. The slight emphasis on the middle voice, beginning on b-natural, enhances those changes in the music as well as the change of modality.

A similar device of voicing may also be used in the phrase that begins at measure 20 (figure 10, p. 42). This phrase begins exactly like that in figure 7 (p. 32, m. 5), This time it is longer by virtue of its extended melody that rises to a peak and then falls back down in contrary motion to the lower voices that are moving chromatically upward (mm. 23-24). Again, the ostinato can be allowed to fall into the background somewhat and the middle voices may be projected slightly so that they are heard in chromatic parallel motion with the bass. The shift in the spatial quality is once again enhanced.

Determinations about voicing, then, can be made by considering such things as texture, shifts in register, and by observing the way that Debussy may often group notes to create separate layers of sound. Tonal or harmonic structures may also provide answers to questions about voicing. At measure 8, (figure 13, p. 55) the music begins to move in a steady, four-voice texture. The lowest voice is marked expressif, and it is marked with a slur, as is the voice above it. The question that must be
addressed pertains to the musical texture and how its various elements might be projected, especially the degree to which the bass line should be projected above the other parts.

The harmonic device that gives this passage its floating, tonal ambiguity is that of alternating dominant-7th chords moving in parallel motion on beats two and three of measures 8-9. The roots of those two chords, c and c-sharp, are in the tenor voice. In the alto voice, the sevenths move in parallel motion to the roots. The notes of the ostinato act as an appogiatura while the bass line acts similarly in the first chord.

The ostinato does not carry a strong tonal association as it does elsewhere in the piece; instead, it adds harmonic color and rhythmic character to the passage, and can therefore be allowed to fall into the background slightly. The harmonic character of the passage can be
enhanced by softly projecting the parallel 7ths of the half-note inner voices so that they are heard in accompaniment of the bass line in a hymn-like texture. The fluctuating, ambiguous harmony is thereby more apparent.

The bass line only tells part of the harmonic story in these two measures, and its voicing, while important, should not be overly imposing in the musical texture. The pianist can fulfill the expressif direction by allowing the dynamics of that line to rise and fall with the melodic direction.

Measures 8-9 are identical except for the upward octave displacement of the c-sharp at the end of measure 9, a melodic motion that foreshadows events in the next two measures. In measure 10, the parallel harmony is discontinued. The bass melody should be voiced more clearly to emphasize its upward movement through the musical texture, including its upward sequential treatment in measure 11, beginning with c in the alto voice—the expected descending fifth in measure 11 is not completed until the e-flat in the new bass line in measure 12 (see figure 9, p. 41). While its sequential movement is upward, the motive itself has been partially inverted, a musical event that is reinforced visually by the shift to spelling the notes in flats. The bass motive, as it appears in

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the alto of measure 11, is in competition with new tenor and bass voices. As those voices enter, the climactic point of this passage arrives, corresponding with Debussy's crescendos in that measure.

As the passage might be described in terms of the winter-weary traveler, measures 8-9 could represent the steady, but laborious progress thereof, while the registral shifts in the melody along with the changes in the harmonic movement at measures 10-11 may suggest the traveler's arrival at the crest of a hill where he anticipates the view of a more favorable passage, only to find more of the same. This passage demonstrates how the elements of the texture, specifically the melody and the ostinato, may drop in and out of prominence at different points in the prelude. Measures 8-9 may be an example of that delicate balance of melody and harmony that Marguerite Long referred to as being essential in playing Debussy's music.
Problems of Technical Challenge

Solutions to technical problems can be found through musical analysis. Such analytical solutions may often supplement the search for technical ease sought through a traditional practice regimen.

At the end of measure 8 (figure 14) of "Le vent dans la plaine," the pianist is required to make a considerable

Figure 14: "Le vent dans la plaine," mm. 7-12
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jump with the left hand to play the low fifth in measure 9. The right hand must also begin to play the descending parallel chords, a task which at that point will require that the hands be spaced far apart. The difficulty of the leap is exacerbated by the quick tempo of the piece.

