

DEBUSSY AND THE ÉTUDE

A critical survey of Debussy's attitude to this nineteenth century single movement structure through analysis and commentary of selected études by Debussy and Chopin

by

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This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF MUSIC**

at the

*University of Cape Town*

September 1998



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the following for their guidance and assistance:

Mr Michael Tuffin, Senior lecturer in Musicology, University of Cape Town. I am indebted to him for his extensive and invaluable advice on the preparation and presentation of this dissertation.

Mr Edward Hart, Senior library assistant, University of Cape Town, for his enthusiastic assistance in locating the preface to the Complete Chopin Works edited by Debussy.

The publisher Durand for providing me with a copy of Debussy's preface to the Complete Works of Chopin.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a critical survey of Debussy's attitude to the nineteenth century single movement structure of the *étude*. The analyses of selected *études* from Debussy's set of twelve *Études* for solo piano attempts to illustrate the nature of this attitude and furthermore, an investigation is done into a possible analogy between two specific *études* of Chopin and Debussy.

## PREFACE

Claude Debussy's *Études*, his final set of works for solo piano composed in 1915, encapsulate and substantiate his unique compositional language. Since they are products of a non-programmatic nature, a genre which he seemed eager to pursue in the latter part of his life, there is the belief that they represent a decline in Debussy's compositional inspiration and seem to be regarded with much scepticism. Ernest Walker was rather outspoken on this matter:

... most [of the *Études*] ... seem musically overmuch concerned with the narrow matter in hand.<sup>1</sup>

The objective of this dissertation is, through the analysis of selected Debussy *études*, to illustrate the fusion of Debussy's compositional processes with this nineteenth century single movement structure as a final stage in the composer's output. Additionally, the author aims at awakening an interest in these much neglected works in both a musicological and pianistic capacity.

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<sup>1</sup>*Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th ed., s.v. "Debussy", quoted in Frank Dawes, *Debussy Piano Music* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1969), 58.

The influence of Chopin on Debussy with regard to these Études is irrefutable, since Debussy undertook the arduous task of editing the complete works of Chopin and shortly before the completion thereof, produced the first of his own études. An attempt to establish the extent of this influence is made in this dissertation, with a direct analogy drawn between two études of the respective composers, more specifically, Chopin's Étude op. 25 no. 1 and Debussy's Étude "*pour les Arpèges composés*". These two études were selected from an analogical table compiled by Robert Godet which was presented in a letter to Debussy shortly before his death. It is not known if Debussy approved of the analogies, or if he even read the letter at all.

The author was able to obtain Debussy's general preface to his edition of the Chopin works directly from the publisher Durand and this is included in the appendix.

In referring to bar numbers throughout with the format, for example, bars 20 to 26, the entire bar to which the latter number refers is inclusive. The same procedure applies when referring to specific beats in the bar. Since the term *étude* is in frequent use throughout the dissertation, it shall not be italicised in the text. However, when the term is employed in the title to a music example it shall be placed in italics.

The objectives of this study are threefold:

1. To analyse the fusion of Debussy's compositional processes with a nineteenth century single movement structure

2. To establish the extent of the influence of an étude by Chopin on an étude by Debussy

3. To awaken an interest in Debussy's Études as a set of works representative of a culmination in the composer's stylistic development.

## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iii
PREFACE .....	iv
CHAPTER 1	
Historical Background to Claude Debussy's Études for solo piano .....	1
CHAPTER 2	
A Structural Analysis of the Étude no. II book 1 " <i>pour les Tierces</i> " .....	4
CHAPTER 3	
A Structural Analysis of the Étude no. IV book 1 " <i>pour les Sixtes</i> " .....	21
CHAPTER 4	
A Structural Analysis of the Étude no. X book 2 " <i>pour les Sonorités opposées</i> " .....	36
CHAPTER 5	
A Structural Analysis of the Étude no. XI book 2 " <i>pour les Arpèges composés</i> " .....	48

CHAPTER 6

A Structural Analysis of the Étude no. XII book 2 "*pour les Accords*" ..... 72

CHAPTER 7

An Investigation into a Possible Analogy between the Étude no. XI book 2  
by C. Debussy and the Étude op. 25 no. 1 by F. Chopin. .... 90

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion ..... 101

APPENDIX A

Preface to Debussy's edition of the Complete Works of Chopin ..... 104

APPENDIX B

Article entitled "The Presence of Chopin in the Piano Music of Debussy"  
by Marie-Cécile Barras, translated by Lisa Havard ..... 105

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 131

## CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO CLAUDE DEBUSSY'S  
ÉTUDES FOR SOLO PIANO

The first world war had a profound effect on Debussy, as his inspiration to compose came to a halt almost completely. This musical vacuum could also have been the effect of the terrible physical discomfort he was experiencing, which was from the onset of rectal cancer. His inspiration was rejuvenated with a commission from his publisher Durand in 1915 to prepare an edition of the complete works of Chopin. Since there was a lack of German editions owing to the war, Durand had decided to produce publications of the great classic composers, with the editing done by their contemporary counterparts. According to Claude Helffer, Saint-Saëns was assigned to Mozart, Fauré to Schumann and Debussy to Bach and Chopin - the editing work on the latter was completed by the 24th of February, an astonishing six weeks since the commission was proposed.<sup>1</sup>

Only five and a half months later, during the summer of 1915 when his cancer was in remission, Debussy completed the twelve *Études* for piano. During this period, the works *En blanc et noir* for two pianos as well as two *Sonatas*, one for cello and piano and the other for flute, viola and harp, were also in progress. It is significant that in the final stage

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<sup>1</sup>Claude Helffer, Foreword to Claude Debussy, *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Durand-Costallat, 1991), series 1 vol. 6, *Études*.

of his career, Debussy's compositional course altered from music inspired by circumstance to a genre of pure music.

There was doubt in Debussy's mind as to whether the *Études* should be dedicated to Chopin or Couperin. Although the final decision was to dedicate the works "*à la mémoire de Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)*", an indirect reference is made to Couperin in Debussy's preface to the *Études*:

Our old Masters - I might mention here "our" admirable harpsichordists - never indicated any fingering, undoubtedly relying on the intelligence of their contemporaries. Similarly, it would be individuou to doubt that of today's virtuosi.<sup>2</sup>

In the above-mentioned preface to the *Études*, Debussy presents to the pianist, his reasons for omitting fingering indications throughout. He expresses his opinion that a variety of suitable fingerings for every shape and size of hand would be confusing on the page and would result in the score resembling a mathematical study, rather than a musical one. He states that one is best served by oneself in making fingering choices that will be of assistance in the execution of these works and he openly encourages freedom of choice in this regard.

The first edition of the *Études* was published by Durand, with the first book appearing on 19 April 1916 and the second on 3 June of the same year.

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<sup>2</sup>Claude Debussy, *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Durand-Costallat, 1991), series 1 vol. 6, *Études*. My translation.

The first performance of the *Études* was given on 14 December 1916 by the American pianist Walter Rummel. Two additional performances of selected études were given by Madeleine Chossat on 7 June 1917 and Marguerite Long on 10 November 1917. Shortly before Debussy died, the Geneva pianist Marie Panthès gave a recital with seven of the Debussy *Études* paralleled with an analogous Chopin étude. Debussy was informed about this intended comparison in a letter from Robert Godet dated 23 January 1918. The comparative table drawn up by Godet was presented as follows:

Ex.1. Extract from "*Chopin-Debussy*" by Robert Godet.

DEBUSSY	CHOPIN
pour les <i>Cinq Doigts</i> (à M. Czerny) . . . . .	op.10, N° 4
pour les <i>Tierces</i> . . . . .	op. 25, N° 6
pour les <i>Quarzes</i> . . . . .	pas d'équivalent.
pour les <i>Sixtes</i> . . . . .	op. 25, N° 8
pour les <i>Octaves</i> . . . . .	op. 25, N° 9 et N° 10
pour les <i>Huit Doigts</i> . . . . .	pas d'équivalent
pour les <i>Degrés chromatiques</i> . . . . .	op. 10, N° 2
pour les <i>agrèments</i>	} pas d'équivalents
pour les <i>Notes répétées</i> . . . . .	
pour les <i>Sonorités opposées</i> . . . . .	
pour les <i>Arpèges composés</i> . . . . .	op. 25, N° 1
pour les <i>Accords</i> . . . . .	op. 10, N° 11
	(Chopin : <i>Accords arpegés</i> ; Debussy : <i>Accords plaqués</i> ).

Debussy's personal approach to the étude as a musical form is certainly unique compared to that of his predecessors and contemporaries. In his *Études* the specific technical matter in hand is stipulated and is presented in a work of both musical and compositional mastery. Thus this genre, which has been exploited and developed by composers such as Clementi, Czerny, Chopin, Rachmaninov, Scriabin and Stravinsky, has been given yet another dimension by Claude Debussy in his final set of works for solo piano.

## CHAPTER 2

### A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE ÉTUDE NO. II BOOK 1

#### *"pour les Tierces"*

Although the tempo indication of this étude is *Moderato, ma non troppo* and the textural instruction is *sostenuto*, the succession of thirds provides such a high degree of momentum that the musical product is not a halting one. Debussy finds that the interval of the third, when used in succession, produces musical content of high activity, whereas the interval of a sixth (in the case of the étude no. IV book 1) plays both a highly active and languid role. With regard to musical characteristics resulting from the interplay of intervals, Debussy's Prelude II/11 ("*...Les tierces alternées*") (*sic*) can be placed on a parallel to the étude for thirds.

Not once is the interval played as separate notes, as Debussy is consistent in presenting the thirds as a unit. In the coda, it is common in a Debussyian structure that new material, or in this case a new disposition of the interval, is provided. The thirds are incorporated within octaves, presumably with the intent of achieving a more powerful quality of sound. Only in the final bar does Debussy dispense with the third, at which point the tonality is clear and no longer needs to be veiled by the thirds.

The most prominent factor which provides this work with both the variety of content and structural unity, is texture. The various means of manipulating the successive thirds provides the étude with a variety of contrasting textures which are joined together,

producing a mosaic-like structure of colour and texture. A horizontal framework results from the uninterrupted flow of thirds rather than a vertical one and thus in this case, texture dominates harmony. This domineering factor of texture has an effect on the highly chromatic tonal structure with momentary references made to certain tonalities. However, a tonality of some stability is only achieved in the final bar of the étude.

Bars 1 to 5/2 present an ambiguity between D flat major and B flat minor.

Mus.ex.1. Debussy *Étude II*, bb. 1-5/2.

Moderato, ma non troppo

*p legato e sostenuto*

The musical score consists of three systems of piano notation. The first system shows measures 1 through 4, with a tempo marking 'Moderato, ma non troppo' and a dynamic marking 'p legato e sostenuto'. The second system shows measures 5 through 8, and the third system shows measures 9 through 10. The music is characterized by a continuous flow of thirds in both hands, creating a mosaic-like structure of color and texture.

The opening thirds without bass support imply D flat major, which is already in doubt by the A natural on the third beat in the bass. Pedal notes on E flat and A flat are introduced in bar 2 leading to an implied cadence across the bar-line at bars 2 to 3. It cannot be determined if the cadence is an interrupted one in D flat major or a leading note to tonic cadence on the flattened leading note of B flat minor. However a definite cadence (vii-I) in D flat major across the bar-line at bars 3 to 4 is a more satisfying tonal reference, reinforced by the full major scale as the resolution. This stability is brief though, since an A natural is present once more on the third beat of bar 4 preparing for a chromatic section in which D flat Mixolydian is also referred to in bars 6/1-6/2 and 7/1-7/2.

Mus.ex.2. Debussy *Étude II*, bb. 6-7.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's *Étude II*, measures 6-7. The score is in G-flat major (two flats) and 3/4 time. It features a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *poco cresc.* (poco crescendo) marking. The music consists of a complex texture of chords and moving lines in both hands, with a chromatic section indicated by the 'poco cresc.' marking.

A new texture and colour is presented at bar 8 without the activity of chromatic movement.

Mus.ex.3. Debussy *Étude II*, bb. 8-14.

The musical score consists of four systems of staves. The first system shows the right hand with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a left hand with a similar dynamic. The second system features a *molto dim.* marking in the left hand. The third system includes a *cresc.* marking in the left hand and a *f* dynamic in the right hand. The fourth system concludes with a *f* dynamic and a double bar line. Performance markings such as *Rubato*, *Accel.*, and *Rit.* are placed above the right-hand staff. The score is written in G-flat major (two flats) and 3/4 time.

Bars 8 and 9 refer to C major briefly with the link of a C pedal note from bars 10 to 12. The chromatic tonality is resumed at bar 10 with a circular pattern above the C pedal note. A short melodic figure is introduced at bar 11 while the thirds are now consistently major, thus continuing the chromatic tonality. These major thirds form an ascending pattern in semiquaver groups of 6, 6 and 4. Bars 13 and 14 are an extension of the chromatic section which began in the middle of bar 5 and which progresses to

bar 12. The expressive markings, articulation and new rhythmic articulation of the thirds (bars 13 to 14) add to the air expressed by the lack of resolution of the accompanying chords.

The line of triads, as found at bar 3, is resumed at bar 15 with a B flat pedal note. The A naturals and A flats could be leading notes to any of the minor scales - B flat harmonic, melodic or natural minor.

Mus. ex. 4. Debussy *Étude II*, bb. 15-17.

in Tempo I<sup>o</sup>

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude II*, measures 15-17, is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 15 and 16, and the second system covers measure 17. The music is in B-flat major (two flats) and 3/4 time. The right hand plays a series of triads, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. A B-flat pedal note is indicated in the bass clef at the beginning of measure 15. The tempo marking is 'in Tempo I<sup>o</sup>' and the dynamic is 'p' (piano).

Taking this into account, as well as the insistent B flat pedal notes, it can be deduced that bars 15 to 27/2 present the tonality of B flat minor. A new feature displayed in the above-mentioned section is the alternation of thirds back and forth, which produce the effect of a measured trill. The following examples illustrate this:

Mus.ex.5. Debussy *Étude II*, b. 16/1-16/2.

