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Contrasting Debussy and Ravel:
A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Piano Works and Ondine

by

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ABSTRACT

Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel were the two most important and influential French composers of the early 20th century. They shared similar backgrounds and influences as both resided in Paris during an epoch of rich cultural confluence. As a result, they are often categorized together as “Impressionist” composers. However, a closer examination of their music shows that their works actually have very distinctive characteristics.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the differences between Debussy’s and Ravel’s compositional styles. This will be done in two parts. The first part will focus on the composers’ common background as well as influences they had on each other. Each composer was at times accused of stealing or borrowing from the other. The works that gave rise to these controversies will be introduced, and superficial similarities will be highlighted. Then, a comparative analysis of these same works will be offered, illustrating how they in fact show very distinct styles from a structural point of view.

Differences in compositional approach by Debussy and Ravel will be elaborated on in the second part of the study, a comparative analysis of their piano works based on the same material, namely the Ondine legend. A detailed stylistic analysis of the two works shows how differently each composer approached the same subject. By comparing and contrasting two works with identical titles based on the same inspirational source, each composer’s unique compositional style will be further illuminated.
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INTRODUCTION

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) were known as two of the most prominent figures during the turn of the 20th century, France. As they both resided in Paris during an epoch of rich cultural confluence, they shared many common influences such as the Symbolist movement in literature, the Impressionist movement in the arts, anti-Wagnerism, the Russians, and Oriental art and culture brought about by the World Exposition in 1889. As composers, they were both progressive in their outlook for new harmonies and sonorities that did not conform to the conventional tonal scheme, and they resembled each other in their common preference for modal and pentatonic scales and unresolved 7th and 9th chords. As accomplished pianists, they sought new techniques and effects and cultivated a wider range of expression for the instrument. Because their music show superficial similarities and common sonorities and sounds, they are often grouped together as the “Impressionist” composers, similar to the way Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven are often grouped together as the First Viennese School during the “Classical” era.

However, Debussy and Ravel each possess their own unique compositional styles and characters, and their compositions are vastly different. One cannot study a piece composed by Debussy, and assume that it is by Ravel, and vice versa. They each have their own distinct musical language that cannot be categorized as the same or similar, and these differences can be clearly illustrated through a structural analysis of their compositions.

Although Debussy and Ravel are often mentioned and classified together, there
have not been many extensive style-studies that illustrate their actual similarities and especially their differences in compositional styles. In this thesis, the author intends to demonstrate how such a comparison can be done.

This study will focus mainly on the piano works of Debussy and Ravel, as the author of this study is a pianist, as well as both Debussy and Ravel. Both composers composed at the piano, and their compositional experiments and styles were often expressed first in their piano works. Therefore, the author has chosen several piano compositions to analyze in detail, and will investigate two areas of intersection. The first concerns the relationship Debussy and Ravel had with one another and the apparent rivalry issue imposed upon them. This approach will illuminate similarities between selected piano compositions which sparked controversy and accusations of plagiarism. However, and more importantly, the study will demonstrate how in fact, they are very different, and that although superficial similarities may be found at times, their compositions each represent their distinct compositional styles.

The second approach and focal point of this study will be a comparison of two pieces inspired by the same source: namely Ondine. Both Debussy and Ravel composed piano pieces titled Ondine, and through a comparative, detailed analysis of these works, we will see how the two composers came from a similar starting point, yet ended up with two drastically different compositions both in temperament and style. A comparison of two pieces which share the same inspirational source is an ideal example where each composer's unique personal stamp can be clearly distinguished.
CHAPTER 1

Debussy and Ravel – Their Common Background and Influences

In order to understand the music of Debussy and Ravel, knowledge of their background is vital. Debussy and Ravel share many common influences and experiences, as both of them lived in Paris and attended the prestigious Paris Conservatory, both were pianists, and both matured and established themselves as composers during an epoch rich in cultural and artistic diversity, known as la belle époque (1870-1925). They were both highly influenced by the literary circle of the Symbolist poets and Impressionist artists. They both also shared an acquaintance with Erik Satie whose spiritual attitude and mentality towards music intrigued them. They were both influenced in their use of modality, unique harmonies, and ostinato technique, by the Russians whose music was frequently performed in Paris during this time, such as Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Mussorgsky. The World Exhibition in 1889 opened their eyes to new art, sounds, and timbre from the Far East including pentatonic scales and new techniques in texture and rhythm through the gamelan ensembles. Thus, knowledge of the cultural currents of the fin-de-siècle Paris, is imperative in understanding the influences bestowed upon them.

Paris, at the turn of the 20th century, was the place where many poets, artists, musicians, and writers from all over Europe flocked to in search of new ways of expression, and exchanged inspiration and ideas in cafés and cabarets. These were years of intense speculation about the relationships between different art-forms, where artists spoke freely of sounds as colors, paintings as symphonies, and poetry as music.
The Symbolist poet, Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) explored the connections between the visual and musical arts in *Le Salon de 1846*. In the chapter ‘De la couleur,’ he states: “Harmony is at the root of the theory of colour. Melody is the unity in colour, or colour in general. Melody wants closure; it is an ensemble where all the effects converge into a general effect.”\(^1\)

The Symbolist poets often included musical connotations in their poems. An excerpt from Paul Verlaine’s (1844-1896) *Clair de Lune* reads “Playing the lute and dancing, and almost sad beneath their whimsical costumes, even as they sing in minor mode….” and a phrase from Stéphane Mallarmé’s (1842-1898) *L’après-midi d’un faune* reads “….murmurs no [sound of] water but that which my flute pours into the grove sprinkled with chords…”

The painter James Whistler (1834-1903) gave musical titles to his paintings such as *Nocturne in Black and Gold* and *Symphony in White*, and in an interview for *L’Echo de Paris* in 1895, painter Eugène Gaugin (1848-1903) stated:

“I obtain symphonies, harmonies that represent nothing absolutely real in the vulgar sense of the word, with arrangements of lines and colors given as a pretext by any subject whatsoever from life or nature. These do not express any idea directly, but should make one think the way music makes one think, without the help of ideas or images, simply by the mysterious affinities between our brains and such arrangements of color and line.”\(^2\)

This rich confluence of the arts offered cultural stimulation as well as inspiration to many artists of the time, including Debussy and Ravel.

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Both Debussy and Ravel were involved in and frequented literary and artistic circles that enriched their cultural perception. In the 1880’s, Debussy was often found at the *Librairie de l’Art Independent*, a bookstore owned by esoteric and Oriental scholar, Edmond Bailly, and frequented by Pierre Louÿs, Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé, and André Gide. At the *Taverne Weber* he met with novelist and playwright friends, where he was introduced to writer Marcel Proust. He also frequented *Le Chat Noir*, a cabaret in Montmartre where he met Erik Satie, as well as other literary figures such as Théodore de Banville, Guy de Maupassant, and Jois-Karl Huysmans. However, the richest opportunity of artistic acquaintanceship for Debussy was at the weekly Tuesday meetings at Mallarmé’s house: *les mardis chez Mallarmé*.

The influence Debussy reaped from his close associations with his Symbolist poet friends is paramount. His musical ethics were molded through the principles of the Symbolist movement. In 1886, Jean Moréas published a definition of the “Symbolist” movement: “In this art, scenes from nature, human activities, and all other real world phenomena will not be described for their own sake; here, they are perceptible surfaces created to represent their esoteric affinities with the primordial Ideals.”³ Symbolist poets wrote in a highly metaphorical and suggestive manner, endowing particular images or objects with symbolic meaning. They preferred a poetry of allusion, a poetry of suggestion rather than statement. They sought to evoke, rather than to describe; symbolic imagery was used to signify the state of the poet's soul.

This influence is reflected in many of Debussy’s compositions in the form of “evocative” music beginning with his orchestral prelude *l’Après-midi d’un faune* (1894),

which was inspired by the poem of Mallarmé with the same title. In this prelude, Debussy does not attempt to literally illustrate Mallarmé’s poem, but he offers a general impression of the poem, evoking images of the changing scenes. Debussy makes this clear in a note where he states:

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

In this way, through the symbolist poets, Debussy learned the technique of “suggestive” music by evoking images, not describing them.

Ravel also participated in artistic circles, but not as widely as Debussy did. He preferred intimacy among close friends, and was a member of a group of young artists called the Apaches. The group was formed around 1900, and meetings were held far into the night as they discussed painting, read poetry and performed new music. They considered themselves “artistic outcasts” and defended what they believed was important, whether or not the public agreed. Ravel’s intellectual horizons were broadened, and he met many of his future collaborators and lifelong friends. It was at these Apaches meetings that Ravel first introduced his Jeux d’eau, Oiseaux tristes, and Sonatine. Other members of the group included pianist and Ravel’s close friend Ricardo Viñes, poets Tristan Klingsor and Léon-Paul Fargue, the painter Paul Sordes, composers Maurice Delage, Manuel de Falla, and Florent Schmitt, critic Michel Calvocoressi and

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publisher Lucien Garban. Igor Stravinsky was later to join the group in 1909. Fargue wrote that "Ravel shared our predilections, our weaknesses, our manias for Chinese art, Mallarmé and Verlaine, Rimbaud and Corbière, Cézanne and Van Gogh, Rameau and Chopin, Whistler and Valéry, the Russians and Debussy."\textsuperscript{5}

In 1889, the great World Exhibition was held in Paris, and both Debussy and Ravel were there to experience, first hand, the exotic melodies and sounds, as well as visual arts of the Far East. Debussy was twenty-seven years old, already on his way to becoming one of the most prominent French composers of the time after winning the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1884. Ravel was fourteen years old, and had just been accepted into the Paris Conservatory as a pupil of the preparatory piano class. As with many other composers who heard the Javanese gamelan performances, both Debussy and Ravel were bewitched with the novelty of the music and timbre that was introduced to them for the first time. Robert Godet, Debussy’s friend who was also present at the Exhibition recounts:

"Many fruitful hours for Debussy were spent in the Javanese kampong of the Dutch section listening to the percussive rhythmic complexities of the gamelan with its inexhaustible combinations of ethereal, flashing timbres, while with the amazing Bedayas the music came visually alive."\textsuperscript{6}

In this way, Debussy and Ravel shared many common cultural inspirations. They also received their musical training at the same Paris Conservatory. Although their professors were different (as Debussy entered the Conservatory seventeen years earlier than Ravel), they both entered the conservatory as aspiring pianists, yet diverted to

\textsuperscript{5} Léon-Paul Fargue, "Maurice Ravel," \textit{Plaisir de France} (August 1936) : 15.  
composition, and both experienced conflicts with the authorities due to their unique and progressive styles.

However, this is where their similarities stop. Ravel who was never able to become a virtuoso pianist due to his small frame and hands, acquired his first prize (graduation requirement) in piano in 1891, whereas Debussy who entered the conservatory as a child prodigy and virtuoso pianist at ten years old, never managed to obtain his first prize in piano. Debussy’s interests were diverted to composition, which proved more fruitful, winning him the first prize in composition at the Conservatory as well as the Grand Prix de Rome. However, despite his success, Debussy admitted in an interview many years later:

“For a long time I did not want to study what I considered foolishness. Then I realized that I must at least pretend to study in order to get through the Conservatoire. So I studied, but all that time I worked out my own little schemes, and whenever we were taught anything I made a note in my mind as to whether I considered it right or wrong. Don’t imagine for a moment that I told anyone of this. I kept it all to myself. Until I could give a proof of my ideas I did not care to talk of them.”

Contrary to Debussy who learned to conform to certain rules in order to be successful, Ravel never experienced academic success as a composer with four failed attempts at the Prix de Rome as well as expulsion from the Conservatory in 1903, without ever obtaining a first prize in composition.

Each composer continued to mature and establish their own unique compositional style and musical language, taking greater leaps after graduating from the conservatory which freed them of any scholastic obligations and confinements. Their

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difference in personalities as well as differences in what they integrated from their common background also contributed in molding their views of musical aesthetics in distinctive ways. Whereas Debussy continued to develop his “own little schemes” and musical language through experimentation and improvisation, Ravel strove for perfection as a craftsman within classical traditions. Contrary to Debussy, Ravel rarely spoke about, and did not feel the need to formulate his principles of musical aesthetics. However, according to Roland Manuel, Ravel has stated:

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

Art no doubt, has other effects, but the artist, in my opinion, should have no other aim.”

Therefore, Ravel continuously sought technical mastery in all aspects of his craft. His compositional output is small in comparison to Debussy, due to his meticulous nature in perfecting each work to his full satisfaction. Among the many composers of the past, Ravel considered Mozart his ultimate model. The clarity, perfection of workmanship, and the purity of Mozart’s lyricism was what impressed Ravel, and he strove to achieve such qualities in his own compositional style. Ravel is known to have said about his own music: “quite simple, nothing but Mozart.”

In this way, Debussy’s compositions reflect his free, uninhibited approach to musical expression, while Ravel continuously strove for innovation within tradition and

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technical perfection. The next chapter will portray the relationship between Debussy and Ravel, illustrating how each of their compositional styles, although very different, were also influenced by one another.
CHAPTER 2

Debussy vs. Ravel – Relationship and Rivalry

We have seen that both Debussy and Ravel shared many common influences that molded their musical aesthetics and compositional styles. However, perhaps one of the greatest influences on each composer was the influence of one another. Both Debussy and Ravel showed prolific activity in their piano compositions during the years 1900-1918. Ravel composed all of his solo piano works during Debussy’s lifetime. As Lockspeiser states,9 a close artistic relationship of this kind is largely motivated by rivalry. This chapter will illustrate Debussy and Ravel’s relationship and influence they had on one another, which unfortunately resulted in their unwanted rivalry issue.

Debussy and Ravel officially met around 1900 through Debussy’s stepson Raoul Bardac, with whom Ravel was classmates at the Paris Conservatory. Both Bardac and Ravel were invited along with Lucien Garban to Debussy’s home, where Debussy played excerpts from Pelléas et Mélisande for them – the opera he was currently completing.

Debussy, at this point in his life, had already achieved a status as one of the leading composers of France. He had already won the Grand Prix de Rome with his cantata L’Enfant prodigue, produced numerous vocal compositions on texts of the Symbolist poets (Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Mallarmé), successfully premiered his String Quartet (1893) as well as the orchestral work Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune

(1892-94). Ravel, who was thirteen years junior to Debussy was still a student at the Paris Conservatory in the midst of competing for the *Prix de Rome*. Naturally, Ravel had great respect and high regard for Debussy. He was first introduced to the art of Debussy after hearing *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* which enthralled him and “revealed Debussy to me.” Later in his life, after hearing a record of *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*, Ravel turned to his friend Jacques de Zogheb, with tears in his eyes saying, “It was when I first heard that many years ago that I understood what music is.”

Ravel was an ardent supporter of Debussy’s music, especially during the stormy beginnings of *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Debussy’s opera went through great difficulty until it was finally premiered on April 30, 1902 at the Opéra-Comique. Four failed attempts for its production, disputes between Debussy and the author of the play Maurice Maeterlink, and orchestra musicians who refused to play during rehearsals were only a few of the problems. The dress rehearsal and premier performances were a disaster. The music critic Louis Laloy wrote of the audience: “they were astonished, they protested, they laughed, they made witty remarks; and people left with the pleasant

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11 Towards the final stages of the production, Maeterlink and Debussy had a dispute concerning the casting of the lead soprano role. It had been understood between them, that Maeterlink’s mistress, Georgette Leblanc, was to sing the title role of *Mélisande*. However, Debussy had substituted a singer of his own choice, Mary Garden, for the role. Maeterlink did not even attend the premier of Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and heard it for the first time in 1920, two years after Debussy’s death, at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. On June 28, he wrote to Mary Garden who sang the role of *Mélisande*: “I had sworn to myself never to see the lyric drama *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Yesterday I violated my vow and I am a happy man. For the first time I have entirely understood my own play, and because of you.” In 1925, he says to Henry Russell about his quarrel with Debussy: “Today I find that I was completely wrong in this matter and that he was a thousand times right.” (Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind* Vol. I, p.202).
12 According to Laloy, the orchestral players were baffled by the ‘extreme division of the parts’ and that the violinists were disgruntled ‘because for a whole scene, that in the underground vault, their services were dispensed with.’ (Deborah Priest, *Louis Laloy on Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.,1999) 60n2).
certainty of having made merry at a show many would miss out on, as they did not think it would last beyond the fourth evening.”\textsuperscript{13}

It was then, the supporters of Debussy, which included Ravel and the \textit{Apaches} that came to the rescue. They were allowed into the performance only after the third performance, and Ravel and his fellow \textit{Apache} members attended every single performance of \textit{Pelléas et Mélisande} thereafter. Laloy recounts: “Success was predicted and confirmed; soon there was an enthusiastic reception, the like of which had not been seen since Wagner. Six, eight, ten curtain calls after each of the acts were not enough to calm the frenzy that broke out as each person gave vent to his over-abundance of emotion.”\textsuperscript{14} As an active and passionate devotee to Debussy’s music, Ravel was soon labeled as a leading figure of \textit{les Debussystes} - a group of young musicians, students, and artists who were supporters of the novelty and new compositional style of Debussy, and who were responsible for the phenomenon known as \textit{le Debussyisme}.

