

# Multicultural Influences in Debussy's Piano Music

By

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### Abstract

Debussy has been known for integrating different subjects into his music such as pictures, scenes of nature, poems, and elements from other cultures that leave the listener with the impression that Debussy tries to capture in his music. This paper focuses on multicultural influences on Debussy's *Estampes*, a suite published in 1903 that contains references to three different cultures: Javanese, Spanish, and French cultures. The first piece, *Pagodes*, evokes the musical culture of the Javanese Gamelan of Indonesia, which Debussy first encountered in a performance he saw at the Paris *Exposition Universelle* (World's Fair) in 1889. Debussy uses pentatonic, pedal-tone, and polyphonic texture to imitate the sound of the Javanese gamelan instruments. Besides *Pagodes*, Debussy uses similar techniques in *Prelude* from *Pour Le Piano* and *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut* from *Images* Book 2. *La soirée dans Grenade* evokes the musical character of Granada in Andalusia, Spain by using the habanera dance rhythm, melodies inspired by the Moorish heritage of Spain, and the rolled chords that imitate the strumming gesture of the Spanish guitar. *Jardins sous la pluie* is a composition from Debussy's native French culture. Debussy uses different modes—major, minor, whole-tone, and chromatics—to present different shades of moods. He also quotes melodies from two French children's songs in this piece, which serve as reference for the child-like scene and enrich the expressiveness of the piece. This document is based on historical and cultural research, musical analysis, and performance practice.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Debussy's piano music is often associated with impressionism, and as such, it hints at images of scenes, pictures, poems, and among other elements. His musical language relies on innovative rhythm, harmony, texture, and form. These elements allow Debussy to express unique emotions and ideas that also often include exotic subjects. In his exotic works, Debussy was influenced by various world music modes, such as the pentatonic scales used in Asian music and a variety of melodic inflections inspired in the Arabic scale, which allowed him to break away from the conventional major and minor scales. His interest in modes from other cultures also led him to the study of Indian ragas and Javanese gamelan.

The term exoticism, in a definition given by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is either the “tendency to adopt what is exotic or foreign” or the tendency to create an “exotic character; an instance of this, anything exotic; especially a foreign idiom or expression.”<sup>1</sup> In music, Ralph P. Locke defines exoticism as the employment of characteristics of other regions nearby or distant. It can be by a descriptive title, costume, text, or musical features.<sup>2</sup> Composers use this method to imbue their music with a new language to refresh the musical style of their works. We see examples of exoticism from many composers in the late nineteenth century.

### The Scope of this Paper

In this paper, I will explore the multicultural influences on Debussy's piano music within the scope of Javanese (the Java island in Indonesia), Spanish, and French influences. *Estampes* is

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<sup>1</sup> “Exoticism,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, OED Online, Oxford University Press, accessed 29 April, 2019,

<http://www.oed.com.www2.lib.ku.edu/view/Entry/66406?redirectedFrom=exoticism&>.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph P. Locke, "Exoticism," Grove Music Online, accessed 12 October, 2019, <https://doi-org.www2.lib.ku.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.S45644>.



an excellent example to demonstrate Debussy's exposure to these three cultures. The suite includes three pieces: *Pagodes*, *La soirée dans Grenade*, and *Jardins sous la pluie*.

***Pagodes (Pagodas):***

It is commonly known for pianists that this piece employs references to Javanese Gamelan to evoke the culture and geographical distance of Indonesia.<sup>3</sup> According to E. Robert Schmitz, the initial stimulus for *Pagodes* was Debussy being entranced upon hearing the Javanese gamelan ensemble at the World's Fair in Paris, in 1889 and 1900.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Debussy shows his interest in this culture on other pieces that are composed within the same decade such as *Prélude* from *Pour Le Piano*, 1901 and *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut* from *Images* Book 2, 1908.

***La soirée dans Grenade (The Evening in Granada):***

This piece is inspired by Debussy's impression of Granada, the capital city of Moorish heritage in the south of Spain. He uses the Habanera dance rhythm, of Cuban origin, which had become popular in Spain. Also, he uses rolled chords that imitates the strumming of the Spanish guitar, and the Arabic scale with the augmented second interval, both of which evoke the Spanish character. Describing the character of this piece, Spanish composer Manuel de Falla stated:

“The power of evocation integrated in the few pages of the Evening in Granada borders on the miracle when one realizes that this music was composed by a foreigner guided by the foresight of genius. There is not even one bar of this music borrowed from the Spanish folklore, and yet the entire composition in its most minute details, conveys, admirably Spain.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ralph P. Locke, "Exoticism."

<sup>4</sup> E. Robert Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), 82.

<sup>5</sup> E. Robert Schmitz, 85–86.

***Jardins sous la pluie* (Gardens Under the Rain):**

According to E. Robert Schmitz, the piece depicts a story of children playing in a garden when a storm suddenly appears.<sup>6</sup> Rather than retreat to shelter, the children continue their play. If the rain had any effect it was only to invigorate them. But their mother knows the storm will worsen and calls them inside. She sings a lullaby to them—“Dodo, l’ enfant do, l’ enfant dormira bientôt” (“Sleep, child, sleep, the child will soon be asleep”). It works, and the children quickly fall asleep. But the storm once again interrupts the children as their mother’s insight is proven correct. The storm strengthens. The lightning is close, and the thunder awakens them in fear. The mother once again turns to song. This time she sings to them “Nous n’irons plus au bois, les lauriers sont coupés” (“We’ll not return to the woods, the laurel trees are cut down”), a French children song. Eventually, the storm clears, and a rainbow takes its place. *Jardins sous la pluie* uses no words to convey this story, but varying scales, modes, and abrupt changes in dynamics forged together so masterfully words could never tell the same story.