Musical notation for Mus.ex.5, Debussy *Étude II*, measures 16/1-16/2. The notation is in G major, 3/4 time. The right hand plays a series of chords (triads) moving up the scale: G3-B3-D4, A3-C4-D4, B3-D4-E4, C4-D4-E4, B3-D4-E4, A3-C4-D4, G3-B3-D4. The left hand plays a series of chords moving up the scale: G2-B2-D3, A2-C3-D3, B2-D3-E3, C3-D3-E3, B2-D3-E3, A2-C3-D3, G2-B2-D3.

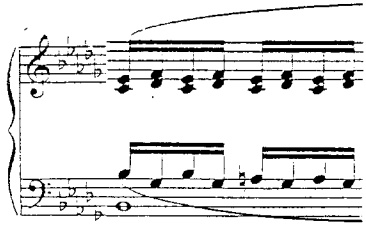
Mus.ex.6. Debussy *Étude II*, b. 17/1-17/2.

Musical notation for Mus.ex.6, Debussy *Étude II*, measures 17/1-17/2. The notation is in G major, 3/4 time. The right hand plays a series of chords moving up the scale: G3-B3-D4, A3-C4-D4, B3-D4-E4, C4-D4-E4, B3-D4-E4, A3-C4-D4, G3-B3-D4. The left hand plays a series of chords moving up the scale: G2-B2-D3, A2-C3-D3, B2-D3-E3, C3-D3-E3, B2-D3-E3, A2-C3-D3, G2-B2-D3. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is present in the right hand.

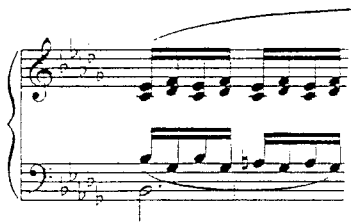
Mus.ex.7. Debussy *Étude II*, bb. 21-24.

Musical notation for Mus.ex.7, Debussy *Étude II*, measures 21-24. The notation is in G major, 3/4 time. The right hand plays a series of chords moving up the scale: G3-B3-D4, A3-C4-D4, B3-D4-E4, C4-D4-E4, B3-D4-E4, A3-C4-D4, G3-B3-D4. The left hand plays a series of chords moving up the scale: G2-B2-D3, A2-C3-D3, B2-D3-E3, C3-D3-E3, B2-D3-E3, A2-C3-D3, G2-B2-D3. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is present in the right hand. The notation is split into two systems, with the second system starting at measure 22. The second system has a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic marking in the right hand.

Mus.ex.8. Debussy *Étude II*, b. 26/1-26/2.



Mus.ex.9. Debussy *Étude II*, b. 27/1-27/2.



Sustained melodic notes above these trills and pedal notes below add yet another layer to the texture. A rhythmic motif appears in bar 18 related to the motif employed in bar 3.

Mus.ex.10. Debussy *Étude II*, bb.3 and 18.

Bars 21 and 23 imply B flat major, alternating with B flat Mixolydian in bars 22 and 24.

Mus.ex.11. Debussy *Étude II*, bb. 21-24.

Bars 25 to 27/3 recall bars 15 to 17/3 with rhythmic variation in bar 25 derived from bar 3 and later encountered in bars 18 to 20. A section opening with two bars of heavy tonal disguise follows at bar 28 with the tonic of E suggested. However, no chromatic

alteration occurs in bars 30 and 31 and there is a supertonic - dominant - tonic progression in E major.

Mus.ex.12. Debussy *Étude II*, bb. 28-31.

After repeating these two bars in D flat major, the texture is thinned from bar 34 where the patterns of thirds are divided between the hands. These support a *cantabile* melody in the treble.

Mus.ex.13. Debussy *Étude II*, b. 34.

The final beat of bar 34 illustrates Debussy's favoured technique of placing an ordinary chord on a certain degree of the applicable tonality - in this case, a plain C major chord on the leading note of D flat Mixolydian. In bar 35 a similar procedure is followed but the chord is placed on the lowered mediant of D flat Mixolydian.

Mus.ex.14. Debussy *Étude II*, b. 35.



Once more this causes confusion in the nature of the tonality.

Bar 36 links up with another chromatic section. A series of seventh chords are presented which resolve on E flat with a descending E flat major scale in thirds at bar 42.

Mus.ex.15. Debussy *Étude II*, bb. 36-44.

## Mus.ex. 15.continued

The musical score consists of four systems of piano and bass staves. The first system shows a complex texture with many notes and slurs. The second system features a *mf* dynamic marking and includes a section with a *Poco rit.* instruction. The third system begins with a *f* dynamic, followed by a *dim.* marking, and then a *p* dynamic section with a *simile* instruction. The fourth system starts with a *piu. p* dynamic marking.

The chord of D minor with a flattened fifth degree dominates bars 43 and 44, producing shades of B flat minor and also a diminished chord on the leading note of E flat major.

An attempt at returning to material from the opening of the étude is thwarted by a chromatic passage of two bars. This relates to the chromatic passage at bar 10, carrying the function of a transition to another textural section.

Mus.ex. 16. Debussy *Étude II*, bb. 45-48.

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude II*, measures 45-48, is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 45 and 46. Measure 45 is marked "in Tempo Iº" and "p". Measure 46 is marked "Rit. . . . . //". The second system contains measures 47 and 48. Measure 47 is marked "in Tempo Iº" and "p". Measure 48 is marked "Rit. . . . . //". The score is in G-flat major and 3/4 time, featuring complex chordal textures and chromatic passages.

Bars 49 and 50 are a development of bar 2 with the E flat pedal notes more articulated and a clear melodic line appearing in the tenor. This melody is repeated a fourth higher in bar 49 and is extended at bar 50.

Mus. ex. 17. Debussy *Étude II*, bb. 49-50.

in Tempo 1º

*molto pp*

*pp un poco marcato*

Transferred to the soprano from bars 53 to 54, the melody occurs within a new texture and has a varied articulation.

Mus. ex. 18. Debussy *Étude II*, bb. 53-58.

*p leggierissimo*

*più p*

*poco a poco cresc.*

Bars 55 and 56 present the melody a fifth lower within the same texture. The following two bars (57 and 58) are related to bars 38 and 39, forming a two bar link to bar 59, with the chromatic tonality of the previous four bars.

A compression of bars 1 to 9 occurs at bars 59 to 62 with a variance in texture, this time with accompanying thirds in the lower part and incorporating the dotted rhythm from bars 4 and 5.

Mus. ex.19. Debussy *Étude II*, bb. 59-62.

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude II*, bars 59-62, is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 59-60) is marked *Animando* and features a melody in the upper voice with a dotted rhythm. Dynamics are marked *mf* and *p*. The second system (bars 61-62) features a melody in the upper voice with a dotted rhythm and a lower voice with accompanying thirds. Dynamics are marked *f* and *dim.*

There is an abrupt introduction of new material at bar 63.

Mus.ex.20. Debussy *Étude II*, bb.63-67.

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 63-64) shows piano (p) dynamics and rapid dynamic fluctuations. The second system (measures 65-66) includes the dynamic markings *p e molto cresc.* and shows a gradual increase in volume. The third system (measures 67-68) is marked *Con fuoco* and *ff*, featuring triplet rhythms in both hands.

This consists of the static harmony of E flat major/minor for four bars coupled with rapid dynamic fluctuations for two bars, progressing to a climax at bar 67. Although the D natural octave in the bass and the indication *con fuoco* have not appeared previously in the étude, the triplet rhythms are related to those in bars 13 and 14. These triplets which have been subjected to retardation, present a new declamatory quality to the work, also heightened by the thirds being incorporated within the octave and the

dynamic level at its highest yet in the étude. D natural octaves in the bass, which alternate with E flat octaves for nine bars (with the exception of bb. 71 and 72), indicate further use of a chromatic tonality or a conclusion in a major or minor tonality other than D flat major.

Material from bar 67 returns at bar 73, whereafter quaver triplets persist in an agitated manner accompanied by a bass line producing an extended plagal cadence in B flat minor across the final three bars.

As mentioned before, the varying textures which result from the various manipulations of the thirds determine the formal structure of this work.

**Tabular analysis A:**

<b>A</b>						
a <sub>1</sub>	b	c	d <sub>1</sub>	a <sub>2</sub>	e	f
Bb 1-4	5-10	11-12	13-14	15-20	21-27	28-33

<b>B</b>	<b>A+B</b>			<b>(Coda)</b>		
g <sub>1</sub>	a <sub>3</sub>	h <sub>1</sub>	h <sub>2</sub>	a <sub>4</sub>	g <sub>2</sub>	d <sub>2</sub>
34-44	45-48	49-52	53-58	59-62	63-66	67-76

An interesting observation is the near symmetry of the outer sections in the macro-structure:

**Tabular analysis B:**

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>A+B</b>
Bb 1-33	Bb 34-44	Bb 45-76
33 BARS	11 BARS	32 BARS

## CHAPTER 3

## A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE ÉTUDE NO. IV BOOK 1

*"pour les Sixtes"*

It is apparent in this étude that Debussy's interest was a contrapuntal one rather than harmonic, as it seems his compositional procedure was motivated purely by digital patterns of sixths on the keyboard. The étude opens with a tonic-dominant-tonic progression in the first bar in a sequence of parallel sixths. These opening chords establish the fundamental sonority which is the focal point of this composition.

Mus.ex.21. Debussy *Étude IV*, b. 1.



The diatonicism and pure sonority provided by this consonant interval is interrupted in bar 2, with the left hand part entering on an A natural and the harmony of the bar is built on the diminished seventh on A natural which is an altered form of chord VII in D flat. The A natural root of this chord is also the flattened sixth degree in D flat major notated enharmonically. After a suspension in the right hand on the first half of the first beat of the bar, this diminished seventh harmony resolves onto chord IV in bar 3. A decorated

cadence is formed in bar 3, by the chromatic shifts in sixths and the single bass line.<sup>3</sup> The second half of bar 3 can also be interpreted as an augmented chord on the flattened mediant resolving onto the tonic in D flat. The use of the flattened mediant as a counterbalance to the major third degree is often encountered in the music of Debussy - with this, the major sense of the key is broken down so that the third degree's importance in determining the quality of the tonality is diminished.

Mus.ex.22. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 2-3.



Bar 4 consists of one harmony, namely a B flat ninth chord with a flattened ninth in an unusual voicing. The rhythmic activity increases in this bar with the dotted rhythm appearing on each beat. The B flat<sup>9</sup> chord progresses to a plain C<sup>7</sup> harmony (which could also be chord VII with raised third and fifth degrees), extending over two bars and which concludes the first phrase, leaving it in harmonic "mid-air". However, Debussy succeeds in maintaining the rhythmic momentum with the use of the semiquaver segments on the final two beats of both bars and the flow of consecutive sixths is maintained by the non-harmonic passing notes.

<sup>3</sup> Another example of Debussy's striking decorated cadences can be found in his Prelude II/6 ("*General Lavine' - excentric*") (*sic*) from bar 17 to 19/1 where the basic progression of VI II V I is decorated linearly.

Mus.ex.23. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 4-6.

A second statement of the opening phrase occurs at bar 7, however this time it is placed an octave higher in the upper part and has harmonic support from the lower part in sixths at the outset. In this statement of the theme, the A natural diminished seventh chord appears sooner than before - this time it is on the second quaver of the theme with the crucial harmony notes in the sixth of the lower part. The enharmonic notation of the flattened sixth degree is discarded in this case and a B double flat is used.

Mus.ex.24. Debussy *Étude IV*, b. 7.

At bar 8, the harmonic movement is by the quaver rather than extending across the bar, as found at bar 2.

Mus.ex.25. Debussy *Étude IV*, b. 8.

At this point in the analysis, it should be stated that Debussy's procedure of combining the interval of the sixth in both the upper and lower parts simultaneously, often creates quartads. In certain cases there is no doubt as to the function of such quartads being that of seventh chords. In other cases however, their function seems more plausible as triads with an added sixth (to which Debussy was partial), or they could simply be passing quartads with no harmonic function at all. An example from the étude presently under study would be at bar 9.

Mus.ex.26. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 9-13/1.

Animando poco a poco

The first chord of the bar is chord V with an added sixth, rather than being a seventh chord on the mediant of D flat major. On the other hand, the subsequent sonority of the same bar is the recurring diminished seventh chord on A natural in its last inversion and not a triad on C with an added sixth. However, this then moves to a simple I<sup>6</sup>, to which an E flat is then attached. The upper sixth resolves by step and the lower by thirds onto chord II<sup>7</sup> in D flat. The next three beats are in "harmonic limbo" when the natural resolution of chord II onto chord V is interrupted until chord IV occurs on the first beat of bar 13.

Although much chromatic movement is present for the duration of bars 13 to 15, a prevailing harmony of V<sup>7</sup> is hinted at by the almost unbroken series of quartads and this seems to resolve at the climax in bar 16. The chromatic alteration of chord I<sup>+6</sup> in D flat or chord VI<sup>7</sup> in D flat (in terms of functional harmony), into a chord which is in fact B flat<sup>7</sup> in its last inversion, would seem to imply a modulation to E flat, but it never arrives there. Once again "harmonic limbo" is created and the instability of juxtaposing chords of seemingly unrelated tonalities is finally relieved, as the chord of C minor with flattened fifth and seventh degrees dissolves onto a C<sup>7</sup> without a third and the tonality of F major is arrived at with a colouring G flat.

Mus.ex.27. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 13-21.

Animando poco a poco

au Mouvt

*f* *dim.* *p* *più p* *pp*

(4) (3) Rit.

au Mouvt, un poco agitato

*sempre pp*

Bar 21 introduces new material, which brings with it a heightening of rhythmic activity from the repetitive triplet semiquavers with chromatic decoration.

Mus.ex.28. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 21-22.

au Mouvt, un poco agitato

*sempre pp*

Bars 23 and 24 appear to be decorations on the chord of B flat followed by two bars of tonal instability as a shift occurs from F major to E flat major on the third beat of bar 25. This is followed by a shift to G flat on the third beat of bar 26, which is confirmed by a perfect cadence from bar 26 (on the second half of the third beat) to bar 27.

Mus.ex.29. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 23-27.