Debussy also took interest in the young Ravel, and was apparently present at the 1898 premier of Ravel’s \textit{Sites auriculaires} (Scenes for the Ear), a two-piano work performed by their mutual and close friend, pianist Ricardo Viñes and Marthe Dron. This concert also marked Ravel’s debut as a composer. The concert was not favorably received by the Parisian public and older generation of musicians, as the composition was too \textit{avant-garde} for them. But the work must have sparked Debussy’s curiosity, as it is said that the elder composer asked Ravel to lend him the manuscript of the work.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Deborah Priest, \textit{Louis Laloy on Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky} (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 1999) 56.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} However, there is no known correspondence between the two composers on this account.
Viñes was a witness to the amicable relationship and association Debussy and Ravel had with one another during this time. According to his diary in 1901, Viñes recounts that on November 30, he came to Debussy’s home and found that Ravel was also there, and they enjoyed Viñes’ performance of Debussy’s Pour le piano.

Ravel’s enthusiasm for Debussy’s music can also be seen as traces of Debussy’s influence on many of his earlier compositions such as his String Quartet (1903), song-cycle Schéhérazade (1903), and the conception of his Miroirs (1906). Parallels with Debussy’s compositional style can be seen in these compositions, which provoked many to label Ravel as Debussy’s imitator.

Ravel composed the first movement of the String Quartet in 1903, and submitted it for the composition graduation requirement of the Paris Conservatory, but it was utterly rejected by his professors, resulting in his expulsion from the Conservatory. He completed the remaining movements of the Quartet, and gave its premier on March 5, 1904. However, upon hearing the premier, Pierre Lalo, one of Debussy’s great supporters and music critic for Le Temps wrote “in its harmonies and successions of chords, in its sonority and form, in all the elements which it contains and in all the sensations which it evokes, it offers an incredible resemblance with the music of M. Debussy.”

Indeed the modal quality and the use of a cyclic form suggest Debussy’s influence on Ravel’s quartet. There are thematic similarities in the first movement with the use of seconds and descending fourths, such as the secondary theme from Debussy’s quartet and the primary theme from Ravel’s quartet. (Example 2.1)

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Example 2.1:

Debussy *String Quartet* First movement Secondary Theme

Ravel *String Quartet* First movement Primary Theme

The most striking similarities between the two String Quartets are in the second movement. Similarity in approach can already be seen in the tempo marking. Debussy notes *Assez vif et bien rythmé*, while Ravel indicates in a similar manner, *Assez vif – Très rythmé*. They are both written in 6/8 time, and what is more, they both feature continuous pizzicatos. (Example 2.2)

Example 2.2:

Debussy *String Quartet* Second movement mm.9-12
When Debussy’s quartet was first premiered in 1893 for a particular group of the musical elite of Paris, this pizzicato effect disturbed and shocked the audience with its novelty. However, the quartet proved successful after subsequent performances for the ordinary public which was also the period after the opening of Pêle-Mêle and received rave reviews. As Ravel was Debussy’s enthusiastic supporter during this time, it is understandable that he would have been highly influenced by Debussy’s quartet that was being performed during the same period.

The second movement shows similarity also in the fact that the pizzicato sections contrast with a second lyrical theme, accompanied by rapid sixteenth-notes. (Example 2.3)
Example 2.3:

Debussy String Quartet Second movement mm.56-59

Ravel String Quartet Second movement mm.13-16

Thus, Ravel’s quartet was criticized for imitating Debussy, and not well-received even as a piece of composition by his conservatory professors. However, it seems that Debussy’s opinion on Ravel’s String Quartet was quite different, and it is commonly known that he supported Ravel in saying “In the name of the gods of music,
and in mine, do not touch a single note of what you have written in your Quartet.”

The same year, Ravel composed *Schéhérazade*, a musical setting on three poems by a fellow *Apache* member, Tristan Klingsor. It was premiered at the *Société Nationale* on May 27, 1899. This composition was also accused of imitating Debussy’s style, as Lalo again attacked Ravel in a review of *Le Temps* on June 13: “The harmonic workmanship is extremely curious, excessively, no doubt: here M. Ravel is obviously undergoing the dangerous influence of a musician whom one should esteem but not imitate, M. Claude Debussy.”

To this, however, Ravel openly admitted that these three poems for voice and orchestra obviously display “Debussy’s spiritual influence.” Roland Manuel observes: “Apart from the personal idiom of the orchestral writing, the style of this evocation, the quality of its harmonies, and, above all, the charm of the declamation, convince me that Ravel was never closer to Debussy than at the beginning of this imaginary voyage.”

Ravel was not afraid to admit that at times, he had borrowed from other composers. He would make remarks of his own compositions verifying the inspiration: “this passage is pure Saint-Saëns,” or “this harmony was used by Chopin.” Ravel was convinced that in order to master one’s craft as a composer, one should learn by imitating good models, similar to the way painters learned their craft. To him, Debussy was his inspiration for many of his earlier works.

Debussy’s ideas and thoughts were transmitted to and inspired the young Ravel,

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20 Ibid., 37.
not only through his music, but also through their mutual friend Viñes. One evening at an *Apaches* meeting, Viñes who just arrived from a visit to Debussy’s home relayed what he had just heard: Debussy had told him that he hoped to compose music with a form so free as to seem like an improvisation; and to write works which gave the impression of being taken straight out of a sketch book.\textsuperscript{22}

This remark sparked enthusiasm in Ravel who longed to compose something different, and said “I should like to do something to help me shake off *Jeux d’eau.*” Soon after, he presented to his *Apaches* friends, his new composition, *Oiseaux tristes,* the second movement of *Miroirs.* Ravel explains:

“The *Miroirs* are a collection of piano-pieces that mark a change in my harmonic development that is so profound that they have put many musicians out of countenance who up to that point have been the most familiar with my style...... Chronologically the first of these pieces – and the most typical of them all – is, I think the second of the group: *Oiseaux Tristes.* [In it I evoke] birds lost in the torpor of a somber forest during the most torrid hours of summertime.”\textsuperscript{23}

*Oiseaux Tristes*, which was inspired by the birds of the forest in Fontainbleau, and the four other pieces that comprise *Miroirs* (1906) display a completely new style in Ravel’s compositional writing. In 1905, after giving up on his numerous attempts at winning the *Prix de Rome* competition, Ravel was free from the scholarly obligations to compose within certain constrictions, and he created this set of pieces inspired by some sort of external image or impression “mirrored” in sound. Departure towards more daring harmony and a wider range of modulation can be seen in the *Miroirs* as well as loosening of the classic formal structure that he was accustomed to follow. His rhythmic

\textsuperscript{22} Manuel, *Maurice Ravel,* 41.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
figures display more freedom, and he makes use of interruptive short motivic gestures as well as ostinato figures, which are techniques highly characteristic of Debussy.

Measures 51-54 of *Noctuelles* (first movement) (Example 2.4) shows an example of short motivic fragments and abrupt stops; a feature not seen before in Ravel's music, but often found in the more evocative music of Debussy such as *Ondine*, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

**Example 2.4:** Ravel *Noctuelles* mm.51-56

Highly frequent change in meter can also be seen, indicating the freedom of rhythmic pulse. The use of ostinato, pedal tone, wider ranges, and layering, which are characteristic stamps of Debussy's style are echoed in *La Vallée des cloches* (fifth movement).

Ravel's sixteenth-note ostinato above ringing quarter and eighth notes in the opening of *La Vallée des cloches* is reminiscent of Debussy's *D'un cahier d'esquisses*
(Example 2.5), and his use of wide range chordal writing as well as layering in mm.12-19 shows distinctive features of Debussy’s music seen in *La Cathédral engloutie* from *Préludes Book I*. (Example 2.6)

**Example 2.5:**

Ravel *La Vallée des cloches* mm.3-7
Debussy ...D’un cahier d’esquisses mm.25-26

Example 2.6:

Ravel La Vallée des cloches mm.12-19
In this way, it is apparent that both Debussy and Ravel had a mutual respect for each other, and they are known to have remained on good terms for a number of years, although never intimate friends. Unfortunately, the two composers were eventually made to be estranged as a result of disputes between their respective supporters and music critics who continuously waged on the merits of one composer against the other.

The critic most responsible for their rupture was Pierre Lalo, who ceaselessly criticized Ravel as an imitator of Debussy, and published an article entitled “Ravel et le Debussysme” in Le Temps of March 19, 1907. For the following 3 years, the files of Le Temps are full of references concerning Debussy’s influence and the imitators of Debussy which he referred to as les Debussystes.

Louis Laloy, a mutual friend of Debussy and Ravel, wrote in La Musique Retrouvée:

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24 Pierre Lalo (1866-1943) was the son of composer Edouard Lalo, and music critic for Le Temps.
25 Louis Laloy (1874-1944) was a critic, musicologist, and also editor of the Mercure Musical. In 1914 he became secretary-general of the Opéra. Laloy was Debussy's first biographer.
"He [Ravel] knew and sincerely admired Debussy.... I did everything in my power to prevent a break between them, but too many stupid meddlers seemed to take pleasure in making it inevitable, by sacrificing, for example, Debussy’s Quartet on the altar of Ravel’s, or by raising absurd questions about the priority of the Habanera and the second of the Estampes. The two composers then stopped visiting each other; and as their respect for each other was entirely mutual, I can vouch for the fact that they both regretted the rupture."  

Controversy began when Debussy, the elder composer published La Soirée dans Grenade (second piece of Estampes) in 1903, which highly resembles the Habanera movement of Ravel’s Site auriculaires which was composed and premiered five years earlier. While it may seem natural that the younger Ravel would show influences of Debussy’s compositional style, what was unexpected and caused a great deal of controversy was the apparent influence Ravel had on Debussy.

Ravel was born in the Basque-country (south-west of France on the Spanish border) and had a close personal affinity to Spanish music. Although Ravel’s family moved to Paris when he was very young, Ravel’s mother who was of Basque heritage, always sang Basque and Spanish folk songs to her son. The well-known Spanish composer Manuel de Falla stated: “Ravel saw Spain through the eyes of his mother, who has often delighted me with her youthful reminiscences of the tortulias of Madrid.” Basque and Spanish influences are one of Ravel’s unique characteristics, which are manifested in many of his compositions including Alborada del gracioso from Miroirs, the orchestral Rapsodie espagnole (1907-08), the opera l’Heure espagnole (1907-09), and the Piano Trio (1914).

26 Manuel, Maurice Ravel, 35-36.
27 Tortulias were a collection of Spanish songs, of which the habanera seems then to have been the most popular.
28 Frank Onnen, Maurice Ravel (Stockholm: Continental books Co., 1947) 10.
On the other hand, although Debussy showed deep interest in Spanish music as can be seen by his many Spanish-related compositions such as *Ibéria* (1906-11), *La Sérénade interrompue* from his *Préludes Book I* (1909-10), and *La Puerta del Vino* from his *Préludes Book II* (1910-13), he had never been to Spain. Manuel de Falla, who was also a good friend of Debussy's, made the following statement after hearing *Ibéria*:

"[Debussy wrote Spanish music] without knowing intimately Spanish territory; though he was acquainted with Spain through books, through pictures, through songs and dances sung and danced by genuine Spaniards.... Permeated as he was by the musical language of Spain, Debussy created spontaneously, I might even say unconsciously, such Spanish music as might be envied him — who did not really know Spain — by many others who knew her only too well. Once only did he cross the frontier, in order to spend a few hours at San Sebastian and to see a bullfight."²⁹

Ravel agreed and supported de Falla's views on Debussy and Spanish music, and wrote enthusiastically to Debussy about *Ibéria*'s "novel, delicate harmonic beauty [and] its profound musical sensitivity."³⁰

However, the public and critics perceived that as a composer of Basque/Spanish heritage, Ravel's innate ability and technique in expressing Spanish elements in his *Habanera* must have initiated Debussy's interest in composing Spanish-inspired pieces, which gave rise to controversy and accusations of plagiarism.

A close examination of the two pieces does display similarities. Debussy notes on the score of *La Soirée dans Grenade*, "Mouvement de Habanera," which indicates the character of the piece to be in the same Habanera dance as Ravel's composition.

Both compositions are written in the key of three sharps, with a continuous

³⁰ Ibid.
rhythmic “pedal tone” on C-sharp in the opening (Example 2.7)

Example 2.7:

Ravel *Habanera* mm.1-4

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Debussy *La Soirée dans Grenade* mm.5-9

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This pedal tone contributes to the suspended quality of the Habanera in both pieces, serving as a backdrop upon which the melodies offer a free improvisatory song. Later in 1907, Ravel incorporated the *Habanera* as the third movement of his *Rapsodie espagnole*, but “in order to establish the authenticity of a particular harmonic device, a
persistent pedal figure, which he had originated\textsuperscript{31} he was obligated to note on the score, that the *Habanera* had been composed twelve years earlier in 1897, earlier than any of Debussy's Spanish-influenced compositions. Thus Ravel was ardent in claiming authenticity of this Habanera pedal-tone figure and style.

Similarities can also be found in the melodies of the two compositions. The main theme in Ravel's piece and Debussy's lyrical theme are strikingly similar, with a triplet rising figure followed by a duple beat. (Example 2.8)

**Example 2.8:**

Ravel *Habanera* Theme 1

\[\text{\includegraphics{music1.png}}\]

Debussy *La Soirée dans Grenade* Theme 2

\[\text{\includegraphics{music2.png}}\]

Both compositions also end in an almost identical way, with the clear tonality of F-sharp major, due to the added sharp on the A. In addition, the persistent rhythmic pedal tone on C-sharp is also present in both compositions. (Example 2.9)

\textsuperscript{31} This is according to Léon Vallas, one of Debussy's first biographers.
As shown, Debussy’s composition displays very similar characteristics with Ravel’s composition, leaving no doubt that he was influenced by Ravel’s work.

Another incident that fueled the rivalry between the two composers was the successful premier and publication of Ravel’s Jeux d’eau in 1901 which marked a revolutionary turning point in the writing of piano music, and highly stimulated his contemporaries and critics. Ravel first played Jeux d’eau at one of the meetings of the
Apaches, where Léon-Paul Fargue recalls: "There was a strange fire, a whole panoply of subtleties and vibrations which none of us could previously have imagined." 32

Inspired by Franz Liszt's Jeux d'eau à la villa d'Este, Ravel's Jeux d'eau demands nothing less than virtuoso technique. What was innovative in Ravel's approach was the sensitivity in bringing out the overtones the piano produces - a new effect and treatment of the piano never seen before. His awareness of the piano, which is fundamentally a percussion instrument, as an instrument of illusion that could create new sonorities through the use of pedals and particular placement of the accompaniment figures and bass notes in relation to the melody, marked the beginning of a new pianistic style.