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<sup>6</sup> E. Robert Schmitz, 90.

## Chapter Two: Javanese Gamelan

### The Appearance of Javanese Gamelan in the West

Javanese gamelan has been known to Western observers since the seventeenth century, during the period of Mataram (the former Javanese kingdom before the European's colonization). Java has a specific high-culture associated with the court and the royal family. In the mid eighteenth century, Europeans, particularly the Dutch and the British started to invade Java island, which was under the control of the Javanese royal family. As a result, in 1755, Mataram separated into two major courts and two minor courts. Since then, the Javanese royal family was under Dutch control. In 1811, the Dutch transferred the colonial oversight of Java to the British as a result of the Napoleonic Wars. In 1816, Thomas Stamford Raffles, a British governor, became the first person to introduce the gamelan to the West, when he came back to England with gamelan instruments after finishing his term in Java. The gamelan was the subject of interest by Alexander Ellis, an English mathematician and philologist who had a great impact on the development of Ethnomusicology as a field of study. Ellis's study was published in 1885 under the title, "On the Musical Scales of Various Nations." Raffles's gamelan instruments are now in the British Museum and the Claydon House in Buckinghamshire. The fact that Java was the center of the Dutch colonial dominion in South-East Asia, led to many Europeans perceiving Javanese culture as part of Indonesian culture.<sup>7</sup>

### Javanese Gamelan in the World's Fair, 1889

Many books point out that Debussy's first encounter with the Javanese gamelan was at the World's Fair, 1889. The event was one of the largest—with 61,722 exhibitors and all the top

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<sup>7</sup> Sumarsam, *Javanese Gamelan and the West* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 78-82.

amenities at the time. The fair took place in Paris between May and November 1889. 32 million visitors attended the World's Fair and its most famous attraction, the Eiffel Tower. The fair consisted of the *Champs-de-Mars* (a large public greenspace located nearby the Eiffel Tower), *Palais du Trocadéro* (the palace on the hill of Chaillot), *Quai d'Orsay* (the street in Paris situated on the south bank of the Seine river), and *Esplanade des Invalides* (a building that contains museums and monuments). Besides displaying new products and inventions, the World's Fair also showcased the development of modern technology. For example, the Eiffel Tower was illuminated by colorful electric bulbs and the Galeries des Machines provided a moving platform that was used to transport visitors. These showcase elements made Paris into *cite féérique* (fairy tale city).<sup>8</sup> In addition to products and technology, the exhibition focused on human evolution and culture, and music was a part of that demonstration. An important aim of the exhibition was also to display the civilizations and cultures of European colonies. The organizers looked for diverse types of performing arts that would be appropriate for presentation at the exhibition. The Javanese court dances were in the fair to display their sophistication and attractiveness.

#### The Javanese Gamelan Ensemble

The Javanese gamelan ensemble is made up of a family of percussive instruments consisting largely of several varieties of gongs and various sets of tuned metal instruments that are struck with mallets. The ensemble uses *colotomic* structure, a system that organizes music into cycles that are accentuated on specific beats.<sup>9</sup> The main melody, known as the "skeleton melody," is played by melodic instruments, such as metallophones (metal keyed) *saron* and

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<sup>8</sup> Adam Matthew, "Exposition Universelle de 1878 Illustrée," *World's Fairs*, accessed 18 April, 2019, <http://www.worldsfairs.amdigital.co.uk.www2.lib.ku.edu/Fairs>.

<sup>9</sup> Terry Miller, Andrew Shahriari, *World Music: A Global Journey* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 144.

*gendér*, xylophones (wooden keyed), the fiddle, or bamboo flute. Other rack gongs, xylophones and metallophones instruments (*kenong*, *kempul*, *kethuk*, and *bonang*) embellish the main melody by filling in the aural space. In western music, this is similar to the polyphony texture.

See Figure 2.1.