Assistance with this technical challenge can be gained by simply observing some basic elements in the score. As measure 9 begins, there are several shifts in the structure of the music. The rapid arpeggiated sextuplet figure that begins the piece gives way to descending parallel chords in eighth-notes. This abrupt shift in rhythmic activity is also accompanied by a sudden expansion of register and spacing of the musical texture. At the same time, the e-flat bass gives the sense of a tonic resolution of the ostinato's b-flat that has sounded incessantly to that point. All of these events contribute to the dramatic shift in the character and mood of the music at measure 9. Making a downward adjustment in the tempo at that point can be helpful in managing the passage. The proper approach, though, to slowing the tempo can be found by observing the changing rhythmic configuration at the end of measure 8.

By writing the four sixteenths on beat four of measure 8, as he did, Debussy has, in effect, written a slight ritard into the music. If the pianist has difficulty
in making the leaps of the hands to measure 9, the last beat of that measure may be used as an opportunity to slow the tempo enough to have the needed time. It may be noted at this point that no tempo indications appear in this passage until the Cedez marking at the end of measure 10. For that reason it is important that the slowing of the tempo in measure 8 be minimal, and that the tempo be restored as much as possible at the beginning of measure 9. The abrupt nature of the musical events that begin that measure can thereby be better preserved.

(The pianist may be assisted in executing the passage by developing a fingering that facilitates the leap more easily—that is, one that either allows the left hand to move downward earlier or one that secures one hand enough that the pianist can follow the other with the eyes.

A more demanding passage appears in this prelude at measure 28 (figure 15, p. 61) and the six measures that follow. The leaping chords create violent outbursts that involve rapid inward leaps in both hands. The performer may find several possibilities to assist with this difficult passage through study of the score, as well as study of Debussy's performance of this work.

By observing that the chords of measure 28, and similar measures that follow, represent a dramatic shift
in register, texture, and rhythmic activity similar to that illustrated in figure 14, the performer may logically consider whether a slight bending of the tempo on each leaping motive could be viewed as a possible solution. Immediately the question of excess arises: can the overall tempo and flow be maintained while repeatedly stretching the pulse?

A study of the motive formed by the uppermost notes in the chords played in measures 28-30, and similarly
in the three measures that follow, reveals that the melody can be heard as an inverted augmentation of the melody in measures 3-4 (figure 4, p. 27). The presence of this motive requires continuity of phrasing in this passage. By reestablishing the tempo as soon as the leaps are executed and by keeping it steady until the leaps must be executed again, the pianist may be able to effectively maintain the phrasing. For example, the last three beats of measure 28 and all of measure 29 should be played in tempo, and there should be no slowing of the tempo before the first beat of measure 30, where the leaping chords must again be executed. By maintaining the tempo this way, excessive slowing of this difficult passage may be avoided.

Another, and perhaps less problematic solution to this difficult passage, may be revealed by studying Debussy's recording of the work. The Durand-Costallat publication of the first book of preludes, from which this example is taken, offers an alternate version of the left-hand notes in the chordal passages. Editor Roy Howat has provided this version based upon his examination of the piano rolls created when Debussy's recording was made. Because the rolls are a reliable source, clearly delineating what notes were actually played by Debussy, the alternate version is a completely acceptable one that
provides some technical relief for the performer. In the alternate version, the first two notes of the left hand in measure 28 and following (e sempre simile, "and always the same") are played simultaneously, thereby allowing more time to bring the left hand to the center of the keyboard to play the eighth-note chord. The aural difference in the two versions may only be slightly perceptible, although the pianist should be sure not to let the bass note be covered up by the fifth above it, since the original version clearly shows the bass notes as pedal tones. The alternate version is considerably less difficult, allowing the pianist to concentrate on the musically expressive qualities of this climactic passage.