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude IV*, measures 23-27, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 23-24) features a piano (*p*) dynamic and a melodic line in the right hand. The second system (measures 25-27) includes markings for *Stringere*, *Poco rit.*, and dynamics ranging from *p* to *mf*. The third system (measures 28-29) is marked *Mouv<sup>t</sup>* and *pp subito*, concluding with an *espress.* marking.

The Mixolydian mode on G flat is employed for two beats of bar 28, followed by a plain  $D^7$  chord resolving onto G flat major in bar 29.

Mus.ex.30. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 28-29.

The mellow timbre provided by this tonality is brightened by a shift to E flat major at bar 30, which contains submediant and dominant pedal points and no modulation.

Mus.ex.31. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 30-31.

In order to return to G flat at bar 33 (which begins with chord VII<sup>7</sup>), a chromatic shift is arrived at by way of an F sharp seventh chord at the end of bar 32, but the voicing is altered at bar 33.

Mus.ex.32. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 32-33.

Musical score for Debussy *Étude IV*, bars 32-33. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a piano (*p*) dynamic with a forte (*f*) accent at the start. The music is marked *dim.* (diminuendo) and *Molto rit.* (Molto ritardando). The piece concludes with a double bar line and a fermata. The score includes triplets in both the upper and lower staves.

Direct repetition of bars 27 to 29 occurs at bars 34 to 36 with an additional bar (bar 37) creating a link to the next section. The material of this additional bar originates from bar 28, however in bar 37 the Mixolydian mode on G flat is recalled and it concludes with a descending line in the upper part on the third beat.

Mus.ex.33. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 34-37.

Musical score for Debussy *Étude IV*, bars 34-37. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The music is marked *Mouv<* (Mouvement), *Rubato*, and *Poco rit.* (Poco ritardando). The piece concludes with a double bar line and a fermata. The score includes a variety of rhythmic patterns and dynamics.

Material from bars 21 to 24 reappears in a varied form at bars 38 to 41 - the lower part of bars 38 and 39 has descending octave leaps on the second, third and fourth quavers of both bars, thus resulting in a more active line and articulating the dominant harmony rather than employing a sustained dominant, as in the former case.

Mus.ex.34. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 21-22.

21

au Mouvt, un poco agitato

*sempre pp*

Mus.ex.35. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 38-39.

Mouv<sup>t</sup> (un poco agitato)

*p*

Bars 40 and 41 are identical to bars 23 and 24.

Mus.ex.36. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 40-41.

Linear decoration is presented once more from bars 42 to 45, remaining in F major. The flattened sixth degree in F major (D flat) functions here as a reminder of the opening tonality of the étude, to which a return is imminent. The collapse of rhythmic drive in this bridge to the recapitulatory section (bars 43 to 45), incorporates a shift, slipping back chromatically into D flat major at bar 46. As the progression eases tonally into D flat major via the B flat pedal point which moves down to B double flat (the lowered sixth that has recurred numerous times and was also incorporated into the altered VII<sup>7</sup> chord) and via the E double flat which descends to D flat, the section closes down rhythmically as well as dynamically by means of the *rit. poco a poco e calando* and *smorzando*.

Mus.ex.37. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 42-46.

## Mus.ex.37.continued

1er Mouvt

*p slentando*

In this restatement of the theme, the octave displacement of the upper part and the octave support from the lower part creates the richest sonority yet achieved in the work. Debussy avoids the tonic in the bass. The chromatic E double flat is employed again and is manipulated into a plain D major chord at bar 49.

Mus.ex.38. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 46-50.

1er Mouvt

*p slentando*

Rit. . . . .

The D flat tonic eventually occurs at bar 51, but it is incorporated into a tonic to dominant pedal point beneath subdominant harmony with an added sixth.

Mus. ex.39. Debussy *Étude IV*, b. 51.

Musical score for Debussy *Étude IV*, bar 51. The score is in G-flat major (two flats) and 3/4 time. It features a *Più lento* tempo marking and *sempre dolcissimo* dynamics. The right hand plays a melodic line with a trill-like figure, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with a prominent D-flat tonic pedal point.

This shifts back and forth chromatically at bars 51 and 52, regaining tonal stability at bar 53.

Mus. ex.40. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 51-53.

Musical score for Debussy *Étude IV*, bars 51-53. This excerpt shows three bars of the piece. It continues with the *Più lento* tempo and *sempre dolcissimo* dynamics. The chromatic shifting of the D-flat tonic pedal point is clearly visible across the three bars.

One final D natural appears in bar 54.

Mus.ex.41. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 53-54.

The tonic to dominant pedal point is sustained for a further two bars beneath a chromatically altered fifth degree. On the second beat of bar 56, the D flat is held across the bar while the pedal point reverses to dominant to tonic for the subsequent two bars. Retaining the added sixth to the tonic harmonies above (bars 57 and 58), Debussy concludes the étude with the finality of the major third degree.

Mus.ex.42. Debussy *Étude IV*, bb. 55-59.

The formal structure of this étude can be classified as a standard ternary structure - A B A. In this case, Debussy does not follow his characteristic form of writing the recapitulatory section in a reminiscent manner forming an A B A/B structure. The recapitulation excludes any restatement of material from the middle or B section.

**Tabular analysis:**

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>A (severely contracted as a coda)</b>
Bb 1-20	21-45	46-59

## CHAPTER 4

## A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE ÉTUDE NO. X BOOK 2

*"pour les Sonorités opposées"*

The appropriate translation of the title of this tenth étude would be 'for opposing qualities of sound', as it is variances in register, dynamics, articulation, rhythm, texture and tempo that collectively make up musical sonority. It is apparent that contrapuntal layers are established by means of contrasting registers, varying textures and articulations - a direct link to the influence of the gamelan orchestra on Debussy with its percussion and bell sounds. Misha Donat comments that "Debussy establishes contrapuntal layers . . . that foreshadow the compositional preoccupations of a much later generation of composers"<sup>4</sup> and this is the product of his fascination with the Javanese gamelan that he heard in 1889 and 1900.

An introduction of six bars, portraying the sound of bells, presents an elusive sense of tonality.

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<sup>4</sup>Misha Donat, Brochure notes entitled "In the footsteps of Couperin and Chopin" for Georg Wübbolt, *The Debussy Etudes performed and discussed by Mitsuko Uchida* (Südwestfunk R M Arts, 1989).

Mus.ex.43. Debussy *Étude X*, bb. 1-6.

Modéré, sans lenteur

pp

p dolente

A persistent G sharp is to become the tonal anchor of the work.<sup>5</sup> The first sense of tonality occurs across the bar-line from bars 6 to 7 with a plagal cadence in F major.

Mus.ex.44. Debussy *Étude X*, bb. 6-7.

Animando poco a poco

p expressif et profond

<sup>5</sup>A similar means of obtaining tonal stability is encountered in Debussy's 'Soirée dans Grenade' from *Estampes*.

The new section presents a chromatic tonality (bars 7 to 14) in the melodically active inner layers, while the stabilising G sharp notated enharmonically in the uppermost layer and answered by a persistent low F, provides a framework within which the melody is active. As a result of the doubling of inner layers and the sustained notes of other layers, the texture of bars 7 to 14 is of a thicker nature than the transparent introduction.

Mus.ex.45. Debussy *Étude X*. bb. 7-14.

*Animando poco a poco*

*p expressif et profond*

*p poco cresc.*

*pp*

After the descending tritone in the bass from bars 13 to 14, the common G sharp/A flat of the ninth chord on E in bar 14 becomes the central focus from bar 15, initiating a new section with new sonorities.

Mus.ex.46. Debussy *Étude X*, bb. 15-18.

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude X*, measures 15-18, is presented in a grand staff format. The top staff is in bass clef and the bottom staff is in treble clef. The time signature is 3/4, and the tempo is marked '1º Tempo'. The score begins with a *pp* dynamic marking. The music consists of a series of chords and a chromatic line in the inner layer. A 'C' time signature change is indicated in the middle of the score. The word 'simile' is written below the staff in the middle section. The score is annotated with various musical symbols, including a circled '3/4' at the beginning and a 'C' at the end of the middle section.

On this occasion, triads are doubled in the two outer layers and the single inner layer provides rhythmic activity with a chromatic line in quavers. These meandering progressions are decorations on the significant note of G sharp. One ponders the reason behind notating the bass part for the right hand and the treble for the left, resulting in cross-handed playing of an awkward disposition for the duration of ten bars. The most logical reason seems for the necessity to play the chromatic line with the thumb and first finger of the right hand. Thus it could be deduced that although Debussy refrained from notating fingerings in this set of works (as he states in the preface to the *Études*), he did however, suggest fingerings by his choice of notation.

The deviation of the harmonic orientation in bar 26 with seventh chords on D and G causing a flattening in the tonality, hints at the imminent introduction of a new idea, particularly reinforced with the rapid thinning in texture at bar 30.

Mus.ex.47. Debussy *Étude X*, bb. 26-30.

Musical score for Debussy's *Étude X*, measures 26-30. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a complex harmonic structure with seventh chords on D and G. The texture thins out significantly in bar 30. A 'Rit.' marking is present at the end of the passage.

A new melody based on E pentatonic of distinct melodic and rhythmic interest, is introduced on a G sharp pedal.

Mus.ex.48. Debussy *Étude X*, bb. 31-33/1.

Musical score for Debussy's *Étude X*, measures 31-33/1. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a new melody based on the E pentatonic scale, introduced on a G sharp pedal. The tempo is marked "L'istesso tempo". The dynamics are marked "pp" and the mood is "lointain, mais clair et joyeux".

The dotted rhythms and wider intervals provide a pleasant contrast in sonority to the chromatic inflections in steady quavers of the previous section. Debussy is particularly descriptive regarding the sonority required from the onset of this melody - *lointain, mais clair et joyeux*.

The pentatonic mode is interrupted for three bars from bar 33, when a flattening in tonality occurs similar to that encountered from bar 26 onwards.

Mus.ex.49. Debussy *Étude X*, bb. 33-35.

The second appearance of the pentatonic melody at bar 36 is indicated to have more presence than the first (*de plus près*). The chordal accompaniment increases the thickness of the texture and a slight variation towards the end of bar 37 functions as a link to the subsequent section.

Mus.ex.50. Debussy *Étude X*, bb. 36-38.

Crossed hands and chromatic melodic material in the inner voice could relate this section to material previously encountered. However, this seems tenuous since bars 38 to 52 present a new section governed chiefly by the tonality of C sharp major. A dominant thirteenth chord provides harmonic support for five bars, while a chromatic melody is presented in the inner voice of the upper part, commencing at bar 40.

Mus.ex.51. Debussy *Étude X*, bb. 38-43.

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude X*, measures 38-43, is presented in two systems. The first system shows measures 38-40, and the second system shows measures 41-43. The score is written for piano and features complex textures with crossed hands and intricate articulation. The upper staff (treble clef) and lower staff (bass clef) are shown. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p doux*, *p marqué*, *p expressif et pénétrant*, and *pp*. Performance instructions include *Animando e appassionato* and *(9) poco a poco*. The score shows a progression of chords and melodic lines, with a chromatic melody in the inner voice of the upper part starting at bar 40.

The bar-by-bar instructions from bar 38 (*doux*, *marqué*, *expressif et pénétrant*), the extensive use of hairpins and intricate articulation markings convey the means by which the different layers of sonorities are to be achieved. These differing sonorities in their respective layers are played off against one another and this isolates the layers in a contrapuntal manner.

Bars 51 and 52 are derived from bars 40 and 41.

Mus.ex.52. Debussy *Étude X*, bb.51-52.

pp subito

Mus.ex.53. Debussy *Étude X*, bb.40-41.

p expressif et pénétrant

However, there are rhythmic, dynamic and articulation alterations. It can thus be deduced that although the fundamental material is employed on more than one occasion, the quality of sonority is the variable factor.

Bars 53 to 58 form a link to the coda which begins at bar 59.

Mus.ex.54. Debussy *Étude X*, bb. 53-59.

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude X*, measures 53-59, is presented in two systems. The first system, measures 53-59, is marked 'Calmato' and 'ppp'. It features a complex texture with multiple layers of sound. The uppermost layer, marked 'ppp' and 'Calmato', consists of a melody in smaller print. The middle layer has a more active melody. The lowest layer provides a harmonic foundation with chords and a bass line. A 'd.' (diminuendo) marking is present in the first measure. A '3/4' tempo change is indicated in measure 57. The score ends with a 'pp' (pianissimo) marking in measure 59.

The lowest layer maintains the anchoring note in the bass which is altered to an F sharp with a chord above it, whilst the uppermost layer presents material from the first bar of the melody at bar 40 in rhythms of half the original value. The notation of this uppermost layer in smaller print is a further indication of a different sonority from the lower layers, considering the main objective of this particular étude.

The thinner texture and blatantly static quality of bars 57 and 58 provide a forewarning of the arrival of the coda at bar 59, and over an F sharp pedal carried over from the link, the pentatonic melody from bar 31 reappears (see mus.ex.54). As is typical with Debussy, the final section is one of reminiscences of previously heard material. The anchoring note evaporates from bar 60, only to function in a cadential capacity from bar 66. The melody

ascends until it is suspended on a fermata in bar 61, to be connected to an incomplete quotation of the melody from bar 40.

Mus.ex.55. Debussy *Étude X*, bb. 61-62.

Bars 64 and 65 are drawn from the section beginning at bar 15, however in this case, the chromatic line is doubled by the two outer layers and is highly decorated.

Mus.ex.56. Debussy *Étude X*, bb. 64-65.

The new sonority which results from this manipulation of the material, is so innovative that the chromatic line seems hardly related to that from bar 15.

The harmonies in bars 66 and 67 are related to those in bars 26 and 27 and a segment of the pentatonic melody appears in bar 68.

Mus.ex.57. Debussy *Étude X*, bb.66-70.

calando

(de loin)

pp

p marqué

(de plus loin...)

The final cadence of the étude occurs across the bar-line from bar 69 to 70, with a dominant thirteenth chord in C sharp minor resolving in the bass to a single note. A rhythmically retarded version of the pentatonic melody instigates a decorative closing for a further five bars.

Mus.ex.58. Debussy *Étude X*, bb.70-75.