Ricardo Viñes had told Hélène Jourdan-Morhange that "Ravel recommended the use of the pedal in high passages to produce instead of clear notes, the vague impression of vibrations in the air." 33

These "high passages" consist of flowing arpeggiated figures above a melodic line, contrary to the conventional way in which the nineteenth-century composers placed the melody in the higher register, and arpeggiated accompaniment in the lower register. By placing the accompaniment and rapid moving notes in a higher register, with the addition of the pedal, Ravel created an effect of haziness, tone color, and blurred vibrations of the overtones, which was immediately labeled and considered a new "impressionistic" approach, and at the same time appealed to many of Ravel's contemporaries including Debussy.

Paul Roberts describes the physics of overtone production: "One of the great

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33 Perlemuter, Ravel according to Ravel, 6.
secrets of the piano is its ability to amplify harmonics, the natural impurities of tone (overtones) sounding at the edge of our aural awareness which give to a note or chord its particular character. . . . (By loudly striking and holding down a low C on the piano), the lower harmonics, with careful listening, can be heard distinctly while the upper ones become progressively fainter.”

Figure 2.1: The Overtone Series

With the use of the sustaining pedal and *una corda*, this effect is amplified, bringing forth different qualities of tone color and texture to the music. When Ravel made corrections on his manuscripts, they consisted mainly of reducing the chords in the left hand so that the proportion of overtones to notes actually sounded is increased.

Ravel was not aware of the greatness of his innovation and influence on his contemporaries, until Debussy’s *Estampes* (1903) and *Images I* (1905) were published. Concerning these recent piano compositions by Debussy, Pierre Lalo asserted that following Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt, Debussy had “created a new manner of writing for the keyboard, a special style of particular virtuosity.” In spite of his modest and reserved personality, Ravel felt the need to speak up and defend the authenticity of the

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new pianistic writing. In a letter to Lalo on February 5, 1906, he wrote:

“I would like to call your impartial attention to the following point. You dwell upon a rather special type of writing for the piano, whose invention you ascribe to Debussy. *Jeux d’eau* appeared at the beginning of 1902, however, when there were only Debussy’s three pieces *Pour le piano*, for which, I do not need to tell you, I have the warmest admiration, but which, from a purely pianistic point of view, did not contain anything new. I hope you will excuse this legitimate claim.”

Close examination of Debussy’s *Pagodes* from *Estampes*, and *Reflects dans l’Eau* from *Images I*, do show similarities with the new pianistic style that actually Ravel had created with *Jeux d’Eau*. In the early 1900’s, Debussy’s piano compositions took a new direction, beginning with *Estampes* (1903), which was Debussy’s first solo piano output since the emergence of Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau*.

Comparison of the Codas between Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau*, Debussy’s *Pagodes*, and *Reflects dans l’eau* illustrates the marked similarity and influence. (Example 2.10)

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Example 2.10:
Ravel Jeux d’eau mm.80-81

Debussy Pagodes mm.80-81
These incidents played a great role in heightening the tension between the two composers, where they eventually ceased to speak to one another. In 1912, Ravel mentioned to Manuel about his relationship with Debussy: “It’s probably better for us, after all, to be on frigid terms for illogical reasons.” However, Ravel remained respectful and continued to show great admiration for Debussy and his music. Ravel had also planned to write a book explaining his relationship with Debussy, which unfortunately never came about, but his dedication to Debussy’s music can be seen by his 1903 orchestration of Debussy’s Sarabande, and his two-piano transcriptions of Debussy’s Nocturnes and L’Après-midi d’un faune, in 1909 and 1919 respectively. In addition, in 1923, he orchestrated Debussy’s early piano piece Tarantelle styrienne. On the contrary, although Debussy is known to have highly esteemed Ravel, his letters and published opinions often displayed bitterness and irony toward the younger composer.

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36 Manuel, Maurice Ravel, 36.
In 1907, Ravel’s *Histoires Naturelles* was premiered, and the performance of this song-cycle, which introduced a new kind of musical declamation, triggered a scandal among the audience and critics. However, Ravel’s supporters such as Jean Marnold, M.D. Calvocoressi, and Louis Laloy greeted the new composition with enthusiasm and support. Laloy, on February 15, 1907, praised this song-cycle in *La Revue S.I.M.*, and drew comparison between the character of Ravel’s music with that of Japanese landscapes and declared that the *Histoires Naturelles* showed the spirit of Mussorgsky’s *Nursery*. Provoked by Laloy’s comparison between Mussorgsky and Ravel, Debussy wrote a letter to Laloy on February 22:

“I have received the second number of the *S.I.M.* and am amazed to see that a man of your taste deliberately sacrifices such a pure instinctive masterpiece as *The Nursery* to the deliberate Americanism [*l’Americanisme voulu*] of the *Histoires naturelles* of Monsieur Ravel. Despite Ravel’s unquestionable skill, these songs only consist of music that we must call unwarranted.”

He also added in his letter to Laloy on March 8:

“As for Ravel, I recognize the marks of your usual ingenuity…. Even if I don’t feel he’s quite found ‘his way’, he’ll be able to thank you for pointing one out to him….

…I agree with you Ravel is extraordinarily gifted, but what annoys me is the attitude he adopts of being a ‘conjuror’, or rather a Fakir casting spells and making flowers burst out of chairs…. The trouble is, a conjuring trick always has to have a build-up and after you’ve seen it once you’re no longer astonished.

For the moment I’m happy people find it entertaining. Given the way people torment and annoy music, she might be glad to hear the excuse that her only function is to bring a smile to the lips!”

However, Debussy must have had mixed feelings towards Ravel and his music,

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as in a letter to his publisher Durand two weeks earlier on February 25, Debussy had said: “Thank you for the Histoires naturelles. It is extremely interesting [excessivement curieux]! It’s artificial and imaginative, rather like the house of a magician. Le Cygne is all the same very lovely music.”

Thus, despite the tension and bitterness between the two composers, Debussy did retain respect for Ravel as a composer. Debussy’s American pupil George Copeland stated in his memoirs, “Claude Debussy would, not infrequently, inject into some current discussion his reaction to, or estimation of, other composers. Among his contemporaries, he was most fond of d’Indy, Chausson and Ravel, although he thought the last of these too lush in his orchestrations.”

In 1913, the paths of the two composers were to collide once again. It was the year that a new edition of a collection of poems by the famous Symbolist poet, Stéphane Mallarmé was published. As fate would have it, both Debussy and Ravel acquired a copy of this new edition, and decided to set Mallarmé’s poems to music, with absolutely no knowledge that the other composer was attempting the same project. What is more, the two poems Ravel had chosen, Soupir and Placet Futile were the exact same poems that Debussy had chosen.

While Debussy remained in Paris to work on his project, Ravel was in Switzerland with Stravinsky in a joint-production of Mussorgsky’s Khovantchina. It was here, in Clarens on Lake Geneva that Stravinsky relayed to Ravel, his enthusiasm for Arnold Schoenberg’s latest work, Pierrot Lunaire, which he just heard in Berlin in 1912.

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39 Lesure and Nichols, ed., Debussy Letters, 177.
40 George Copeland (1882-1971) was an American pianist born in Boston, who traveled to France in 1911 and took private piano lessons with Debussy.
Stravinsky, inspired by Schoenberg’s work, was working on his Three Japanese Lyrics, which consisted of almost identical instrumentation as Schoenberg’s Pierrot Lunaire. Inspired by Stravinsky’s description of Schoenberg’s work as well as the Three Japanese Lyrics, Ravel set out to compose his Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé, which again, displays similar instrumentation as Pierrot Lunaire. Ravel initially chose only two poems to set to music, but upon returning to Paris in August, he was stunned to learn that Debussy had also set the two exact poems to music, thus felt obligated to add a third different poem to the set.

Upon learning that Ravel had also set the same Mallarmé poems to music at the same time, Debussy wrote in anger to his publisher Durand on August 8, 1913: “I don’t find the story of the Mallarmé-Ravel family amusing. What’s more, is it not strange that Ravel should have chosen the same poems as me? As a phenomenon of auto-suggestion ought it to be communicated to the Academy of Medicine?"

Although Debussy’s version of Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé was published first, it was Ravel who completed the work first, and obtained permission and rights from Mallarmé’s son-in-law, Dr. Edmond Bonniot, to use Mallarmé’s two poems, Soupir and Placet Futile. A short time after Ravel acquired permission, Dr. Bonniot was approached by Debussy through his publisher Durand with a similar request, but he refused publication of Soupir and Placet Futile, as he had already given the rights to Ravel. He only granted publication of Debussy’s third song, Eventail. Ravel wrote to Roland Manuel: “You will soon witness a Debussy-Ravel match. The other day, our publisher sent me a desperate letter, because Bonniot had refused the authorization for Soupir and Placet Futile which Debussy had just set to music. I have settled
everything."⁴² Ravel eventually secured the publication of Debussy's songs by begging Dr. Bonniot to grant Durand the required authorization.

This incident was most likely the last time paths crossed between the two composers. Debussy continued to compose pieces for the piano, notably his *Twelve Etudes* (1916), and Ravel left to serve the military, and upon his return to France, completed his *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1918), in which each of the six movements is dedicated to a comrade who had died in the war. Debussy died that same year in 1918, and curiously, after the death of Debussy, Ravel ceased to compose any piano solo music, and did not write for the solo piano again until 1931 and 1932, when he composed the two Concertos for Piano. His Duo for Violin and Cello, written in 1922 is dedicated “....à la mémoire de Claude Debussy.”

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CHAPTER 3

Contrasting Debussy and Ravel – Their Individual Compositional Styles

It is apparent that Debussy and Ravel highly influenced one another, and it is almost impossible to speak of one composer without mentioning the other. The fact that they both developed their compositional styles in the same cultural environment during the same epoch, adds to their common perceptions about and approach to music. Their similar backgrounds and influences on one another reinforce the false notion that they show very similar styles in their compositions.

This chapter will illustrate how they in fact show very distinct and unique styles and techniques in their compositions. Although it is evident that they influenced each other, a closer look at their compositions reveals each composer’s personal stamp on their works. In demonstrating their specific characteristics, a few selected piano works will be highlighted. Focus will be placed on piano works that provoked controversy mentioned in the previous chapter, as these pieces were considered “similar” and plagiaristic. Ravel’s Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn and Debussy’s Hommage à Haydn will also be compared and contrasted, as these works were composed the same year, and manifest each composer’s different approach and technique to the same task – composing a piece based on the same exact theme. Other works which illustrate typical compositional traits of each composer will also be discussed. Works that will be highlighted are listed below:
**Ravel**

*Habanera* (1897)  
(1903)  
*Jeux d’eau* (1901)

**Debussy**

*La Soirée dans Grenade* from *Estampes*  
*Pagodes* from *Estampes* (1903)  
*Reflets dans l’eau* from *Images Book II* (1905)  
*Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn* (1909)  
*Hommage à Haydn* (1909)  
*Oiseaux Triste* from *Miroirs* (1906)  
*Voiles* from *Préludes Book I* (1910)

**Form and Structure**

As mentioned earlier, Ravel was known to be a highly meticulous craftsman and thus respected formal structure in his compositions. In addition to his admiration for Mozart’s clarity and perfection, this trait can be a reflection of his early conservatory training with André Gédalge whose teaching emphasized clarity, logic, and melody as well. Ravel had great admiration for Gédalge and his teaching, and stated: “I owe the most valuable elements of my technique to André Gédalge,” and in his homage to his former teacher, Ravel wrote: “You may not understand everything that Gédalge meant to me: he taught me to realize the possibilities and structural attempts which may be seen in my earliest works.”

It is also well known that Debussy sought to compose music which was not confined to a particular form or structure. As early as his days in Rome, Debussy conveyed his musical ideals through letters to Eugène Vasnier:

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44 Ibid., 35.  
45 Eugène Vasnier was the husband of Marie-Blanche Vasnier, whom Debussy had met in 1881 in the singing class of Madame Moreau-Sainti, for which he acted as accompanist. He dedicated more than twenty songs to madame Vasnier between 1881 and 1884.
“I don’t think I’ll ever be able to cast my music in a rigid mould. I hasten to add
I’m not talking about musical form, merely from the literary point of view. I would
always rather deal with something where the passage of events is to some extent
subordinated to a thorough and extended portrayal of human feelings. That way, I think,
music can become more personal, more true to life; you can refine your means of
expression.”46

In another letter he states: “Generally speaking, I feel more and more that music,
by its very essence, is not something that can flow inside a rigorous, traditional form. It
consists of colours and of rhythmicized time....”47 Debussy’s ideals for “a form so free
as to seem like an improvisation.” is also confirmed by Ricardo Viñes when he
recounted what he had heard at Debussy’s home at one of the Apaches meetings. For
Debussy, his musical expression reigned superior, and structure was to conform to the
musical expression.

Ravel’s contradiction and response to Debussy’s approach is reflected in an
interview for The Morning Post in 1922. Ravel stated that he “followed Debussy in the
ideal of economy of material, but he was at odds with him in his respect for forms, as
Debussy had shown negligence in regards to form.”48 He also stated that he was in fact
anti-Debussyist, and that through the influence of Poe, he had decided “to abandon the
vagueness and formlessness of the early French impressionists in favor of a return to
classic standards.”49

Ravel’s preoccupation with structural discipline can be reflected in the fact that
he composed more pieces in dance forms (pavane, menuet, valse, bolero, etc.) than

46 Lesure and Nichols, Debussy Letters, 8.
47 Ibid., 184.
48 Orenstein, A Ravel Reader, 421.
49 Ibid., 21.
Debussy did. A majority of Ravel’s compositions for piano are in dance form: _Minuet Antique, Pavane pour une infante défunte, Mouvement de Menuet_ from _Sonatine, Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn, Forlane, Rigaudon_, and _Menuet_ from _Le tombeau de Couperin._

The structured Ternary Form of the dance is one of Ravel’s most preferred forms. Even in his _Miroirs_, which was conceived as “improvisatory” pieces evoking certain images, an approach inspired by Debussy, most of the pieces display an ABA Ternary Form. Most of his piano compositions outline this Ternary Form, as well as others that suggest Sonata Form, such as _Jeux d’eau_ and _Sonatine_, while others, such as _La Vallée des cloches_ shows an arch form (ABCBA).

Debussy’s compositions on the other hand are often through composed. Although in many of his piano works, he applies the Ternary Form, such as in _Pagodes_, most of his works show a series of contrasting sections with new themes, resulting in multi-sectional works. Debussy does not use formal structure to unify his compositions. Instead, he uses his recurring themes and short motivic gestures as a device in unifying his pieces. In Debussy’s music, his use of themes and motives dominates the structure.

These features are well illustrated in a comparison between Ravel’s formal structure of _Habanera_ and Debussy’s _La Soirée dans Grenade_. Ravel’s _Habanera_ offers a clear, concise, structural form: a simple Binary Form. Contrary to this, the structure of _La Soirée dans Grenade_ does not follow any traditional form. It is through composed with recurring themes and sections. It consists of approximately nine sections of equal length, and the composition is unified with the recurrences of motives and themes.

Ravel’s _Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn_ and Debussy’s _Hommage à Haydn_ shows
this difference as well. Ravel’s piece is a traditional ABA Ternary Form, typical of a
dance piece. In contrast, Debussy’s piece shows multiple sections which highly contrast
in character, linked together with the main thematic material. Again, his composition
consists of three sections equal in length plus a Coda.

In this way, Ravel and Debussy show distinct characteristics concerning their
formal structure. Ravel indicates a need for clear formal structure in his music, whereas
for Debussy, form is of secondary importance, and his thematic and motivic elements are
his primary concern.

**Themes and Melodies**

One of the most striking differences between the two composers is their
treatment of themes. The most marked difference in their approach is that Ravel places
great importance in the clarity of his themes, and they are usually distinctly placed and
recognizable, whereas Debussy utilizes his themes to serve various functions and at
times transforms their character or uses only segments of the themes. Ravel prefers to
conserve the dominance and clarity of his themes, and when themes are restated, they
are often restated as they were presented in the beginning and when developed, his
themes recur with different accompanimental figures, but always clearly marked and
remain the dominant feature in the music.