Problems of Pedaling

The coda of "Le vent dans la plaine" (figure 6, p. 29) presents some interesting pedaling problems. A number of potential difficulties can be easily identified. Foremost is the single issue of how much pedal to use. In essence, the constant challenge in Debussy's music, is to maintain the depth of tone color without obscuring notes or chords that may need to be heard clearly. The

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pedal is not the only pianistic element involved in this performance issue. Special characteristics of Debussy's music, such as layered sonorities and opposing textures, require that pedaling must be considered in combination with other playing techniques if the proper textures and sonorities are to be achieved.

In the chapter titled "Gieseking's Pedaling in Debussy and Ravel," Dean Elder expounds on the suggestions of Walter Gieseking in stating that skillful voicing can help the pianist avoid excessive blurring when using long-pedal effects. "In using long pedals, the melodic notes must be brought out, nonharmonic notes voiced more softly than harmonic ones, and everything else weaker in sonority." Gieseking's comment about one such long-pedal effect in the minuet from Debussy's Suite bergamasque was: "Pedal for three bars, [mm. 35-37] it's the same harmony. If it doesn't sound good, you aren't giving enough nuance with your fingers."

Invariably, fingering is interrelated with voicing. In order to clearly articulate the triads in the coda, a fingering change in the ostinato may be helpful. While


59Dean Elder, 235. Understanding Debussy's system of articulation markings may be essential in developing such "finger nuance" techniques. See chapter two.
most pianists play only the b-flat of the six-note ostinato figure with the left hand, it can be helpful to play both the b-flat and c-flat with the left hand on those beats in which the right hand must play a triad. This allows the right hand a bit more freedom to articulate the triad clearly, as well as allowing the thumb to be used in the triad if desired.

Skillful voicing aside, the issue of pedaling remains to be addressed. This passage provides another example where the pianist's decisions may be influenced by study of the harmony of the passage, thus helping to determine which notes may need to be heard more clearly. Also enlightening will be the examination of Debussy's recording of the work and Gieseking's written comments about the piece.

Analysis of pitches and harmony in the coda reveals a strong correlation between this passage and the rest of the work. Significant references are made to a number of pitches at different points in the prelude. First and foremost is the b-flat that is repeated in the ostinato. That pitch appears prominently in the piece and is the final note as well. The initial melodic idea that first appears in measure 3 is restated at measure 15, but this time the b-flat of the sextuplet ostinato has been lowered to b-double flat. Figure 16 shows some
of the pitches that play prominently in the tonal layout and where they are asserted in the prelude:

m. 1 ----- b-flat
m. 9 ----- e-flat
m. 15 ----- b-double flat
m. 22 ----- g
m. 25 ----- a-flat
m. 28 ----- g-flat
m. 33 ----- g-natural

Figure 16: Pitch assertions in "Le vent dans la plaine"

After measure 33, the piece begins movement back to the original b-flat sextuplet figure by sequential, chromatic motion through the pitches g-sharp and e-natural. Then, after a short recapitulation of the opening passages, the coda appears.

The upper notes of the triads in the coda exhibit a chromatic melodic motion that lead from g-flat to the final b-flat. Those upper pitches, along with the b-flat bass, are, (with the exception of e-flat) the same as those listed in figure 16 above for having tonal significance in the prelude. In fact, their chromatic design in the coda is almost a reverse order of how they appear earlier in the music: g-flat, g-natural, a-flat,
a (b-double flat), and b-flat. It is as if Debussy has structured the coda so as to create a musical synopsis of the prelude by allowing the main pitch, b-flat, to sound against the triad harmonizations of the series of pitches that come into play earlier in the piece. This time the pitches move toward the b-flat instead of away from it. Additionally, the roots of the triads can be heard as an incomplete line ascending toward e-flat, a pitch that carries significance by virtue of the key signature, as well as by its treatment as a tonic resolution of b-flat (in measure 9 and at the corresponding passage at measures 50 and 52). After having been given a pivotal place earlier in the piece (figure 14, p. 58), the e-flat is not sounded at the end of that line in the coda, and b-flat is given final emphasis.