(de plus loin...)

pp

smorzando

f

p

pp

There are a number of consistent factors in this étude: the melodic material is chiefly chromatic, the accompanying chords are diatonic, the harmony is stabilised by pedal notes, repeated melodic material brings alterations in sonority and lastly, different sonorities are played off against one another. It is apparent from the constant alteration of tempo, articulation, dynamic and character indications that Debussy demands extreme precision in the production of sound qualities, often within a rather restricted dynamic range and in a short space of time. This étude is the epitome of the wide ranging tonal palette of the piano which is exploited to its fullest potential by Debussy.

Since the opposing sonorities are dependant on a number of musical elements, the formal structure of this étude is determined by varying motivic material.

**Tabular analysis:**

	<b>Intro.</b>	<b>a</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>c</b>	<b>d</b>	<b>Link</b>	<b>Coda</b>
Bb	1-6	7-14	15-30	31-37	38-52	53-58	59-75
Pedals{	G <sup>#</sup>	A / G <sup>#</sup> F	E	G <sup>#</sup> G <sup>#</sup>	G <sup>#</sup>	F <sup>#</sup>	F <sup>#</sup> G <sup>#</sup> C <sup>#</sup>

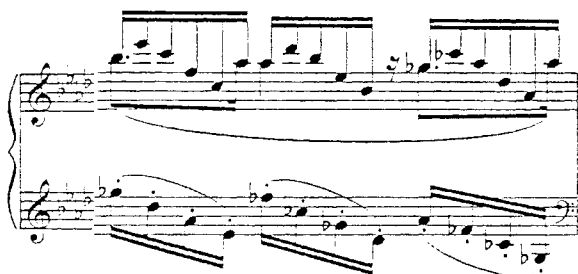
## CHAPTER 5

## A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE ÉTUDE NO. XI BOOK 2

*"pour les Arpèges composés"*

This étude can be considered a display of all the possible ways that arpeggio figures can be employed in the pianistic genre and as a result, the étude becomes an illustration of all the possible technical and musical demands made on the pianist by this wide range of arpeggio figures. As a result of this aspect being exploited almost consistently throughout this work, the structure of the étude is determined by the varying texture according to the changing construction of the arpeggio figures. The melodic content is intertwined through the arpeggios and in some cases, the arpeggio itself functions as melodic material. The sextuplet figure in the opening bars, for example, is transformed in bar 2 to function as melody interspersed with accompaniment.

Mus.ex.59. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 2.



The opening figure in bar 1 suggests an elusive sense of key - the doubt being between F minor and A flat major. In bar 2, the G flat suggests the Mixolydian mode on A flat and the harmony of the third beat of the bar could have three explanations: a ninth chord on VII in F minor with an added sixth, or a diminished seventh chord on IV in A flat major with a flattened third and added fourth, or a series of appoggiaturas which resolve on the first beat of bar 3. The resolution is onto an A flat chord on the first beat of bar 3 and the A flat tonality is reinforced with a plagal cadence from bar 3 to 4, which would suggest that, in harmonically functional terms, the last beat of bar 2 has a dominant function.

Mus.ex.60. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 1-4/1.

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude XI*, measures 1-4, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1-2) is marked *dolce e lusingando*. The second system (measures 3-4) includes dynamic markings *f* and *pp*. The score is written for piano and features a complex harmonic structure with various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and fingerings.

Bars 4 to 6 are an exact repetition of bars 1 to 3.

Mus.ex.61. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 4-6.

This technique of direct repetition is often encountered in Debussy's compositions. Further examples of it in this étude are illustrated below:

Mus.ex.62. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 7-8/2

is the same as

Mus.ex.63. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 9-10/2.

Mus.ex.64. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 40

is the same as

Mus.ex.65. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 42.

Mus.ex.66. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 43-44/1

Musical score for Mus.ex.66, Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 43-44/1. The score is in bass clef with a key signature of two flats. It shows two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with a 'pincé' marking and a dynamic of 'pü p'. The lower staff has a bass line with chords and a 'pincé' marking.

is the same as

Mus.ex.67. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 44-45/1.

Musical score for Mus.ex.67, Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 44-45/1. The score is in bass clef with a key signature of two flats. It shows two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with a 'pincé' marking and a dynamic of 'pp'. The lower staff has a bass line with chords and a 'pincé' marking.

Mus.ex.68. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 48

Musical score for Mus.ex.68, Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 48. The score is in bass clef with a key signature of two flats. It shows two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with a slur and a dynamic of 'pü p'. The lower staff has a bass line with chords and a dynamic of 'pü p'.

is the same as

Mus.ex.69. Debussy *Étude XI*, b.49.

Molto rit.

The rapid, thick textured arpeggios with appoggiaturas and added sixths, commence at bar 7. They are diatonic chords in A flat major. The single exception is the C major arpeggio in bars 7 and 9 on the third beat where an ordinary major ninth chord is used on the mediant of A flat major, instead of a diatonic chord.

Mus.ex.70. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 7-10.

The term 'ordinary chord' can be explained as an aurally diatonic chord which has been chromatically altered and this alteration transforms the chord into a non-modulatory ordinary chord and is a characteristic feature of the composer's harmonic language. This process of alteration can be illustrated as follows:

Mus.ex.71. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 7.

Another pertinent example illustrates this aspect of Debussy's harmonic language:

Mus.ex.72. Debussy *Prelude I/4* "(... 'Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir')" (*sic*), b.1.

Modéré (♩ = 84)  
(harmonieux et souple)

The use of ninth chords on C and E in bar 11, in addition to the decorated seventh chords on V in A flat or II in the new key D flat in bar 12 and the supertonic seventh chords in D flat at bar 13 serve as a transition to the key of D flat major which is confirmed by the perfect cadence at bars 13 to 14. At bar 12 the structure of the arpeggios changes and each one incorporates a downward direction only. Tension builds to the third beat of bar 15 with the insistency of the melodic line in dotted rhythms.

Mus.ex.73. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 11-15.

The musical score consists of three systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef).  
 - **System 1 (Measures 11-12):** The right hand plays a melodic line with dotted rhythms. The left hand plays arpeggiated chords. A dynamic marking of *p* appears at the start of measure 12.  
 - **System 2 (Measures 13-15):** The right hand continues with dotted rhythms. The left hand features more complex arpeggiated textures. Dynamic markings include *mf* and *SONORO*. The key signature changes to two flats (B-flat and E-flat) starting in measure 12.  
 - **System 3 (Measures 16-17):** The right hand continues with dotted rhythms. The left hand features arpeggiated textures. Dynamic markings include *mf* and *molto dim.*

Suddenly there is an immediate return to material reminiscent of the étude's opening in bar 16 with the melodic line presented in the left hand. The rhythm is derived from that of the inner melody at bar 2 but is rhythmically displaced and slightly altered. The return to the key of A flat is clarified by way of a perfect cadence from bar 17/3 to 18/1.

Mus.ex.74. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 16-18/1.

The same construction of arpeggios and thus the same texture, as found from bar 7 occurs again from bar 20, however the sense of tonality seems to lose its stability since the previous perfect cadence is not present in the bass line here but is altered to form a perfect cadence in E flat major at bar 19 resolving at bar 20. The tonic harmony at bar 20 has both a major and minor flavour as both F sharp (also G flat) and G are side by side in this arpeggio. Instead of a sub-dominant chord at bar 21 (as was the case at bar 8), any sense of the note A flat is avoided by using a ninth chord with a raised third on F instead.

Mus.ex.75. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 20-21.

A sense of progression is felt in bar 23 with the same rhythmic progression as found in bar 12 but the arpeggio construction is retained from the preceding bars, with the melodic line in the bass. The lowered third degree in E flat is present once more on the third beat of bar 23 creating a sense of elusiveness. The altered ninth chord on C in bar 24 is a pivot chord on the sub-mediante of E flat or the lowered sub-mediante of E major.

Mus.ex.76. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 23-24.

In bar 25, the seventh chord on F sharp, in its second inversion introduces a tonal shift to E major, which is reinforced by a perfect cadence.

Mus.ex.77. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 25-26/1.

Bar 25 heralds a new section of the étude (B) with the texture highly contrasting to the texture provided by section A. It is audibly apparent from the beginning of this section, or even from the abrupt cut off from the last dotted rhythm in bar 24, that the texture is far more disjointed than that of section A, with drier sonorities achieved through the articulation and more rapid exchange of different arpeggio manipulations. The unifying factor in this section is the use of chord clusters, however the various manners in which these clusters are exploited are so wide ranging that the material generated, sounds innovative and unrelated. The first arpeggio in bar 25 appears as if without measure and states the new mindset of the section. The chord clusters are varied in the following ways:

(a) shorter ascending arpeggios;

Mus. ex. 78. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 25.

(b) rolled arpeggios;

Mus. ex. 79. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 26.

Mus. ex. 80. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 31.

Mus.ex. 81. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 34.

(c) staccato ascending and descending arpeggios;

Mus.ex. 82. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 26.

(d) descending arpeggios/clusters as approach to the beats;

Mus.ex. 83. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 27.

Mus. ex. 84. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 29-31/1.

Giocoso Scherzare

*f* *dim.* *p* *pp*

Mus. ex. 85. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 32-34/1.

*p* *pp*

Mus. ex. 86. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 35.

*m.f.* *p* *f*

Mus.ex.87. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 38.

(e) extended ascending arpeggios;

Mus.ex.88. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 27.

(f) chord clusters;

Mus.ex.89. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 26.

Mus.ex.90. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 31.

Scherzare

*p* *pp*

Mus.ex.91. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 40-41.

Tempo

*p* *sfz*

Mus.ex.92. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 43.

*più p* *pincé*

Mus.ex.93. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 45.

The material at bars 31 and 32 resembles strumming and plucking on a guitar which seems quite intentional as the tuning of a guitar is in fourths and this material is constructed in intervals of fourths. This illustrates the Spanish influence which permeates much of Debussy's music, such as is found in his Prelude I/9 '( . . . *La sérénade interrompue*)' (*sic*), Prelude I/12 '( . . . *Minstrels*)' (*sic*) and Prelude II/3 '( . . . *La puerta del vino*)' (*sic*). The harmony in bar 31 is tonic harmony of ninth chords with an added sixth. The last one and a half beats of bar 32 are based on a thirteenth chord on flattened VII and functions as a descending chromatic line to bar 33. Bar 33 is notated enharmonically and still in E major employs a thirteenth chord on the unaltered seventh degree but with a lowered third and raised fifth in the chord.

Mus.ex.94. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 31-34.

## Mus.ex.94.continued

The musical score for Mus.ex.94 continued consists of two staves. The left staff is in bass clef and the right staff is in treble clef. The music is in a key with two flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The left staff features a series of semiquaver chords, with the second chord of each group having an added sixth that is replaced by a D sharp. The right staff features a descending figure followed by two semiquaver chords. Dynamics markings include *p* and *pp*.

Bar 34 is a slightly altered version of bar 31, in that the added sixth of the second semiquaver chord of each group is replaced by a D sharp, thus adding a seventh to the tonic ninth chord. The result is that the added sixth in the first semiquaver chord of bar 34 now rises to the D sharp instead of remaining static.

The descending figure followed by two semiquaver chords which appears for the first time in bar 35 is all decoration of chord II in E with a raised third and added sixth or a seventh chord on B with an added fourth.

Mus.ex.95. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 35.

The musical score for Mus.ex.95, Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 35, consists of two staves. The left staff is in bass clef and the right staff is in treble clef. The music is in a key with two sharps (D major or F# minor). The left staff features a series of semiquaver chords, with the second chord of each group having an added sixth that is replaced by a D sharp. The right staff features a descending figure followed by two semiquaver chords. Dynamics markings include *m.d.*, *f*, *p*, and *f*.

A chromatic passage from bar 37 to bar 39 assists a tonal shift from E major to B major. The Lydian fourth in E is quoted with the A sharp on the last beat of bar 37 and this small rhythmic figure originates from bar 27/3. The composer emphasises this shift with trills in the inner part moving from a D sharp - F trill (notated enharmonically as E flat - F) to a D-sharp - E trill in bar 39. Bar 39 establishes the key of B major with the statement of a thirteenth chord, heralding a tonal shift to B major.

Mus.ex.96. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 37-40/1.

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude XI*, measures 37-40/1, is presented in two systems. The first system shows measures 37 and 39. Measure 37 begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a chromatic passage in the right hand, marked with a bracket and a '3' below it. The left hand plays a bass line with a trill on D sharp and F. Measure 39 continues the chromatic passage and features a trill in the inner part moving from D sharp - F to D sharp - E. The second system shows measures 40 and 40/1. Measure 40 is marked 'Rit.' and 'subito *p*', with a dynamic of *pp*. Measure 40/1 is marked 'Tempo' and '3/4', with a dynamic of *p*. The score includes various musical notations such as trills, chromatic lines, and dynamic markings.

The same harmonic idea at bars 31 and 34, is encountered at bar 40 once again, though differently voiced. This figure is concluded with a plain seventh chord on G and although interrupted by an ascending chromatic line, is retained until the third beat of bar 41.

Mus.ex.97. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 40-41.

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude XI*, measures 40-41, is presented in a grand staff. The time signature is 3/4. The right hand (treble clef) features a complex, tremolo-like texture of chords, with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano) in the first measure. The left hand (bass clef) has a more rhythmic, eighth-note pattern. A 'Tempo' marking is placed above the first measure. The score concludes with a dynamic marking of *sfz* (sforzando) in the final measure.

Bars 43 and 44 have a construction of this idea similar to that of bars 31 and 34 and the C sharp functions as an appoggiatura resolving onto B clearer this time. The final quaver of each bar is a dominant thirteenth chord, resolving onto the tonic note.

Mus.ex.98. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 43-44.

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude XI*, measures 43-44, is presented in a grand staff. The time signature is 3/4. The right hand (treble clef) features a complex, tremolo-like texture of chords, with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano) in the first measure. The left hand (bass clef) has a more rhythmic, eighth-note pattern. A 'pincé' marking is placed above the final measure of each bar. The score concludes with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano) in the final measure.

Harmonic derivatives from bar 43 are transformed in character by means of the legato at bar 45, seemingly with the intention of the bar to function as a transition. The harmony is a

ninth chord with a G sharp root, an added sixth and a minor third (B) which also relates to A flat major being the minor third (C flat), however the A sharp (B flat) is the clearest pivot note as it is held over to the following bar.

