

**Orchestrations of French Piano Music of the Late Nineteenth
and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Pianist's Perspective**

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Declaration

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List of Musical Examples

PV = Piano Version; OV = Orchestral Version; Hns. = Horns; Stgs. = Strings; Ww. = Woodwinds; Fl. = Flute, Bsn. = Bassoon; Vln. = Violin; Hps. = Harps

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Abstract

Regarding orchestrations of the piano repertoire, French music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries constitutes a uniquely rich canon. While a great deal has been written about this repertoire, this thesis attempts to create a greater awareness among pianists of the wealth of orchestrations of this music. It examines, in detail, Maurice Ravel's orchestration of his *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*, the four movements he orchestrated from *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and his orchestration of 'Alborada del Gracioso', the fourth piece from *Miroirs*. Also explored are Debussy's orchestrations of two of his piano pieces – *La plus que lente* and *Berceuse heroïque*, as well as his orchestration of the piano parts of four of his songs and the *Prémière Rhapsodie* for clarinet and piano.

Orchestrations of the music discussed span a timescale from the period of the works' original composition up to the last twenty years. André Caplet's orchestration of Debussy's *Children's Corner* dates from 1911, while Colin Matthews began his ground-breaking orchestrations of Debussy's complete *Préludes* in 2001 – they were published as a set by Faber and Faber in 2012. The thesis offers a critical engagement with both Caplet and Matthews's works, focusing on Matthews's orchestrations of three of the *Préludes* - 'La Cathédrale engloutie', 'Ondine' and 'Feux d'artifice'. It contrasts Caplet's faithful translation of Debussy's notation with Matthews's more radical interventions. An interview between the author and Colin Matthews is included in Appendix A and sheds considerable light on Matthews's creative process.

Orchestrations by Erik Satie's contemporaries of his works are explored, with an emphasis on how these orchestrations have affected perceptions of his music, while a final chapter concerns orchestrations of music for piano duet, focusing on three pieces – Henri Busser's orchestration of Debussy's *Petite Suite*, Ravel's orchestration of his suite *Ma mère l'Oye* and Henri Rabaud's orchestration of Gabriel Fauré's *Dolly*.

Orchestrations of this canon of French piano works reveal it to be open to continuing re-evaluation and re-interpretation. Their imprints can be seen in later editions of some of the original piano pieces, on which they shed considerable interpretative light. Above all, they 'defrost' the scores so that they may be seen, not as rigid sets of instructions to be followed, but as living, evolving calls to informed, creative interpretation.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

I initially alighted on this rich subject because as a pianist, a piano teacher and composer I felt that a greater understanding of how these seminal piano works could be, and have been, orchestrated would benefit all three of my professional disciplines. As a pianist, I could conceive works, that I have long played, in a better-informed orchestral sense. As a teacher, I could pass on this knowledge to my students and as a composer I could advance my orchestral technique through closer study of this canon. I primarily compose at the piano, so the translation of piano sonority to a broader orchestral palette is of special interest to me.

Until quite recently, the training of classical musicians had become increasingly specialised, to the point where it was quite rare to come across a composing pianist or a composer who could play to a concert standard. In fact, the pursuit of a broad range of disciplines, such as playing, composing, improvising and the ability to play jazz, was looked down on by some as evidence of diletantism.¹ Thankfully, this attitude has begun to change.

Conservatories and music schools, faced with a challenging professional landscape for their graduates, are placing greater emphasis on equipping their students with a broader range of skills to give them the necessary tools to pursue a viable career in music. For students majoring in piano performance, skills such as improvisation, arranging and

¹ In the year 2000, the pianist Veronica McSwiney divulged to me that a fellow jury member on a piano competition in which I was participating questioned the validity of my participation, exclaiming 'I don't know why he's taking part – he's a composer!' Conversely, during my time as an undergraduate in Trinity College Dublin in the 1990s, performance was looked upon, by some lecturers, with a degree of disdain, as a distraction from the business of musicology.

orchestrating, conducting and digital recording techniques are no longer deemed of lesser importance. Instead, they are increasingly seen as valuable and increasingly vital assets which are intrinsic to their primary instrumental studies. Ironically enough, this attitudinal shift in performance education brings our current conservatoires closer to the all-encompassing model of the Paris Conservatoire at the turn of the twentieth century. It is no coincidence that both Ravel and Debussy were highly trained, accomplished pianists or that Satie (who left the Conservatoire, without graduating, in 1886) made his living for a time playing and accompanying singers at the *Chat Noir*, the celebrated cabaret venue in the Montmartre district of Paris. This thesis is, in part, a plea for classical pianists to become broader musicians.

A significant number of piano pieces from 1880 to 1920 were destined for orchestration, either by their composers or their composers' friends and colleagues. Ravel orchestrated his *Menuet Antique* and *Pavane pour une Infante défunte*. He also orchestrated (at different times) two pieces from *Miroirs* – 'Une barque sur l'océan' and 'Alborada del gracioso', along with the cycles *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* and four of the six pieces which comprise *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. In addition, he created a colourful orchestration of his piano duet suite *Ma mère l'Oye*. He also orchestrated many works by other composers including Modest Musorgsky, Claude Debussy, Emmanuel Chabrier and Robert Schumann. His orchestrations of Musorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* played an important role in establishing that work's place in both the orchestral and piano canons.

Debussy orchestrated two of his solo pieces, *La plus que lente* and *Berceuse Héroïque*, as well as the piano parts of four of his songs, the *Trois Ballades de François Villon* and 'Le jet d'eau', the third of his *Cinq poèmes de Charles Baudelaire*. He also orchestrated the piano part of his *Première Rhapsodie* for clarinet and piano and his *Marche Écossaise* for piano duet.

Conversely, many of Debussy's orchestral works exist in arrangements (by himself and others) for solo piano, piano duet and two pianos. If, in orchestrating his piano music, Debussy was less prolific than Ravel, his contemporaries proved to be enthusiastic orchestrators of his works. André Caplet, Henri Busser, and Bernardino Molinari, among others, made orchestrations of many of Debussy's piano pieces. This thesis examines Caplet's orchestration of Debussy's *Children's Corner* and Busser's orchestration of his *Petite Suite* for piano duet. The most recent significant addition to this canon is Colin Matthews's orchestration of Debussy's twenty-four *Préludes*. Matthews, in kindly agreeing to be interviewed about this music, gives great insights into his processes and challenges. Special attention is given to three of Matthews's orchestrations – 'La cathédrale engloutie,' 'Ondine' and 'Feux d'artifice'. Part of Chapter Three concerns Debussy's own orchestrations of his piano music, which involved structural changes and textual additions to the originals, and their implications for our understanding of the original versions.

In orchestrations of Debussy's work, from his contemporaries such as Caplet and Busser to the more recent Colin Matthews orchestrations of the *Préludes*, a recurring issue concerns the tension between creative freedom and respectful translation in the act of orchestration. In the case of Caplet and Busser, finely crafted orchestral writing and textual adherence to the original piano works are their works' greatest strengths. The same rigid fidelity, however, imposes certain limitations. Caplet's orchestration of Debussy's 'Pagodes' from *Estampes*, for example, executes a well-crafted, yet somewhat superfluous act of reverse engineering on Debussy's re-imagining of a Gamelan orchestra. The exotic fantasy of Debussy's writing in *Pagodes* does not survive the translation to the symphony orchestra – that most western of cultural institutions. A century later, Colin Matthews takes considerable liberties with Debussy's *Préludes* with mixed results – sometimes revelatory, sometimes debatable. Even Matthews, for all his creative daring, reacts explicitly to an earlier orchestration by Leopold Stokowski in deliberately playing down the great climax

of ‘La Cathédrale engloutie’, explaining: ‘Stokowski’s version seems to me as if it was ‘The Great Underwater Gate of Kiev’, and I wanted to achieve something notably more subdued, or, as you say, submerged.’² In his orchestration of ‘La fille aux cheveux de lin’, Matthews invokes the spirit of Mantovani strings: ‘My approach was somewhat tongue in cheek, and to me it sounds almost like the ‘studio strings’ of Mantovani (Annunzio not Bruno!)...’³ In other words, the arrangement could be construed as an ironic comment on ‘easy listening’ interpretations of this music. One potential difficulty with this approach is that some listeners may not be as aware of this ironic intention and may take the orchestration at face value. In any case, both examples demonstrate how it is virtually impossible to ignore the cultural history which accumulates around such well known canons.

1.2 Similarities and Divergences in the Pianistic and Orchestral Conceptions of Ravel and Debussy

The writings and lectures of Ravel and Debussy occasionally reveal the same musical concerns, albeit couched in somewhat differing terms, reflecting the distinct personalities of the two composers. Regarding the creative process of both men, it is enlightening to read the following accounts. In a 1917 interview with *The New York Times* Debussy stated:

I do not know how I compose. At the piano? No, I can’t say I do. I don’t know how to explain it exactly. It always seems to me that we musicians are only instruments, very complicated ones it is true, but instruments which merely reproduce the harmonies which spring up within us. I don’t think any composer knows how he does it. If he says he does, it seems to me he must be deluding himself. I know I could never describe the process.

² See Appendix A, an interview between Colin Matthews and Conor Linehan, 191. Annunzio Paolo Mantovani (1905-1980), was an Anglo-Italian conductor famed for the ‘easy-listening’ sound of his orchestra. Bruno Mantovani (b. 8 October 1974) is a French composer.

³ Ibid.