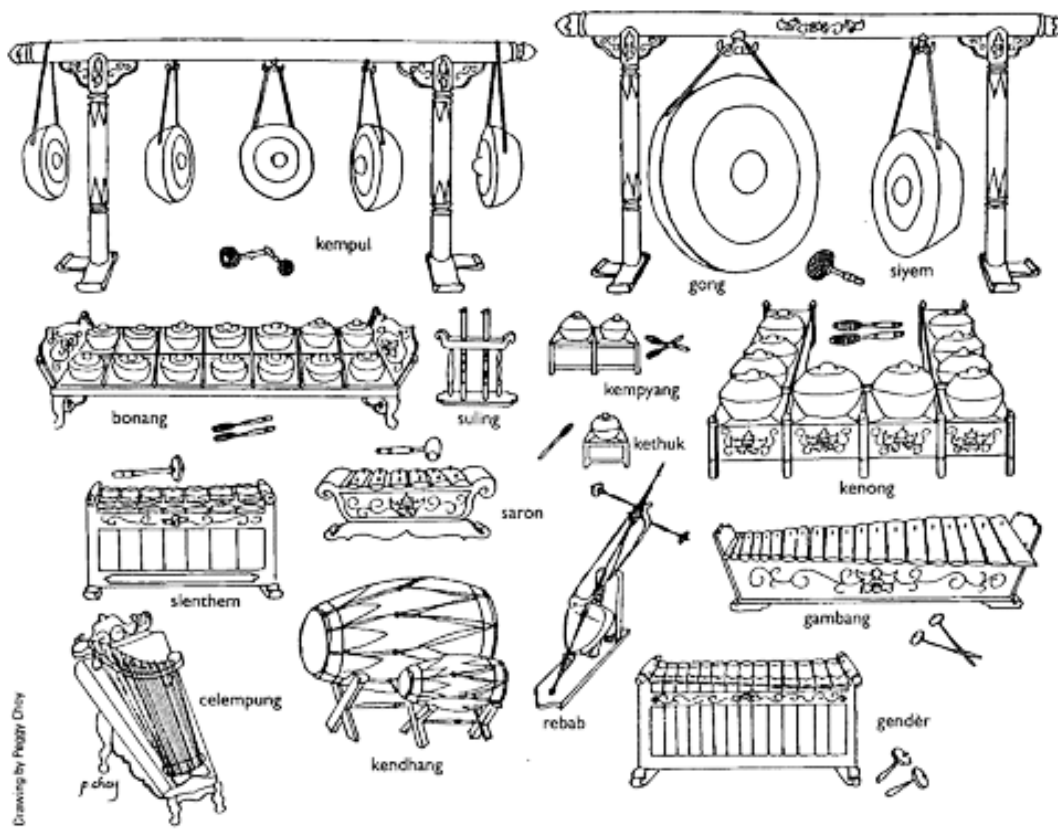


Figure 2.1 Javanese gamelan instruments (Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World's Peoples, page 235)

The sound of gamelan has a shimmering and gentle quality unlike some types of Western percussions that can be very loud. Vocalists may be included in the gamelan for their vocal timbre, rather than for the words they sing. There is a shift of solo parts between different instruments to produce contrasting moods and dynamics in the performance.

There are two types of tuning systems in Indonesian music: *Pélog* and *Sléndro*. The *Pélog* scale divides an octave into seven pitches with unequal intervals; the *Sléndro* scale divides

an octave into five pitches with equal intervals.<sup>10</sup> The five-pitch *Sléndro* has a different intervallic structure from the Chinese anhemitonic pentatonic scale (black keys on the piano's keyboard). Both *Pélog* and *Sléndro* tuning systems are incompatible. The gamelan ensemble is entirely in one of these two systems, the performance of both systems simultaneously is impossible. Also, both tuning systems are unable to play in the western piano due to the unmatched pitches.

The complexity of texture and tuning systems of Javanese gamelan challenged Debussy to include these effects in his piano music. On the one hand, an effect that is compatible when playing on the piano is the *colotomic* structure, which to some degrees is similar to polyphonic texture. On the other hand, the *Pélog* and *Sléndro* tuning systems need some modifications to match the pitch on the piano's keyboard. Debussy's approach to this uses whole-tone scale for the *Pélog*, and pentatonic scale for the *Sléndro*.

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<sup>10</sup> José Maceda, "In Search of a Source of Pentatonic Hemitonic and Anhemitonic Scales in Southeast Asia," *Acta Musicologica* 62, no. 2 (May – December 1990): 208–209.

### Chapter Three: The Recognition of Javanese Gamelan in Debussy's Piano Music

#### *Prélude from Pour Le Piano, 1901*

*Prélude* was published in 1901, a few years after the 1889 World's Fair. It is the first piece of *Pour Le Piano*, a suite consists of *Prélude*, *Sarabande*, and *Toccata*. The *Prélude* is dedicated to Debussy's pupil, Mlle Worms de Romilly. She notes that Debussy "telling evokes the gongs and music of Java."<sup>11</sup> Although this piece is not heavily influenced by the Javanese gamelan, it is significant as Debussy's first experimentation with Javanese gamelan musical culture.

From m. 6, the long base sustains (with a few repeats) for eighteen measures. The left-hand plays the melody using quarter notes in a slow movement, while the top voice plays fast, broken intervals. This polyphony texture suggests the perception of the *colotomic* structure in gamelan ensemble (Figure 3.1). In comparison to the gamelan, the long bass imitates a large gong, and the slow-moving melody in the middle voice coordinated with the sparkling broken intervals in the top voice imitates different instruments in the gamelan ensemble, perhaps the *bonang*, *kempul*, *géndér* and *saron*. In mm. 41–42, the rapid four-note movement in the whole-tone scale imitates the equal-tone pentatonic scale and the fast passage in the middle and high register of *Bonang* (Figure 3.2). The *glissando* technique on the piano in m. 46 imitates the fast movement of the mallets when playing the *bonang* (Figure 3.3). From m. 71, there is a shift of the melody to different voices. The indication of *staccato*, accent, and *tenuto* in a different register suggests the sonority of *Bonang* that plays trill in the high register, *Kenong* in the lower register, *saron* and *slenthem* that plays the quarter-note "skeleton" melody, together with *Kempul* that plays the half-notes (Figure 3.4).

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<sup>11</sup> François Lesure, *Pour Le Piano* (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 1984), iii.

Figure 3.1 shows the musical score for measures 4-9 of 'Pour Le Piano, Prélude'. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system (measures 4-6) features a treble clef with a series of eighth-note chords and a bass clef with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Above the first system, the instruction *dim.* is written above the treble staff, and *p* is written above the bass staff. The second system (measures 7-9) continues the bass line and introduces a treble line with a series of eighth-note chords. Above the second system, the instruction *un peu retardé* is written above the treble staff, and *peu à peu, reprendre le mouvt* is written above the bass staff.