Mus.ex.99. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 45-46.

Musical score for Debussy *Étude XI*, measures 45-46. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a piano (*pp*) dynamic and includes markings for "Rit." and "Tempo rubato". The right hand plays a series of chords and arpeggios, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. A fermata is placed over the final chord of measure 46.

Bars 46 and 47 show the tonality to be somewhat vague as Debussy moves through a series of quartads built around material reminiscent of bars 12 and 13. Only when this stalls on the B flat in the left hand part on the last beat of bar 47 tied to the first beat of bar 48, is there a definite sense of recapitulation to the material and a tonal stability previously encountered.

Mus.ex.100. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 46-50/1.

Musical score for Debussy *Étude XI*, measures 46-50/1. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a piano (*pp*) dynamic and includes markings for "Tempo rubato". The right hand plays a series of chords and arpeggios, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. A fermata is placed over the final chord of measure 46.

## Mus.ex.100. continued

Musical score for Mus.ex.100. continued. The score is in G-flat major (two flats) and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems. The first system shows the piano part (left hand) and the right hand part. The tempo marking "Molto rit." is placed above the right hand staff. The second system shows the right hand part alone, with the tempo marking "Tempo I°" above it and the dynamic marking "sempre *pp*" below it.

The opening right hand figure of the étude reappears in bar 49 on the third beat and signals the onset of the recapitulation, which in true Debussyian fashion, is reminiscent rather than recapitulatory. The composer connects fragments of material previously used in the work. Hence the reason material originating from the middle section is found at bar 58 and is juxtaposed with arpeggios altered from the first section.

Mus.ex.101. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 57-59.

Musical score for Mus.ex.101. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 57-59. The score is in G-flat major (two flats) and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems. The first system shows the piano part (left hand) and the right hand part. The tempo marking "Rit." is placed above the right hand staff, followed by a double bar line and "Tempo I°". The dynamic marking "più *pp*" is placed below the right hand staff. The second system shows the right hand part alone, with two measures marked with a circled "12" above them, indicating a 12-measure phrase.

A change of mode, in this case Mixolydian, is typically Debussyian practice in order to signify the onset of the coda. In this case, the Mixolydian mode begins at bar 57 as a transition or pivot (see mus.ex.101). There are numerous examples in the works of Debussy where this device is employed.

In the example shown below, the coda of the work commences at bar 86 with a change in tonality from B major to the Mixolydian mode on B:

Mus.ex.102. Debussy Prelude I/5 '(... *Les collines d'Anacapri*)' (*sic*), bb. 85-89.

The musical score for Debussy's Prelude I/5, measures 85-89, is presented in two systems. The first system shows measures 85-89. The tempo is marked 'a Tempo'. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'm.g.', 'dim.', and 'p'. A double bar line with a repeat sign is placed above the first measure. The word 'Cédez' is written above the staff in the middle section. The second system shows measures 90-94. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'p' and 'f'. The score ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

The direct repetition at bar 63 of bar 62 creates a sense of retardation with the subdominant eleventh chord in A flat seemingly suspended in the air at bar 64 and gracefully collapsing onto the tonic chord at bar 65, with the D flat appoggiaturas resolving onto the C's of the following two beats.

Mus.ex.103. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 62-67.

In this étude with the set purpose of the work being composite arpeggios, the formal structure is governed by the similar or differing textural qualities. Thus the formal structure of this étude can be classified under Debussy's use of the standard ternary structure in the manner A B A/B.

**Tabular analysis:**

	A		B		A/B		Coda	
	a	b	a	b	c	b	a	
Bb	1-6	7-15	16-19	20-24	25-45	46-49	50-57	58-67

## CHAPTER 6

## A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE ÉTUDE NO. XII BOOK 2

*"pour les Accords"*

"And then there's another which breaks in the left hand with almost Swedish gymnastics."<sup>6</sup> Debussy could have been referring to one of two études with this statement - either the Étude no. V book 1 *"pour les Octaves"* or the Étude no. XII book 2 *"pour les Accords"*, since both require agility for the execution of left hand leaps. Both of these études make equally high demands on the right hand, however these demands should be less problematic for the right hand than for the weaker left hand of most pianists.

Rhythm, or more specifically rhythmic momentum and rhythmic displacement, is the influential factor in the structure of the two outer sections of this work. A factor remarked on by Paul Roberts in suggesting that these elements are almost Bartókian in their harshness.<sup>7</sup> The first 32 bars profoundly illustrate this fact. The first phrase of four bars 'a' consists of the following rhythmic pattern :

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<sup>6</sup>Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1996), 314.

<sup>7</sup>"'Pour les accords' is nevertheless an essentially percussive creation, the nearest Debussy came to the piano style of Bartók, but without Bartók's harshly dissonant harmony." *Ibid.*, 315.

Mus.ex.104. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 1-4/2.

Décidé, rythmé, sans lourdeur

This pattern is extended for the second phrase 'a+b' :

Mus.ex.105. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 4/3-18/2.

Although the third phrase 'a+b<sub>1</sub>' is rhythmically the same as the second, the nature of the chords becomes increasingly complex, with fewer triads and more compound chords:

Mus.ex.106. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 18/3-33/1

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 18/3-21) shows complex chords in both hands, with a dynamic marking of *p*. The second system (measures 21-24) includes a *rinf.* marking and continues with complex harmonic structures. The third system (measures 24-33/1) shows a *cresc.* and *molto* dynamic, ending with a *sfz* marking and a perfect cadence in C major across the bar-line from measure 32 to 33.

Additionally, melodic interest is incorporated in the lower part against static octaves on G in the upper part at bar 21. This third phrase concludes with a perfect cadence in C major across the bar-line from bars 32 to 33, which dovetails with a new tonal and rhythmic idea from bar 33.

From this point up to bar 53, new rhythmic ideas control the phrase structure, chiefly in the way of ternary groupings, successive binary groupings (from bar 39) and single units in a spondaic rhythm (from bar 47). The tonality is chromatic from bar 33, in contrast to the prevailing tonality of A minor in the opening section. The changes in tonality seem to underscore the introduction of new material and therefore new sections of the work.

Mus.ex.107. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 33-50.

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude XII*, measures 33-50, is presented in four systems. The first system is marked "Poco allargando" and features complex chordal textures with dynamics ranging from *sfz* to *p*. The second system is marked "in Tempo" and shows a more rhythmic, flowing texture with a dynamic of *p*. The third system includes the instruction "p poco cresc." and features a dynamic of *p*. The fourth system is marked "do molto" and shows a final section with a dynamic of *p*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Returning to bar 39, the chordal pattern which commences from this point spans four binary rhythmic groups (from bar 39 to bar 41/2), whereafter the same four groups of chords are repeated in reverse but, with the chords within each group in their original order.

Mus.ex.108. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 39-44/1.

The musical score shows two staves. The upper staff is the right hand, and the lower staff is the left hand. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'in Tempo'. The dynamic is marked 'p' (piano). The score is divided into two sections by a double-headed arrow above the staff. The first section (measures 39-42) shows a sequence of chords in the right hand and eighth notes in the left hand. The second section (measures 43-46) shows the same chordal pattern in reverse order, with the chords within each group in their original order. The left hand continues with eighth notes, including a downward octave leap.

Thus, this procedure cannot be classified as strict retrograde motion. Perhaps the intention was to preserve the downward octave leap in the left hand.

From bars 43 to 44/1, the last two groups of the 'reversed' pattern are dovetailed with the first two groups of another statement of the original pattern. The latter is extended by two additional groups to the end of bar 46.

Mus.ex.109. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 43-46.

Entirely new material, creates a link to another statement of the opening four bar phrase 'a' at bar 54. A similar technique as was encountered across the bar-line from bars 32 to 33 is employed across bars 53 to 54 - two phrases are dovetailed in order to create a fluid transition between the sections. The material employed is new in several respects - articulation, rhythm, tempo, the binary rhythm is presented at double speed with new articulation and dynamic markings, and the spondaic rhythm is introduced.

Mus.ex.110. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 51-54/2.

Another repeat of 'a' seems to arise at bar 57/3 but it is pursued in ternary groupings until bar 63. These ternary groupings signify a decrease in the rhythmic drive by elongating the

phrase. Although the binary rhythmic groupings reappear at bar 64, the decreasing harmonic activity, dynamic levels and the two bars of silence, indicate a shutting down of this rhythmically propelled section.

Mus.ex.111. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 57/3-69.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Debussy's *Étude XII*, measures 57-69. The first system (measures 57-69) is characterized by a dense, rhythmic texture with many beamed notes and dynamic markings of 'f' (forte). The second system (measures 70-76) shows a transition to a more melodic and less rhythmically dense texture, with dynamic markings of 'mf' (mezzo-forte) and 'dim.' (diminuendo).

The transition from bar 76 to the new section at bar 80 is aided by means of dovetailed phrases once again, as a cadence with Phrygian qualities (G to F sharp) stretches across to its resolution on the first decorative chord of the new section.

Mus.ex. 112. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 70-79.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's *Étude XII*, measures 70-79. The score is in F# major and 6/8 time. It features a piano texture with a 'molto dim.' marking in the first system and 'pp' in the second. A 'Poco rit.' instruction is placed above the second system. The music consists of arpeggiated chords in the right hand and sustained chords in the left hand.

In contrast to the previous section governed by strict rhythmic momentum, the following section from bars 80 to 104, is controlled by fluctuating rhythms. This is underlined by the numerous rhythmic instructions, assisted by the lack of first beats and very carefully worked out dynamic markings. The improvisatory nature of the writing with its decorative chords and long sustained chords contribute to the mood of this section. The key is predominantly F sharp major (a tertiary relation to the dominating key of the previous section) with a momentary emphasis on its third (A sharp) from bars 92 to 94. Even though this section (bars 80 to 104) is in every respect a contrast to the two outer ones (bars 1 to 79 and 105 to 181), Debussy does not go beyond his brief in exploiting chords.

An interesting manipulation of form is observed in this middle section. A four bar phrase containing predominantly dotted crotchets is presented from bar 80 to 83, 'x'.

Mus.ex.113. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 80-83.

Lento, molto rubato (la  $\text{♩}$  à la  $\text{♩}$ . précédente)

*pp* molto leggiero

*pp*

Bars 84 to 86 display chiefly semiquavers, 'y'.

Mus.ex.114. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 84-86.

Rit. . . . . //

*m.g.*  
*poco marc.*

*p* *più pp*

Bars 87 to 90 present a slightly altered form of 'x', followed by an extended and varied form of 'y'.

Mus.ex.115. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 87-90.

a Tempo

Poco stretto . . . //

*sempre pp*

*pp*

Mus.ex.116. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 91-95.

a Tempo

*molto pp*

*dolce sostenuto*

*pp*

*pp*

Poco stretto . . . rit. . . . //

a Tempo

*p*

*pp*

*più pp*

Rit. . . . //

*ppp*

*pp*

*più pp*

*ppp*

Rhythmic elements and certain melodic elements of both 'x' and 'y' are combined from bar 96 to form 'z'. The combined product 'z', continues to be developed until bar 104.

Mus.ex.117. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 96-104.

The musical score for Debussy's *Étude XII*, measures 96-104, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 96-100) is marked "a Tempo" and "pp". The second system (measures 101-103) is marked "Poco stretto" and "pp", with a "Rit." marking above measure 102. The third system (measures 104-104) is marked "Rit. . . //", "a Tempo", "sensibile", and "dolcissimo", with "perdendosi" written below the bass line. The score features complex harmonic textures with many accidentals and dynamic markings.

The short motif of a descending fourth in bar 84 (part of 'y') is incorporated in the bass of 'z' at bars 97, 99 and 100.

Mus. ex. 118. Debussy *Étude XII*, b. 84.

Musical score for Debussy *Étude XII*, bar 84. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a complex texture with multiple voices in both hands. The right hand has a melodic line with grace notes and a fermata. The left hand has a bass line with a fermata. The tempo marking "poco marc." and dynamic "m.g." are present.

Mus. ex. 119. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 97-100.

Musical score for Debussy *Étude XII*, bars 97-100. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It shows a gradual increase in momentum and intensity. The right hand has a melodic line with a fermata and a "Poco stretto" marking. The left hand has a bass line with a fermata. The dynamic "pp" is present.

The combination of these motivic and rhythmic components from two individual subsections provides unity within the main middle section. It also results in a gradual increase in momentum, making the link to the reappearance of the opening section meaningful.

Returning to bar 90, the dominant thirteenth chord in F sharp major seems unresolved.

Mus.ex.120. Debussy *Étude XII*, b. 90.



However, the delayed resolution occurs six bars later at bar 96, resulting in a perfect cadence. The ninth chord on G natural on the final beat of bar 95 creates the feeling of a Phrygian cadence across the bar-line to bar 96, but it cannot ignore the low C sharp. Thus one cadence occurs within another in this instance.

Mus.ex.121. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 95-96.

Rit. . . . . // a Tempo

In pursuit of the return of the opening material, a distant reappearance of 'a' is presented in an altered form in the bass.

Mus.ex.122. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 105-108.

1<sup>er</sup> Mouvt  
 (3)  
 sempre *pp* (lointain)

Two further statements thereof, progress to a succession of binary rhythmic groupings based on the chord of F major - yet another tertiary relation to the key of A minor.

Mus.ex.123. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 112/3-126/2.

Un poco accel.  
 ere scen  
 do molto

Bars 126/3 to 144/2 are a direct repetition of bars 1 to 18/2. Instead of continuing with the subsequent third phrase 'a+b<sub>1</sub>', bars 144/3 to 164 originate from bars 54 to 73.

Mus.ex.124. Debussy *Étude XIII*, bb. 144/3-164.

The image displays a musical score for Debussy's *Étude XIII*, measures 144/3 to 164. The score is written for piano and consists of four systems of staves. The first system (measures 144/3-144/4) features a complex texture with many notes and rests, marked with dynamics *f* and *mf*. The second system (measures 144/5-144/6) continues this texture, marked with *f* and *mf*. The third system (measures 144/7-144/8) shows a gradual dynamic shift, marked with *f*, *mf*, *dim.*, and *molto dim.*. The fourth system (measures 144/9-144/10) concludes the passage with a final chord, marked with *mf*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

The coda commences at bar 165, with new material in the form of four bars of ascending staccato chords. The new material is interrupted with material from bars 70 to 73 and a rhythmic reference to 'a'.