The triads are not only scored as a separate textural element comprising a melodic or motivic segment leading to the final b-flat, but they are also an individual layer of sonorities wherein each triad harmonizes an important pitch while being placed in juxtaposition with the continuous b-flat assertion of the ostinato. There can now be devised a logical pedaling solution that enhances these tonal aspects of the coda without creating excessive blurring. At the same time, the pedaling should allow
for the required decrescendo as well as some small degree of phrase articulation.

Realizing that a recording by the composer exists, the pianist may proceed eagerly to that source for enlightenment. In that recording, Debussy apparently uses a single, continuous pedal for the entire coda (see chapter two). The result is a blurry wash of sound. This may be contrasted with Gieseking's recording, in which the combined effect of voicing and pedaling produces a much drier sound that emphasizes the triads and their climb to the final b-flat.\textsuperscript{60}

It seems that Gieseking uses a rapid half-pedal technique when the triads are played. Pianists should note that the term "half-pedal" may imply something other than the technique that Gieseking uses. Banowetz explains that on concert grands the dampers must rest on the strings for a significant amount of time to in order to stop all vibrations completely. Lifting the dampers back up again quickly allows a considerable amount of the sound to be carried through.\textsuperscript{61} Contrary to what the term may imply, this technique is actually a full stroke of the pedal,


but one that is done very quickly creating a half-damping. Pianos that have less sensitive pedaling mechanisms may require a partial-lifting of the pedal that is somewhat like a slow flutter pedaling using the lower part of the pedal stroke. It may often be useful for less experienced pianists, as well as those who must perform on upright pianos, because the motion of the foot does not have to be as exact, and the piano may not be capable of much carry-over sound after an actual half-pedal execution.

Problems of Phrasing

The emphasis that Debussy placed on the visual appearance of his scores is apparent in part by the ways he drew phrase markings with particular shapes, lengths, and directions, as well as how he directed note stems. His meticulous care in placing articulation markings in his scores requires that they be carefully observed. Since some editions may not present such markings of his with accuracy, an examination of manuscripts, whenever practical, can be valuable in making determinations about such things as phrasing and texture.\textsuperscript{62}

Debussy's title suggests two elements of nature, namely the wind and the plain. One descriptive

interpretation of the piece could view the incessant ostinato as the wind pushing steadily across a barren expanse. The melody that appears below it could easily represent some object, perhaps a leaf, that rides along, lifting and falling with the contour of the land. In any case, the idea of separate, simultaneously occurring sound elements is suggested not only by the markings of phrasing and articulation, but also by the appearance of the score. Debussy writes the repeated double-stemmed bass note of the ostinato below the melody and stems it separately (figure 4, m. 3, p. 27). It is as if he has created a visual, as well as musical, effect in the score that reflects the wind "in" the plain as the title suggests. If that is the case, then the ostinato would represent the landscape within which the wind, represented by the melody, would move.® Regardless of the descriptive view one takes of the piece, observation of the registral placement of these separate sound elements can be helpful when addressing some of the challenges of phrasing.

In performing the prelude, the melody in measures 3-4 can be exposed in the texture of the ostinato by following the advice of E. Robert Schmitz. He warns

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**63** David Lewin offers some other interpretations of how the wind moves within the plain in musical terms in: "Some Instances of Parallel Voice-Leading in Debussy," *19th Century Music* 11, no. 1 (Summer 1987): 64n.
that the thirty-second-notes of the melody should not be allowed to become sixteenth-notes.\(^6\) Indeed, taking steps to illustrate the rhythmic differences between the melody and the ostinato will enhance the qualities of the dual layers of music. Additionally, the double-stemmed b-flats of measure 3 should be played very softly so as not to be heard as part of the melody. In using a long pedaling effect at the appearance of this and other similar melodic segments, as Debussy does, the pedal should be depressed at the beginning of the second beat on the thirty-second-note e-flat. This will tell the listener that the melodic phrase actually begins after the downbeat of the upper strand of ostinato. Also, the slightest stretching of the tempo at the beginning of measure 3 will create a sense of phrase delineation, although the performer must be careful not to create a monotonous hesitation between phrases by using such a device too frequently.