Figure 3.1 *Pour Le Piano, Prélude*, mm. 4–9 ((Durand & Fils edition))

Figure 3.2 shows the musical score for measures 40-42 of 'Pour Le Piano, Prélude'. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system (measures 40-41) features a treble clef with a series of eighth-note chords and a bass clef with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Above the first system, the instruction *peu* is written above the treble staff, *a* is written above the bass staff, and *peu* is written above the treble staff. The second system (measures 42) continues the bass line and introduces a treble line with a series of eighth-note chords. Above the second system, the instruction *cresc.* is written above the treble staff, and *f* is written above the bass staff.

Figure 3.2 *Pour Le Piano, Prélude*, mm. 40–42 (Durand & Fils edition)



This musical score shows measures 46 to 48. The key signature is one sharp (F#). Measure 46 features a *glissando* in the right hand, indicated by a horizontal line with a wavy line underneath. The left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Measure 47 contains a complex chordal texture with multiple notes per hand, some marked with accents (^). Measure 48 continues this texture, ending with a final chord marked with an accent (^).

Figure 3.3 *Pour Le Piano, Prélude*, mm. 46–48 (Durand & Fils edition)

This musical score covers measures 71 to 79. Measure 71 starts with a *mf* dynamic and includes fingering numbers 1, 3, and 2. Measure 72 features a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking. Measure 74 begins with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic and includes a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. Measure 77 contains a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. Measure 79 concludes with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand, with a final chord marked with an accent (^).

Figure 3.4 *Pour Le Piano, Prélude*, mm. 71–79 (G. Henle Verlag edition)

### *Pagodes from Estampes, 1903*

The melodic structure is based on four out of five notes from the pentatonic scale, which in this piece is structured as a typical Chinese anhemitonic pentatonic scale. However, Debussy might have used this scale instead of *Pélog* and *Sléndro* because these are impossible to play on the piano keyboard. From a compositional perspective, pentatonic scales were often used to elicit thoughts of Asia. In contrast, Western concert music predominantly uses major and minor modes, and either diatonic or chromatic tonal approaches. According to David Kopp and Ralph P. Locke, *Pagodes* is based on an extensive use of pentatonic scales.<sup>12</sup> The 5-sharp key signature tells us that the “B-major” scale holds the following five pitches, B - C# - D# - F# - G# (scale degrees 1–2–3–5–6).

From m. 3, he suggests the key B-major in the left-hand by having the fifth interval based on B, and G-sharp minor in the right-hand by having G-sharp on the quarter notes (Figure 3.5). This harmonic treatment produces a mild sense of tonality without convincingly establishing the key. In addition, Debussy added non-chord tones into the traditional chords. The added notes that become non-chord tones create new harmonic colors. Arnold Schoenberg, cited in a book by David Kopp, comments on Debussy’s use of non-traditional harmonies: “the composition, without a strong establishment of the tonic, and without constructive meaning, often served the coloristic purpose of expressing moods and pictures.”<sup>13</sup> The heavy use of the pentatonic scale and unfamiliar scales without a solid sense of the tonic reflects Debussy’s innovative thoughts.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Image and Reflections* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 233–236.

<sup>13</sup> David Kopp, “Pentatonic Organization in Two Piano Pieces of Debussy,” *Journal of Music Theory* 41, no.2 (Autumn 1997): 261.

<sup>14</sup> Roy Howat, “Debussy, (Achille-)Claude,” *Grove Music Online*, Accessed 5 May, 2019, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline->

*délicatement et presque sans nuances*

**Modérément animé**

*pp m.d. m.g.*

2 Ad.

Figure 3.5 *Estampes, Pagodes*, mm. 1–3 (Durand & Fils edition)

However, there is an A-natural in the left-hand in m. 5 (Figure 3.6). It is a non-pentatonic pitch that produces the dominant-seventh chord of the passage. Also, in m. 7 (Figure 3.7), the A-sharp has loosened the stability of E-major after its dominant-seventh in m. 6. This method of using non-pentatonic injects a Western sound into the pentatonic and gamelan-influenced composition. As a result, the audience perceives the sound as Westernized-Asian due to the tonal recognition and familiarity from the Western music style.

*a Tempo*

Rit. Rit.

8- 8-

2 2

Figure 3.6 *Estampes, Pagodes*, mm. 4–6 (Durand & Fils edition)

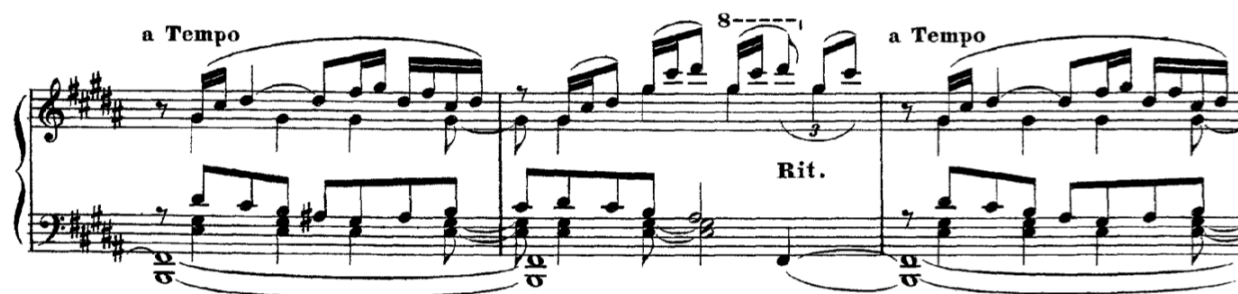


Figure 3.7 *Estampes, Pagodes*, mm. 7–9 (Durand & Fils edition)

Some passages consist of an under-layer of melodic phrases with differing rhythmic structures. For example, the top voice melody in m. 3 (Figure 3.5) returns in m. 7 (Figure 3.7) with an additional linear eighth-note melody in the left-hand. The opening melody in m. 11 is transformed into a form of octave in triplets over the quarter notes constructing the inner melody (Figure 3.8). In mm. 23–26, there is a four-part texture layering three melodies, with a drone-like melody in the bottom voice (Figure 3.9). This style of melodic arrangement highlights the performance of gamelan via various sized instruments playing simultaneously with slight difference in pitch octaves. The way that the melodies from different instrumental parts are played in the same and different ways also contributes to the emphasis.