Mus.ex.125. Debussy *Étude XII*, bb. 165-181.

The final five bars are in the Aeolian mode on A with a Picardy third in the final cadence (bar 180).

The recurring use of tertiary relations is an important feature in this particular étude. Apart from the tertiary relationships between the changing tonalities, the chords employed in 'a' present relations of a tertiary nature : F minor, A major, C minor, E major. These chords are not only a third apart, but also present semitone shifts and this is part of Debussy's musical grammar and syntax.<sup>8</sup> They also illustrate a striking resemblance to those encountered in Liszt's 'Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este' from *Les Années de Pèlerinage, Troisième année : L'Italie*.

Mus.ex. 126. Liszt 'Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este' from *Les Années de Pèlerinage*,  
bb. 253-260.



The choice of compound time signatures for this étude is indeed favourable over simple time signatures, for two reasons: the instruction *sans lourdeur* clearly indicates that although the approach should be decisive, the chords should not sound laborious. The quaver beat unit could psychologically assist the pianist in this regard. Secondly, the binary

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<sup>8</sup>Further illustrations of this facet of Debussyan grammar are to be found in the Prelude II/6 "(... 'General Lavine' - excentric)" (*sic*) and also in the Prelude II/7 "(... La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune)" (*sic*).

rhythmic groupings notated in crotchets, would not be as visually effective as the grouping of units in quavers.

The main structural principle, as mentioned throughout this essay, is rhythm.

**Tabular analysis:**

**A**

a	a+b	a+b <sub>1</sub>	c	d	e	f	a
Bb 1-4/2	4/3-18/2	18/3-33/1	33/1-38	39-46	47-50	51-53	54-57/2

**B**

a <sub>1</sub>	g	h	i	x	y	x <sub>1</sub>	y <sub>1</sub>
57/3-63	64-69	70-73	74-79	80-83	84-86	87-90	91-95

**Bridge**

**A**

z		a	a+b	a	a <sub>1</sub>
96-104	105-126/2	126/3-130/2	130/3-144/2	144/3-148/2	148/3-154

**Coda**

g	h	j+ fragments of h and a
155-160	161-164	165-181

## CHAPTER 7

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO A POSSIBLE ANALOGY BETWEEN THE ÉTUDE  
NO. XI BOOK 2 BY C. DEBUSSY AND THE ÉTUDE OP. 25 NO. 1 BY  
F. CHOPIN**

An analogy between seven of the études of both Chopin and Debussy was presented in the form of a recital by the Geneva pianist Marie Panthès with the co-operation of Robert Godet, shortly before the death of Debussy. Their aim was to place each of these seven études of the two composers in a parallel with one another to illustrate resemblances and differences in style with regard to both inspiration and technique. Godet wrote a letter to Debussy, dated the 23rd of January 1918, to ask his approval of this series of lecture-recitals.<sup>9</sup> We do not have knowledge of Debussy's approval of this analogy or if he even read the letter in his state of ill health.

A definite connection between Chopin and the études is their dedication. However, in a letter to Durand dated the 19th of August 1915 Debussy displays some indecision in this regard: "They will be dedicated to - F. Chopin or F. Couperin? I respect and admire them so and am so grateful to both masters, such admirable 'diviners'."<sup>10</sup> The final dedication to the memory of Chopin could be a hidden reference to the inspiration for writing a set of études for piano.

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<sup>9</sup>Robert Godet, "Chopin-Debussy," *Cahiers Debussy* 3 First series (1976): 11.

<sup>10</sup>Claude Debussy, *Lettres à son éditeur*, ed. J. Durand (Paris, 1927), quoted in Claude Helffer, Foreword to Claude Debussy, *Œuvres Complètes* 6 First series (Paris: Durand-Costallat, 1991), XVI.

In a letter to Durand dated the 28th of August 1915 Debussy states: " I'm sure you'll agree with me that there's no need to make technical exercises over-sombre just to appear more serious; a little charm never spoilt anything. Chopin proved it and makes this desire of mine seem somewhat overweening, I know. Neither am I so dead to the world as not to be aware of the comparisons that my contemporaries, colleagues and others . . . will studiously make to my disadvantage."<sup>11</sup>

Debussy was clearly aware of the inevitable comparisons that would be made and an article by Marie-Cécile Barras goes as far as drawing possible parallels between certain Chopin preludes and Debussy études.<sup>12</sup>

A hidden reference to Chopin could be that the work was finally divided into two volumes (not the original plan), alluding to Chopin's opp. 10 and 25. However, as in his *Preludes*, Debussy did not adopt Chopin's structure of keys nor did he use the alternating major and relative minor keys that Chopin did. Only with the first one, does Debussy conform to a tradition that all didactic works begin with the first in C major.

In a short preface to pianists, Debussy explains with acerbic irony the reasons for omitting fingerings. The mockery is carried on into the instruction at the beginning of the étude no. I book 1 "*pour les 'cinq doigts' - d'après Monsieur Czerny*".

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<sup>11</sup>François Lesure and Roger Nichols, eds., *Debussy Letters*, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 300-301.

<sup>12</sup>Marie-Cécile Barras, "La Présence de Chopin dans la Musique de Piano de Debussy," *Cahiers Debussy* 20, (1996): 41-60. See Appendix for translation of this article.

## 2. COMPARATIVE ANALYSES

On examining the two études placed in parallel by Godet and Panthès, Chopin's op. 25 no.1 and Debussy's "*pour les Arpèges composés*", one is visually and aurally struck by Chopin's uniformity of the arpeggio figures from beginning to end. In contrast, Debussy manipulates the arpeggio concept with great variety.

In both composer's études, in contrast to those by Czerny, the chosen aspect of technique is never allowed to be exploited at the expense of the musical result. This is certainly evident in this Chopin étude with its complimentary harmonies to the beautiful melodic line. The structure of the work is governed by the melody and tonality. The texture, as opposed to that of Debussy's étude, remains the same throughout, the only exception being in the final six bars when the arpeggio figure breaks free from the melodic line and demonstrates arpeggios extending over almost four octaves.

Mus.ex.127. Chopin *Étude Op. 25 No. 1*, bb. 44-49.

The musical score for Chopin's Étude Op. 25 No. 1, measures 44-49, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 44-45) is marked *leggierissimo* and *pp*. The second system (measures 46-47) continues the texture, with a *ppp* marking in the right hand. The third system (measures 48-49) shows the arpeggio figure breaking free from the melodic line, with a *trill* marking and a *p* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Apart from this single instance, Chopin employs one structure of the arpeggio which provides harmonic support to the melody, as well as perpetual motion to the work.

Mus.ex.128. Chopin *Étude Op. 25 No. 1*, bb. 9-12.

The image displays a musical score for Chopin's Étude Op. 25 No. 1, measures 9-12. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system covers measures 9 and 10, and the second system covers measures 11 and 12. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The music features a constant arpeggiated accompaniment in the bass clef and a melodic line in the treble clef. The arpeggios are marked with 'p' and asterisks to indicate specific rhythmic or dynamic features.

The Debussy étude can be considered a display of all the possible ways that arpeggio figures could be employed in a pianistic context. The étude becomes an illustration of all possible technical and musical demands made on the pianist by this wide range of arpeggio figures, which leads to an analysis of texture as the fundamental structural principle.

Bars 1 to 6 produce a transparent, flimsy texture with the melodic line intertwined in the arpeggio figures.

Mus.ex.129. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 1-6.

The musical score consists of three systems of two staves each. The first system (measures 1-2) shows a right-hand arpeggio with a '6' fingering and the instruction 'dolce e lusingando'. The second system (measures 3-4) features a right-hand arpeggio with a '7' fingering and dynamic markings 'rf' and 'pp'. The third system (measures 5-6) continues the right-hand arpeggio with a '7' fingering and a 'f' dynamic marking. The left hand provides a bass line with various intervals and rests.

Linking up with this texture is the elusive sense of key in the first bar, with the ambiguity of A flat major and F minor. The Mixolydian mode on A flat is suggested in the second bar by the G flat; however, all doubt is removed by the second appearance of the opening material at bar 4 with a plagal cadence across the bar-line. Along with each different arpeggio configuration, as the basic structural principle, is a particular tonal association.

A thicker, more sturdy texture commences at bar 7 with rapid ascending and descending arpeggio units and a bass melody.

Mus.ex.130. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 7-11.

This texture changes at bar 12 where the arpeggio units form a single descent and a melodic line is drawn from the first and last notes of each of these units.

Mus.ex.131. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 12.

The insistence of the double-dotted melody dissolves into the alluring character of the opening figure presented again at bar 16. This time the melodic line is kept independent of the arpeggios.

Mus.ex.132. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 16-17.

The same textural principle from bar 7 recurs at bar 20, when a simple bass melody is presented. This is surprisingly interrupted by a bright splash of colour from an isolated arpeggio, which heralds a new section of the étude introducing a new textural intention and character - the mood is less fluid and the structure more fragmented.

Mus.ex.133. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 25-26.

The articulation is also conspicuously different and there is a more rapid exchange of different arpeggio manipulations.

Mus.ex.134. Debussy *Étude XI*, b.27.

*elegante, un poco pomposo*  
*p* [*mf*]  
*staccato marcato*  
 8

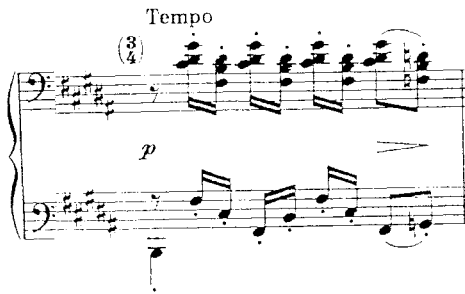
Mus.ex.135. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 29.

*Giocoso*  
*f*

Mus.ex.136. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 31.

*Scherzare*  
*p* *pp*

Mus. ex.137. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 40.



The unifying factor in this section is the use of chord clusters, however the various manners in which these are exploited are so wide ranging that the material generated gives the impression of being both innovative and unrelated. Fluid melodic lines and arpeggios return at bar 46, with the A flat major tonality and opening tempo returning only four bars later.

The majority of Debussy's smaller structures depend on a ternary principle, as the return of the first section is a reminiscence of previously heard material rather than a recapitulation, taking his cue from the symbolist poets, as if some symbolic half-grasped memory is incorrectly recollected. This is the reason for the changes in texture at bars 58 and 60, as these figures originate from the previous section. The change of mode to Mixolydian on A flat from bar 57 is typically Debussyian practice, signifying the onset of the coda.

Mus.ex.138. Debussy *Étude XI*, bb. 57-59.

Musical score for Debussy *Étude XI*, measures 57-59. The score is in B-flat major and 3/4 time. It features a treble and bass clef. The top system shows a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The tempo is marked 'Tempo 1º' and there is a 'Rit.' (ritardando) marking. The dynamic is 'più pp'. The bottom system shows a close-up of the right hand with arpeggiated chords, marked with '(12)' and a slur.

The fluidity and smoothness demanded from the Chopin étude as a complete work, can surely be applied to the outer sections of the Debussy étude. Another technical aspect which is common to the two works, is the isolation of a melodic voice within an arpeggio figure - this occurs throughout the Chopin étude but only in certain instances in the Debussy étude, for example:

Mus.ex.139. Debussy *Étude XI*, b. 12.

Musical score for Debussy *Étude XI*, measure 12. The score is in B-flat major and 3/4 time. It features a treble and bass clef. The top system shows a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. The dynamic is 'p'. The right hand has arpeggiated chords, marked with a slur and a 'p' dynamic.

It is apparent that the collective aim of the two composers in writing sets of études was similar - the exploitation of the possibilities of the instrument and the ability of the pianistic execution thereof. With regard to the specific works discussed here, the arpeggio figure is the starting point for both works, however the manner in which this concept is exploited is radically different. This is to be expected, since both composers are working within their own frames of reference. Hence it can be suggested that Debussy's work is a display in compositional mastery and not solely pianistic mastery, as it is far more complex in this regard than Chopin's op. 25 no.1.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

The analyses of five selected works from the *Études* by Claude Debussy, namely *Étude* no. II book 1 "*pour les Tierces*", *Étude* no. IV book 1 "*pour les Sixtes*", *Étude* no. X book 2 "*pour les Sonorités opposées*", *Étude* no. XI book 2 "*pour les Arpèges composés*" and *Étude* no. XII book 2 "*pour les Accords*", have yielded insight into Debussy's approach to this nineteenth century single movement structure.

The presentation of the intended purpose of each *étude* in its title, is unique in the history of the *étude* as a work suitable for presentation on the concert platform. Moreover, the manner in which each intended purpose is exploited to its fullest potential from a compositional perspective makes this set of works rank equal to the *Préludes*, *Images* and *Estampes*, even though they lack content of a programmatic nature.

Many elements of Debussy's compositional style are included in these works. He employs modal and chromatic tonalities in addition to major and minor tonalities. The use of a chromatic tonality often signifies a transition to a new section of the work, while the occurrence of a mode towards the close of the work signifies the onset of the coda. Direct repetition is employed on numerous occasions, creating unity within the formal structure. The ternary structure A B A/B employed so often by Debussy in his single movement works, is used extensively in the *Études* with the coda constructed from a string of reminiscences of material which summarise and render each *étude* conclusive. The

harmonic language in the *Études* is typically Debussyian, with frequent use of non-diatonic chords within a diatonic context and progression based on tertiary relations. All the above-mentioned compositional features are many of the elements that constitute Debussy's compositional language.