Of course, in the first place I must have a subject. Then I concentrate on that subject, as it were – no, not musically, in an ordinary way, just as anybody would think of a subject. Then gradually after these thoughts have simmered for a certain length of time music begins to centre around them, and I feel that I must give expression to the harmonies which haunt me. And then I work unceasingly.⁴

In a striking parallel, in a lecture to the Rice Institute in Houston, Texas, Ravel explains:

In my own work of composition, I find a long period of conscious gestation, in general, necessary. During this interval, I come gradually to see, and with growing precision, the form and evolution which the subsequent work should have as a whole. I may thus be occupied for years without writing a single note of the work – after which the writing goes relatively rapidly; but there is still much time to be spent in eliminating everything that might be regarded as superfluous, in order to realize as completely as possible the longed-for final clarity. Then comes the time when new conceptions have to be formulated for further composition, but these cannot be forced artificially, for they come only of their own free will, and often originate in some very remote perception, without manifesting themselves until long years after.⁵

What is so striking about these two accounts is the similar creative process of each composer. Both refer to a long period of gestation, followed by an intense burst of compositional activity. Both accounts, moreover, refer to the intangible, mysterious nature of the original ideas; for Debussy composers are ‘instruments which merely reproduce the harmonies which spring up within us’, while Ravel refers to conceptions which ‘often originate in some very remote perception, without manifesting themselves until long years after’. If the expression of these parallel ideas varies, the substance of them gives lie to any received idea of Ravel as an exceptionally controlled craftsman and Debussy as an intuitive

⁴ ‘Debussy discusses music and his work’, *The New York Times*, 26 June 1917 [Accessed 10 October 2021}.

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1910/06/26/104941892.pdf?pdf_redirect=true&ip=>

⁵ Maurice Ravel, *Contemporary Music*, *Rice Institute Pamphlet – Rice University Studies*, 15 no. 2 (1928), 141.

dreamer. Ravel found the well-spring of his ideas as intangible and mysterious as Debussy, while Debussy valued craft and structure every bit as much as Ravel.

Evidence suggests that Ravel and Debussy shared a distaste for overly ‘ornate’ orchestration. Debussy’s orchestration of *La plus que lente* was written in reaction to Hubert Mouton’s arrangement of the same piece. In a letter to his publisher Jacques Durand, Debussy wrote, ‘I’ve examined the ‘brasserie’ style orchestration of *La plus que lente* and it seems to me to be needlessly decorated with trombones, timpani, triangle, etc. ... and therefore designed for a kind of ‘brasserie de luxe’ I’ve never come across!’⁶

Ravel also had little time for ostentatious orchestrations. After a concert at the Société Nationale on 13 March 1909 he wrote this scathing assessment of the music he had heard: ‘Ah, lousy composers! They can’t orchestrate so they fill in the gaps with “Turkish music”. Fugal episodes replace technique, themes from *Pelléas* do duty for inspiration. And the noise it all makes! Tam-tams, tambourines, military drums, glockenspiels and cymbals, all over the place ...’⁷

Beyond their shared disdain for ‘gimmicky’ or overly fussy orchestrations, there are also marked differences in Ravel and Debussy’s attitudes to orchestration. Arbie Orenstein describes Ravel’s enthusiasm for Charles-Marie Widor’s orchestration textbook *Technique de l’orchestre moderne*,⁸ ‘which proved to be a constant and useful guide. Ravel dutifully copied out Widor’s “safe” and “dangerous” ranges for each instrument, and when orchestrating, deliberately sought the most “dangerous” possibilities of each instrument as

⁶ Debussy, from a letter to publisher Jacques Durand, 25 August 1910 in François Lesure (ed.) and Roger Nichols (ed. and trans.), *Debussy Letters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 197.

⁷ Ravel, letter to Cipa Godebski, 14 March 1909, in Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 108.

⁸ Charles-Marie Widor (1844-1937) was a French composer and organist. His *Technique de l’orchestre moderne* was published in 1904. An English translation by Edward Suddard was published by Joseph Williams Ltd. in 1906. It is available on IMSLP: <[https://imslp.org/wiki/Technique_de_l%27orchestre_moderne_\(Widor%2C_Charles-Marie\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Technique_de_l%27orchestre_moderne_(Widor%2C_Charles-Marie))> [Accessed 4 October 2021].

well as novel combinations of timbre.⁹ Debussy showed no such devotion to an orchestral textbook. In a letter to the composer Charles Levadé he wrote:

I've no desire to write a 'history of orchestration through the ages' for you as I haven't brought the necessary documents to the country with me; and anyway the idea doesn't appeal. To be honest, you learn orchestration far better by listening to the sound of leaves rustling in the wind than by consulting handbooks in which the instruments look like anatomical specimens and which, in any case, contain very incomplete information about the innumerable ways of blending the said instruments with each other ... But take my advice and don't burden yourself with a system or a formula ... by bar 10 you won't know what to do with it ... Don't ever worry that you haven't got enough instruments! And remember above all that the brass are to be handled with extreme delicacy and are not instruments of bloodshed! Only in ultimate extremity should a trombone blare.¹⁰

It should be added, however, that Debussy's embrace of intuition should not be mistaken for anti-intellectualism or a dismissal of craft in the art of orchestration. Marie Rolf's analysis of three of Debussy's orchestral manuscripts – *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, (1892-1894), *Nocturnes* (1897-1899) and *La Mer* (1903-1905) reveals the extreme care that Debussy took in the orchestration of each work.

His correspondence with his publishers often took the form of an apology for not having completed a particular work months, and in some cases, years, before. Delays in the completion of his scores were frequently the result of his habit of incessantly revising a piece. Debussy contended that in his revisions he was striving to create a freer, more simplistic, or more natural form of art.¹¹

Rolf also presents evidence to suggest that Debussy's confidence in his compositional technique increased as his career progressed.

⁹ Arbie Orenstein, 'Maurice Ravel's Creative Process' *The Musical Quarterly* 35 (1967), 471.

¹⁰ Debussy, letter to Charles Levadé, 4 September 1903 in *Debussy Letters*, 140.

¹¹ Marie Rolf, 'Orchestral Manuscripts of Claude Debussy 1892-1905', *The Musical Quarterly* 70 (1984), 545.

Debussy clearly became more sure of himself as an orchestrator in the later works since many more changes in orchestration occur between the short score and the printed edition of the *Prélude* than between the parallel sources for the two later works ... The draft of the *Prélude* is the most complete of the three manuscripts and the most carefully worked out; the score of *La Mer* is probably the sketchiest and shows the most obvious signs of haste. Such evidence points to increasing confidence and diminishing hesitation, resulting from a more solid compositional technique and greater experience.¹²

It can be inferred that, to a certain extent, Debussy acquired his orchestral technique ‘on the job’. Every composer (including this one) knows that the greatest orchestration lesson comes from hearing one’s work played at the first rehearsal, when any issues of balance, playability, dynamics and a host of other details, quickly become apparent. It is a foolish composer who refuses to consider the advice of players and conductors. In Debussy’s case, conductors Arturo Toscanini and Ernest Ansermet, who both knew the composer, later made alterations to the scoring of, respectively, *La Mer* and *Ibéria*, citing perceived deficiencies in the orchestration.¹³

Though Ravel’s orchestration technique was, arguably, more assured than Debussy’s, he was certainly not above asking for advice from instrumentalists on the playability of certain passages. He consulted his friend, the violinist Hélène Jourdan Morhange about passages in both the violin part in the *Tzigane* and the orchestration of *La Valse*. Indeed, according to Roger Nichols, the orchestration of *La Valse* ‘was taxing even Ravel’s superlative powers ... orchestrating the 110 bars from figure 85 to the end took him no fewer than five weeks of uninterrupted work, at an average of a mere three bars a day.’¹⁴

Both Debussy and Ravel were accomplished pianists. Neither were what might be

¹² Ibid, 543.

¹³ James R. Briscoe, ‘Debussy and Orchestral Performance’, in James Briscoe (ed.), *Debussy in Performance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 68-69.

¹⁴ Nichols, *Ravel*, 208-209.

considered virtuosos, though, on the evidence of their piano roll recordings and contemporary accounts of their playing, Debussy was markedly closer to that standard. By all accounts, Ravel was a somewhat unreliable pianist. In 1893, his piano teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, Charles de Bériot, wrote of his performance of Chopin's fourth Ballade, 'plays with feeling and warmth, but not always under control'.¹⁵ From the other end of his life comes this review of his playing during his 1928 tour of the United States, 'Only a supreme ironist would consent to play his own beautiful music in public as badly as Ravel plays it. He plays even worse than Johannes Brahms did in his declining years and Brahms set a mark for all bad pianists to shoot at. However, it is a tradition that composers play badly and no one can complain that Ravel does not respect it.'¹⁶ Ravel's own 1913 piano roll recording of his *Sonatine* and *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* displays many traits of nineteenth-century pianism which sound quite idiosyncratic to modern ears and are, in addition, occasionally at odds with accounts of his own teaching of the same works. Aside from some technical 'fluffs', most notable are the de-synchronisation of the hands (the bass notes often anticipating the treble), quirky fluctuations in tempo and the marked separation of episodes by distinct *caesurae* (particularly evident in the first movement of the *Sonatine*). In the opening movement of the *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* he follows his own instructions to the pianist Vlado Perlemuter that the piece should be a steady three in a bar for all of four bars, before tearing off in bar five, never to return to the original tempo.¹⁷ In the 'Epilogue', where fragments of the earlier waltzes are threaded through the score, Ravel similarly ignores his advice to Perlemuter that the different interludes should not disrupt the basic pulse of the music.¹⁸ Despite, but also, in part, because of these idiosyncrasies, the performances have an improvisatory

¹⁵ Bériot, from the Archives Nationales, Paris (Archives Nationale, classification AJ37, piece 293) in Nichols, *Ravel*, 13.

¹⁶ Review by Glen Dillard Gunn of 1928 recital by Ravel in Norman Dunfee, *Maurice Ravel in America, 1928*. DMA diss. (Kansas City: University of Missouri, 1980) in Nichols, *Ravel*, 292- 293.

¹⁷ Vlado Perlemuter and Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel according to Ravel*, trans. Francis Turner, ed. Harold Taylor (London: Kahn and Averill, 1988), 44.