His particularity in the presentation of a clear melody again stems from his high
regard for Mozart, which is confirmed in an article from an interview with the composer
for *The Morning Post*: “in his view of melody, the melodic line, as distinct from the
thème développé,\textsuperscript{50} he looked upon himself as a Mozartian.\textsuperscript{51} Ravel’s composition professor, Gédalge also played an important role in molding Ravel’s approach to melody. Gédalge taught his pupils that melody is the essence of music, and that “Whatever sauce you put around the melody is a matter of taste. What is important is the melodic line, and this doesn’t vary.”\textsuperscript{52}

Debussy, on the other hand, transforms his themes into accompanimental figures, bass lines, ornamental figures, transitional figures, and also layers and combines fragments of them. Thus, Debussy’s themes show a more motivic nature. Debussy also tends to introduce multiple, contrasting, and concise motivic gestures in addition to his main themes, which occur and recur sporadically throughout his compositions, whereas Ravel usually introduces no more than two main themes which are developed. In contrasting Ravel’s Habanera and Debussy’s La Soirée dans Grenade, we can already see that whereas Ravel uses only two main themes, Debussy presents six different motives or themes, resulting in the highly sectional aspect of his writing.

Ravel prefers themes which tend to be longer and melodic and often presented in a clear single line, whereas Debussy’s themes constitute shorter gestures. In some cases, melody in Debussy’s music is simply non-existent. Repetitious gestures, change in harmony, sonority, and texture replace the melody as can be seen in Ce qu’a vu le vent d’Ouest and Feux d’artifice. (Example 3.1)

\textsuperscript{50} The developed theme, that is, a theme which contains the germ of developmental unfolding.
\textsuperscript{51} Orenstein, \textit{A Ravel Reader}, 421.
\textsuperscript{52} Orenstein, \textit{Ravel: Man and Musician}, 131.
A comparison of Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau* and Debussy’s *Pagodes* will illustrate this contrast in thematic treatment. Although these pieces sparked controversy as Debussy’s piece was considered to be influenced by Ravel’s new pianistic technique, they show
very distinct treatment of themes.

In Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau*, he introduces two main themes, and then a third theme for the development section. The first main theme or Primary Theme is presented in the beginning as an arpeggiated figure above left hand intervals. The Secondary Theme is more linear and melodic, and is presented in the left hand with an accompaniment of shimmering seconds in triplets in the right hand. The third theme begins the development section in measure 38 and is restated continuously throughout the development section in various keys, increasing in motion, and building to the climactic point. (Example 3.2)

**Example 3.2: Ravel *Jeux d’eau* Themes**

Theme 1

![Musical notation](image)
Theme 2

Development Theme mm.38

The Primary Theme is restated four times in the opening section, transposed (mm.3, 5) or inverted (mm.9), but always as a clear melodic line. It is restated again in the recapitulation (mm.62) above a bass pedal tone, but again, it is presented in its original form, and clearly as the dominating melodic line. (Example 3.3)
Example 3.3: Recurrences of Theme 1

Ravel *Jeux d’eau* mm.5

Ravel *Jeux d’eau* mm.9 - inverted

Ravel *Jeux d’eau* mm.62 - Recapitulation

Tempo I
The Secondary Theme displays more variety in its recurrence. However, the variety highly depends on the different accompanimental figures, and again, the theme is clearly illustrated as the main melody. The varying accompanimental figures include waves of arpeggios (mm.21), two-note groupings (mm.29), and embedding of the theme within thick chords of interlocking hands (mm.31). (Example 3.4)

Example 3.4: Recurrences of Theme 2

Ravel *Jeux d'eau* mm.21

![Musical notation for Ravel *Jeux d'eau* mm.21]

Ravel *Jeux d'eau* mm.29

![Musical notation for Ravel *Jeux d'eau* mm.29]
Subsequent recurrences take the role of developing and modulating but the theme consistently remains the main focus and melodic line as it is taken through various harmonies and keys. Measure 51 is the beginning of the long developmental section. (Example 3.5)

**Example 3.5:** Ravel *Jeux d’eau* mm.51

After a developmental section, the Secondary Theme returns in measure 73 in a slower pace with a rallentando, functioning as the vehicle to restrain the momentum it had built in the previous section. The theme is restated again in a more lyrical character and Ravel notes *Lento* as the Secondary Theme comes to a halt in preparation for the Coda. (Example 3.6)
Example 3.6: Ravel *Jeux d’eau* mm.75

For the Coda, Ravel chose the Secondary Theme as the melody to be embellished by the sweeping arpeggiated figures above; an effect that inspired many of his contemporaries. (Example 3.7)

Example 3.7: Ravel *Jeux d’eau* mm.78

As the examples illustrate, Ravel’s themes remain the predominant melodic line, restated clearly in almost unchanged form. His clarity of his melodic lines and themes highly contrast with Debussy’s various transformations of his themes. A close look at Debussy’s thematic treatment in *Pagodes* shows his very different approach.

In *Pagodes*, Debussy presents five different themes, a contrast to Ravel’s use of only two main themes. Theme 1 consists of a pentatonic figure beginning with an
interval of the fourth, followed by a step. Theme 2 is a linear descending and ascending line in minor mode. Theme 3 is another pentatonic theme beginning with a descending third, followed by a lower neighbor in eighth notes. Theme 4 is a linear theme similar to Theme 2, but built on a whole-tone scale with different rhythm. What is labeled Theme 5 is actually derived from Theme 3. It utilizes the same intervals as Theme 3 in the beginning, but with different rhythm. (Example 3.8)

Example 3.8: Debussy *Pagodes* Themes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5

Theme 1

Theme 2

Theme 3

Theme 4
Contrary to Ravel’s clear statement of his themes, Debussy’s themes are often presented within thick layers of sonority. The themes are also frequently layered on top of one another, and their functions vary.

Derivations of Theme 1 can be seen in many occurrences together with other themes. The introduction of theme 2 is embedded within multiple layerings, with Theme 1 in the upper voice, and pedal tone on open fifths as well as a persistent accompaniment in thirds. (Example 3.9) The introduction of Theme 2 is subtle and vague, highly contrasting to Ravel’s clear introduction of his themes.

**Example 3.9:** Debussy *Pagodes* mm. 7-8

Theme 1 is also seen transformed into a triplet accompanimental figure above the introduction of Theme 3. (Example 3.10) Again, the texture is three-layers with the
profound pedal tone on G-sharp, Theme 3 introduced in the mid range, and a derivation of Theme 1 as an accompaniment above.

**Example 3.10**: Debussy *Pagodes* mm.11-14

Theme 1 is also used as transitional material. In the transition that begins in measure 23, Theme 1 is again transformed into a triplet figure in counterpoint, creating both a harmonic as well as rhythmic polyphony. (Example 3.11)

**Example 3.11**: Debussy *Pagodes* mm.23-24

This is followed by another passage where Theme 1 is transformed into triplets of fourth intervals, serving as an accompaniment. The melody below foreshadows the
introduction of Theme 5, with its repeated eighth notes and whole step down. (Example 3.12)

**Example 3.12:** Debussy *Pagodes* mm.27-28

Revenez au 1er Tempo

Theme 1 also occurs as an ostinato figure for the introduction of Theme 5 in measure 37. (Example 3.13)

**Example 3.13:** Debussy *Pagodes* mm.37-39

In this way, Theme 1 is highly transformed, layered, and utilized in various functions throughout the piece, a characteristic not seen in the thematic treatment of Ravel. Although the other themes in *Pagodes* do not go through as abundant transformations as Theme 1 does, they recur nonetheless in different voices and
character. Theme 3 recurs in measure 19 as a ringing and dominant melody in the upper voice, contrary to its introduction, where it was introduced within a thick texture of multiple themes and rhythmic polyphony. (Example 3.14)

**Example 3.14:** Debussy *Pagodes* mm.19-20

![Animez un peu](image)

Theme 5 is restated in measure 41, in a more dynamic character, consisting of firm chords in *ff*, contrasting with its introduction as a soft sweeping line layered under Theme 1. (Example 3.15)

**Example 3.15:** Debussy *Pagodes* mm.41-42

![Theme 5](image)

Theme 4 as a theme itself is not transformed as significantly, but recurs with different pedal tones and ostinato figures that accompany it. It recurs in measure 46, with
an upper neighbor ostinato figure in the upper voice as well as with trills starting measure 50. (Example 3.16)

**Example 3.16:**

*Debussy Pagodes mm.46-47*

![Music notation](image)

*Debussy Pagodes mm. 50-51*

![Music notation](image)

Also note that each recurrence of Theme 4 brings along with it, the persistent pedal tone in seconds (f-sharp and g-sharp), which is actually derived from the opening measures of the piece where Theme 1 is introduced. (Example 3.17)
Example 3.17: Debussy *Pagodes* mm.1-4

![Musical notation](image)

The Coda is worth noting, as it also shows more variety than Ravel’s Coda. Texturally, Debussy’s Coda displays a very high resemblance to Ravel’s Coda as seen in Chapter 2 (see Example 2.10). However, contrary to Ravel’s Coda, which utilizes but one theme (his Secondary theme), Debussy recapitulates three different themes: Themes 1, 2, and 5. The themes are presented almost as a summary or reminiscence of the piece.

In this way, Debussy displays a wider range of use for his themes by deriving from them, transforming them, and using them as various functions, as well as layering them upon one another. Ravel opts to preserve his themes as the dominating melodic line, clearly stated and restated.

Another interesting way to compare their difference in treatment of themes would be to study Ravel’s *Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn* and Debussy’s *Hommage à Haydn*, as these two pieces were written based on the same exact theme. These pieces were commissioned by the music journal *S.M.I.* in 1909, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Haydn’s death. The music was to be written on the composer’s name in notes based on the Renaissance “soggetto cavato” system which translates every letter in the alphabet to a musical alphabet. According to this, H-A-Y-D-N would turn out to be B-A-D-D-G in musical notes (Example 3.18) The composers were to write a piece based
on this theme. Both Debussy and Ravel participated, as well as Vincent d’Indy, Charles-Marie Widor, Reynaldo Hahn and Paul Dukas.

**Example 3.18 : H-A-Y-D-N Theme**

Given the harmonic implication of the theme (the final two notes D and G implying a $V \rightarrow I$), both Ravel and Debussy chose G major as their key. However, coincidentally, both chose to write a dance in 3/4 time: Ravel, a *menuet*, and Debussy indicates *Mouvement de Valse lente*. However, a closer look into the two compositions reveals different treatment of their themes.

Ravel’s *Menuet*, written in ABA Ternary form, immediately introduces the Haydn theme, clearly in the upper voice. (Example 3.19)

**Example 3.19: Ravel *Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn* mm. 0-4**

The B section which begins in measure 16 presents the theme in different guises: in a descending manner, backwards, and inverted. (Example 3.20)
Example 3.20: Treatment of Theme in section B

Ravel *Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn* mm. 16-18 Descending

Ravel *Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn* mm. 19-20 Backwards

Ravel *Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn* mm. 25-26 Inverted

The theme is also presented in the middle or lower voice rather than the top voice that it was introduced in section A. The clarity and simplicity of the theme is consistently preserved throughout the piece. From measures 27-34, the backward theme
is developed through various key changes until it reaches a bridge section, and returns to section A.

Debussy, contrary to Ravel’s direct use of the theme, presents the theme in various and contrasting character. *Hommage à Haydn*, written as a slow waltz, consists roughly of three sections, and each section represents the theme in different ways. Section A, which introduces the Haydn theme presents the theme in the upper voice of a slow waltz. (Example 3.21)

**Example 3.21: Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm. 7-11**

![Example 3.21: Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm. 7-11](attachment:image.png)

Section B, utilizes the Haydn theme as fleeting arpeggiated figures in the high register, which eventually becomes an accompaniment to a new theme. (Example 3.22)
Example 3.22: Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm. 23-26

The Haydn theme is also presented in bold tenuto chords, contrasting in character from the arpeggiated figures. (Example 3.23)

Example 3.23: Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm. 43-46

The theme changes character yet again in measure 53, as it is presented in light, ringing octaves in the upper register. (Example 3.24)
Example 3.24: Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm. 53-56

In section C, the character of the Haydn theme is transformed yet again, into a percussive and dynamic entity. The rhythmic complexity adds to the chaotic characteristic of this section. It begins with the theme presented in off beat rhythm against rising chromatic lines in the left hand. (Example 3.25)

Example 3.25: Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm. 61-64

It is restated in octaves again on off beats, then fragmented into groupings of four and three, thus obliterating the rhythmic pulse. Notice that in Examples 3.24 and 3.25 the Haydn Theme is slightly altered with the omission of the second “D,” resulting
in the four-note grouping of the five-note Haydn Theme. Such alterations and fragmentation of themes is common in Debussy, a feature almost never seen in Ravel's more strict and academic treatment of themes.

As momentum builds and the rhythmic pulse is destroyed, the Haydn theme is presented in consecutive chords heightening in tension and speed. (Example 3.26)

**Example 3.26: Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm. 73-74**

Animé

The section reaches to a climax as Haydn's theme is presented in bold tenuto chords, followed by an echo of the theme as a single line in the left hand beneath. (Example 3.27)

**Example 3.27: Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm. 87-90**
The Coda presents fragments of the Haydn theme in high octaves, floating above the rich chordal sonorities (Example 3.28), giving a sense of suspension after the dynamic build to the climax. The piece ends recapitulating the Haydn theme in the rapid arpeggiated form. (Example 3.29)

**Example 3.28:** Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm. 94-98

![Example 3.28](image)

**Example 3.29:** Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm. 115-118

![Example 3.29](image)

In this way, Debussy’s treatment of the Haydn Theme is more varied and complex. He displays a wide variety in his use of themes which are more thoroughly
developed than Ravel’s themes, which are presented in a more straightforward manner, unmodified, efficiently and clearly stated. Debussy takes a more motivic approach to his themes, whereas Ravel’s approach is more sequential or repetitive.

**Modes and Tonality**

Ravel and Debussy shared the frequent usage of certain tonalities such as the use of modes as can be seen in both of their String Quartets and the use of the pentatonic scale, exemplified in the third movement of Ravel’s Piano Trio as well as in Debussy’s *Pagodes*. However, each composer showed preferences to certain modes and harmonies which mirror their personal background. Ravel showed particular preferences for the Dorian (d-d’) and Phrygian (e-e’) modes, which are modes characteristic of the folk tunes Ravel grew up hearing. Phrygian mode is typical of Andalusian folk music, and the Dorian mode is typical of Basque music. These preferences are projected in his compositions such as *Habanera*, the Spanish-inspired composition, where the main theme in Andalusian character is in Phrygian mode. His *Piano Trio*, which was originally conceived as a Piano Concerto based on Basque themes and rhythms, begins with a melody in Dorian mode.

As for Debussy, although he frequently utilized modes in his composition, he had a particular preference for whole-tone scales in which leading tones do not exist, thus, emphasizing equality among all notes of the scale. Ravel on the other hand, almost never used whole-tone scales. A prime example of Debussy’s usage of whole-tone sonority can be seen in his *Voiles* from *Préludes Book I*, in which out of the sixty-four bars of the piece, fifty-eight bars are built exclusively on a whole-tone scale.
Differences in their preference for particular tonality can be seen in a comparison of themes in Debussy’s *La Soirée dans Grenade* and Ravel’s *Habanera*. Although the character and inspiration of these pieces are Spanish-Andalucian, the Secondary Theme of Debussy’s piece is based on a whole-tone scale, contrasting with Ravel’s usage of traditional Andalucian Phrygian mode. It is interesting to note these differences, as these themes were considered very similar, and led to accusations of plagiarism on Debussy’s part. (see Example 2.8 from Chapter 2)

Although sharing similar tastes for modal and pentatonic tonalities, each composer possessed their particular preferences for certain tonalities, which stem from their different backgrounds and musical aesthetics.