With regard to the analogy made between the *Étude* no. XI book 2 "*pour les Arpèges composés*" by Debussy and the *Étude* op. 25 no. 1 by Chopin, the extent of the similarities between the two works does not seem to go beyond the common purpose of the *étude* as a form and the arpeggio figure as a technical obstacle. The manner in which the two composers exploit the arpeggio figures is vastly different: the Chopin *étude* presents the arpeggio in a consistent manner, while Debussy's variety in the presentation of the arpeggio figure is almost limitless. Thus, the detailed comparisons made by Marie-Cécile Barras in her article "*La Présence de Chopin dans la Musique de Piano de Debussy*" with regard to the Debussy *Études*, seem nebulous as it appears possible to find patterns with such tenuous similarities in any two compositions exploiting the same technical concept.<sup>13</sup> Thus the author deduces that analogies between the *Études* of Chopin and Debussy can only be made on a superficial level, since it is apparent that the frames of reference of these two composers represent two different eras in music with Debussy influenced by Chopin at a historical level. The only common elements in this case, are the medium (the piano), the genre (the *étude*) and often the intended purpose of the *étude*, although Chopin did not state this in the titles, as did Debussy.

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<sup>13</sup>Marie-Cécile Barras, "La Présence de Chopin dans la Musique de Piano de Debussy," *Cahiers Debussy* 20, (1996): 41-60. See Appendix for translation of this article.

Although the *étude* was new territory for Debussy, the integration of his unique musical language with the genre present a mere extension of repertoire in a language that is still purely Debussyian in concept. Therefore, returning to Ernest Walker's statement that 'most [of the *Études*] . . . seem musically overmuch concerned with the narrow matter in hand'<sup>14</sup>, it would seem that the true objective was in fact the exploitation of 'the matter in hand'. However, the realisation of that objective, involves the use of a wide ranging palette of familiar Debussyian colours, which provides these works with their rightful place in the *œuvre* of the French master.

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<sup>14</sup>Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th ed., "Debussy", quoted in Frank Dawes, *Debussy Piano Music* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1969), 58.

## APPENDIX A

### **The 1915 Preface to the Complete Works of Chopin edited by Claude Debussy and commissioned by *Editions Durand***

This preface was made available to the author with the kind co-operation of *Editions Durand*.

## PRÉFACE

La musique de Chopin est une des plus belles que l'on ait jamais écrite. L'affirmer en 1915 n'est qu'un hommage facile par lequel on ne saurait se débarrasser de son importance et de l'influence qu'elle n'a cessé d'avoir sur la musique contemporaine.

Par la nature de son génie, il échappe au jeu des classifications: l'influence de Field, purement d'époque, fut légère; son *italianisme*, son *chromatisme*, diversement critiqués, ne sont que les formes d'une sensibilité aigüe, qui lui resteront particulières.

Chopin était un délicieux conteur de légendes amoureuses ou guerrières, qui souvent s'échappe vers cette forêt de "Comme il vous plaira" où les Fées sont seules maîtresses de l'esprit. Si la liberté de sa forme a pu tromper ses commentateurs, comme l'abondance des "traits" faire croire à un souci de virtuosité, il faut pourtant en comprendre la valeur de mise en place et la sûre ordonnance.

La documentation des éditions antérieures s'appuie sur *trois* manuscrits qui, certainement, ne sont pas tous de la main de Chopin. La présente édition est faite d'après celles qu'il a pu corriger de son vivant.

En faisant la part du manque de loisirs d'une vie trop brève, et peut-être aussi, la confiance dans la force d'une tradition orale laissée par lui, (il eut beaucoup d'élèves... plus qu'on ne lui en a attribué, sans doute) on peut expliquer le peu d'indications des originaux comme les surcharges arbitraires. Nous nous sommes dévotieusement conformés aux sources les plus sûres, mettant entre parenthèses ce qui nous a paru conforme aux expressions de son génie.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

## **APPENDIX B**

**Translation by Lisa Havard of "La Présence de Chopin dans la Musique de Piano de Debussy" by Marie-Cécile Barras published in *Cahiers Debussy* no. 20 1996**

**pp. 41-60**

Note: The footnotes in this appendix are part of the article, as is the list of sources.

**THE PRESENCE OF CHOPIN IN THE PIANO MUSIC OF DEBUSSY****Marie-Cécile Barras****Translated by Lisa Havard**

The piano works of Debussy reveal a certain aspect of Chopin which Debussy could hear and without doubt was one of the first to hear it. To clarify the limits of this research<sup>1</sup> : the predominant musical field in this case is mainly that of the *Études* for piano by the two composers, with an occasional reference to the *Preludes*, which are perhaps more inclined, by their difference in conception, to escape the complete systematic comparison - the pianistic microcosm is united by the cycle of great diversity of Chopin, "instantaneous eternities<sup>2</sup>", wrote Jankélévitch on Debussy. The choice of favouring the *Études* serves simply as evidence in providing some noticeable examples, and sometimes some more hidden ones, on the subject of reviving the presence of Chopin in the Debussyist piano.

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<sup>1</sup>This research, originally carried out as a seminar by Mr Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger at the "École Normale Supérieure", subsequently completed to instructions from Mr François Lesure on the text *Chopin-Debussy* of Robert Godet, was presented as a symposium of recitals "Music and Memory", organised by the French Society of Musicology (26-29 June 1990).

<sup>2</sup>V. Jankélévitch, *Debussy et le mystère de l'instant*, Paris, Plon, rev.ed. 1989, p. 290.

This approach is not at all new. Actually, shortly before the death of Debussy, his friend Robert Godet took part in a recital project in Geneva, given by the pianist Marie Panthès:

[...] here she took it into her head to establish, by means of recitals, a way of comparing you and Chopin, to prove the truth or alleged sympathy of the soul which she supposes unites the two of you across planetary space. Some of the preludes, and I believe all of the études serve to show differences and resemblances by the inspiration being the aspect of technique (in which you and Chopin, in my opinion, showed two decisive stages)<sup>3</sup>.

Robert Godet promised to write a piece on this subject, and wishing to have Debussy's opinion, he notified him of his plan to send him the text. Did he receive the agreement of the composer for the chosen programme? Godet's text<sup>4</sup> proposes elements of comparison for the Études as shown below, "without further comment<sup>5</sup>":

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<sup>3</sup>Letter from Robert Godet to Claude Debussy, 23 January 1918, in François Lesure, "Five letters from Robert Godet to Claude Debussy", special volume, *Revue de Musicologie* (1962), pp. 77-95.

<sup>4</sup>"Chopin - Debussy" by Robert Godet, in *Cahiers Debussy*, no. 3, 1976, 1st series, pp. 11-13, text presented by François Lesure.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

DEBUSSY	CHOPIN
pour les <i>Cinq Doigts</i> (à M. Czerny) . . . . .	op.10. N° 4
pour les <i>Tierces</i> . . . . .	op. 25. N° 6
pour les <i>Quarties</i> . . . . .	pas d'équivalent.
pour les <i>Sixtes</i> . . . . .	op. 25. N° 8
pour les <i>Octaves</i> . . . . .	op. 25. N° 9 et N° 10
pour les <i>Huit Doigts</i> . . . . .	pas d'équivalent
pour les <i>Degrés chromatiques</i> . . . . .	op. 10. N° 2
pour les <i>agrément</i> s	} pas d'équivalents
pour les <i>Notes répétées</i> . . . . .	
pour les <i>Sonorités opposées</i> . . . . .	
pour les <i>Arpèges composés</i> . . . . .	op. 25. N° 1
pour les <i>Accords</i> . . . . .	op. 10. N° 11
	(Chopin : <i>Accords arpègés</i> ; Debussy : <i>Accords plaqués</i> ).

This comparison of these works of the two composers, brings about likeness in the intended purpose (thirds, sixths, octaves, chromatic notes, arpeggios) specifically mentioned by Debussy, not specified but effectively present in Chopin. The absence of a common pianistic issue (for example, the Études "*pour les Huits Doigts*" or "*pour les Agréments*") is indicated by the words "no equivalent".

Apart from a similarity of the "intended purpose"<sup>6</sup> of the études (the pianistic technical issue) presented by Godet's programme, we will see that apart from the fingering plan, the sonority also influenced Debussy.

While Debussy the pianist played the Études of Chopin, Debussy the composer worked on revising their edition<sup>7</sup>. This double perception could only enrich the creation at the same

<sup>6</sup>"The six *Études* presented here are nearly all "*en mouvement*"; you can be rest assured there will be some calmer ones! If I were to begin with the later ones, they would be more difficult to write and vary . . . - the intended purpose soon uses all the possible shrewd combinations." (Debussy, 28 August 1915, in Claude Debussy, *Lettres à son éditeur* published by Jacques Durand, Paris, Durand and sons, 1927).

<sup>7</sup>Owing to the war, the German music publications were not readily available and the publisher Durand approached Debussy at the beginning of 1915, to compile an edition of the complete works of Chopin.

time, of the twelve *Études* for piano, with which he himself made a historical connection, by dedicating them "*à la mémoire de Frédéric Chopin*".

The objectives, however, are not comparable, considering the position of the works in the careers of the two composers: a work of youth for Chopin, a work of maturity for Debussy. Debussy did not need<sup>8</sup>, like Chopin, to present a model of virtuosity or technique -although his *études* are in a style of writing which is undoubtedly formidable. He provides us nevertheless, by means of this great work for piano, with the very essence of his art, purified, stripped of the whole impressionist or symbolist issue.

The homage of Debussy to Chopin, materialised in the form of his piano compositions, - twelve *Études* for piano in two volumes, "*à la mémoire de Frédéric Chopin*", as well as in the 24 *Preludes* - is the main proof in which Debussy himself notated of his own will, his filiation with Chopin. Literary sources can aid us in having a better understanding of the significance of this filiation.

Firstly, the autobiographical sources: the writings of Debussy expose the devout following in the memory of Chopin, whose name has been recalled from page to page by an admiring fellow composer. Had Debussy not always been of the belief that his first teacher, Madame Mauté de Fleurville, was a pupil of Chopin?

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<sup>8</sup>"Orchestrally, declamatory, pianistically, in which field of his art did he not break new ground, and which triumphant missions did he not fulfill on this planet, when giving in, in 1915, to the desire to produce the set of *études*! Though he knew that they would not be able - yet in their place - to noticeably increase his glory." in "Chopin - Debussy" by Robert Godet, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[...] I have very clear memories of what Mme Mauté de Fleurville told me. He (Chopin) recommended practising without the pedal and, in performance, not holding it on except in very rare instances. It was the same way of turning the pedal into a kind of breathing which I observed in Liszt when I had the chance to hear him in Rome<sup>9</sup>.

Clear evidence also, is that of Marguerite Long<sup>10</sup>, although its weakness is, without a doubt, a certain degree of vanity in the artist's praising recollections as a pianist having worked with the master. It is very useful, however, since it is informative with regard to the approach of Debussy as a pianist, informing us of the great harmonic importance he assigned to touch, the absence of harshness of the attack and the art of the pedal of Chopin. The worship of Chopin, "such an admirable diviner/foreteller<sup>11</sup>", is therefore vital in the research on sonority and pianism in Debussy.

Yet another aspect of this presence is woven into the same music of Debussy, superficial yet tangible, more imperceptible and ethereal in quality.

Above all, the main issue of the naming of the études, that which Debussy calls "the intended purpose" - for thirds, sixths, octaves, chromatic notes . . . - is direct homage to Chopin, as shown in the parallel established by Robert Godet. But the interval is not only a

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<sup>9</sup>Debussy, 1 September 1915, in *Lettres à son éditeur*, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup>Marguerite Long, *Au piano avec Claude Debussy*, Paris, Julliard, 1960.

<sup>11</sup>Debussy, 19 August 1915, in *Lettres à son éditeur*, *op. cit.*

technical pretext, for on playing them often, these Études recall the presence of Chopin in the digital memory .

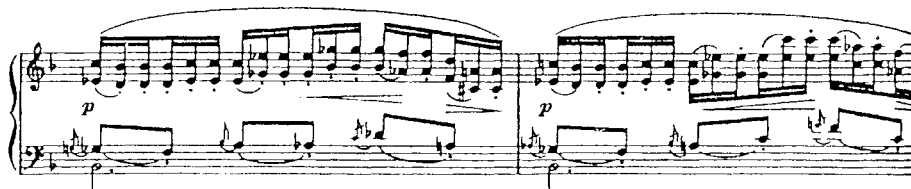
The most striking example concerns the parallel between Chopin's étude in A flat major op. posthumus and the étude "*pour les Sixtes*" by Debussy (over and above the two respective études in sixths). If one were to already have the first lines of the Chopin étude in their fingers and under their hand, they could only be astonished to find a copy of the right hand - the same notes - in certain bars of the Debussy étude:

**Example 1 C**<sup>12</sup> Chopin, posthumus étude in A flat major (bb. [1-2])

(extract from *Trois nouvelles Études pour la 'Méthode' de Moscheles et Fétis*)



**Example 1 D** Debussy, book I étude IV - "*pour les Sixtes*" (bb. [23-24])



<sup>12</sup>In this and subsequent examples, the letters C and D refer to the initials of the composers.

Debussy seems to base a whole passage here on this position of the hand, placed like a pivot on a chord almost like that of Chopin, with the same fingerings still applicable. Did Debussy not suggest - if one is to believe Marguerite Long - "using the fingering<sup>13</sup>" of that posthumus étude in A flat? Apart from the recollection of memory, the presence in this case is tangible and tactile.

This interval of a sixth results in the hand forming a position one would use at the beginning of the Debussy étude and is the same as one would use in certain lines of the étude in E major op. 10 and was certainly engraved on the digital memory of Debussy:

**Example 2 C** Chopin, étude no. 3 op. 10 (bb. [46-47])



**Example 2 D** Debussy, book I étude IV - "pour les Sixtes" (bb. [7-8])



<sup>13</sup>Marguerite Long, "Advice from Debussy" in *Revue internationale de musique*, April 1939, pp. 889-890.

Another model of writing which one could also assimilate to digital memory - memory of the hands, of touch: the "fan-like" movements (the opening out with the contrary movement of the hands, with the thumbs as a central point) which Chopin uses with generosity in his numerous piano compositions - and naturally in the Études as well as in certain works of Debussy:

**Example 3 C** Chopin, étude no. 4 op. 10 in C sharp minor (b. [35])



**Example 3 D** Debussy, book II étude VII - "*pour les degrés chromatiques*" (b. [54])



**Example 4 C** Chopin, étude no. 8 op. 10 in F major (bb. [53-57-...])

mes. [53] 8

*pp* *poco a poco* *cresc.*

mes. [57]

*pp* *poco a poco* *cresc.*

**Example 4 a D** Debussy, book I étude VI - "pour les huit doigts" (b. [40])

*pp leggerissimo*

Example 4 b D Debussy, book I étude VI - "pour les huit doigts" [9 bars before the end]



These fan-like movements, sometimes a horizontal rippling of harmony (see the example of the étude op.10 no. 8), relate to an element dear to Debussy - sonority. Indeed, can we not call that which directly appealed to Debussy in Chopin's music, that is to say a non-percussive conception of the piano matched with the changing colour of harmony, created what one could call, for want of a better phrase, a harmony of tone?