¹⁸ Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel according to Ravel*, 57.

charm and spontaneity quite at odds with many modern performances of this music. Ronald Woodley writes that ‘frequently one comes away from listening to a recent CD of, say, Ravel’s *Quartet*, or *Valses Nobles*, or *Boléro*, after having been previously immersed in various pre-war recordings, thinking that the modern version is, frankly, rather boring.’¹⁹

Contemporary accounts of Debussy’s playing agree on the beautiful sound which he made at the piano. According to Marguerite Long:

Debussy was an incomparable pianist. How could one forget his suppleness, the caress of his touch? While floating over the keys with a curiously penetrating gentleness, he could achieve an extraordinary power of expression. There lay his secret, the pianistic enigma of his music. There lay Debussy’s individual technique; gentleness in a continuous pressure gave the colour that only he could get from his piano.²⁰

Debussy’s own piano roll recordings reveal a rhythmic suppleness and direct, natural style which is reminiscent of Chopin’s call for simplicity above all: ‘Simplicity is everything. After having exhausted all the difficulties ... then simplicity emerges with all its charm, like art’s final seal. Whoever wants to achieve this immediately will never achieve it; you can’t begin with the end.’²¹ The performances on these recordings display such calm, inward simplicity that one can only wonder about the suitability of this music for performance in large concert halls.²² They are closer in tone to the intimate solo recordings of Bill Evans than to a virtuoso concert pianist.²³ Paul Roberts, on the other hand, offers a

¹⁹ Ronald Woodley, ‘Performing Ravel: style and practice in the early recordings’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 213.

²⁰ Marguerite Long, Olive Senior-Ellis (trans.), *At the Piano with Debussy*, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1972), 19.

²¹ Chopin, quoted by Friederike Müller-Streicher in Jean-Jacques Eideldinger, Naomi Shohet, Krysia Osostowicz (trans.) and Roy Howat (ed. and trans.), *Chopin, Pianist and Teacher*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 54.

²² It is worth noting, however, that the playback of piano rolls can vary significantly in such details as pedalling, chord spacing and, most importantly, tempo. Piano rolls set by such experts as Kenneth Caswell and Denis Condon produced distinct varieties of duration in the same rolls by Debussy. For further information see Roy Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 315-318.

²³ Bill Evans (1929-1980), was an American jazz pianist, perhaps best known for his solo recordings and his playing on Miles Davis’s seminal album *Kind of Blue*.

contrasting view to the gentle, dreamy Debussy style:

Yet the performer will find that the “pianistic enigma of his music” is not only created through a “penetrating gentleness” as essential as that is. Much of Debussy’s piano music, for all the composer’s disparaging remarks about the professional concert pianist, requires the panache as well as the technique of the virtuoso ... We have only to think of the electrifying *glissandi* of the “Prélude” in *Pour le piano*, at the onset of Debussy’s great piano-composing period, and the pounding, almost barbaric rhythms of “Pour les accords” at the end to see the nature of the Debussyan alternative to the Debussyan “atmosphere”.²⁴

It might be useful to think of Debussy’s philosophy of pianism as ‘the art which conceals art’. In a letter to André Caplet he expressed his displeasure in Ricardo Viñes’s playing (with Debussy) of Caplet’s two-piano transcription of (Debussy’s) *Ibéria*:²⁵

They also played, at the same ‘Gala Debussy’, your two piano arrangement of *Ibéria*. I wish you’d been there, I missed you at every moment – I know the careful balance of each sound so well and every time I felt as though I’d sat on a gas lamp! ... and those tremolos sounding like the rumble of so many dead pebbles.²⁶

Roy Howat points to a similar clarity in the tremolos in Viñes’s recording of ‘Poissons d’Or’, which Howat suggests ‘may well have been too defined for the ever-demanding Debussy, whose indication *pp aussi léger que possible* suggests something more orchestrally shimmering...’.²⁷ Perhaps, in these passages, Debussy wishes to evoke something similar to the effect of heterorhythmic doubling, as described by Marie Rolf:

Curiously, one subtlety of orchestration is rarely notated in any of the drafts, yet is consistently realized in the full scores; it features heterorhythmic doubling, or the doubling of a specific line in several different rhythmic patterns simultaneously. This special textural

²⁴ Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1996), 179.

²⁵ Ricardo Viñes (1875-1943) was a Spanish pianist who gave the premieres of works by Ravel, Debussy, Satie, Falla and Albéniz.

²⁶ Debussy, letter to André Caplet, 23 June 1913, in *Debussy Letters*, 274.

²⁷ Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music*, 219.

effect, used so characteristically by Debussy to create a sense of shimmering sound, was almost added at the last minute in the autograph full scores of his works.²⁸

Viñes's evidently exceptionally clear playing would seem to be at odds with the 'shimmering sound' of its equivalent orchestral textures. The difficulty seems to lie, not in the brilliance of his technique, but in the overly demonstrative execution of that brilliance. In any event, Viñes seems to have been aware of Debussy's critical standards. After a performance on 12 March 1912 of the first book of *Images* and 'La soirée dans Grenade' he wrote in his journal, 'I was not very pleased with myself, especially because I knew that Debussy was in his box and that he never finds performances to his liking.'²⁹

1.3 Piano Transcriptions of Debussy and Ravel's Orchestral Works

Most of Debussy's orchestral works exist in his own versions for piano duet or two pianos, including the *Marche Écossaise*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, *La mer*, *Jeux*, as well as his incomplete orchestrations of *Khamma* and *La boîte à joujoux* and a two-piano reduction of the concertante *Fantaisie*. Ravel arranged *Nocturnes* for two pianos. Debussy himself prepared a piano duet version of *La Mer*. To study this version is to be made acutely aware of its relationship to some of the piano music he wrote during the same period. Debussy was working on *Estampes* around the same time in 1903 and the parallels, in tonality and shape, between parts of *La Mer* and 'Pagodes' from *Estampes* are clear (Example 1.1 and 1.2).

²⁸Rolf, 'Orchestral Manuscripts of Claude Debussy 1892-1905', 548.

²⁹Ricardo Viñes, Nina Gubisch (trans. and ed.), *Le Journal inédit de Ricardo Viñes*, *Revue internationale de musique française* 1, no. 2 (June 1980), quoted in François Lesure, Marie Rolf (trans.) *Debussy, A Critical Biography* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2019), 285.

Ex. 1. 1. Debussy: *La mer*, ‘De l’aube à midi sur la mer’ (PV), Bars 66-69

The musical score for Debussy's 'La mer', 'De l'aube à midi sur la mer', bars 66-69, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the piano accompaniment with expressive markings such as 'expressif', 'mf', and 'p cresc.'. The right hand features complex textures with triplets and octaves. The second system continues the piece, marked 'le thème en dehors', with 'sfz' dynamics. The score is in G major/A major, 3/4 time.

Ex. 1. 2. Debussy: *Estampes*, ‘Pagodes’ (PV), Bars 27-32.

The musical score for Debussy's 'Estampes', 'Pagodes', bars 27-32, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the piano accompaniment with markings such as 'pp' and 'Revenez au 1° Tempo'. The right hand features complex textures with triplets and octaves. The second system continues the piece, marked 'Rit.' and 'm.g.'. The score is in E major/A major, 3/4 time.

It is easy to imagine, in this context, both ideas springing from initial pentatonic improvisations on the piano's black keys. Similarly, the relationship between 'Jeux de Vagues', the second movement of *La Mer*, and *L'isle joyeuse* becomes much clearer when heard in the same piano sonority. The similarities can be heard, both in the E major/A major tonal centres and the giddy dotted-rhythms in each work.

Ravel's transcription, for two pianos, of Debussy's *Nocturnes*, was published by Fromont

in 1909.³⁰ Roger Nichols suggests that the transcription of *Sirènes* ‘is not completely successful, largely because the neutral piano tone cannot sufficiently distinguish between different strands often pitched in the same register, especially ones for the female chorus and the orchestra.’³¹ The same might be said of *Nuages*, which reflects Debussy’s stated aim in what may have been early sketches for the *Nocturnes* to ‘split up the orchestral groups so as to try and achieve nuances with the groups by themselves.’³² These nuances and distinctions, often between repeated phrases, are almost impossible to achieve within the monochromatic piano sonority, no matter how deftly arranged. Conversely, the oft repeated phrases of the main theme, misattributed as the ‘Earl of Ross March’, in the *Marche Écossaise* benefit greatly from the contrasting sonorities Debussy employs in its orchestration.³³

If we accept that Debussy composed, at least in part, at the piano and that the orchestral works went through initial sketches, short score versions and then full orchestration, it could be argued that all of Debussy’s orchestral works are, in a sense, orchestrations of piano music. The symbiotic nature of the piano and orchestral works would seem crucial to the understanding of both. The published piano versions probably relied more on the short scores, rather than being reductions of the finished orchestral versions. Versions published for piano duet would also have been commercially attractive given the prevalence of home performances in pre-gramophone times.

Conversely, Ravel described *L’isle joyeuse* as an ‘orchestral reduction’ (this should not necessarily be construed as a criticism, as it was a description he also applied to ‘Scarbo’

³⁰ Debussy arr. Ravel: *Nocturnes* (Paris: E. Fromont, 1909. Plate E, 3003 F).

³¹ Nichols, *Ravel*, 124-125.

³² Debussy, letter to Henri Lerolle, 28 August 1894, in *Debussy Letters*, 73.

³³ The tune is actually called “Meggerny Castle”, see Lesure, *Claude Debussy*, 95-96.

the third movement of *Gaspard de la Nuit*).³⁴

Bernardino Molinari, who conducted the Roman premieres of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and 'Ibéria', orchestrated *L'isle joyeuse* in 1917. This orchestration was overseen by Debussy and published by Durand of Paris in 1923. One of this orchestration's most revealing features is the distribution of parts in the final climactic pages. The melody is assigned to winds and strings, while the secondary material is in the brass, consistent with Debussy's disinclination to give melodic climaxes to trumpets and trombones (Example 1.3).

³⁴ Ravel, as recalled by Vlado Perlemuter in Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel according to Ravel*, 44.

Ex. 1. 3. Debussy, orch. Molinari, *L'isle joyeuse* (OV), Bars 219-223

62 **39 Un peu cédé**

The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The instruments listed on the left are: Gdes Fl., Hautb., C.A., Cl. 1 and 2, Cl. 3, Cl.B., Bass, C. Bass, Cors, Tromp., Tromb., Tuba, Timb., Cymb., T. ce B., Trg., Xyl., 1^{re} H., 2^{me} H., Voies, Alt., Violon, and C.B. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The tempo is marked 'à 2'. The score includes various dynamics such as *ff* (fortissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte), and performance instructions like *très en dehors*, *très détaché et gai*, *laissez vibrer*, and *espressivo*. A rehearsal mark '39' is placed at the beginning of the section.