Figure 3.8 *Estampes, Pagodes*, mm. 9–11 (Durand & Fils edition)

The image shows a piano score for Debussy's 'Estampes, Pagodes', measures 19-26. It is divided into three systems. The first system, marked 'Animez un peu' and 'p', shows a right-hand melody with eighth-note patterns and a left-hand accompaniment of eighth notes. The second system, marked 'Toujours animé' and 'pp', features a right-hand melody with triplets and a left-hand accompaniment with triplets. The third system continues the 'Toujours animé' section with similar triplet patterns. The key signature is G major and the time signature is 3/4. Dynamics include 'poco cresc.' in the first system and 'pp' in the second and third systems.

Figure 3.9 *Estampes, Pagodes*, mm. 19–26 (Durand & Fils edition)

Besides the illustration of gamelan instrumentation, another clearly non-Asian, Western-sounding effect is in mm. 19–26. The gong-like melody in the bottom voice descends from G-sharp to B, which is unusual for the authentic practice of gong (Figure 3.9). A similar descending gong-like passage appears in mm. 80–96. The left-hand passages are in an octave stepping down from B to B (Figure 3.10). Perhaps, Debussy is intentionally communicating that this piece is an influence of Javanese gamelan, but presented in the western style.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Image and Reflections*, 233-236.

**1 Tempo**

Measures 79–80

Measure 82

Measure 84

Measure 86

Measure 88

Measure 95–96

Figure 3.10 *Estampes, Pagodes*, mm. 79–96 (Durand & Fils edition)

*Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut* from *Images Book 2*, 1908

This is the second piece in the second volume of *Images*. The suite consists of *Cloches à travers les feuilles*, *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut*, and *Poissons d'or*. The title suggests “descent of the moon upon the temple which used to be.”<sup>16</sup> It is a prime example from the period after *Pagodes*. It is similar to *Prélude* from *Pour le piano* which has a hint of gamelan technique.<sup>17</sup> From m. 12, the use of two grace notes before each note of the main melody in one-octave intervals imitates the sound of *bonang* (grace notes) and *saron* (main melody). The appearance of this pentatonic passage in the middle of the non-pentatonic music shows that Debussy composed this piece mainly in Western music style with an insertion of gamelan effects. Perhaps this was to reflect the descriptive title that is associated with the temple, which is a reminder of Asian culture.

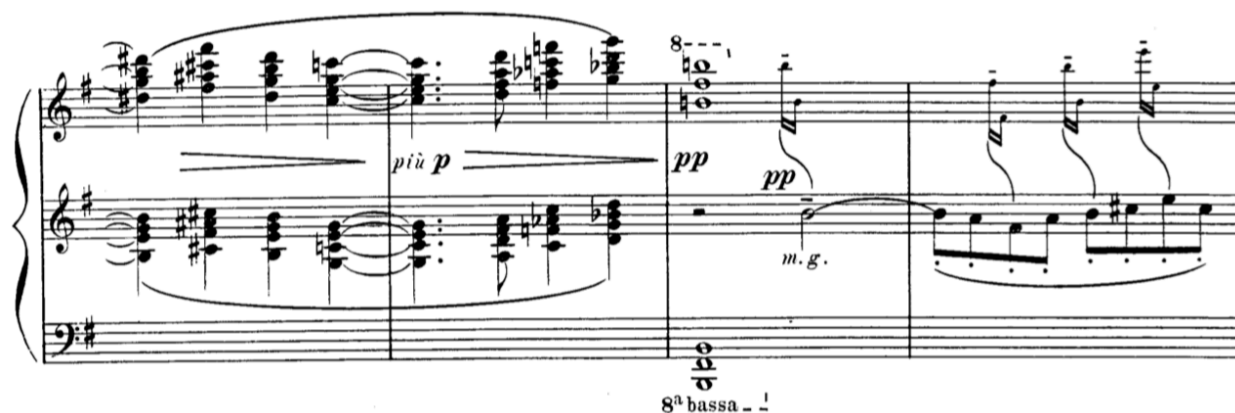


Figure 3.11 *Images Book 2, Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut*, mm. 10–13 (Durand & Fils edition)

<sup>16</sup> E. Robert Schmitz, 111.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Andres, “An Introduction to the Solo Piano Music of Debussy and Ravel: Recital 3 Notes,” BBC: Radio 3, Accessed 24 September, 2019, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/classical/raveldebussy/recital3.shtml>.