Paradoxically, we know from Delacroix that Chopin was not interested in tone himself: "Chopin did not admit to sonority as a legitimate source of feeling [ . . . ]", he wrote in his *Journal* . . .

Yet his concern for perfection demanded a precise quantity of pedal in "the art of execution". Is that not the first step towards the quest for sonority? The piece to which we give preference here is the étude of Chopin in G flat major op. 10 (the black keys étude), with its pentatonic essence, as expressed in the following short example.

**Example 4 b D** Debussy, book I étude VI - "*pour les huit doigts*" [9 bars before the end]

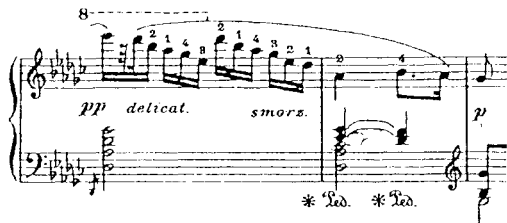


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**Example 5 C** Chopin, étude no. 5 op. 10 in G flat major [2 bars before the final *a tempo*]



Couldn't only this single element have appealed to Debussy ?

In this étude, the mobility and fluidity of the writing of the right hand part uncovers all "on the aspects of technique<sup>14</sup>" in Chopin, of which Debussy was aware; the pentatonic element, the unravelled melodic fourth and rapid arpeggio figures are his transformation of the horizontal line into a superficial and supple movement, and for Debussy's sharpened perception, the sonority becomes structural in this case.

**Example 6 C** Chopin, étude no. 5 op.10 in G flat major (bb. [37-40])



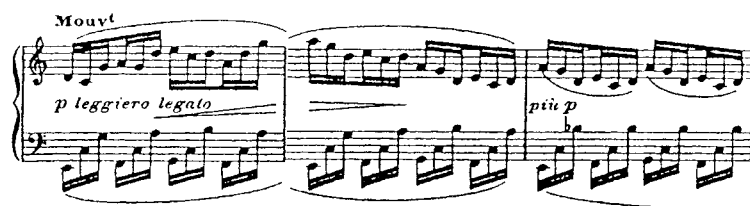
<sup>14</sup>"Regarding technique, these *Études* [by Debussy] will prepare pianists to better understand that one does not have to embark on a career in music with formidable hands!", C. Debussy, 27 September 1915, in *Lettres à son éditeur*, *op. cit.*

This clear sonority of the arpeggios constructed from fourths, found as a compositional formula in certain bars of the études of Debussy, suddenly recall the presence of Chopin:

**Example 7 a D** Debussy, book I étude V - "*pour les Octaves*" (bb. [79-82])



**Example 7 b D** Debussy, book I étude I - "*pour les 'cinq doigts'*" (bb. [35-37])



**Example 7 c D** Debussy, book I étude I - "pour les 'cinq doigts'" (bb. [104-110])

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Debussy's 'pour les cinq doigts'. The first system consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with slurs and a 'dim.' (diminuendo) marking. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a bass line with slurs. Above the first measure of the upper staff are the numbers '(12)' and '(16)'. The second system also consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with slurs and a 'cresc.' (crescendo) marking. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a bass line with slurs. There are vertical lines at the end of the lower staff in the second system, possibly indicating fingerings or specific notes.

And what about the close similarity according to the given perception, in the two examples that follow, by the crystal-clear emergence of fourths in the given register?

**Example 8 C** Chopin, étude no. 5 op. 10 in G flat major (bb. [17-18] and bb. [43-48])

The image shows two excerpts from Chopin's Étude No. 5. The first excerpt is labeled 'mes. [17]' and shows two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with slurs and fingerings (1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2). The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a bass line with slurs and a 'p' (piano) marking. A dashed line with the number '8' above it spans across the two staves. The second excerpt is labeled 'mes. [43]' and shows two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with slurs and fingerings (5, 1, 2, 5, 1, 2, 5, 1, 2). The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a bass line with slurs.

## Example 8 C continued

The musical score for Example 8 C continued consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system is in 3/4 time and features a treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The right hand plays a complex melodic line with numerous slurs and fingering numbers (1-5). A 'cresc.' marking is placed below the first measure. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. A 'Ped.' marking is placed below the second measure. The second system continues the piece with similar melodic and harmonic textures, including a 'Ped.' marking at the end.

## Example 8 D Debussy, book I étude VI - "pour les huit doigts" (bb. [14-16])

*Vivamente, molto leggero e legato*

The musical score for Example 8 D, Debussy's 'pour les huit doigts' étude VI, consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system is in 3/4 time and features a treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The right hand plays a complex melodic line with numerous slurs and fingering numbers (1-5). A 'pp' marking is placed below the first measure. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The second system continues the piece with similar melodic and harmonic textures.

Although this étude of Chopin is emphasised here, there are a large number of his works which are based on a particular sonority. Both the chromatic étude op. 10 no. 2 in A minor and the étude op. 25 no. 22 in F minor fall under this category.

**Example 9 a** C Chopin, étude no. 2 op.10 in A minor (bb. [1-2])

**Example 9 b** C Chopin, étude no. 2 op. 25 in F minor (bb. [1-3])

With the fluidity of the chromatic line and the swirling of the ornamented line, these études attain their sonorous dimension by the rapidity of the tempo, and the parallel between this and Debussy can perhaps only be ethereal, bound by the audible impression of a similar transparency in sonority, as can be observed in several extracts of Debussy:

**Example 10 a D** Debussy, book II étude VII - "*pour les degrés chromatiques*" (b. [7] and b. [11])

*Scherzando, animato assai*

mes. [7]

musical score for measures 7-8, featuring a chromatic line in the right hand and a more ornate line in the left hand. Dynamics include *f* and *dim.*

mes. [11]

*sempre leggerissimo*

musical score for measures 11-12, featuring a chromatic line in the right hand and a simple line in the left hand. Dynamics include *pp* and *dolce espress.* (un peu en dehors)

**Example 10 b D** Debussy, prelude I book II ("*...Brouillards*") (b. [1])

*Modéré*

*extrêmement égal et léger*

*la m.g. un peu en valeur sur la m.d.*

musical score for measures 1-4, featuring a chromatic line in the right hand and a simple line in the left hand. Dynamics include *pp*

**Example 10 c D** Debussy : prelude IV book II ("*...Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses*")

(bb. [1-2])

Rapide et léger

Another characteristic image of sonority: the succession of thirds, based on a principle which clearly has reference to Chopin; the sweeping sonority, vibration of Chopin, and this similarity of line and adopted sonority reveals a profound impression engraved on Debussy:

**Example 11 C** Chopin, étude no. 6 op. 25 in G sharp minor (b. [43])

Allegro 8



Example 12 D Debussy, book I étude II - "pour les tierces" (bb. [30-32])

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Debussy's 'pour les tierces'. The first system consists of two staves: the upper staff is in treble clef and the lower in bass clef. The upper staff features a complex, arpeggiated texture with many beamed notes, marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The lower staff has a simpler accompaniment of quarter notes. The second system is a continuation of the first, showing the same textures and dynamics.

A presence of Chopin in Debussy can be found in the unfolding of a melody without its harmonies: again in the étude op. 25 no. 1 and in the preludes nos. 8 and 23 which both predict the étude XI "pour les arpèges composés". A parallel regarding sonority is all the more convincing with a visual comparison:

Example 13 C Chopin, prelude no. 23 (bb. [1-2])

The image shows the first two bars of Chopin's prelude no. 23. The tempo is marked 'Moderato.' The music is in 4/4 time. The upper staff (treble clef) contains a melodic line with eighth-note patterns, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The lower staff (bass clef) contains a simple accompaniment of quarter notes, marked 'delicissimo.' and 'p'. There are two asterisks (\*) in the bass staff, one under the first bar and one under the second bar, indicating specific notes or chords.

**Example 13 D** Debussy, book II étude XI - "*pour les arpèges composés*" (bb. [1-2])

*dolce e lusigando*

This musical score shows the first two measures of Debussy's Étude XI. The music is written for piano in a key with two flats (B-flat major or D minor) and a 3/4 time signature. The right hand features a complex arpeggiated texture with slurs and accents, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with slurs and accents. The tempo and mood are indicated as *dolce e lusigando*.

**Example 14 C** Chopin, prelude no. 8 (bb. [1-2])

*Molto agitato.*

*p*

This musical score shows the first two measures of Chopin's Prelude No. 8. The music is written for piano in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The right hand features a complex arpeggiated texture with slurs and accents, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with slurs and accents. The tempo and mood are indicated as *Molto agitato.* and the dynamic is *p*.

**Example 14 D** Debussy, book II étude XI - "*pour les arpèges composés*" (b. [12])

*dolce e lusigando*

*p*

This musical score shows measure 12 of Debussy's Étude XI. The music is written for piano in a key with two flats (B-flat major or D minor) and a 3/4 time signature. The right hand features a complex arpeggiated texture with slurs and accents, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with slurs and accents. The tempo and mood are indicated as *dolce e lusigando* and the dynamic is *p*.

Other parallels are clearly possible with regard to certain pianistic aspects intentionally pursued:

- an arpeggiated étude op. 10 no. 11 in E flat major (Chopin) and the étude "*pour les agréments*" (Debussy) ; not illustrated here,
- chordal primacy with the transfer of chords found in Debussy (étude XII "*pour les accords*") as in Chopin (op. 25 no. 3):

**Example 15 C** Chopin, étude no. 3 op. 25 (bb. [1-2])

**Allegro.** ♩ = 120

*leggiero*  
*p*

Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \*

**Example 15 D** Debussy, book II étude XII - "*pour les accords*" (bb. [1-3])

**Décidé, rythmé, sans lourdeur**

*f*  
*mf*

- the major role of the wrist in the étude IX "*pour les notes répétées*" (Debussy) coupled with the étude op. 25 no. 9 (Chopin):

**Example 16 C** Chopin, étude no. 9 op. 25 (b. [1-...])

Allegro vivace. ♩ = 112  
*leggiero*

**Example 16 D** Debussy, book II étude IX - "*pour les notes répétées*" (b. [9])

Scherzando  
*pp*

However the last three comparisons do not raise the fact of a common pianistic pretext: they simply prove, if yet again necessary, that Debussy like Chopin, knew how to exploit the full potential of the piano... including the difficulties encountered by pianists, and

Debussy's études presuppose an assimilation with the technique required for those of Chopin.

One last example is required to illustrate the presence of Chopin's sonority in the music of Debussy: colour and vibration fades in the memory, but there is an aspect that is retained by the memory and leaves an impression . . .

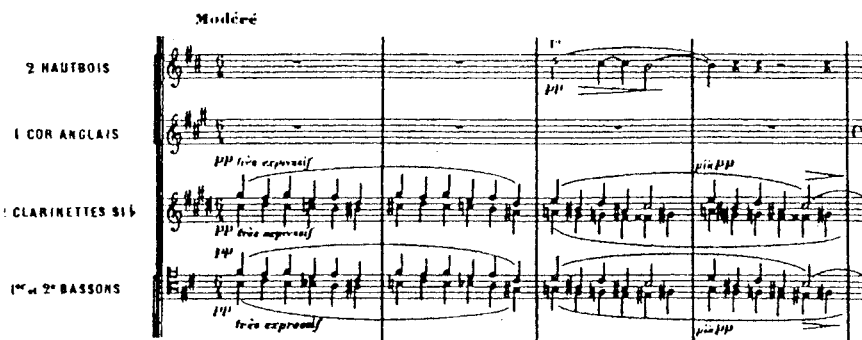
**Example 17 C** Chopin, prelude no. 2 (bb. [1-4])

*Lento.*



**Example 17 D** Debussy, *Nocturnes* (no. 1 "Nuages") (bb. [1-4])

*Mouvé*



2 HAUTOIS  
1 COR ANGLAIS  
CLARINETTES Bb  
1<sup>re</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> BASSONS

Below, in perpetual motion, the presence of the two notes E and D is imprinted on the memory like a highlighted point - but this should be illustrated with a visual analogy:

**Example 18 C** Chopin, prelude no. 3 (bb. [1-4])

*Vivace.*  
*leggieramente.*

The image shows the first four measures of Chopin's Prelude No. 3. The right hand features a melodic line with a trill on the final note of each measure. The left hand provides a continuous eighth-note accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Vivace' and the articulation is 'leggieramente'.

**Example 18 D** Debussy, prelude III book I ("*...Le vent dans la plaine*") (bb. [1-4])

*Animé (♩ = 126)*  
*aussi légèrement que possible*

The image shows the first four measures of Debussy's Prelude III. The right hand features a complex, flowing melodic line with many sixteenth notes. The left hand provides a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Animé' and the articulation is 'aussi légèrement que possible'.

The image of Chopin presented above, is through a prism of colours... but this prism is the perception that Debussy had as a favoured filter of listening; a guide to how he perceived the music of others.

It is true that this comparison, established between the *Études* - and some of the *Preludes* - of the two composers, takes place in silence, which is not to our advantage.

But beyond the visible homage and the formal references, beyond the proposed programme of Robert Godet, the crossed connections - digital memory, quality of sonority - which have been established between the pieces without an "intended purpose": the memory of Chopin is inscribed in pianistic matter of the same texture which Debussy encountered in Chopin's sonority, and to which he dedicated himself with a certain "respectful gratitude<sup>15</sup>".

Debussy reveals to us all that a composer is able to project his own artistic vision through the music of another composer. But he also reveals the infinite richness of Chopin which he illustrates with reverence and this study in particular, reveals a composer for whom the aspect of sonority of a work is essential.

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<sup>15</sup>Debussy, 19 August 1915, in *Lettres à son éditeur, op. cit.*

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