D. & F. 10246.

It is more difficult to attribute the description of transcription or arrangement to Ravel's piano works existing in parallel to orchestral versions. One could not describe *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* or *Le Tombeau de Couperin* as 'transcriptions', given that they already existed and were well known before their orchestral versions appeared. In the case of *La valse* (1919), however, there can be no doubt that the work's conception was primarily orchestral. Evidence can be seen in Ravel's version for solo piano, which

features multiple *ossia* staves incorporating details which are unrealisable by a solo pianist. Some early pieces such as *Pavane pour une Infante défunte* (1899) sit rather uncomfortably under the hand, suggesting an orchestral conception that was unlikely to receive a performance at that early stage of Ravel's career – its orchestration came ten years later in 1910. Similarly, the *Menuet Antique*, published in 1898 three years after its composition, contains a great deal of unidiomatic piano writing. Its chains of left hand thirds are far happier when played by two bassoons than by one uncomfortable pianist. The orchestration of *Menuet Antique*, published a full thirty-two years after the appearance of the original piano work, is suggestive of long unfinished business. In his catalogue of Ravel's works, Roger Nichols does not include *La valse* or *Rapsodie Espagnole* in the list of piano works. As Roy Howat observes, 'While Ravel always envisaged *La valse* for orchestra, his solo and two-piano versions were completed first and have established an understandable place in the repertoire. If their primary purpose was for ballet rehearsal, Ravel, being Ravel, made them top quality from the outset.'³⁵ In contrast to Debussy, who allowed other musicians such as Caplet, Busser and Molinari to orchestrate, respectively, *Children's Corner*, 'La Cathédrale engloutie' and *L'isle joyeuse*, orchestrations of Ravel's piano music by his contemporaries appear non-existent.³⁶

1.4 Erik Satie

In exploring the music of Erik Satie, I explore a more elusive, and somewhat misunderstood musician. So much of Satie's music exists in fragments, unfinished, and unconventionally notated works, that it is something of a miracle that this great musical path-finder still occupies such an important place in the canon. That position owes a great

³⁵ Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music*, 224.

³⁶ Ravel had planned, however, to orchestrate Debussy's *Épigraphes antiques*, a project later realised by Ernest Ansermet. Later orchestrations include Marius Constant's *Gaspard de la Nuit* and Zoltan Kocsis's 'Fugue' and 'Toccata' from *Le Tombeau de Couperin*.

deal to contemporaries such as Debussy, Ravel, Poulenc and Roland-Manuel, who orchestrated much of his piano music, as well as to later composers such as John Cage, Brian Eno and Philip Glass who acknowledged their debt to him in, respectively, music of chance, ambient music and minimalism.

Satie was a composer who, during his lifetime, rarely enjoyed the acclaim given to Debussy or Ravel. Nevertheless, in his music and writings he exerted a profound influence on his contemporaries and on the subsequent trajectory of western art music. Curiously, unlike Debussy and Ravel at the Paris Conservatoire, in 1909 Satie received lessons in orchestration from Vincent d'Indy at the Schola Cantorum, as part of his belated, and not uncomplicated, formal studies. According to Robert Orledge, d'Indy

filled poor Satie's mind with the harmonic series restrictions of natural horns, leading him to despise the instrument, and he told him that three trumpets signified "the end of the world", even though he habitually used three trumpets in C himself, as did Debussy. So, it is perhaps not surprising that Satie emerged as an orchestrator who seems to have been paranoid about any form of orchestral doubling.³⁷

Debussy's orchestration of two of Satie's *Trois Gymnopédies* appears to have been inspired by a desire to promote his older friend's work: 'In an effort to help Satie become better known, Debussy had orchestrated the first and third of his *Gymnopédies* in February 1896. Their première was given on 20 February 1896 under the auspices of the Société Nationale and were conducted by Gustave Doret.'³⁸ Satie's later public breakthrough, fourteen years later, was a result of the promotion of his music by the Société Musicale Indépendante, co-founded by Ravel, Florent Schmitt (1879-1958) and André Caplet (1878-1925), whose purpose was to promote new French music. Between 1911 and 1913, performances, at the

³⁷ Robert Orledge, 'Debussy's Concept of Orchestration', in François de Médicis and Steven Huebner (eds.), *Debussy's Resonance*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2018), 254-255.

³⁸ Lesure, *Claude Debussy*, 151.

Société, of a selection of Satie's solo pieces by Ravel, and of orchestrations of his music by Debussy and Roland-Manuel, brought belated success and attention to the now middle-aged composer.

Orchestration of Satie's music, like any orchestration, changes the nature of the original music and presents it through the lens of the orchestrator's interpretation. Debussy's subtle adornments of *Gymnopédie* no.1 could be argued to contradict the 'nakedness' implicit in its title and realised in the sparseness of the piano version's texture.³⁹ Later orchestrations by Poulenc and Roland-Manuel of his 'Rose-Croix' period music reveal an astringency and modernity which is less apparent in the piano originals. The cool neo-classicism of Roland-Manuel's arrangement of the 'Prélude' to *Le fils des étoiles* reveals Stravinskian echoes.

Darius Milhaud's orchestration of Satie's *Jack in the Box*, on the other hand, while lavishing a good deal of orchestral colour on the somewhat simple piano texture, imbues it with a rather formal jocularity which diminishes the raucous wit of the original. Perhaps an arrangement for a smaller theatre band would have suited the music better, allowing the work's puckish cabaret tone to come through. Indeed, a recurring issue in this thesis is the suitable proportions of the ensemble in relation to the material being orchestrated. In playing the piano music of Satie it is important to understand the unique personality of this great musical path-finder and to contextualise the orchestrations and arrangements through which other composers interpreted him.

1.5 Literature Review

In assessing this subject, we are fortunate to have many first and second-hand documents of the composers' thoughts. Debussy's letters contain many insights into his philosophy of orchestration. *Debussy Letters*, selected and edited by François Lesure and translated by Roger Nichols, offer a wide selection of his correspondence, parts of which directly bear

³⁹ 'Gymnopédie' derives from a series of exercises from ancient Greece, performed by naked boys.

on his philosophy of orchestration.⁴⁰ Robert Orledge's 'Debussy's Concept of Orchestration', in the 2018 collection of essays, *Debussy's Resonance*, explores Debussy's orchestrations from the distinctive perspective of a musician who has completed many of Debussy's unfinished orchestrations. Orledge observes that there was no formal teaching of orchestration at the Paris Conservatoire when Debussy studied there. He includes a section entitled 'Orchestral Effects in Debussy's Piano Music'.⁴¹

Denis Herlin's essay, 'An Artist High and Low, or, Debussy and money', from the 2011 collection *Rethinking Debussy*,⁴² examines the more practical motivations around Debussy's orchestrations.⁴³ Debussy's suffered from financial difficulties for long stretches of his life. Herlin documents the payments Debussy received for each of his works and speculates on how many of his orchestrations were motivated, primarily, by financial rather than artistic needs.

James Briscoe's essay, 'Debussy and Orchestral Performance',⁴⁴ in the collection *Debussy in Performance* gives an overview of early performances of Debussy's orchestral music and discusses the interesting changes made by Arturo Toscanini and Ernest Ansermet to the orchestrations of, respectively, *La Mer* and *Ibéria*. In a related piece, Simon Trezise in his short book *Debussy: La Mer* makes some interesting points concerning how Toscanini and, later, Herbert von Karajan, distorted the balance of melody and accompaniment in *La Mer*. These iconic recordings must certainly have influenced subsequent perceptions of the 'Debussy sound' in orchestral playing,⁴⁵ the pianistic equivalent of which can be found in Marguerite Long's recollection of Debussy in her account of playing for the composer, *At*

⁴⁰ Lesure and Nichols (eds.), *Debussy Letters*.

⁴¹ Orledge, 'Debussy's Concept of Orchestration', in *Debussy's Resonance*, 255-256.

⁴² Elliott Antokoletz and Marianne Wheeldon (eds.), *Rethinking Debussy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴³ Denis Herlin, 'An Artist High and Low, or, Debussy and Money' in Elliott Antokoletz and Marianne Wheeldon (eds.), *Rethinking Debussy*, 166-167.

⁴⁴ James Briscoe (ed.), *Debussy in Performance*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁴⁵ Simon Trezise, *Debussy: La Mer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 28-29.

the piano with Debussy: ‘One day Debussy stared at me, his eyes clear and shining. ‘The fifth finger of virtuosi, what a pest it is! What he meant by that is that too often one hammers the melody without attaching sufficient importance to the whole harmony; harmony that, according to him, should never be sacrificed to the melodic idea.’⁴⁶

Roy Howat’s essay ‘What do we interpret?’ in his book *The Art of French Piano Music* reflects on orchestral elements from Debussy and Ravel. Pointing out that ‘the manuscript of Debussy’s first four preludes in Book 2 brackets *four* staves to a system’, Howat suggests that this visual presentation ‘encourages us to play as if we’re reading from a *particelle*, the sort of ‘short score’ in which Debussy always drafted his orchestral works.’⁴⁷ A theme of promoting orchestral thinking at the piano runs through Howat’s comprehensive study.

In 1950 Vlado Perlemuter gave a series of radio interviews with H el ene Jourdan-Morhange recalling his lessons with Ravel. These interviews were later transcribed into the short book *Ravel d’apr es Ravel* and published in an English translation by Frances Tanner in 1988. The interviews offer much illumination on the orchestral thinking in Ravel’s piano music. Of Scarbo, Perlemuter recalls Ravel’s constant orchestral promptings, written on his score – ‘*comme un c.-basson ... comme un tambour ... comme des timbales*’.⁴⁸

Michael Russ’s essay ‘Ravel and the orchestra’ includes subsections devoted to Ravel’s transcriptions of his own music and his transcriptions of music by others.⁴⁹ Russ asks a question which recurs throughout this thesis – ‘In evaluating Ravel’s reworking of other composers’ music how far may one composer legitimately alter another’s work?’ This question can certainly be asked of some of Colin Matthews’s orchestrations of Debussy’s

⁴⁶ Marguerite Long, Olive Senior-Ellis (trans.), *At the Piano with Debussy* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1972), 13.

⁴⁷ Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music*, 210.

⁴⁸ Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel*, 37.