**Rhythm and Pulse**

Another marked difference between the two composers is their usage of time elements in their compositions. Whereas Ravel’s rhythms are often clear and conform to the basic pulse, Debussy’s rhythms are often distorted and fluctuate, and the bar lines become ambiguous. At a meeting with Ernest Guiraud, his former composition teacher, Debussy states: “Rhythms are stifling. Rhythms cannot be contained within bars. It is nonsense to speak of ‘simple’ or ‘compound’ time. There should be an interminable flow of them both without seeking to bury the rhythmic patterns.”

Debussy’s often extensive use of tied notes, fluctuating duple and triple meter and note values, dotted rhythms in combination with off-beats and ties all contribute in creating this effect. His pedal tones also frequently fall on off-beats, whereas Ravel’s

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pedal-tones, when used, often fall on the strong beat. Debussy also frequently layers different rhythms with different speeds in his many voices, another aspect of the gamelan influence, which delivers a highly complex rhythmic polyphony.

In Ravel’s *Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn* and Debussy’s *Hommage à Haydn* we could see how their approach to dance rhythm is very different in that Ravel conforms strictly to the triplet pulse, while Debussy opts to distort the pulse at times with ties, elongated notes, duple groupings against the triplet pulse.

In Ravel’s minuet, although it begins with an accented upbeat and contains numerous ties, the rhythmic pulse is clear with the strong beat usually falling on the first beat of each measure. The beats are emphasized through his notation with accents, long note values such as half-notes, and grace-notes and large chords that fall on the first beats of each measure. (Example 3.30) He also maintains this consistent triple pulse throughout the entire piece.

**Example 3.30**

![Ravel Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn mm. 2 and mm. 5](image)

On the contrary, although Debussy’s waltz begins with a clear triplet pulse, the pulse is soon distorted in the eighth measure when the melody enters on an off-beat, elongated over the bar line with a tie, which weakens the downbeat. The dotted rhythm towards the end of the phrase also contributes in obscuring the rhythm. (see Example
3.21)

Further disintegration of the rhythmic pulse begins in the B section, where the three-note theme is introduced in the mid-range on off-beats in duple time. (Example 3.31)

**Example 3.31:** Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm. 37-38

Notice how the sixteenth-note accompaniments are grouped in fours and cross over the bar line although the section is written in 3/8 time. This discrepancy adds to the contortion of the triple pulse.

The following C section completely distorts the triple pulse with the entry of the left-hand in rising duple chromaticism as well as the Haydn theme on off-beats in the right hand. Because of Debussy's usage of the Haydn theme as a four-note or five-note grouping, which does not fit into the 3/4 time structure, the bar-lines are obscured. (Example 3.32)
Example 3.32: Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm. 61-72

Peu à peu animé

![Musical notation](image)

Similar rhythmic contortion and discontinuity can be seen in many of Debussy's other compositions such as *Ondine*, where the use of fragmented contrasting short gestures obscure the underlying rhythmic pulse, the end of *La Soirée dans Grenade*, with frequent meter and character changes between 2/4 and 3/4 time (Example 3.33), and the opening of *Clair de Lune* with its numerous ties and alternating duple and triple figures in the melody line. (Example 3.34) All of these aspects in obscuring the rhythmic pulses deliver the impression of an improvisatory piece without bar lines, a style Debussy strove to achieve.
Example 3.33: Debussy *La Soirée dans Grenade* mm. 112-115

Example 3.34: Debussy *Clair de Lune* mm. 1-4

Ravel did seek to compose pieces in an “improvisatory” style, as he was stimulated by Debussy’s comment on improvisatory music without form as if taken straight out of a sketchbook, which he heard from his friend Ricardo Viñes. Ravel’s attempt at improvisatory music gave fruit to *Oiseaux Tristes*, the second movement of his *Miroirs*.

Although *Oiseaux Tristes* displays improvisatory qualities such as no strict form, the small, short gestures or bird-calls and occasional flourishes that are interspersed throughout the piece remains stable from a rhythmic point of view, with a consistent pulse that can easily be felt through the continuous slow triplets in the accompaniment. (Example 3.35)
Most of the accents and long note values such as half notes fall on down-beats, and the accompanimental figures also stress the down-beats. Although Ravel uses frequent ties that cross over the basic down-beat pulses in the accompaniment, there is always the presence of the bird-calls that accentuates the down-beat pulse. There are also no abrupt changes in pace, rhythm, or character throughout the piece as is often seen in Debussy’s music. Ravel’s music displays more of a rhythmic and characteristic consistency throughout his composition, highly contrasting with Debussy’s varied and
 contrasting rhythmic pulses between sections.

**Harmonic Pacing and Progression**

Ravel and Debussy also show very different pacing of their harmonic progressions. Ravel utilizes a more conventional approach to his harmonic progressions and pacing. Although he often utilizes innovative harmonies, his adventurous harmonic language is solidly rooted in tonality. His accompanimental figures and rapid arpeggios are often marked with moving bass lines, with clear harmonic direction. Debussy’s harmonic progressions on the other hand, proceed at an extremely slow pace. Compared to Ravel, he often uses longer note values, and even in works where he utilizes rapidly moving arpeggiated figures, they are frequently repetitions of the same harmony which remains in place and only gradually move along.

In *Ce qu’a vu le Vent d’Ouest*, Debussy offers a highly technical and animated piece. However, the first four measures consist of the same harmonic arpeggiated figure with a pedal tone on F-sharp that is extended for twenty-four measures (see Example 3.1), thus prohibiting any harmonic development despite the fact that the harmonies and rapidly moving patterns change.

This difference is well illustrated in a comparison of accompanimental figures from Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau* and Debussy’s *La Cathédral engloutie*. (Example 3.36)
Example 3.36

Ravel *Jeux d'eau* mm.21-23

![Musical notation](image)

Debussy *La Cathédrale engloutie* mm.72-76

![Musical notation](image)

In Ravel’s piece, the descending bass line is clearly marked with accents as well as eighth-notes among the rapid thirty-second notes. The harmony shifts and changes as the notes of the arpeggiated left hand figures moves in accordance to the bass note. In contrast, Debussy’s piece offers an accompaniment of continuous and unchanging open fifth sonority in the left hand, in other words an ostinato. Debussy’s accompanimental figure does not progress at all and remains on the same harmony for twelve consecutive
measures.

A comparison of the Coda from Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau* and Debussy’s *Pagodes* also reflect their difference in pace and direction of the harmonic progressions. In Ravel’s piece, the open fifth bass on A (which is the subdominant) is established in measure 80, but soon in the next measure, the bass line descends stepwise and settles onto the tonic on E in measure 82. His harmonic progression from IV to I is clear, and moves in an efficient manner. On the other hand, Debussy’s Coda begins with the bass on the tonic B, but then meanders and takes fourteen measures for the Coda to finally resolve back to the tonic B.

Comparing the openings of Ravel’s *Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn* and Debussy’s *Hommage à Haydn*, the difference in the pacing of harmonic progression is again, very clear. Ravel’s piece, within the first few phrases, modulates to the dominant. (Example 3.37)

**Example 3.37: Ravel *Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn* mm. 0-8**
Debussy’s piece on the other hand, displays a very slow harmonic progression, if any. The tonality is not clear from the beginning, and the first instance of a concrete bass is not until measure 8 on D (the dominant), where the Haydn theme enters. Debussy’s bass remains on the D for four measures, then finally to G, the tonic for the following three measures. (Example 3.38)

**Example 3.38:** Debussy *Hommage à Haydn* mm.7-14

In this way, Ravel displays a more customary harmonic progression and pacing than Debussy’s, whose harmonic changes are usually anchored by a long pedal point or ostinato figure, which are prolonged for three measures or more.

Debussy’s harmonic progressions also tend to meander and do not necessarily lead to the tonic or home key immediately. In many cases, his harmonic progressions do not resolve at all. His most common technique is parallel chords, which does not establish a tonality at all, but rather, offers a gradual succession and change in sonority. The chord progressions are a means of creating certain gradations of color, and do not
carry any functional purpose thus, resolution is not necessary. Since the structure of the parallel chords does not change, this can be a very unique device in prolonging the same harmony over several measures. As Ravel was usually not interested in prolonging certain harmonies over an extended time, the use of parallel chords is very rare in his compositions.

A prime example of Debussy’s use of parallel chords is showcased in La Cathédrale engloutie. (Example 3.39) Debussy also commonly uses parallel chords in contrary motion, which can be seen in Reflets dans l’eau. (Example 3.40)

Example 3.39:

Debussy La Cathédrale engloutie mm.1

Debussy La Cathédrale engloutie mm.28-33

Sonore sans dureté
Example 3.40: Debussy *Reflets dans l’eau* mm.16-17

This innovative approach to harmonic progression resulted from his early experimentation and improvisations of chords and daring harmonies during his conservatory years, which was witnessed by fellow classmates such as Maurice Emmanuel. Emmanuel recounts a particular improvisatory *séance* at the conservatory one spring morning in 1884:

“A disheveled head peeped through the door, and the student who entered, soon seating himself at the piano, was already the man he was to become. At the piano we heard chromatic groanings in imitation of the buses going down the Faubourg Poissonnière, groups of consecutive fifths and octaves, sevenths which instead of being resolved in the proper way actually led to the note above or were not resolved at all; shameful ‘false relations’; chords of the ninth on all degrees of the scale; chords of the eleventh and thirteenth; all the notes of the diatonic scale heard at once in fantastic arrangements; shimmering sequences of arpeggios contrasted with trills played by both hands on three notes simultaneously. For more than an hour he held us spellbound around the piano, his shock of tousled hair constantly shaking as he played.”

Debussy’s improvisational experiments eventually became his personal stamp

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as he began to establish his own musical language after leaving the strict compositional confines of the Conservatory.

The crystallization of his musical ethics was to be conveyed to his former composition teacher Guiraud in 1889, again before the presence of Emmanuel.55 Stressing that tonality and resolution is not necessary, Debussy states: “Relative keys are nonsense too. Music is neither major nor minor. Minor thirds and major thirds should be combined, modulation thus becoming more flexible. The mode is that which one happens to choose at the moment. It is inconstant.”

Debussy then played a series of intervals on the piano and explained that they are “Incomplete chords, floating. Il faut noyer le ton (You have to blur the sound.) One can travel where one wishes and leave by any door. Greater nuances.” As Guiraud exclaims in astonishment that Debussy’s opinion is theoretically absurd, Debussy replies: “There is no theory. You have merely to listen. Pleasure is the law.”

In this way, Debussy had created his own musical language consisting of harmonies and sonorities that pleased the ear and offered colorful effects. His frequent use of parallel chords and whole-tone scales indicate his approach to the equality of all chords and harmonies, and that chords do not carry a particular harmonic “function” nor hierarchy.

These successions of chords also result in the disappearance of independent voices, giving the effect of slowly changing pure sonorities and color. This idea is correlated to Charles Baudelaire’s notion of the color spectrum, which highly influenced Debussy. In his book Le Salon de 1846, Baudelaire explained his notion of the color

spectrum with its musical equivalents, which he finds in the gradation of color from shade to light in nature. His observations from nature that harmony is created in the subtle blend of gradations of color and shadow, and that form and color are one, constitute important aspects of Debussy's originality.

Ravel's and Debussy's difference in harmonic progression may be one of the most distinctive features between the two composers. Ravel follows a more conventional approach to harmonic pacing, whereas Debussy devised his own system and ethics concerning harmony and progression.

**Pedal tone and Ostinato**

One of Debussy's most characteristic features in his music, which is also related to his slow harmonic progression, is his extensive use of pedal tone and ostinato. It is quite difficult to find a piano piece written by Debussy that does not utilize a low, profound bass note or pedal-tone, as well as an ostinato figure in the accompaniment. Ravel on the other hand used pedal tone and ostinato sparingly. Debussy's usage of pedal tone also contrasts with Ravel in that they are mainly used for timbre effects of layering and to create a static effect in his music. Ravel, on the other hand often uses pedal tone more as a structural device. His usage of pedal tone as a motivic device that penetrates an entire work, such as in Habanera is particularly unique.

Debussy's frequent usage of pedal tone as the effect of a low gong inspired by the gamelan ensemble can be seen in the following examples. This 'gong' effect serves as the foundation upon which he layers other voices, giving richness and depth to the timbre and sonority. It is often used in slow-paced works such as La Cathédrale
engloutie (see Example 3.39) and Pagodes (see Example 3.17).

Another important aspect in Debussy’s use of pedal-tone is to create the impression of stasis. Whereas Ravel likes to develop his material and give momentum to his music through rapid notes and moving bass lines, Debussy prefers to prohibit development of the music, and uses frequent pedal tones to anchor the harmony in one place.

Debussy’s extreme use of pedal tone is well-illustrated in his Voiles. In this piece, the B-flat pedal tone permeates the entire piece, an approach similar to Ravel’s motivic use of the pedal tone. However in Debussy’s piece, the pedal tone, although remaining on B-flat throughout the entire composition, recurs in different guises and functions, whereas Ravel’s pedal tones that permeate an entire piece remain in the same form. The pedal tone is first introduced in measure 5, after the unharmonized introduction of the main theme. For the first twenty measures, the pedal tone represents a rhythmic motive that supports the main theme. (Example 3.41)
Example 3.41: Debussy *Voiles* mm.5-11

In the following next twenty-three measures, the pedal tone serves more as an anchoring device to prevent any development and forward movement in the harmony (Example 3.42) Although the upper voice begins to pick up in rhythmic speed, the effect of stasis and non-development is enhanced through the repetition of the same harmonic gestures in the upper voices (mm.28) as well as through the use of ostinatos (mm.33).
Example 3.42

Debussy *Voiles* mm.21-27

Debussy *Voiles* mm.28-30 Repetition of same harmonic gestures
Debussy *Voiles* mm.33-36 Usage of Ostinato

In the last third of the piece, the pedal tone is used as a tonal foundation upon which Debussy adds rapid arpeggiated flourishes above. (Example 3.43) He also layers the pedal tone by discretely adding the B-flat an octave above in delayed eighth-notes. Here again, the repetition of the same harmonic flourishes in the upper voices helps to prevent any developmental attempt.

**Example 3.43:** Debussy *Voiles* mm.48-51

Although Ravel also used pedal tone and ostinato for different functions and effects, his use of a low bass note, pedal tone and ostinato is sparse compared to Debussy. His piano music tends to move in a certain parallel direction with both hands in similar registers, resulting in the lack of a bass altogether, or his music shows a more rapid succession and progression of harmony, which indicates that the bass and harmonies are
Example 3.45: Ravel *Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn* mm.38-43

These examples demonstrate Ravel’s distinct use of his pedal tones as a structural device, which contrasts with Debussy’s approach to pedal tone for timbre, layering, and non-development. In this way, the two composers show a different usage of pedal point effects.

The use of ostinato is also as frequent in Debussy’s music as his pedal tones are. Debussy was highly influenced by Mussorgsky and the Russians in the use of ostinato, creating the illusion of suspended time within the succession of rapidly moving notes. Typical examples of Debussy’s usage of ostinatos have already been presented in this paper, and can be seen in *Voiles* (see Example 3.42, mm.33), and *...D’un cahier d’esquisses* (see Example 2.5).

Ravel’s usage of ostinatos is again limited compared to Debussy, and his approach and purpose of using the technique is slightly different. Like Debussy, Ravel’s ostinatos serve as a harmonic backdrop as well as a means of impeding progression in evolving sections. However, Ravel’s use of ostinato figures are used in a more narrative and dramatic manner, which contrasts with Debussy’s use of the ostinatos as a means of non-development. Ravel uses ostinatos often in highly agitated
sections, which contrasts with the main purpose of ostinato figures, which is actually to hold back motion. The opposing forces between the forward agitated motion and the stasis of the ostinato create a highly dramatic effect of tension. Ravel’s use of pedal tone and ostinato as dramatic effects is best illustrated in *Scarbo* from *Gaspard de la Nuit*. (Example 3.46)

In measure 68, the accompaniment, although highly animated and agitated, is retained of any forward movement with the continuous ostinato, increasing the tension and drama of the section.