The timeline of this composition shows that Debussy includes gamelan effects in *Prélude* from *Pour Le Piano*, 1901. Then he composed *Pagodes* in 1903, which includes gamelan effects extensively. Finally, he composed *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut* in 1908 with a bell-like passage, which I believe to be the extension of the compositional techniques used in *Pagodes*. The timeline from 1901 – 1908 shows that Debussy is interested in employing musical materials from Javanese gamelan cultures. However, there is no solid evidence of how exactly Debussy perceived the impression of Javanese gamelan from the World's Fair, 1889. The title *Pagodes* is contradictory in itself because pagoda—an ancient architecture of Buddhist temples—is not a root-culture of Java island where it is predominantly Islamic. These issues remain pertinent for music scholars. The musical analysis and the date of the compositions that are shortly after the World's Fair, lead me to believe that Debussy is inspired by Javanese gamelan.



## Chapter Four: Influences from Spanish and French Cultures

### *La Soirée dans Grenade* from *Estampes*

The piece contains materials that are popular in Granada, the city in southern Spain. For example, 1.) the Cuban-origin Habanera rhythm, which was very popular in Spain in the late nineteenth-century (Figures 4.1 and 4.2). 2.) From m. 7, the melody in the left-hand carries element of an Arabic scale with an augmented second melodic interval, which evokes the musical culture of the Moorish heritage of Spain<sup>18</sup> (Table 4.2). The melodic structure in mm. 7–14 is based on the Arabic's *saba* scale, which is the closest match to the melodic structure used by Debussy in this piece. The comparison of pitches in Table 4.1 shows that there is only one note difference between the transposed *saba* scale and in *La Soirée dans Grenade*. 3.) In m. 18, there is a passage reminiscent of Spanish guitar strumming at the last eighth-note chord (Figure 4.3). The rolled chord on the piano imitates the movement of the guitarist when strumming from the lowest to the highest note of the chord.

Debussy uses multiple culturally influenced materials efficiently and effectively. He places Habanera rhythm at the opening of the piece, then the melody in the Arabic scale enters expressively. Finally, the Spanish guitar strumming passage in the same page of the score confirms the Spanish character of the piece.



Figure 4.1 Habanera Rhythm (Grove Music Online)

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<sup>18</sup> E. Robert Schmitz, 86.

Figure 4.2 *Estampes, La Soirée dans Grenade*, mm. 5–14 (Durand & Fils edition)

Figure 4.3 *Estampes, La Soirée dans Grenade*, mm. 15–18 (Durand & Fils edition)

<b>Melody in mm. 7 – 14</b>	E#	F#	G#	A	B#	C#	D
<b>Arabic's <i>saba</i> scale (transposed)</b>	E#	F#	G#	A	B#	C#	D#

Table 4.1 A Comparison between the melody from mm. 7–14 and Arabic's Saba scale<sup>19</sup> (with transposition)

<sup>19</sup> Harold S. Powers, Frans Wiering, James Porter, James Cowdery, Richard Widdess, Ruth Davis, Marc Perlman, Stephen Jones, and Allan Marett "Mode," *Grove Music Online*, Accessed 29 September, 2019,

*Jardins sous la Pluie* from *Estampes*

This piece depicts a scene of the rain and storm through modal materials such as major, minor, whole-tone, and chromatic. The piece opens with a passage of rapid, broken, minor chords that reproduce the heavy storm (Figure 4.4). In contrast, the broken chords at the end of the piece are in major mode, bringing to mind smiling children and the rainbow after the storm (Figure 4.6). In addition to the opening section, the turbulent passage is presented by a series of whole-tone scales in mm. 60–63 and chromatic idioms in mm. 64–65 (Figure 4.5). The melody of the children song “Dodo, l’enfant do” is in mm. 1–56: the ascending four notes, then descending three notes, followed by the perfect-fourth up and the perfect-fifth down. The theme “Nous n’irons plus au bois” is in mm. 75–83 (Figure 4.7). In addition, Debussy added the configuration of descending notes from the major-seventh interval down to the perfect fifth in m. 155. This is typical of Debussy’s unique approach to the cadence in order to avoid the obvious arrival of a traditional tonic chord<sup>20</sup> (Figure 4.6). This approach appears at the end of *Les collines d’Anacapri* (A# - G# - F#) and in the ostinato within the coda of *L’isle joyeuse* (G# - F# - E). There is no doubt that Debussy shows his musical intelligence by using different methods of music composition to effectively convey the story and his artistic thoughts.



Figure 4.4 *Estampes, Jardins sous la Pluie*, mm. 1–2 (Durand & Fils edition)

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000043718>.

<sup>20</sup> François Lesure, "Debussy, (Achille-)Claude: Models and Influences," *Grove Music Online*, Accessed 29 July 2019, <https://doi-org.www2.lib.ku.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.07353>.

Figure 4.5 shows two systems of musical notation for the piece *Jardins sous la Pluie*. The first system is marked *p* and consists of two staves. The right hand plays a continuous eighth-note pattern, while the left hand provides a bass line with occasional triplets. The second system continues this texture, with the right hand introducing more complex rhythmic patterns and the left hand featuring triplets.

Figure 4.5 *Estampes, Jardins sous la Pluie*, mm. 60–65 (Durand & Fils edition)

Figure 4.6 shows a single system of musical notation for the piece *Jardins sous la Pluie*. The right hand features a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the left hand plays a bass line with slurs and accents. The piece is marked *f* and *ff*. The system concludes with a double bar line and an asterisk.