⁴⁹ Michael Russ, ‘Ravel and the orchestra’, in Deborah Mawer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 136.

Préludes and, further afield for example, jazz musicians' interpretations, such as Gil Evans's arrangement of *La plus que lente* for the Gerry Mulligan sextet⁵⁰ or Herbie Hancock's improvisatory re-working of the second movement of Ravel's G major piano concerto.

Paul Roberts's *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*⁵¹ and *Reflections: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel*⁵² offer plentiful insights from the perspective of a musicologist who is also a celebrated concert pianist. While only lightly touching on the orchestral element of these works, Roberts provides considerable insight into much of the music explored in this thesis.

Marie Rolf's article 'Orchestral Manuscripts of Claude Debussy 1892-1905' examines the development of Debussy's orchestral technique, using the watermarks and inks which he used in his short scores to ascertain the degree of revision and re-writing that occurred through the compositional process. They reveal a compositional process at odds with any notions of Debussy as a wholly intuitive composer. François Lesure's comprehensive 2003 biography *Claude Debussy* has been available in an English translation by Marie Rolf since 2019.⁵³ It draws on Debussy's complete correspondence and previously unavailable diaries, as well as contemporary reviews and criticism.

Roger Nichols's 2011 biography *Ravel* offers an equally comprehensive survey of Ravel's life and work, while employing a somewhat more conversational tone and editorial stance⁵⁴ while Caroline Potter's *Erik Satie, A Parisian Composer and His World*⁵⁵ inhabits a space

⁵⁰ Gerry Mulligan Sextet – *La plus que lente*

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vIrJ4am0as>> [accessed 29 September /2021]

⁵¹ Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1996).

⁵² Paul Roberts: *Reflections: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Milwaukee: Amadeus Press, 2012).

⁵³ François Lesure, Marie Rolf (trans.), *Claude Debussy* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2019).

⁵⁴ Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).

⁵⁵ Caroline Potter, *Erik Satie, A Parisian Composer and His World* (Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2016).

between biography and musicology, in contrast to James Harding's earlier, more anecdotal, *Erik Satie*.⁵⁶

Williametta Spencer's essay 'The Relationship Between André Caplet and Claude Debussy' offers a succinct picture of the relationship between Debussy and his amanuensis.⁵⁷ Caplet, a notable composer and conductor in his own right, assisted in the orchestration of many of Debussy's works and transcribed *La Mer* for two pianos. Clare Wilson has written on Caplet's own songs in her thesis 'Reimagining the Mélodie: An Analysis of the Musico-Poetic Expression of André Caplet'.⁵⁸

To the best of my knowledge, my work on Colin Matthews's orchestration of Debussy's *Préludes* is the first extended writing on the subject, notwithstanding reviews in *Gramophone Magazine*, *MusicWeb International* and an online interview with Matthews about the work.⁵⁹ As far as I am aware, there is no extended critical engagement with the Caplet orchestrations of *Children's Corner*, beyond a review of its première in the *Boston Globe* on 5 February 1912.

⁵⁶ James Harding, *Erik Satie* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971).

⁵⁷ Williametta Spencer, 'The Relationship Between André Caplet and Claude Debussy', *The Musical Quarterly* 66 (1980), 112-131.

⁵⁸ Clare Wilson, 'Reimagining the Mélodie: An Analysis of the Musico-Poetic Expression of André Caplet' PhD thesis, Ulster University (2018).

⁵⁹ 'Orchestrating Debussy', an online interview with Colin Matthews:
<<https://musaic.nws.edu/videos/orchestrating-debussy>> [accessed 6 October 2021].

Chapter Two: Three essays on Maurice Ravel

2.1 Beyond Instrumentation: An examination of the relationship between the piano and orchestral versions of Maurice Ravel's *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*

The French composer Manuel Rosenthal (1904-2003) reminisces on his time as a student of Maurice Ravel:

I had been studying with him for some time and he kept repeating 'You still don't understand orchestration. This is only instrumentation.' Then finally I brought a score and he said, 'Ah, now that's orchestration.' But what's the difference?' I asked. 'Instrumentation, he said, is when you take the music you or someone else has written and you find the right kind of instruments – one part goes to the oboe, another to the violin, another to the cello. They go along very well and the sound is good but that's all. But orchestration is when you give a feeling of the two pedals at the piano: that means that you are building an atmosphere of sound around the music, around the written notes – that's orchestration'.¹

Ravel's description of orchestration goes to the heart of his process. In distinguishing between the acts of 'instrumentation' and 'orchestration', he adroitly delineates the difference between the craftsmanship of the former and the artistry of the latter. Ever the craftsman, Ravel, nevertheless, implies an interpretative engagement with the source material in the act of orchestration. In engaging with the creative nature of Ravel's orchestral transformations, pianists can deepen their understanding of his intentions, sharpen their stylistic awareness of his piano works and furnish their imaginations with a greater sound world than the piano can possibly provide. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* is a good starting point. In Ravel's orchestral transformation of the piano cycle the music

¹ Manuel Rosenthal, in conversation with Roger Nichols, quoted in Nichols (ed.), *Ravel Remembered* (London: Faber, 1987), 67-68.

becomes something different – somewhat softer in texture yet more complex in its realisation of the material – particularly in the fragmented ‘memory music’ of the ‘Epilogue’, where string and harp harmonics, celeste and complex *divisi* string textures create a more pictorial, evocative soundscape than the eerie and somewhat glacial landscape of the piano original.

In describing successful orchestration as giving ‘the feeling of the two pedals at the piano’ Ravel captures the symbiotic nature of the transformation from piano to orchestral sonority – the pianist may think in orchestral terms as much as the orchestrator thinks in pianistic terms.

The original piano version of the *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* was given its premiere by its dedicatee Louis Aubert (1877-1968) on 8 May 1911, in a concert organised by the Société Musicale Indépendente the previous year.² The work was later orchestrated in 1912 by Ravel to create the score for a ballet ‘Adélaïde, ou le langage des fleurs’ for the dance troupe of ballerina Natasha Trouhanova.³

‘Trouhanova came into her own in 1912 with the mounting of a dance spectacle, in association with Jacques Rouché, comprising four symphonic works: *Istar* by Vincent d’Indy, *La Tragédie de Salomé* by Schmitt, *Adélaïde, ou le langage des fleurs ...* by Maurice Ravel and *La Péri* by Paul Dukas. Each work was given in a different set, designed and painted by a different reputed French designer.’⁴

An unusual feature of the SMI concert in which the piano version premiered was that each

² The *Société Musicale Indépendente* was established in 1910 in reaction to the conservative musical strictures of the earlier *Société Nationale de Musique*. Its founders included Ravel and Fauré.

³ Natasha Trouhanova (1885-1956) was best known for dancing the role of *Salomé* in Richard Strauss’s opera. She became embroiled in a public row with the composer after he refused to let her take a bow with the singer of the role, considering the role of a dancer to be inferior to that of a singer.

⁴ Clair Rowden, ‘Whose/Who’s Salomé? Natalia Trouhanowa, a Dancing Diva’ in Clair Rowden (ed.), *Performing Salomé, Revealing Stories* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 76.

work was presented anonymously and the audience had to guess the identity of the composer. Ravel's friend, the critic Michel-Dmitri Calvocoressi, wrote of this *jeu d'esprit*:

Many people who would have applauded the *Valses* with the utmost vigour had they known Ravel had written them remained indifferent and unfavourable comments arose freely, during the interval, from lips usually ready to sing Ravel's praises ... I cannot remember whether the majority found for Ravel, but I doubt it. What I remember quite well is that I did not.⁵

It was, evidently, unusual for Ravel's work to be met with such critical resistance. A large part of the hostility may have been due to the arresting dissonances of the opening four bars. These would certainly have jolted an audience accustomed to less hard-edged music from Ravel. For all the harmonic subtleties in the subsequent waltzes, the most unique and distinctive feature of this cycle lies in its boisterous opening declamation.

The passage characterises an important development, during this period, of Ravel's style.

Ravel described the process with the verb *durcir*:

After *Gaspard* and *Ma mère l'Oye* Ravel changed his style to what he called 'a distinctly clearer writing, which sharpened the harmony and emphasised the contours of the music'. He uses the word *durcir* – to harden. Even today this hardening of dissonance, this sharpened profile – signalled in the magnificent audacity of the opening bars – is one of the notable characteristics of this work.⁶

This more hard-edged style better reveals the contrapuntal writing and harmonic discipline which, without exception, characterises Ravel's music. It also further exposes the underlying compositional processes in the music. Analyses of Ravel's orchestrations reveal, in their individual instrumental lines, rigorous harmonic and contrapuntal processes

⁵ Michel-Dmitri Calvocoressi, *Music and Ballet* (London: Faber, 1934), 51.

⁶ Paul Roberts: *Reflections: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Milwaukee: Amadeus Press, 2012). 95.

which are less easily perceived in the more sustained and overlapping sonorities of the original piano pieces. In this regard, Ravel's orchestration of the opening four bars is illuminating (Example 2.1).

Ex. 2. 1. Ravel: *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (PV), 1st movt. bars 1-4



The opening harmony consists of three overlaid G major and F major chords (the F major tonality somewhat visually obscured by the spelling of F as an E sharp in the piano score). Curiously, in the orchestration, the same note is spelt as a straight F (in the trombones and second violins). The second chord on the third crotchet of the first bar is an overlay of a D major augmented fifth chord and an F sharp major sixth. In the orchestration, this can be seen clearly in the distribution of harmony through the sections. The string section only plays the notes of the augmented D major tonality while the harps play F sharp sixth chords *fortissimo*. The actual voicing of the piano chord is distributed exactly amongst the woodwinds, who maintain the piquancy of the piano sonority. The 3rd chord, on the opening of bar 2 is a G major chord with added 6ths and 9ths.

The string writing in the opening bars of the orchestration is masterful in its distribution of complex harmony, employing double and triple stopping techniques in the violins, violas and cellos as well as *divisi* cello writing and alternating *arco* and *pizzicato* techniques on each chord. Played in isolation it is reminiscent of the string writing in the Blues movement of the Violin Sonata and the *Assez vif* 2nd movement of the String Quartet which also revels in Ravel's favourite '6/8 or 3/4?' rhythmic game (Example 2.1a).