The dotted-rhythm melody of measures 3-4 changes in measures 5-6 into a series of short motives in two-beat slurs. In fact, several times when the initial melody is restated in the piece, it is followed by a similar set of short phrases. This is a device that contributes

to the sense that the wind and the landscape are not altogether regular, and the violent gusts of the middle section occur here on a smaller, less imposing scale.

The quality of these short phrases can be projected while maintaining a smooth sound in the ostinato if the pianist uses a careful pedaling combined with the proper hand technique. The rests that occur on the second and fourth beats may be observed by lifting the damper pedal at that point and then depressing it again on the following quarter-note. The d-flats should be held through those pedal changes in order to achieve their full quarter-note value. By doing so, an intrusive break in sound is avoided while the b-flat is sounded anew each time, signaling the beginning of another phrase.

The development of ideas about phrasing through the study of motivic structure and registral movement can be demonstrated in another passage in the piece. In measure 22 (figure 17, p. 73), the ostinato is given up for a sextuplet figure that spells out whole-tone harmony above a bass that moves slowly in parallel fifths. These patterns continue until they lead into the climactic chords of the middle section.

The passage forms a sequence between measures 22-24 and measures 25-27. The sequential process contributes to the forward motion of the music, and the phrase
Figure 17: "Le vent dans la plaine," mm. 21-28
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delineation between measures 24 and 25 is more effective if the pianist creates a substantial crescendo in measure 24 and a subito piano (pianissimo) in measure 25. It may also be effective to use the una corda at this point, releasing it on the crescendos; in fact, it may also be used in measure 22 to maintain the low dynamic level while playing the shifting sextuplets. It is important for the pianist to note that the sequential nature of the passage requires an additional crescendo at measure 27. An effective practice technique will include playing measure 24, pausing while counting measures 25 and 26, then playing measure 27. Through this activity, the pianist is able to listen and grade the two crescendos in comparison and learn to produce the effect without building the dynamics excessively.

The phrasing and musical direction within the two 3-measure sections of this passage (mm. 22-24 and 25-27) may be guided by the shifts in register and spacing. The shifting sextuplets of measure 22 are marked as a single phrase, but there is an overlapping of phrases since the tied fifths in the bass are marked as part of the lower phrase that follows in measures 23-24. The motive suggested by the moving fifths in measure 23 is derived from the initial pentatonic melody that appears in measures 3-4 (Figure 4, p. 27). The sextuplets in
measure 22, as they shift up and down at the tritone, may be viewed as a whole-tone version of the pentatonic melody. A sense of motivic unity, as well as effective phrasing, is produced if the passage is performed so as to allow a sort of question and answer between the sextuplets of measure 22 and the fifths of measure 23. Skillful pedaling and voicing will be helpful in creating this effect.

In many instances, careful observation of Debussy's scoring, including note stems, slurs, and even rests, lead the performer to decisions about phrasing. Additionally, by studying motivic structures and the way they are derived and treated as the music unfolds, the pianist is able to define phrase structures and in turn develop performance strategies that will reflect an understanding of those structures.
In order for analysis to serve as a viable tool in making performance decisions, there are several important issues that the performer must confront. The subjective quality of musical interpretation, in both analysis and in performance, may well be the first of those issues that comes to mind; it is the basis of many of the complexities found in the relationship between performance and analysis.

Any attempt to systematize the examination of musical structure to serve the ends of performance is likely to expose variables that only add to the complexities of the process. The guidelines defined and applied in this study, when employed in a thorough manner, allow the analyst/performer the flexibility necessary to accommodate the subjective interpretive processes involved. Simultaneously, the implementation of these guidelines requires a comprehensive approach to developing an understanding of the structure of the music at hand. Analysis that is thorough, that examines all elements of musical structure, helps the performer make better
performance decisions based on a clearer understanding of the essential qualities of the music.