Figure 4.6 *Estampes, Jardins sous la Pluie*, mm. 154–157 (Durand & Fils edition)

**1<sup>o</sup> Tempo** (moins rigoureux)

*pp*

*p doucement expressif*

Figure 4.7 *Estampes, Jardins sous la Pluie*, mm. 75–83 (Durand & Fils edition)

## Chapter Five: Performance Practice

This chapter discusses how to play the examples from previous chapters. I believe that *Pagodes*, *Prélude* from *Pour Le Piano*, and *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut* from *Images* Book 2 are inspired by Javanese Gamelan. Pianists should imagine the sonority and percussive quality of the gamelan ensemble. Unlike Western drums that are mostly loud and focus on tempo and rhythm, the gamelan instruments create a gentler, shimmering tone. The metal-key glockenspiel and the wooden-key marimba are the closest Western percussive instruments to the gamelan. The melodic gesture is less *legato* compared to string instruments, yet still produces connecting melodic lines. It is important for pianists to know that Debussy composed *Estampes* with influences from other cultures. Pianists need to be aware of each culture, so they can respond to it in their study and performance. Pianists are encouraged to integrate the Western style chords, intervals, and *legato* melodic lines with the shimmering of materials from the East, the dance-like quality of Habanera rhythm, and the sound that depicts the scene.

In *Pagodes*, the example of gamelan-like melody is in m. 3, where the top voice of the right-hand is in pentatonic scale (Figure 3.5). This melody can be sung in the movable-do solfege as la-re-mi-sol-la-mi-sol-re-mi.<sup>21</sup> The left-hand is in a traditional B-major chord. The major-second harmonic interval in the right-hand creates an impressionistic and tonal colorization that is typical of Debussy. The sustaining B in the left-hand, which starts from the beginning of the piece and lasts for fourteen measures, represents the large size of the gong that plays the pedal-tone or drone-like melody.

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<sup>21</sup> The movable-do solfege consists of do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do. Each syllable represents the scale degrees 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8 consecutively. Pentatonic scale in the movable-do solfege consists of do-re-mi-sol-la.

The layer of the texture in mm. 7–8 contains gamelan melody in the top voice of the right-hand and Western style melody in the eighth-note melodic line in the left-hand (Figure 5.1). The melodic line in the left-hand can be sung in the moveable-do solfege as mi-re-do-ti-la-ti-do-re-mi-re-do-ti. This is a non-pentatonic melody due to the pitch from the seventh scale degree. The approach to these two melodies is different. The top voice in the right-hand should be played with shimmering sonority, while the left-hand melodic line can also be played with lyrical and *legato* approach. Moreover, for the first time, the secondary melody in the left-hand is being introduced. The pianist should play the left-hand melodic line louder than the right-hand's top voice in order to create an effective entrance of the secondary melody. This texture reflects the character of gamelan ensemble in the way that there are different melodic instruments performing simultaneously.



Figure 5.1 *Estampes, Pagodes*, mm. 7–8 (Durand & Fils edition)

The first eight measures contain various types of musical materials such as Debussy's impressionistic harmony, the standard chord, the gong-like pedal tone, the gamelan-like sonority, and the lyrical melody. The pianist should be able to master each character with different approaches. To practice each of them, for example,

- For the gong-like pedal tone, pressing the keys deeply sustains the sound and lets it be heard for its entire length. Although the gong is a percussive instrument, it is

used by Debussy in a gentle way rather than with harshness. To avoid making a harsh sound, a suggestion for an effective approach is to use the skin around the fingerprint when touching the key. Pianists need to move the hand slowly when touching the key.

- The character and sound of gamelan instruments is a gentle percussiveness with a shimmering quality. To capture this feeling on the piano, use the fast and light movements of the fingers to help the piano's hammers to strike the string quickly and lightly.
- Rotation techniques are useful for playing the lyrical melodies in this piece. For example, playing descending four notes by fingers 1-2-3-4 in the left-hand consecutively, the second finger will lift up towards the right direction while the thumb is pressing the key. This can also be an imitation of a swinging or rotating motion. The second finger will then play the next note as it rotates down towards the key. Then, the third finger will follow the same procedure, and so on, to the last note. The rotation technique helps to enhance the *legato* quality of the melodic line. The horizontal approach to the melody helps the line to be smoother, rather than “up and down” motion that creates a digital sound that sounds like hitting hammers. The pianist should use a great variety of different movements and parts of the finger to make a great variety of sounds needed in this piece.

In mm. 11–14, both hands play octave passages (Figure 3.8). The top voice employs the opening melody from m. 3 with augmentation technique. The octave passages in the left-hand are in pentatonic scale with the indication of *tenuto*, which contrasts with the *staccato* in the top



voice. In my opinion, these two voices are imitating different instruments in the gamelan ensemble. The top voice imitates the shimmering percussive sound of *bonang*, while the lower voice plays with sustaining and lyrical quality like the sound of *saron*.

In mm. 15–18, the harmony is not based on regular chords of the scale, but built up from the dissonance and irregular chords. This four-bar phrase shows that Debussy is keeping the composition away from being fully submerged into the exoticism effects. There is no gamelan material, only French impressionistic sound, which suggests to the audience that this piece is composed by Debussy. It is recommended that the pianist play with flattened fingers and minimal motion to produce a gentle sound. The approach to the key can emphasize the color of each chord rather than the top voice melody.

Figure 5.2 *Estampes, Pagodes*, mm. 13–18 (Durand & Fils edition)

In mm. 19–26, the music returns to the gamelan materials (Figure 3.9). There are arrangements of the previous melodies in polyphonic texture.

From m. 37, the indication of “dans une sonorité plus claire” tells us to play this section “in a sonority that is very clear.” The fluid movement of the melody with thirty-second notes gives a hint that this passage is imitating a small percussion instrument. The quarter-note in the high C-sharp in m. 38 with *tenuto* gives a bell-like sound.