Ex. 2.1a Ravel: *String Quartet*, movt. 2 bars 1-5

The fourth chord of the first waltz is a F sharp sixth over D (Example 2.1). The upward leaps of the opening bars give the music a deceptively improvisatory feel. The clarity of voice leading is best seen (as so often) in the French horns, which in contrast to the pyrotechnics of strings and woodwind, move through chromatic stepwise harmonies. These clarify the contrapuntal discipline underpinning a harmonic progression which, in the piano version at least, can (and should) sound somewhat improvisatory (Example 2.2).

Ex. 2. 2. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 1st movt. bars 1-4 Hns.

The addition of percussion, in the form of timpani, tambourine, cymbals and bass drum in the opening bars gives the piece a rather festive, almost bucolic, atmosphere which contrasts markedly to the bracing severity of the piano version. The trumpets, trombones and tambourine in bars 5-6 (similarly horns and tambourine in 7-8) expose the hemiola rhythm which is absent in the piano score until bars 7-8 (perhaps these cross-rhythms were also reflected in Trouhava's choreography) (Example 2.3).

Ex. 2.3. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 1st movt. Bars 1-4, full score

Valses nobles et sentimentales

*Le plaisir délicieux
 toujours nouveau d'une
 réputation inutile...*
 Henri de Régnier

*... the pleasure, delightful
 and always new, of a useless
 vocation.*
 Henri de Régnier

I

Modéré ♩ = 176

ANDES FLÛTES
 HAUTBOIS
 COR ANGLAIS
 CLARINETTES en Sib
 2 BASSONS
 2^e CORS en FA
Chromatiques
 4^e CORS en FA
 TROMPETTES en UT
 2^e TROMBONES
 TROMBONE et TUBA
 TIMBALES
 TRIANGLE
 BOUCLE de BASQUE
 TAMBOUR
 CYMBALES
 GROSSE-CAISSE

ENSEMBLE de TIMBRES

1^{re} HARPE
 UT, RÉ, MI, FA, SOL, LA, SI

2^{de} HARPE
 RÉ, SI

Modéré ♩ = 176

1^{ers} VIOLONS
 pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco

2^{ds} VIOLONS
 pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco

ALTOS
 Div. Unis Div. Unis Div. Unis Div. Unis Div. Unis

VIOLONCELLES
 pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco

CONTREBASSES
 pizz. arco

145

In Ravel's own scenario for *Adélaïde*, the opening scene is described as 'A soirée at Adélaïde's home. Couples are dancing. Others, seated or walking, are conversing tenderly. Adélaïde comes and goes among her guests, inhaling the fragrance of a tuberose (symbolizing voluptuousness).' The more festive, tender and 'voluptuous' atmosphere of the ballet scenario must surely have influenced Ravel's orchestral choices – certainly a

more picturesque and whimsical world than the more angular piano textures create. Though the ballet scenario may strike modern audiences as somewhat old-fashioned when set against the sophistication of the score, it should be remembered that ballet is a collaborative art-form, that the piece was a commission and that Madame Trouhanova (and her choreography) may have played a major role in the overall conception of the piece.⁷

Establishing a correct tempo in this music is crucial. Though Ravel insisted to Vlado Perlemuter that the music should be played as three beats in a bar, an overly slow performance, particularly in an orchestral context, can make the music sound somewhat heavy and ponderous.⁸ Perlemuter's recollection of Ravel's insistence that one 'must not use any pedal for the chord on the third beat, but only on the first beat' is reflected by the use, in the orchestration, of pizzicato strings to delineate the third beat. These pedalling suggestions have been included in the Bärenreiter edition (Example 2.3a).

Example 2.3a: Ravel, *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (PV), Bars 1-4 (Bärenreiter Edition)



As the music settles into a more flowing, less declamatory tone, the orchestration, more conventionally, doubles strings and woodwind, while the horns continue to underpin and

⁷ This is highly possible, given the intense involvement of Trouhanova in another of the featured ballets, *La Péri*, with score by Paul Dukas, also danced by Trouhanova. The extent of her involvement in all aspects of the production is documented in Helen Julia Minors, 'La Péri, poème danse (1911-12): A Problematic Creative-Collaborative Journey', *The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, Vol. 27 no. 2 (2009), 227-252.

⁸ Perlemuter added the caveat that 'you must keep it on the lively side, not wildly so, but moving: Vlado Perlemuter and Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, Francis Turner (trans.), Harold Taylor (ed.), *Ravel according to Ravel* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1988), 44.

clarify the harmonic discourse. A notable technique is the *divisi* writing of the viola part which allows for four-part chords in bars five and six, and three-part chords from bars seven to twelve, while the cellos play rising figurations in double stops. This enables the first and second violins to carry the melodic material in octaves, then thirds, and strengthens the melodic contours of the texture. The complexity and ingenuity of Ravel's string writing here provides a good example of the difference between 'orchestration' and 'instrumentation'. A further example occurs in the three fortissimo chords in bars 17-18 at the culmination of the 'exposition'. This chord, essentially a B minor 7th superimposed on an A minor 7th, is distributed in first violins, *divisi*, with double and treble stopping in second violins, unison triple stopping in violas and single A crotchets in unison cellos and basses. According to Arbie Orenstein, Ravel 'considered the strings the soul of the orchestra and generally notated their parts before the other instruments.'⁹ (Example 2.4).

Ex. 2. 4. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 1st movt. Bars 14-20, Stgs.

The musical score for strings, bars 14-20, consists of five staves. The first two staves are Violin I and Violin II, the third is Viola, and the last two are Cello and Bass. The score is in 3/4 time and features a variety of dynamics and articulations. Key performance instructions include 'Div. pizz.' (divisi pizzicato) for the violins and viola, 'Unis arco' (unison arco) for the violins and viola, and 'C. B. à 5 cordes' (Cello and Bass on 5 strings) for the lower strings. The score shows a progression from mezzo-forte (mf) to fortissimo (ff) dynamics, with a final fortissimo chord in bar 20.

Another revealing element in the orchestration appears in bars 53-60: the rising chromatic crotchet chords of the piano version are orchestrated as triplet quavers in the string parts, giving the orchestral texture more tension and momentum (Examples 2.5 and 2.6).

⁹ Arbie Orenstein, 'Maurice Ravel's Creative Process', *The Musical Quarterly* 53 (1967), 472.

Ex. 2. 5. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (PV) 1st movt. Bars 50 -60.

Ex. 2. 6. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 1st movt. Bars 45-48, Stgs.


A literal transposition of the crotchet chords would have created a rather inert orchestral texture. Conversely, pianists familiar with this orchestration will infer a growing dynamism and rhythmic momentum from this passage of orchestration, suggesting a strong forward phrasing in the equivalent piano passage.

The second waltz would surely have given the listeners at the SMI concert a better clue to the identity of the mystery composer, being more explicitly ‘Ravelian’ in character. Plangent major/minor seventh chords resolve downwards to augmented fifths echoing the

voice leading from the first waltz (Examples 2.7 and 2.8).

Ex. 2. 7. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (PV) 2nd movt. Bars 1-5

Assez lent_avec une expression intense ♩ = 104
en dehors



The image shows a piano solo score for five bars. The music is in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The tempo is 'Assez lent' with a metronome marking of ♩ = 104. The instruction 'avec une expression intense' and 'en dehors' are present. The score features a right hand with chords and a left hand with a melodic line. The dynamics start at *p* (piano) and increase towards the end of the passage.

Ex. 2. 8. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 2nd movt. Bars 1-6, Ww.



The image shows an orchestral score for five instruments: 2 Hautbois, 1 Cor Anglais, 2 Clarinettes in Si b, 2 Bassons, and 1^{er} et 2^e Cors en Fa. The music is in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat. The tempo is 'Assez lent'. The dynamics are marked *mf* *expressif* and *mf*. The score includes instructions for the horns: '1^o Sourdine' and 'ôtez la Sourdine'. The woodwinds play a melodic line with a rising *portamento* effect.

This figure is scored for oboes and bassoons with pedal points in the horns and muted string accompaniment. It leads to a rising *portamento* figure on violins. This slide, so characteristic of the ‘Kreisler’ style of playing, creates a markedly ‘*sentimentale*’ impression, which might encourage modern pianists (who may be more stylistically at home in the ‘*nobles*’ passages of the work) to adopt a freer, more expressive style in their playing.¹⁰ While, of course, impossible to realise at the piano, the effect is well worth bearing in mind when performing the piano version (Example 2.9).

¹⁰ Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962) was an Austrian-born American violinist and composer notable for the extensive use of *portamento* and *vibrato* in his playing.

Ex. 2. 9. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 2nd movt. Bars 7, Vln. 1.



There follows a melody of classic Ravelian simplicity on the flute (Example 2.10).

Ex. 2. 10. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 2nd movt. Bars 9, Fl.



Like the Adagio of the G major concerto, this melody is teased out with great care and its simplicity underpinned by a strong harmonic structural base. Ravel's student Roland-Manuel wrote:

He was quick to point out that his boldest ideas were grounded in reason and shaped in the classical mould, and that I was mistaking means for ends; beautiful harmonies had no autonomous existence, their charm resulting from a chord in the right place or from a modulation which simultaneously surprised the ear and fulfilled its expectations.¹¹

Other notable techniques employed in the second waltz include the use of harp harmonics and *sul tasto*, or *sur la touche* techniques in the strings to create a more disembodied sound in the pianissimo sections.

If the second waltz is an *obligato* for flute, the third could be described similarly for oboe.

¹¹ Alexis Roland-Manuel, conversation with Roger Nichols quoted in Nichols, *Ravel Remembered*, 142.

In its elegant playfulness and finely-wrought simplicity it anticipates the eighteenth-century sensibility which would later permeate *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. What is so striking about this waltz is what might be termed the ‘complex simplicity’ of the orchestration. Ravel rarely adds new material to the original piano piece. There are (with one notable exception in the fourth waltz) no countermelodies and no extraneous flourishes. Yet the orchestration achieves a great deal more than simple ‘instrumentation’. In Rosenthal’s account,¹² Ravel describes the act of orchestration itself in pianistic terms – as a symbiotic act – almost as if the act of orchestration was to bring to it the resources of the piano rather than the other way around. In the third waltz the melody is played initially by solo oboe and then restated in octaves by flutes, oboe and cor anglais, underpinned by a pedal E in the clarinet and pizzicato strings. In bars 5 and 6 the close voice leading texture in clarinets and horn is reminiscent of the horn writing at the opening of the first waltz (Example 2.11).