Analytical study of the history, chronology, and the performance tradition that pertains to the music can inspire the performer's interpretive ideas as well as provide information about practical considerations. All of the aspects of analysis that are pursued in this study can combine to contribute to the performer's better overall understanding of the character and style of the music. Such understanding of the music may greatly enhance the pianist's ability to create satisfying performances.

As for the usefulness of recordings, especially older ones of a historical nature, there are likely to be limitations found either in the recording process itself, the special circumstances affecting the performance, or both. Nevertheless, there is still much to be gained from the examination of such recordings, as this study shows. Since the study of any recorded performance will have its limitations, that study should, in some cases, be done with the expectation of developing ideas about the composer's apparent intentions for the performance of the music as much as the actual result.

Based on the study contained herein, it may be concluded that analysis can provide a sound basis for making performance decisions. The types of performance
questions that may be addressed through analysis vary from larger issues such as phrasing, or formal delineation and contrasts between sections of music, to minute details of rhythmic nuance, subtle voicing, or delicate dynamic inflection. As previously stated, all elements of musical structure must be examined in the analytical process. In this study of some of Debussy's music for piano, it has been shown that elements of musical structure such as harmony and tonality, texture, motivic structure, and rhythmic structure, among others, can contribute to the decision-making process. However, the role that each of those elements plays in the choice of a performance execution may vary depending upon the degree to which it is central in the style of the composer's music. Rhythmic character, for example, plays a very different role in the music of Debussy than it does, for example, in that of J. S. Bach or Alberto Ginastera.

It is also important for the performer to take an analytical look at the score itself--certainly, whenever possible, the composer's manuscript. Debussy placed great emphasis on the visual appearance of his scores; some editions of his music do not remain true to that fact.

In conclusion, there is a smaller, though important, aspect of analytically-based performance techniques that may be mentioned. Janet Schmalfeldt has pointed out the
value of exploring the "dramatic implications of purely musical events":

By attempting to explain how formal and motivic processes can convey dramatic relationships, the Analyst has offered this Performer a mode of analysis whose appeal and value relate directly to the nature of performance. While, as Schmalfeldt concedes, the dramatic metaphor does not necessarily apply to all styles of music, performers will often rely on descriptive or metaphoric assessments in relating the essential qualities of a piece of music and how it should be performed. Such descriptions are a way of expressing our ideas about musical mood and character that must be illuminated in performance. One of the most fascinating aspects of a musical masterpiece is, after all, that the composer has expressed so clearly in musical terms that which others can only approximate in verbal terms.

At several points in this study, there have been offered brief, subjective descriptions of musical events that were first analyzed in more logical, less subjective terms. In chapter two, the rhythmic character of the ostinato in "Des pas sur la neige" was described as being reflective of the forward progress of an ill-fated, winter traveler. Such descriptions illustrate that analytical

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constructs can, and often do, lend themselves to an interpretation that relates directly to the subjective nature of performance. Chapter four contains a chart (p. 66) of a series of pitches that receive emphasis through the course of "Le vent dans la plaine." Those pitches move downward from b-flat to g-flat, and then, in the coda, they ascend back to b-flat. This tonal layout can easily be thought of in terms of the plain, bound on two sides by separate mountain ranges, over one of which the wind descends to the plain and then, over the other, it ascends (in the coda). A multi-layered musical fabric, reflecting the wind and the landscape, is again suggested, in subjective terms, but generated from an analytical rationale. For performers who may be skeptical about the usefulness of analysis, such translations of analytical information may help provide a basis for performance decisions that is compatible with performers' imaginative, intuitive sense.

Answers to many of the complex questions surrounding the relationship between analysis and performance may remain elusive. The most satisfactory answers are likely to be found in a close, comprehensive examination of the music itself.
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DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: William Timothy O'Steen

Major Field: Music

Title of Dissertation: Analysis and Interpretation: Musical Analysis as a Technique for Performance Decisions in Selected Preludes by Claude Debussy

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

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