**Example 3.46:** Ravel *Scarbo* mm.68-76

![Example 3.46](image)

Similar usage can be seen in *Oiseaux Tristes*, where the ostinato serves as a propelling device to animate the motion towards the upcoming grand flourish, yet, harmonic development is prohibited due to the repetition of the same harmonies. This builds tension and drama as the bird-calls also display a more animated and agitated
character. (Example 3.47)

**Example 3.47:** Ravel *Oiseaux Tristes* mm.13-14

An exception, and rare usage of his ostinato can actually be seen in *La Vallée des cloches* (see Example 2.5) The usage of ostinatos in this work represents an approach similar to Debussy, where suspension in time and evocation of an image is the main objective.

It is also noteworthy to mention that Ravel’s usage of ostinatos is most frequent in his *Miroirs*; a work that was inspired and influenced by Debussy’s ideals and approach to music.

The frequency in which Debussy utilizes his pedal tones and ostinatos contrasts sharply with Ravel’s limited and selective use of this technique. Their functions often differ as well, in that Debussy’s main purpose in utilizing the pedal tone is for sonorous effects resembling the gamelan gongs or for the illusion of stasis, whereas Ravel’s use is
mainly functional, motivic, or dramatic.

**Range and Texture**

Another difference between the two composers, is their approach to range and texture in their music. Ravel’s music tends to focus on a certain register on the piano, and aside from climactic points, both hands often interlock and work in close proximity especially in the openings. Both hands often move together in parallel motion across the keyboard registers, and remain predominantly in two voices. His melodies are written in a more distinct high register, in comparison to Debussy’s melodies that are often veiled within the thick texture and sonorities of the outer extremes. Many of Ravel’s piano pieces begin with both hands in the same high register written in two treble clefs, such as *Jeux d’eau, Ondine, all three movements of the Sonatine, five out of six movements of Le tombeau de Couperin*\(^{56}\), and half of the movements from *Mirors*.

In contrast, Debussy’s music shows more layering and wider range of sound and sonorities presented simultaneously compared to that of Ravel, frequently requiring three staves to accommodate the wide range and to clarify the layering. As mentioned before, this characteristic in Debussy can be linked to his fascination with the Javanese gamelan ensemble that he heard in the World Expo of 1889. In Debussy’s music, one usually finds a profound bass, resembling a low gong used in the gamelan ensemble. On top of these profound bass notes, Debussy adds layers of sonority in high registers, and frequently introduces a third layer in the middle, serving as some sort of melody.

Debussy’s layering of material and wide-range texture is very explicit in the

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\(^{56}\) The entire “Fugue” is written predominantly in two treble clefs.
following examples from his *Cloches à travers les feuilles* from *Images II*, and *La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune* from his *Préludes Book II*. (Example 3.48)

**Example 3.48:**

Debussy *Cloches à travers les feuilles* mm.26-30
Debussy utilizes layering not only for its sonorous texture, but also to create rhythmic polyphonic effects which is also an important feature of the gamelan ensemble. In the 1900 Exhibition, Debussy was again fascinated by the solo gamelans of Bali, which produced a more limpid texture, and had a distinct technical resemblance to the music of the Renaissance, in which the percussion instruments weave a complex polyphony. Debussy considered this rhythmic polyphony, “a type of counterpoint by comparison with which that of Palestrina is child’s play.” In the gamelan ensemble, the rhythmic polyphony is woven through the layers of different parts representing different rhythmic groupings and pacing. Debussy applied this rhythmic counterpoint to the piano – an instrument that is technically a “percussion” instrument.

This layering of rhythmic polyphony unique to Javanese music can be seen in many of Debussy’s compositions. A prime example of such is from Cloches à travers les feuilles (Example 3.49) and Pagodes (see Example 3.11).

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57 Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind Vol. I, 115.
In his study, Roy Howat describes the characteristic way the gamelan ensemble interlock rhythmically, and he reflects that principle on Debussy’s music. He demonstrates how the rhythm of the opening of Pagodes highly resembles the interplay of rhythms performed by two sorts of gongs used in the gamelan ensemble. He also explains how the entire coda is dominated by a mixture of rhythmic groups of $5 + 4$ (see Example 2.10) or $4 + 3$ (Example 3.50).

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Example 3.50: Debussy *Pagodes* mm.88

In this way, Debussy’s music often shows the use of a wide range extending to the two extremes of the piano, as well as a multi-layered texture. This adds to the richness of the sonority as well as rhythmic interest and complexity.

Comparison of the openings of Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau* and Debussy’s *Pagodes* clearly show this distinct characteristic. (see Example 3.2 and Example 3.17) Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau* begins with both hands in the upper register no wider than an octave apart, with hands interlocked. The proximity of both hands does not exceed much more than an octave or two for most of the piece. The two hands move mostly in parallel motion, where both hands move across the different registers of the piano in close proximity as can be seen in Example 3.51.
Example 3.51

Ravel *Jeux d’eau* mm.14-18

Also, Ravel’s piece remains basically in two voices, with a melody and accompanimental figure. Although he uses frequent chords for sonority and to
harmonize the melody such as in measure 31 (see Example 3.4), his voices remain in similar registers, and their roles as either melody or accompaniment are very clear cut.

Contrary to this, Debussy’s *Pagodes* displays a wide range and multiple layering of material. A typical usage of wide range and layering can be seen in measure 11 (see Example 3.10) where he offers a low pedal tone on G-sharp, an inner voice serving as the melody, and accompanimental figures in the upper voice. In measure 11 alone, the range spans 5 octaves, which highly contrast to Ravel’s use of close proximity in voices. Another example of layering can be seen in measure 23 (see Example 3.11). Here, above a low B pedal tone, the upper two voices in both hands move in contrary motion, a feature not often seen in Ravel’s music. This section not only displays melodic counterpoint, but at the same time offers rhythmic layering as well, a distinct feature of the Javanese gamelans. The two against three rhythm alternating between the hands as well as the contrary motion of the melody creates a complex polyphonic effect, another aspect not seen in the music of Ravel. Again, the range in this section spans a wide range of four octaves.

In comparing Ravel’s *Habanera* and Debussy’s *La Soirée dans Grenade* their contrast in range is also very clear. Ravel’s *Habanera*, although written for two pianos, shows proximity in range of both parts. The Introduction is written with both piano parts, and both hand parts in the high Treble clef. (Example 3.52)
Example 3.52: Ravel Habanera mm.1-4

When the melody enters in measure 9, both registers remain in the treble. When the second piano takes over a low rhythmic figure in the bass, the first piano also follows in a low extreme bass. (Example 3.53)

Example 3.53: Ravel Habanera mm.14-15

In the six sections that make up Debussy’s piece, four sections plus the
Introduction and Coda span four octaves or more. Debussy’s use of layering can also be seen in the return of D section where the melody is presented in the middle register, and the rhythmic habanera figure in the high extreme, and a low bass five octaves lower (Example 3.54) Again, Debussy is obligated to use three staves to accommodate the wide range.

Example 3.54: Debussy *La Soirée dans Grenade* mm.97-102

There are no instances in Ravel’s piece of a low bass anchor with melodies in the extreme high register, nor are there any instances of wide range layering, similar to what we see in many of Debussy’s composition.

As can be seen, Debussy’s music often offers at least three layers of texture spanning often more than four octaves, with a low bass and two upper voices, one of which usually serves as a theme or melody, and the other, an accompaniment or ostinato figure. The rhythms of each of these voices also vary. The bass is usually a pedal tone, the themes are simple quarter note or eighth note combinations, whereas the accompanimental figures and ostinatos usually consists of faster moving triplets, sixteenth notes, or even thirty-second notes in varied groupings.
In this way, the contrast in range and texture between Debussy’s and Ravel’s music is significant. Debussy’s multiple layering of textures and sonorities as well as the use of wide range across the piano, distinguish him from Ravel’s approach characterized by the close proximity of two voices.
CHAPTER 4

Ondine vs. Ondine

A prime example illustrating Debussy and Ravel’s differences in approach to their compositions can be seen in a comparison of their two Ondines. Both Ravel and Debussy chose to write music inspired by the same legendary water spirit Ondine. By comparing these compositions which share the same inspirational source, each composer’s distinct compositional style and approach will be illuminated.

Ondine, also known as Undine in German, is a legendary water nymph (wassernixe), created by German writer, Baron Friedrich Heinrich Karl de La Motte-Fouqué (1777-1843). His novel Nouvelle Undine which was introduced in the literary journal “Die Jahreszeiten” in 1811 appealed to a wide audience and won him great fame.

Undine’s character was inspired by several pre-existing legendary figures. She represents the fusion of German myth, Loreley, and Mélusine de Lusignan, a character created by the French trouvere, Jean d’Arras in the 14th century. Loreley represents a water spirit who seduces to destroy. As the ancient legend goes, the Loreley rock (a tall, 120-meter rock on the Rheine river in Germany) is a maiden who threw herself into the Rheine in despair over a faithless lover, and became a water nymph who sits at the top of the rock and lures sailors and fishermen with her beautiful singing voice and golden hair. The enchanted men who gaze up at Loreley do not see the rocks under the water and perish as their boats are destroyed. Mélusine de Lusignan represents a supernatural spirit
who gives herself entirely to the man she loves, with hopes of becoming entirely natural with flesh and blood like all living mortals. However, her happiness and mortal existence depend on the loyalty and love of her husband. Her mortal husband betrays her, leaving the supernatural Melusine to suffer for the rest of her life. Both Loreley and Melusine were very successful and well-known legends, and inspired many fables and operas in the 19th century.

Fouqué’s Undine displays the characteristics of these legendary figures in that she is a spirit who falls in love with a mortal man, but then is betrayed by him, and is forced to drown her husband and his kingdom to the bottom of the sea. Nature, purity, and faithfulness are represented by Undine, whereas, the darker, evil supernaturality is expressed by her uncle Kühlborn, who takes on many different forms: water-spirit, ghost, the river, etc. Human weaknesses and shortcomings are demonstrated by the man she falls in love with, Knight Huldrand and his lover, Bertalda.

Fouqué’s Undine continued to inspire many plays, operas, poems, and musical works during the 19th and 20th centuries. It influenced Danish writer, Hans Christian Anderson to write The Little Mermaid (1836). Two opera productions followed based on Fouqué’s work: E.T.A. Hoffman’s Undine (1816) and Albert Lorzing’s Undine (1845), and then Anton Dvorak’s Rusalka (Rusalka being the equivalent of Undine in Czech) was premiered in 1900. Maeterlink’s play Pelléas et Mélisande (1892) was also said to have been influenced by the story of Undine. Carl Reinecke’s Flute Sonata in E-major, Op.167 (1882), is also subtitled “Undine.” In 1836, French poet, Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841) released his book of poems, Gaspard de la Nuit which contains Ondine, the source of inspiration for Ravel’s Ondine.
Bertrand’s poems were introduced to Ravel through his good friend Ricardo Viñes. Viñes wrote in his diary of September 25, 1896: “Ravel stayed till eleven in the evening. We read…. Bertrand’s Gaspard de la Nuit, which I let him take away.”59 More than a year later on December 19, 1897, Viñes writes “I asked him to give me back Gaspard de la nuit and he said he would bring it around to my flat tomorrow because it was at the bottom of a trunk.”60

Bertrand’s Gaspard de la Nuit consists of six parts, or six fantasies de Gaspard de la Nuit as Bertrand calls them, with 13 Pièces Détachées at the end. Ravel chose three poems from this book to set to music: Ondine, Le Gibet, and Scarbo. Ondine is derived from the third fantasy titled La Nuit et ses prétiges, and Le Gibet and Scarbo are derived from the Pièces Détachées.

These poems by Bertrand remained in Ravel’s mind for many years, and took many months of gestation before he presented 11 years later, his own virtuosic piano piece, Gaspard de la Nuit (1908). The fact that Ravel inserted the actual texts of Bertrand’s poems in his publication of Gaspard de la Nuit confirms his inspirational source. (see Appendix B)

The source of Debussy’s inspiration in composing his Ondine, which comprises the eighth prelude in his second book of Préludes (1913), is less known. However, in 1912, a new French edition of La Motte-Fouqué’s novel Undine was published containing fifteen beautiful colored illustrations by Arthur Rackham. Rackham was a prolific English children’s book illustrator, and it is known that Debussy had previously been inspired by Rackham’s illustrations, as a few others of his preludes carry titles

60 Ibid., 7.
pertaining to Rackham’s illustrations.

*Les Fées sont d’exquises danseuses* (the fourth prelude in *Préludes Book II*) has taken the exact caption of Arthur Rackham’s illustration from J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan of Kensington Gardens*, a book given to Debussy’s daughter Claude-Emma, also known as “Chouchou” on Christmas 1911, by a family friend, the conductor Robert Godet.

Debussy is known also to have owned the edition from the New Temple Shakespeare series of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* with illustrations by Arthur Rackham. One of the illustrations in this edition is of Puck, happily dancing across a swamp, and is captioned “I Am That Merry Wanderer of the Night.” In an article in 1903 on Weber’s opera *Oberon*, Debussy quoted Puck’s own account of himself: “I am that merry wanderer of the night.” In Shakespeare’s play, there is no account of the elf’s dancing, thus this illustration by Rackham was most likely the inspiration of Debussy’s *La Danse de Puck* (the eleventh prelude in *Préludes Book I*).

Therefore, it is also very likely that Debussy may have been inspired by Rackham’s illustrations of Ondine, if not the tale of Ondine itself, which was well-known and popular during the 18th and 19th century, as mentioned earlier.

In the following section, a stylistic analysis and comparison of Ravel’s and Debussy’s *Ondine* will be presented to illustrate how the composers develop two very authentic yet contrasting views of the same material. Focus will be placed on aspects discussed in the earlier chapter on their general compositional styles concerning their approach to form, themes, rhythm, harmonic progression, range, texture, and pedal tone.
Ravel’s *Ondine* is a highly virtuosic piece of grand scale, demanding high technical competence and sensitivity of the performer. From a structural point of view, it is difficult to define the exact form. As a composition inspired by a literary source, and due to its narrative characteristic, the precise form is obscured. However, with a primary focus on the presentation of the themes the form can be interpreted as an Arch Form.

The composition is based on two main themes (Theme 1 and Theme 2) which are connected together with three transitional themes $a$, $b$, and $c$. The diagram below illustrates the structure:

**Figure 4.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sonata Section</th>
<th>Exposition</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Recapitulation</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>0-31</td>
<td>32-41</td>
<td>42-51</td>
<td>52-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>$1/a/1/b$</td>
<td>$2/a/2/a$</td>
<td>$1/c/1/c$</td>
<td>$2/a/2/c/2/a/b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key</td>
<td>C#</td>
<td>G#</td>
<td>C $\rightarrow$ F# $\rightarrow$ iv/F#</td>
<td>d C#</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The piece represents a clear structure of two alternating themes. The efficiency in his use of themes and the clear balanced structure are typical characteristics of Ravel’s compositional style.

One of the most prominent aspects of this piece is the presence of a strong melodic protagonist. As mentioned earlier, Ravel’s themes are often clearly presented and recur in a systematic manner in their complete forms, developed through different accompanimental figures.

The two principal themes 1 and 2 are shown in Example 4.1. Theme 1 will be labeled as “Ondine’s Theme.”
Example 4.1: Ondine's Theme and Theme 2

Theme 1 – *Ondine's Theme*

```
\begin{music}
\newStaff{4}\StaffName{1}\Octave{-3}\thicklines\invisibleText\staffText{1}\note{G}{8}\quad\note{A}{8}\quad\note{C}{8}\quad\note{D}{8}\quad\note{E}{8}\quad\note{G}{8}\quad\note{A}{8}\quad\note{C}{8}\quad\note{D}{8}\quad\note{E}{8}
\end{music}
```

Theme 2

```
\begin{music}
\newStaff{4}\StaffName{1}\Octave{-3}\thicklines\invisibleText\staffText{1}\note{G}{8}\quad\note{A}{8}\quad\note{C}{8}\quad\note{D}{8}\quad\note{E}{8}\quad\note{G}{8}\quad\note{A}{8}\quad\note{C}{8}\quad\note{D}{8}\quad\note{E}{8}
\end{music}
```

It is also important to note that these two themes are similar in character. They are both modal, moving in mainly small intervals, lyrical, and meander around a central note.