Ex. 2. 11. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 3rd movt. Bars 1-7.

The musical score for Example 2.11 shows the orchestration for the first seven bars of the third movement of *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*. The score is written for five instruments: 1 Grandes Flûtes, 2 Hautbois, 1 Cor Anglais, 2 Clarinettes en Si b, and 2 Bassons. The tempo is marked 'Modéré'. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The flute part has a first ending bracket over bars 5-7. The oboe part is marked 'Solo' and 'pp léger'. The bassoon part has a first ending bracket over bars 5-7 and is marked 'pp'. The clarinet part has a first ending bracket over bars 5-7 and is marked 'pp'.

In contrast to the somewhat neoclassical style of the third waltz, the fourth is more fluid and pianistic in its texture and therefore poses a different set of challenges in its orchestration (Example 2.12).

¹² See Chapter 1, Introduction, 24.

Ex. 2. 12. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (PV) 4th movt. Bars 1-8

Assez animé $\text{♩} = 80$

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system covers bars 1 through 4, and the second system covers bars 5 through 8. The music is written for piano and bass clef. The tempo is marked 'Assez animé' with a quarter note equal to 80. The score includes various dynamics such as *pp* and *p*. A slur in the bass clef indicates that the sonority should be sustained. In bars 7-8, an upward sweep creates a full, arpeggiated sonority. The music is treated in a straightforward way with phrases passed between flutes and clarinets; trumpets and bassoon provide the underpinning sustaining harmony.

The slurs in the bass clef indicate that the sonority should be sustained. In bars 7-8 the upward sweep creates a full, arpeggiated sonority. In the absence of an orchestral sustaining pedal, however, a simple re-distribution of the notes will not suffice. The music must be ‘orchestrated’ rather than ‘instrumentated’. In this instance, the melodic material is treated in a straightforward way with phrases passed between flutes and clarinets; trumpets and bassoon provide the underpinning sustaining harmony (Example 2.13).

Ex. 2. 13. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 4th movt. Bars 1-5. Ww.

27 *Assez animé* ♩ = 80

LES FLÛTES
OBOES
COR ANGLAIS
CLARINETTES en SI \flat
BASSONS
CORNS en FA
CORNS en FA
TROMBONES en SI \flat
CYMBALES

It is, as so often with Ravel, in the string writing that the most complex and ingenious textures occur (Example 2.14).

Ex. 2. 14. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 4th movt. Bars 1-6. Stgs.

Basses play D flat and B flat pedals, while cellos and violas play pizzicato and *divisi* pizzicato respectively. The first and second violins are both *divisi à 3* and play shivering crescendo and diminuendo phrases. In bar seven the rapid triplet figuration is passed between clarinets and flutes (Example 2.15).

Ex. 2. 15. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 4th movt. Bars 6-10, Ww.

The single monophonic line in the piano version is translated into thirds in the woodwinds and two harps. This does not alter the harmonic structure of the music but creates, necessarily, a fuller texture. In these two instances a simple re-assignment of the piano part would not have been satisfactory, leaving the music somewhat underpowered and bare in

texture.

A further feature of this waltz is the rising tenor figure in the cellos at bar 31. Although this figure is not in the first edition of the piano version, Ravel marked it into Vlado Perlemuter's score and it was included in a later edition for piano duet (Example 2.15a).

Ex. 2.15a: *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 4th movt. Bars 31-36 strings.

Vlado Perlemuter: I see on my music, in his handwriting, the addition of an ascending phrase to the printed text, which enriches it in a singular way.

Hélène Jourdan-Morhange: What's more, it's the version which he chose for the orchestral score.¹³

These modifications in the strings, harps and woodwind further demonstrate Ravel's distinction between 'instrumentation' and 'orchestration'.

There are two immediately striking features in the orchestration of the fifth waltz - the sparseness of the opening pages and the passing of the melody between clarinet, cor anglais and oboe in, what might be described as a magnified chamber music. Indeed, the phrase

¹³ Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel according to Ravel*, 49.

'magnified chamber music' is an appropriate description of the orchestral timbres in the *Valses*, employing, as they do, much interplay between individual instruments throughout. The initial phrases are scored for woodwind. Pizzicato violas double the second clarinet (in A) to add a little rhythmic definition (Example 2.16).

Ex. 2. 16. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 5th movt. Bars 1-5

V

33 **Presque lent** ♩ = 96

2 GRANDES FLÛTES *pp*

2 HAUTOIS *pp*

1 COR ANGLAIS *1^o Solo*

2 CLARINETTES en LA *pp*

2 BASSONS

1^{er} et 2^e CORS en FA *pp* *Sourdine*

3^e et 4^e CORS en FA *pp* *3^o Sourdine*

TRIANGLE $\frac{3}{4}$

HARPE

Presque lent ♩ = 96

1^{ers} VIOLONS

2^{ds} VIOLONS *pizz.*

ALTOS *pp*

VIOLONCELLES *pizz.* *pp*

CONTREBASSES *arco* *pp*

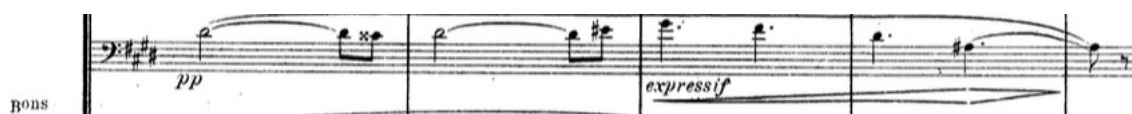
In the fifth bar, cellos and basses play in the same register, rather than the more common doubling an octave apart, creating a lighter overall texture. Combined with the use of clarinet and oboes in the accompaniment, this creates an almost Mozartean limpidity of texture. In its variety of influences, then, the music can encompass both Kreislerian sentiment and Mozartean simplicity of expression. The orchestration of bars 17-24 is played *sur la touche* and *ordinaire* in alternate two-bar phrases, with two flutes in unison and the first bassoon playing the dotted crotchet lines in the third and fourth bars (Example 2.17).

Ex. 2. 17. Valses Nobles et Sentimentales (PV) 5th movt. Bars 17-24.

The following line, though implicit in the harmonic structure, does not occur in the piano part (Examples 2.18 and 2.19).

Ex. 2. 18. Valses Nobles et Sentimentales (OV) 5th movt. Bars 17-24,Fls.

Ex. 2. 19. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 5th movt. Bars 17-24, Bsn.



Typical of Ravel's mastery of tonal shading, the two equivalent phrases from bars 17-20 and bars 20-24 employ contrasting textures. The first is played by strings with flutes and bassoon, accompanied by harp harmonics. The second uses strings, again, but now with horns and oboes. The clarinets play the dotted crotchet line. It is this endless colouristic variety which gives Ravel's orchestrations their particular qualities. For pianists, this varied orchestration of equivalent phrases can find a parallel in subtle variations of pedalling, timbre and attack in recurring phrases. While orchestral varieties of sonority may not be available to them, they can inspire a constant search for contrasts of tone and texture. In the sixth waltz the piano and orchestral versions are barred significantly differently (Examples 2.20 and 2.21).

Ex. 2. 20. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (PV) 6th movt. Bars 1-5



Ex. 2. 21. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 6th movt. Bars 1-4

The musical score shows five staves for string instruments. The first violin staff starts with a tempo marking 'Assez vif' and a quarter note equal to 100. The music is in 3/4 time. The first violin part has a melodic line with phrasing slurs. The piano part (pizz.) is in 3/4 time. The orchestration includes dynamic markings like pp and p, and performance instructions such as 'Div.' (divisi), 'arco', 'pizz.', 'sur la touche', and 'Cédez à peine au Mouvt'.

The piano part is written in consistent 3/4 bars while the orchestra plays the same passage in alternate meters of 3/2 and 6/4. Moreover, the phrasing of the melody in the first violins is subtly altered from its equivalent passage in the piano version. The orchestration more clearly delineates the playful rhythmic ambiguity of the music. It would appear that Ravel intended the 3/2 and 6/4 bars to be conducted in 3 and 2 respectively, thereby making explicit the dual time signatures which are implicit in the piano part. Familiarity with the orchestration can help pianists to achieve a subtler performance of these rhythms.¹⁴ The question that arises is this – is it legitimate to adopt this different articulation in performances of the piano version? As will be seen later,¹⁵ a similar issue recurs in the ‘Forlane’ of *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. At bar 45, when the theme returns, the cross rhythms in the strings are further emphasised through being doubled by percussion (Example 2.22).

¹⁴ It also makes the music easier to conduct and less liable to fall into the ‘oompahpah’ pattern to which performances of the *Valses* can occasionally succumb.

¹⁵ See Chapter 2, pages 75-76.

Ex. 2. 22. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 6th movt. Bars 43-47

Retenez 43 au Mouvt

The musical score is arranged in ten staves. From top to bottom, the instruments are: Gdes Fl., Hrb, Cor A., Cl., Bons, Cors, Timb., Trg., T.de B., and Tamb. The score begins with a 'Retenez' instruction and a boxed bar number '43' followed by 'au Mouvt'. The time signature is 6/8, with a 3/2 bar line. The score includes various dynamics such as *f*, *pp*, and *mf*, and includes markings like 'à 2' and '30'.

This binary time signature, simultaneously in three and two, is also used in the second movement of the G major piano concerto where the melody is in 3/4 while its accompaniment is suggestive of 6/8. This suggestion is, however, tempered by Ravel. Roy Howat notes that ‘In the ‘Adagio’ his left-hand beaming (maintaining 3/4) warns against bumping the half-bar with the apparent syncopations.’¹⁶ (Example 2.23).

¹⁶ Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music*, 261.

Ex. 2. 23. Ravel: *Piano Concerto in G*, 2nd Movt, Bars. 1-5.