From m. 78, the right-hand passage represents the virtuosity of the gamelan player. The complexity of this passage is increased in m. 80 by the quintuplets. The fluidity of the top voice continues to the end. To play the fast passage with *piu pianissimo* on the piano, I suggest to play with flattened fingers, avoid the “up and down” movement, and keep the wrist and finger motion minimal. In the practice room, the pianist can try playing this passage while standing up. The hands and fingers will be forced to stay close to the key due to the weight and support of the arm. Once the pianist is used to playing close to the key, then they can replicate the same touch while sitting regularly. Another method to help differentiate the contrasting dynamics between each hand is to play the right-hand on the music stand of the piano while playing the left-hand on the keyboard. The pianist will then play with two hands while the right-hand is not actually touching the key. Then the pianist will switch the hand—the right-hand plays on the keyboard while the left-hand plays on the music stand. This practice helps the pianist to hear each hand separately, while still being aware of the coordination needed between two hands. Once they hear the different sounds, they will start to improve playing with the contrast dynamics. This technique is more effective than playing solely one hand alone, while another hand is resting. It is true that the sounds are heard in the same way; however, the coordination that was omitted when playing with the rested hand will prevent the pianist from playing effectively when returning to playing hands together.

In *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut*, the passage from m. 12 (Figure 3.11) has the sonority of the gong. The right-hand plays the grace notes by touching the key lightly and quickly. The left-hand plays the melody with *staccato* touch while pressing the damper pedal down. In addition to my suggestions, a legendary pianist, Sviatoslav Richter is an excellent example of this style of playing. His recording of *Pagodes* delivers a quality of shimmering sound, with a distinction of imitating different instruments in each voice of the texture.<sup>22</sup>

The Spanish character in *La Soirée dans Grenade* starts from the Habanera rhythm at the opening of the piece. One of the most well-known examples of habanera rhythm is Georges Bizet's Habanera (Aria) from the opera *Carmen*. The rhythm is easy to recognize. I suggest the pianist clap along to the rhythm while listening to *Carmen*. Then play *La Soirée dans Grenade* with the same sense of rhythm. The melody from the Arabic *saba* scale from m. 7 (Figure 4.2) is expressive. The pianist can use the rotation technique to enhance the *legato* as discussed in *Pagodes*. Finally, for the Spanish guitar strumming-like chord in m. 18 (Figure 4.3), I suggest the pianist tries swinging the hands in a clock-wise motion. This movement lets the pianist feel the quick rotation of the wrist, similar to the way table tennis players swing their hands. Once the pianist understands the quick rotation of the wrist, they can try playing the last chord in m. 18 with the same feeling. This approach helps to produce a quick rolling chord with a bright sound.

The evocation of scenes from the French tune in *Jardins sous la pluie* comes from the use of various tonal modes and the sudden change of moods. The opening section from m. 1 is technically challenging to play both hands evenly and lightly (Figure 4.4). To practice, it might be helpful for the pianist to tap on the table with the same fingers as though they were

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<sup>22</sup> 1. Claude Debussy, *Pagodes*, Piano Recital: The Art of Sviatoslav Richter, by Sviatoslav Richter, pianist, recorded between 1962 – 1954, Deutsche Gramophone 00028947622031, 2004, streaming audio, Accessed 13 October, 2019, Naxos Music Library.

performing the piece. Imagine that the pianist is playing every note accurately, but on the table. Then listen to the tapping sound and try to make both hand steady. The elimination of the piano sound and only listening to the tapping rhythm helps the pianist to focus only on the steadiness of the fingers. Moreover, the pianist is recommended to allow the right-hand's wrist to move freely in order to support each finger. As a result, the sound of the right-hand will not sound like a machine.

The melody in mm. 75–83 (Figure 4.7) is simple and beautiful—the pianists should play it in the impressionistic approach, which is gentle and descriptive. Pianists have been trained to play the melody from the classical and romantic periods expressively, emphasizing every note. In this section, to produce the sound of French impressionism, the pianists should think about the late French pointillist paintings. The artists usually use dots instead of thick lines, then the viewer perceives multiple dots as a whole concept of colors and shapes. To imitate the same effect on the piano, the pianists should not emphasize every note, but aim for the overall atmosphere. The dynamic should follow the harmonic color instead of the melodic line. For example, the major chords should be brighter and louder than the minor chords regardless of the shape of the melody. Finally, the trill-like passage in the left-hand should stay soft as it is a background sound. The pianists can play with flattened fingers, and touch the keys by using the fingerprint part of the finger. This approach produces a very soft dynamic.

The performance approach varies depending on the size of the performer's hands, the different training backgrounds, and the taste of the pianist. My suggestions for the performance of these pieces are one of the countless possibilities. This being said, the pianists should take the historical and analytical aspects into account when learning and interpreting the music so they can deliver the meaning behind the score.

## Conclusion

The way that Debussy has maintained an openminded composition style and employed multiple musical cultures in his piano music expands the experience of the audience. This study helps pianists to understand the context behind the exotic effects as follows: Java is characterized by the fundamental of gamelan instruments and ensemble, the shimmering sound quality, and the *colotomic* structure. Spain is characterized by the Cuban-based Habanera rhythm, the Spanish guitar chord strumming, and the melody that uses the Arabic scale. France is characterized by the evocation of scene interpreted through the use of colorful harmonies and quotation of two well-known French children songs. In terms of Pedagogy, this research can be used as an example for students to acquaint themselves with the background behind the music that they are learning. Lastly, this research explores more about culture, and realizes a great impact from social contexts and other types of arts that are imaginatively put together into a piece of music.

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