The two main themes are both introduced as a clear, prominent melody in the left hand in a very similar manner. (Example 4.2)

Example 4.2

Ravel *Ondine* mm.2-3 Introduction of Ondine's Theme

```
\begin{music}
\newStaff{4}\StaffName{1}\Octave{-3}\thicklines\invisibleText\staffText{1}\note{G}{8}\quad\note{A}{8}\quad\note{C}{8}\quad\note{D}{8}\quad\note{E}{8}\quad\note{G}{8}\quad\note{A}{8}\quad\note{C}{8}\quad\note{D}{8}\quad\note{E}{8}
\end{music}
```

\textit{très doux et très expressif}

Ravel *Ondine* mm.32-36 Introduction of Theme 2

```
\begin{music}
\newStaff{4}\StaffName{1}\Octave{-3}\thicklines\invisibleText\staffText{1}\note{G}{8}\quad\note{A}{8}\quad\note{C}{8}\quad\note{D}{8}\quad\note{E}{8}\quad\note{G}{8}\quad\note{A}{8}\quad\note{C}{8}\quad\note{D}{8}\quad\note{E}{8}
\end{music}
```

\textit{pp}
These melodies are the driving force, and declamatory vehicle of this composition. Ondine’s song recurs five times, and although each time it recurs with a different accompaniment figure, it is clearly recognizable, as can be seen by the following examples. (Example 4.3)

Example 4.3
Ravel *Ondine* mm.14-15

Ravel *Ondine* mm.48-49

Ondine’s Theme is consistently presented in a dynamic level lower than *p*, predominantly remains in the high registers and although accompanied by different figures, conveys a similar characteristic.

The Second Theme plays a more developmental role in the composition. The accompanimental figures broaden in range, and the dynamic level increases. The theme
is first introduced in a similar way as Ondine’s Theme below shimmering chords, but begins to develop in its third appearance. Here, the theme is embedded within the accompaniment figure, but Ravel indicates *le chant bien soutenu et expressif* ("the song well brought-out and expressive") indicating the importance in projecting the theme which he regards as "the song." (Example 4.4)

**Example 4.4:** Ravel, *Ondine* mm.52-54

![Example 4.4](image)

The fourth appearance which immediately follows shows the broadening of range and caliber. (Example 4.5)

**Example 4.5:** Ravel, *Ondine* mm.55-56

![Example 4.5](image)

The range spans four octaves, and for the first time in the piece, we see a dynamic indication of *f.* This prepares us for its final recurrence and further expansion in
mm.66, where the music reaches the climactic point of the entire composition. Here, the music spans six octaves with arpeggiated figures moving in contrary motion, which is a very rare instance in Ravel's music, as well as the indication *ff*, signifying the powerful and dramatic climax. (Example 4.6)

**Example 4.6: Ravel *Ondine* mm.66**

Un peu plus lent

In this way, Ravel's main themes are clearly defined and fulfill their roles as melodic protagonists as the music unfolds around them.

Ravel's usage of his transitional themes *a*, *b*, and *c* are also very clear and economical, and they serve as different functions throughout the piece. (Example 4.7)

**Example 4.7: Transitional Themes *a*, *b*, and *c***

Theme *a*
Theme $a$ is actually derived from the intervallic pattern of Ondine's Theme. The perfect fourth intervallic leap followed by a descending second is derived from the third phrase of Ondine's Theme (see Example 4.1). This Theme $a$ serves as an extension and transition for the two main themes. Referring to the diagram of Ondine's formal structure (see Figure 1), it is noticeable that Theme $a$ always occurs after as well as before the recurrences of the Ondine's Theme and the Secondary Theme.

Theme $b$ on the other hand is used as a transitional bridge between the larger sections of A and B. It occurs twice in a symmetrical manner as can be seen in Figure 1. It serves as a transition from section A to section B in measure 22, as well as the retransition from section B back to section A towards the end in measure 75.

Finally, Theme $c$ which occurs only in the mid-section of the piece is utilized as developmental material to heighten the tension towards the climax. Its first occurrence which immediately follows Ondine's Theme in measure 45 foreshadows its final recurrence in measure 57, where it is highly and extensively developed, bringing the music to its climactic moment in measure 66.

In this way, Ravel uses his themes as his vehicle to develop his music and to embellish upon as he increases in force and power to a climactic point. His principal themes are also restated in their clear, original form as dominating melodies. His transitional themes bind the main themes together in a highly structured manner.

Ravel's *Ondine* also shows clear narrative and dramatic elements exemplified in
explicit illustrations of the poem. The end of Bertrand’s poem reads:

“And when I replied that I was in love with a mortal woman, she was sulky and vexed; she wept a few tears, burst out laughing and vanished in showers that formed white trickles down my blue windowpanes.”

This passage is illustrated through music with heightened dramatic effect. After continuous waves of thirty-second notes throughout the piece, in mm.85 the motion stops and a single melody line is revealed. The melody is stripped of all embellishments and accompaniment, and presented purely in a single solo line. What can be more musically convincing and declamatory than a simple recitative? By introducing a recitative, Ravel achieves a higher level of literary expression in his piano music.

Example 4.8 illustrates the crucial moment which occurs towards the end of the piece that leads to the recitative.
Example 4.8: Ravel *Ondine* mm.81-88

The melodic line of this section (measures 81-88) is actually a complete restatement of the melodic line stated in measures 8-14. (Example 4.9) The recitative in Example 4.8 is a derivation of the melody in measures 11-13 of Example 4.9, which is also Transitional Theme a.
Example 4.9: Ravel *Ondine* mm.8-14

In Example 4.8, Bertrand’s poem is illustrated in musical terms through changes in character, harmony, and accompanimental figures. Starting measure 81, Ondine’s song is harmonized with a 9\textsuperscript{th} chord pedal tone on G-sharp. After three measures of G-sharp pedal tone preparation, in measure 84, the harmony takes a striking and unexpected turn to D minor. Ravel emphasizes the importance of this moment: all sharps of the key signature are cancelled out, the meter changes, and the bass is deeply rooted down in a low D octave. This dramatic turn to D minor could be taken as an illustration of Ondine’s doomed state upon hearing the disappointing news that the man she wants to
seduce is already in love with another woman.

Although the melody is derived from the original song of Ondine, by presenting it soloistically and through a recitative-style in *pp, Très lent* (very slow), the emotional effect of this moment is enhanced, perhaps suggesting Ondine’s “sulky and vexed” state. The last interval of the recitative is also altered to a minor 2\textsuperscript{nd} between A and G-sharp. Every other time this particular melody recurs in the piece as Theme \textit{a} (mm.13, 35, 40, and 54), the interval is always a major 2\textsuperscript{nd}. Ravel emphasizes the minor 2\textsuperscript{nd} quality of this instant, with a release of the preceding A (notated with the staccato), and an accent on the G-sharp with an elongated note value of a half note.

Another precise depiction follows. After the diminuendo on A in measure 88, a sudden crescendo burst of rapid arpeggios break the suspended moment created by the recitative, suggesting “burst out laughing and vanished in showers” from the poem. (Example 4.10)

**Example 4.10: Ravel *Ondine* mm.89**

Such dramatic writing with meticulous notations reflects Ravel’s approach in illustrating particular events that take place in Bertrand’s poem. His composition
displays a very narrative approach and character through his use of his clear melodic protagonists which dominate the music, as well as the insertion of a dramatic depiction of the poem with the recitative section.

Another striking characteristic of Ravel’s *Ondine* is the overwhelming rhythmic continuity that it offers through the rapid thirty-second note accompaniment. The waves of thirty-second notes are never interrupted during the entire ninety measures of the piece, except for the four-measure recitative section. Similar continuity throughout an entire section or composition has been displayed by Ravel in his other piano pieces such as his works with other water-related titles, *Jeux d’eau*, and *Une barque sur l’océan* from his set *Miroirs*, as well as *Scarbo* from *Gaspard de la Nuit*, and the outer movements of his *Sonatine*. Such rhythmic continuity and drive, as well as fluidity and consistency in the general character of the entire composition, are characteristic traits of Ravel’s music.

Ravel’s approach to smaller time elements such as rhythmic pulse is also very consistent. Typically, Ravel’s rhythmic pulses are very clear and square, and this trait can be seen in *Ondine* as well. Although there are frequent changes in the time signatures, the flow and pulse of the music remains constant throughout the piece. All themes begin on the down beat, and there are no instances of tied notes over bar lines. Although the accompanimental figures are varied, and the rapidly moving arpeggiated notes are often grouped in uneven and varied numbers, they are always clearly grouped according to the rhythmic beats, and often marked with a clear bass line which all fall on the beats as well. (Example 4.11)
Example 4.11: Ravel *Ondine* mm.16-17

Ravel’s *Ondine* also constantly progresses harmonically towards a certain direction. His limited use of pedal tone and rapidly moving bass lines help to continuously propel the harmonic progression forward.

Ravel’s *Ondine* utilizes pedal tone only twice. The first instance a prominent pedal point is used is in the preparatory section before the climactic point of the piece in measure 57. (Example 4.12)

Example 4.12: Ravel *Ondine* mm.57

The pedal tone on C-sharp is the dominant preparation for the climax in F-sharp
which occurs in measure 66. The pedal tone serves as a device to heighten dissonance and tension, which prepares the arrival of the climax in a dramatic manner.

The second instance of the pedal point begins in measure 81 (see Example 4.8), just before the recitative. This is also a dramatically crucial preparatory section. Ondine's Theme is presented in the mid-voice range, while the pedal tone lays a carpet of G-sharp sonority. After the grand climax, this section serves as the bridge to the calm recitative section that follows. Development and movement subsides, and the use of pedal tone hinders the music.

In this way, Ravel uses the pedal tone as a preparatory function, heightening suspense, dissonance, and drama before climactic points, or using it as a device to bring moments of calm back to the music. Since pedal tones are rarely used in Ravel's music, when they do occur, they are very distinct, functional, and carry much weight.

The rarity of pedal tone usage in Ravel's music indicates how his music usually progresses harmonically in a continuous fashion. Already in the opening bars of Ravel's Ondine he moves from one harmony to the next as the chordal accompaniment alters its harmony accordingly. (Example 4.13) Although tonality is extremely ambiguous, harmonic change is observed in measures 5 and 7, leading towards the resolution in measure 8.
Ravel’s accompanimental figures are also frequently marked with a moving bass line, indicating the direction and progression of the harmonies. Example 4.14 shows how he progresses from the C-sharp (tonic) to the dominant in G-sharp measure 22.
Example 4.14: Ravel *Ondine* mm.16-22

Such ceaseless movement in the bass line pushes the harmonic progressions forward, resulting in a continuous flow of the music.

As far as texture and range is concerned, Ravel’s *Ondine* remains basically in two voices, clearly separating the melody and accompaniment. The piece begins with
interlocking hands spanning only one octave (both parts written in treble clef; a typical feature of Ravel’s openings), which does not break away until the sixteenth measure. More than fifty percent of this piece consists of interlocking hands or both hands working in close proximity less than an octave apart. Although the range the accompaniment covers broadens as the music develops, the music pretty much maintains a two-voice texture, with the exception of the occasional pedal point sections.

Ravel’s narrative approach with his melodic protagonists, continuity and fluidity throughout the entire piece, economy of his themes, balanced form and rhythm, continuous harmonic progression, and proximity of range are very typical of his compositional style. In contrast, Debussy’s *Ondine* represents an entirely different approach and view of the same inspirational source. It is very difficult to find the same traits as Ravel in Debussy’s *Ondine*, which offers a completely different musical statement.

A first look at Debussy’s *Ondine* reveals a big difference in the length and scale of the composition, compared to that of Ravel’s. Contrary to Ravel’s virtuosic grand scale work, Debussy’s *Ondine* is much smaller, shorter, and intimate, and half the length of Ravel’s *Ondine*. As for the overall structure of the piece, Debussy’s *Ondine* shows his typical multi-sectional construction based on his themes and motivic gestures offering a through-composed nature. In a larger grouping, the structure can be illustrated as a two-part form, consisting of an Introduction, A section, then B section. However, within each section, Debussy introduces many different contrasting themes and motives that recur throughout. The return of motivic gesture e (which is introduced at the beginning
of section A) at the closing of the piece is highly typical of Debussy, as he often restates previously presented material at the end for closure.

His piece comprises two main themes (Theme 1 and Theme 2) as well as seven different contrasting motivic gestures which I will label \( a, b, c, d, e, f, g \). These themes are all uniquely placed and inserted in various sections of the composition.

**Figure 4.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Intro</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coda</strong> Measures 62-74</td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>11-31</td>
<td>32-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Theme/Motive ( e )</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E-flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedal Tone D-flat D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B-flat</td>
<td>A D D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contrary to Ravel’s well-balanced and efficient structure, Debussy’s structure represents a form based on the succession of juxtaposed, contrasting themes and motives. His piece displays more of a collage or kaleidoscope of several themes and motives which shift from one to the other in a through-composed fashion.

While Ravel’s *Ondine* displayed clear narrative aspects, Debussy’s piece cannot be considered as narrative. As mentioned earlier, Debussy’s musical aesthetics parallel the ideals of the Symbolist poets, whose purpose was to evoke rather than to illustrate. As a result, Debussy’s music shows a much more “suggestive” nature than Ravel’s piece. Although Debussy’s *Ondine* comprises also of basically two main themes, his treatment of the themes is very different compared to Ravel. In Ravel’s *Ondine*, the main themes were of primary focus and dominated the piece from beginning to end. They carried the
role of developing the piece and brought the piece to a climax, as well as illustrating specific events and emotions of Bertrand’s poem. The main themes in Debussy’s *Ondine* however, do not display such dominance in the music, and they are presented as shorter motivic devices which are frequently interrupted, a characteristic contrary to Ravel’s longer lines and continuous flow of his themes. In Debussy’s *Ondine*, Theme 1 recurs almost always in the same form, indicating its static, unchanged quality. Theme 2, although recurring with different accompanimental figures and character, does not develop nor bring the piece to a climax in the way Ravel’s Second Theme did.

In Debussy’s *Ondine*, Theme 1 is not even introduced in the very beginning. After a long introduction consisting of an interplay between six motivic gestures, Theme 1 is finally presented in the sixteenth measure of the piece, where the tonality on D is finally established. It consists of a rising and descending line in Lydian mode on D. (Example 4.15)

**Example 4.15:** Theme 1

```
\begin{music}
\Staff\MusicRow\WithNotes
\CM{\time 4/4}
\CM{D,2\flat}
\CM{g,3\flat} \CM{c,2\flat} \CM{e,3\flat} \CM{a,3\flat} \CM{d,2\flat} \CM{f,3\flat} \CM{a,3\flat} \CM{d,2\flat} \CM{f,3\flat} \CM{a,3\flat} \CM{d,2\flat} \CM{f,3\flat} \CM{a,3\flat} \CM{d,2\flat} \CM{f,3\flat} \CM{a,3\flat} \CM{d,2}\end{music}
```

Theme 1 is an elegant and fluid, short, two measure theme, embellished with neighboring note-pairs, and doubled by the left hand. Theme 2 is presented in measure 30, as a non-harmonized single line. (Example 4.16)
Example 4.16: Theme 2

The character of Theme 2 contrasts sharply with Theme 1 with the use of staccatos, a chromatic line, and the tritone as the last interval, giving it a more somber character.

Theme 1 recurs three times during the course of the piece, but it reappears mostly unchanged, although the second appearance in measure 20 is presented in the mid-range as a fragment and in its inverted form. Example 4.17 illustrates its unchanging nature, with the first appearance (mm.16) and subsequent recurrences:

Example 4.17: First appearance and Recurrences of Theme 1

Debussy *Ondine* mm.16-17 (First appearance)
Its third recurrence in measure 38 is a curious instant, as it is inserted in the middle of section B, between two occurrences of Theme 2 (see Figure 4.2), interrupting the musical flow of Theme 2. This juxtaposition of Theme 1 in its complete original form, in a completely different section of the piece is a feature characteristic of this piece, where his themes and motives are inserted in different sections and interrupt one another.

Theme 2 recurs four times, but contrary to Theme 1, it returns with varied accompanimental figures. Similar to Ravel, Debussy has chosen his second theme as the one to develop. That being said, Debussy’s development is limited in scope.

The following example shows the recurrences of Theme 2 (Example 4.18)

**Example 4.18: Recurrences of Theme 2**

Debussy *Ondine* mm.32-25 (First recurrence)
Debussy *Ondine* mm.42-43 (Second recurrence)

*Le double plus lent*

Debussy *Ondine* mm.44-47 (Third recurrence)

*rubato*

*un peu au-dessous du mouvement*

*pp marnurando*

*deucement marque*
In the first (mm.32) and third recurrence (mm.42) of the theme, Theme 2 is presented with harmonic pedal tones and ostinato figures. As mentioned earlier, ostinatos and pedal tones are Debussy’s most frequent devices in creating the impression of non-developmental stasis. These two recurrences offer different harmonic backgrounds, but the harmonies remain the same with no change and no development within each section. In the first recurrence, Theme 2 is presented with an augmented 5th harmony, and in the third recurrence, perfect fourths and tritones serve as the background, reinforcing the tritone element of the theme, and also offers a shift in harmonic color.
from the previous section.

The second recurrence of Theme 2 (mm.42) is similar to its introduction, as it is offered as a single line, but it is to be played twice slower, as Debussy notes *Le double plus lent* ("doubly slow"). This is immediately followed by its third recurrence (mm.44) in which the theme is actually written out with twice slower rhythm, using eighth notes instead of sixteenth notes.

The fourth and final recurrence (mm.54) attempts to pick up momentum and develop as Debussy indicates *Mouvement*. The character of this section becomes more agitated and aggressive due to the chromaticism and increase in speed. This character contrasts with the two previous sections which were more suspended in quality due to the pedal tones. However, in this section, development is still hindered.

The bass begins with a chromatic rising and descending ostinato wave, increasing in agitation as it is allowed to rises higher after four measures. Theme 2 takes on a more aggressive character, as excitement builds. However, this development comes to an abrupt stop, as motivic gesture *e* interrupts in mm.62. Therefore, the attempt to develop and bring the piece to a climax is never fulfilled.

In this way, Debussy's themes do not carry narrative qualities as did Ravel's themes. Debussy's themes are presented with very limited development, often restated in a similar manner which do not progress in any harmonic direction nor lead to any dramatic climax. They also show fewer variety in their accompanimental figures, which in this case, consisted mainly of ostinato figures that anchored the harmony in place. The themes do not dominate the piece, as they are presented within the thick layers of complex harmonies and are often interrupted by the other themes. In Debussy's piece,
the interplay of contrasting short themes and motivic gestures, the gradual change of color and timbre between the sections are what dominate this piece.

Debussy’s *Ondine* also clearly lacks the rhythmic continuity and harmonic progression which characterized Ravel’s *Ondine*. Debussy’s technique in juxtaposing various motives one after another obstructs the rhythmic flow of the composition.

Debussy’s motivic gestures are primarily responsible for the disruption of continuity. They are presented in a manner where they constantly interrupt one another. Debussy’s piece opens with an introduction which consists of introducing four out of the seven short motivic gestures. The seven different motivic gestures contrast in character and style. (Example 4.19)

**Example 4.19:** Gestures $a$, $b$, $c$, $d$, $e$, $f$, and $g$
The gestures can be categorized into three sorts: the static clusters (a and b), the rapidly moving flourishes (c and e), and the flowing glissando-type ascending scales (d, f, and g). The static clusters represent sonorous suspended qualities, whereas the flourishes offer a more whimsical nature, and the glissandos offer fluidity. Oftentimes, each gesture is repeated unchanged, and presented precisely in the same manner.

The introduction of the piece exemplifies this inhibition of continuity through the composition’s fragmentary and improvisational nature. The piece is written in 6/8 time, but the various motivic elements that are introduced one after another, contrast in speed and character, thus, it is difficult to achieve a sense of the underlying rhythmic pulse. In addition, the tied notes within and across the bar line of motivic gesture a further obscures the pulse.

Between measures 3-10, motivic gestures with different note values and character are juxtaposed. In measure 3, Motive b which consists of a pedal tone and eighth note clusters offers a resonant sonority in suspension, but it is interrupted with motive c in measure 4 which consists of sixteenth note triplets and a grace note flourish, almost convulsive in nature, prohibiting continuity. (Example 4.20)
Example 4.20: Debussy Ondine mm.3-6

Motive $d$ which enters in measure 8, is again different, as an elegantly ascending scale with groupings of quintuplet figures. Three measures later, Motive $e$ is introduced, with improvisatory ornamental flourishes. In this way, until we reach the B section of the piece, where the ostinatos serve as an underlying pulse, the flow of the music is constantly interrupted with contrasting gestures and temperament.

Harmonic progression is also impeded, and the lack of a climactic point in this piece is already an indication of lack of progression and development which highly contrasts with Ravel’s dramatic work which clearly presented a climactic point. This is chiefly due to Debussy’s constant use of pedal tones and ostinatos, which do not progress in any direction.

Contrary to Ravel’s limited usage of pedal tone in his composition, Debussy’s Ondine presents pedal tone fourteen times, among which almost two-thirds of them are constructed on the tonic or dominant, or both. The lack of variety in the pedal tone tonality, also adds to the unchanging static quality of the piece and hinders harmonic progression.

The pedal tones are utilized throughout, in various situations and sections, and
displays different functions. The piece opens immediately with a pedal tone on C-sharp, and an example of a typical pedal tone on the dominant A can be seen starting in measure 3. (see Example 4.20)

In measure 11, a different kind of pedal tone is presented. (Example 4.21)

**Example 4.21:** Debussy *Ondine* mm.11-13

![Example 4.21](image)

Here, the pedal tone also functions as the unifying thread of the repeated gesture $e$. It helps the repeating gesture form a foundation upon which it can embellish. The pedal tone on A here, is also a dominant preparation for the arrival on the next pedal tone, the tonic D in measure 14. (Example 4.22)

**Example 4.22:** Debussy *Ondine* mm.14-16

![Example 4.22](image)
The longest example of his pedal tone usage, is in the last page of the piece beginning at measure 65. Although the register of the pedal tone changes, he sustains the pedal tone on the tonic D for ten consecutive measures. The harmonies above fluctuate between D tonic major, and F-sharp major, and finally at the end, the harmony settles on D major, with the A-sharp cancelled out.

In some instances, he layers the pedal tones one over the other. A good example is in measure 16 where he introduces Theme 1 (see Example 4.17). He utilizes an extended pedal tone on D and A, establishing the harmony while introducing Theme 1. At the same time, Within Theme 1, he layers yet another pedal tone (repeated notes) on A in the inner voices. Debussy incorporates a pedal tone within his theme, supporting the static quality of the theme itself.

Another such layering of pedal tone can be seen in Example 4.18. The section begins in measure 44 with triplets consisting of a perfect 4th + tritone in the right hand, which continues to be maintained while in the left hand, a second harmony consisting of a tritone + perfect 5th enters in the next measure. These two tritone harmonies serve as the anchoring harmony, retaining the Second Theme in one place.

Debussy utilizes yet another technique in measure 54, where he marks Mouvement indicating heightened tension and acceleration. Here, he utilizes a chromatic ostinato in the left hand (see Example 4.19). Despite the acceleration of tempo and increase in movement, due to the anchoring of the ostinato, which repeats over and over again, Theme 2 again, is prevented from progressing further.

In addition to his use of pedal tones and ostinatos, Debussy's utilizes one of his unique techniques – parallel chords – to inhibit harmonic motion. B section is expanded
with the use of parallel chords in measure 49. (Example 4.23)

**Example 4.23: Debussy *Ondine* mm.49-51**

As mentioned earlier, parallel chords do not progress in any harmonic direction due to its non-functional harmonic nature. Debussy’s particular use of parallel chords is a means of creating gradual shifts of color and harmony.

As shown, harmonic progression in Debussy’s *Ondine* serves more as color change across the different sections of the piece, and pedal tones and ostinatos anchor the harmony in place within each section, resulting in a greatly reduced pacing of harmonic progression and change.

Finally, in comparing Ravel’s and Debussy’s *Ondine*, even a first glance at the
score will reveal the difference in range. Ravel’s piece begins with interlocked hands in close proximity in the treble register whereas Debussy is in need of three staves to accommodate the wide range spanning four octaves.

In addition to range, Ravel’s *Ondine* displays a predominantly two-voice texture with a clear melody and accompaniment, whereas Debussy’s *Ondine* shows his characteristic technique in layering various material one over the other. Layering of pedal tones and ostinatos was discussed earlier, and Example 4.17 as well as Example 4.18 show his typical three-layer texture with a profound bass, contrasted with figures in the high-range and melodic line in the mid-range.

In this way, we have seen that although inspired by the same source – the legend of Ondine – Ravel and Debussy display highly contrasting compositions, each of which distinctly illustrate their personal traits and techniques. Although the inspirational medium may have played a role in the different approaches - Ravel’s version inspired by a literary source whereas Debussy’s version was most likely not – through this comparative analysis, it is evident that each piece contains each composer’s unique personal stamp. Whereas Ravel’s *Ondine* displays a clearly narrative and developmental nature through the dominance of the main themes and dramatic unfolding of the music, Debussy’s version seeks to evoke changing scenes and images, with changing color, timbre, and texture.
CONCLUSION

Through this study, we have seen how distinct Debussy and Ravel were in their compositional approaches, despite their similar background and influences. They shared many common experiences and associations through the rich cultural exchange that flourished in Paris during the turn of the century. They were both progressive in their outlook on musical expression and sound, and assimilated many of the cultural influences which were bestowed upon them. Mutual influences as well as rivalry problems were inevitable as the two artists worked in such close proximity, both striving to establish their musical language in the same cultural milieu and epoch.

Through a close examination of their compositional styles and a detailed analysis of their two *Ondines*, it is evident that they show very different and at times contrasting compositional traits and artistic temperament, and it would be misleading to categorize them together as similar composers of the same period. Music historians frequently group composers into "schools," or label them with an "ism," but those classifications need to be studied very carefully.

The influences Debussy and Ravel had on each other are apparent in many of their compositions, and superficial similarities can be found. However, each possessed a very distinct and unique personality which is reflected in their compositions. Although they both experienced the same cultural influence, the elements that each of them chose to integrate as their own personal styles widely vary.

The stylistic analysis of their *Ondines* illuminates this difference. Although based on the same legend, each work bears the personal stamp of each composer.
Ravel's *Ondine* is more narrative with its clear dominant melodic lines and continuous dramatic unfolding of the music, whereas Debussy's version is more developmentally constrained, evocative, fragmented, and ambiguous.

This paper has focused mainly on the piano works of Debussy and Ravel, but further investigation into other genres of intersection (vocal works, orchestral works, chamber music) will shed further light and deeper understanding of their distinct styles and approaches to music.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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**APPENDIX A**

**Chronological List of Works for Piano Solo and other Selected Works**

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<tr>
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<th><strong>Ravel</strong></th>
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</thead>
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<td><em>Danse bohémienne</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Deux Arabesques</em></td>
<td>1888</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Rêverie; Ballade; Danse;</em></td>
<td>1890</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Valse romantique; Nocturne</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Suite bergamasque</em></td>
<td>1890-1905</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prélude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Menuet</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clair de lune</td>
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<td>Passepied</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Mazurka</em></td>
<td>1891</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>String Quartet</em></td>
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<tr>
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<td>c.1893 Sérénade grotesque</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1895 Menuet antique</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1895-97 Sites auriculaires (2 pianos)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Habanera</td>
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<td>Entre Cloches</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Pour le piano</em></td>
<td>1896-1901</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prélude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarabande</td>
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<td>Toccata</td>
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<td><em>Lindaraja (two pianos)</em></td>
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<td>Jeux d’eau</td>
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<td>1901-3 String Quartet</td>
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<td><em>Estampes</em></td>
<td>1903</td>
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<td>Pagodes</td>
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<td>La Soirée dans Grenade</td>
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<td>Jardins sous la pluie</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>D’un cahier d’esquisses</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1903-05 Sonatine</td>
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<td><em>Masques; L’isle joyeuse</em></td>
<td>1904</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Works</th>
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</table>
| 1904-05 | *Miroirs*  
Noctuelles  
Oiseaux tristes  
Une barque sur l'océan  
Alborada del gracioso  
La Vallée des cloches |
| 1905 | *Images I*  
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| 1906 | *Histoires Naturelles* (voice & piano) |
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| 1907-08 | *Images II*  
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| 1908 | *Gaspard de la Nuit*  
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Pour les sixtes
Pour les octaves
Pour les huit doigts

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Douze Etudes II

Pour les degrés chromatiques
Pour les agreements
Pour les notes répétées
Pour les sonorités opposées
Pour les arpèges
Pour les accords

1918

Frontispiece (2 pianos, 5 hands)
Ondine
Aloysius Bertrand

.....Je croyais entendre
Une vague harmonic enchanter mon sommeil,
Et près de moi s’êpandre un murmure pareil
Aux chants entrecoupés d’une voix triste et tender
CH. BRUGNOT. – *Les deux Génies.*

Ecoute! – Ecoute! – C’est moi, c’est Ondine qui frôle de ces gouttes d’eau les losanges sonores de ta fenêtre illumine par les mornes rayons de la lune; et voici, en robe de moiré, la dame chatelaine qui contemple à son balcon la belle nuit étoilée et le beau lac endormi.

“Chaque flot est un ondin qui nage dans le courant, chaque courant est un sentier qui serpente vers mon palais, et mon palais et bât fluide, au fond du lac, dans le triangle du feu, de la terr et d l’air.

“Ecoute! – Ecoute! – Mon père bat l’eau coassante d’une branche d’aulne verte, et mes soeurs caressent de leurs bras d’écume les fraîches îles d’herbes, de nénuphars et de glaïeuls, ou se moquent du saule caduc et barbu qui pêche à la ligne.”

Sa chanson murmurée, elle me supplia de recevoir son anneau à mon doigt, pour être l’époux d’une Ondine, et de visiter avec elle son palais, pour être le roi des lacs.

Et comme je lui répondais que j’aimais une mortelle, boudeuse et dépitée, elle pleura quelques larmes, poussa un éclat de rire, et s’évanouit en giboulées qui ruisselèrent blanches le long de mes vitraux bleus.
Ondine – translation

(I thought I heard a vague harmony enchanting my slumber and, near me, spreading, a murmur like the interrupted songs of a sad, tender voice…

"Listen! Listen! It is I, it is Ondine brushing with these drops of water the resonant diamond-panes of your window illuminated by dull moonbeams; and here, in a dress of watered silk, is the lady of the castle on her balcony, gazing at the beautiful starry night and the beautiful slumbering lake.

Each wave is a water sprite swimming in the current, each current is a path winding toward my palace, and my palace is of fluid construction, at the bottom of the lake, within the triangle formed by fire, earth, and air.

Listen! Listen! My father is beating the bubbling water with a branch of green alder, and my sisters are caressing the cool islands of grasses, water lilies and gladioli with their arms of foam, or are mocking the tottering, bearded willow that is angling.

After murmuring her song, she begged me to accept her ring on my finger, to be the husband of an ondine, and to visit her palace with her, to be the king of the lakes.

And when I replied that I was in love with a mortal woman, she was sulky and vexed; she wept a few tears, burst out laughing, and vanished in showers that trickled in white rivulets the length of my blue windowpanes.