The seventh waltz brings the cycle to a climax, followed, as it is, by the more fragmented and ghostly ‘Epilogue’. Its orchestration employs many of the techniques employed in the earlier movements. Its middle section, in particular, provides a further example of Ravel’s ability to transform explicitly ‘pianistic’ writing into orchestral sonority. After the initial preamble, in which phrases are passed from clarinets to oboes to strings, the theme emerges (Example 2.24).

Ex. 2. 24. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 7th movt. Bars 17-24

The melody moves from second to first violins and the characteristic sophistication of Ravel’s *divisi* writing is evident. As the music develops towards an exultant peak, it retains,

despite its great sonority, an essential economy of texture.¹⁷ This economy of means occurs throughout the *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*, as demonstrated in this passage (Example 2.25).

Ex. 2.25. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (PV) 7th movt. Bars 39-66

The musical score for Example 2.25 is presented in six systems, each with a piano (treble) and bass clef staff. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various dynamics and performance instructions: *pp*, *un peu en dehors*, *aug - men - tez*, *peu à*, *peu*, *f*, *8*, *17*, *Un peu retenu au Mouv!*, *ff*, *Un peu plus animé*, *pp*, and *très doux, le chant en dehors*. The notation features complex chordal textures and melodic lines, with some passages marked with '8' and '17' indicating specific rhythmic or structural elements.

¹⁷ In an informal talk on orchestration, William Ross, who has orchestrated many of film composer John Williams's scores, suggested that there should never be more than three ideas (and rarely that many) on a page of orchestral writing no matter how large or small the sonority involved (William Ross, in a lecture given at the Radisson Hotel, Dublin, October 2011).

As the music augments through a cycle of fifths it reaches an exuberant climax. Yet the ‘ideas’ are really contained within the rising waltz theme in the bass and the descending quaver theme in the treble. In the orchestration, the former is played by horns, clarinets and violas, the latter by flutes, oboes and harp. The remaining strings play a waltz accompaniment. As the passage augments, Ravel brings the waltz figuration to the fore while tracing the descending quaver figure. This is achieved through the redistribution of the instruments, reinforcing one while diminishing the other, so that the quaver figure is dispersed from woodwinds to violas before disappearing altogether. The brass finally reappear at the climatic moment. It is in the middle section, in a biting bitonality of F and E major, that the most pianistic writing challenges the orchestrator, as it features extensive overhanging pedalled sonorities (Example 2.26).

Ex. 2. 26. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (PV) 7th movt. Bars 62-76.

The musical score for Example 2.26 is presented in three systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a tempo marking 'Un peu plus animé' and a dynamic marking 'pp'. The second and third systems continue the piece with various melodic and harmonic textures. The score features complex chordal structures and rhythmic patterns characteristic of Ravel's style.

Any attempt at ‘instrumentation’ would flounder here - other than for harp or celeste, the writing is unidiomatic for most orchestral instruments. In his orchestration Ravel reworks the material without losing its character. To create a sense of rapid movement, he uses tongued repeated semiquavers in the flutes doubled by dotted crotchets in the bassoons (Example 2.27).

Ex. 2.27. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) 7th movt. Bars 63-69

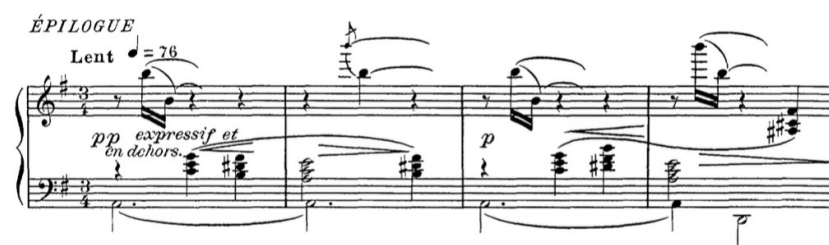
The musical score for Example 2.27, from the 7th movement of *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (Op. 50), bars 63-69, is presented for a full orchestra and harp. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with staves for woodwinds, brass, percussion, and strings, plus a harp part. The woodwind section includes 1st and 2nd Flutes, Clarinet in A, Clarinet in Bb, Bassoon, and Saxophone. The brass section includes Trumpets, Trombones, and Tuba. The percussion section includes Timpani, Snare Drum, Triangle, Cymbals, and Gong. The string section includes Violins, Violas, Cellos, and Double Basses. The harp part is also included. The score features various performance instructions such as '1st Solo', 'Sole', 'Unis', 'Div.', 'sur la touche', 'pizz.', and 'pp'. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' and the time signature is 3/4. The key signature is one flat (F major/D minor).

D & F. 8476

Second violins are divided in four parts to play a *tremolando* E major pedal point while the first violins, also divided in four, play pizzicato figures. From passages such as the one above, it might be surmised that, should he deem it necessary, Ravel would assign every player in the orchestra a different part! Interjections by glockenspiel and celeste (another small addition here – these phrases do not exist in the piano part) and glissando strings suggest an exoticism hitherto absent from the piece. Conscious of the unmutability of the piano part, Ravel has, effectively, reduced the music to its harmonic and melodic skeleton and rewritten it. This transformation anticipates, by almost a hundred years, Colin Matthews’s stated ambition in orchestrating Debussy’s *Préludes*: ‘My overall aim was to rethink them in orchestral terms so that if a piano reduction of the orchestrations were to be made it wouldn’t look much like the original.’¹⁸

In the ‘Epilogue’, Ravel evokes ghostly fragments from the earlier waltzes to create an eerie, somewhat other-worldly atmosphere. Ravel insisted that the tempo of the ‘Epilogue’ should be consistent throughout regardless of which waltz fragment was being played (an instruction which he fails to follow in his own recording).¹⁹ A phrase of three falling triads forms the framework through which the earlier fragments interject (Example 2.28).

Ex. 2. 28. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (PV) Epilogue Bars 1-4.



¹⁸ See Appendix A, ‘An Interview between Conor Linehan and Colin Matthews’, 192, 194.

¹⁹ A playback of Ravel’s 1913 Welte Mignon piano roll recording, engineered by Kenneth Caswell for the Pierian Recording Society is available at:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcS5W-9BwZA>> [accessed 4 July 2019].

The bass figure of C, B and A minor descends over an A pedal, the phrase then repeating but with the second B chord in its first inversion. The same phrase is orchestrated for cor anglais and bassoon:

Ex. 2. 29. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) Epilogue Bars 1-4, Ww.

The musical score for Ex. 2. 29 consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Cor Anglais (1 COR ANGLAIS), marked 'Solo' and 'pp très express.'. The middle staff is for two Clarinettes in B-flat (2 CLARINETTES en SI b), also marked 'pp très express.'. The bottom staff is for two Bassoons (2 BASSONS), marked 'pp' and 'p'. The music is in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Cor Anglais and Bassoons play a descending phrase: C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3. The Clarinettes play a similar phrase: C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3. The Cor Anglais and Bassoons play a second phrase: C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3. The Clarinettes play a second phrase: C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3.

Cellos and violas play a pedal A, while the harp traces the harmonic outline. The main textural difference here is that the overlapping A minor and B major sonorities, implied by the held A pedal in the piano part, cannot be achieved in the woodwind equivalent, thereby denying the orchestral texture some of the ‘ghostly’ atmosphere of the piano phrases.²⁰ The development of the opening phrase through the piece is typically varied in sonority in each iteration – from variations in woodwind/horn timbres to this characteristically sophisticated passage of string writing (Example 2.30).

²⁰A notable feature of recordings of the orchestral version is how frequently the tempo marking of crotchet=76 is entirely ignored by conductors – much faster by Claudio Abbado in his recording with the London Symphony Orchestra:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEq1iCxbPmI>> [accessed 4 July 2019].

And much slower by Seiji Ozawa. Ozawa in this performance with the Boston Symphony Orchestra:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSkrJh1gzYM>> [accessed 4 July 2019].

Ex. 2. 30. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (PV) Epilogue Bars 40-45.

The image shows a musical score for five staves. The top three staves are for violins and violas, and the bottom two are for piano. The score includes performance instructions such as 'Sourdines' (muted), 'Div. en 3' (divided in three), and 'en 2' (in two). Dynamic markings include *pp* (pianissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The key signature is one sharp (F#).

The three-part chord, rather than being distributed in single lines through violins and violas, is played fully by each part *divisi à 3*, in three different octaves, but with first violins muted, in order to balance the sonority of the chord. The *sourdines* surely imply a disembodied *una corda* piano sound in the piano version. If something is lost in the absence of the sustaining pedal, something is also gained in the extraordinary orchestral colour employed, most strikingly in the following passage with its ghostly reminiscence of the the 4th waltz (Examples 2.31.and 2.32).

Ex. 2. 31. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (PV) Epilogue Bars 40-45.

The image shows a piano accompaniment score for two staves. The score includes performance instructions such as 'au Mouv!' (at the movement), 'ppp très lointain' (pianissimo very distant), and 'sourdine' (muted). The key signature is one sharp (F#).

Ex. 2. 32. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) Epilogue Bars 41-44.

214 *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*

71 Au mouvt

1^o Solo

Gdes Fl.

Cl.

Bons

Cors

Tromp.

Timb.

T. de B.

Tamb.

Cymb.

Gr. C.

Harpe

Au mouvt

1^{ers} Vions Div en 4

2^{ds} Vions Div en 4

Alt. Div en 4

Velles Div en 3

C. B. Div en 3

ppp

pizz.

arco

tr.

sur la touche

pizz. jeu ordinaire

Sourdine 1^o

Sourdine 2^o

Sourdines

Woodwinds play the melody, passed between flute and clarinet, while the top two first violin and top second violin parts (they are both *divisi à 4*) play the underlying harmony *sul tasto* and in semitone trills (with the lower note). The other violin parts play alternating rapid semiquaver triplet figurations, while cellos and violas alternate rising and falling glissando figurations. The result is an extraordinary shimmering texture which, rather than imitating the piano sonority, creates something entirely distinctive.

The echo of the first waltz is scored sparingly for muted trumpets with percussion and pizzicato strings. The writing continues in this complex fashion, each fragment of earlier waltzes using a broad palette of orchestral timbre available. Paradoxically, it is in some of the simplest parts of the music that Ravel employs the most complex arrangements, for example, at bars 53-54 which echo the third waltz. A simple left-hand figuration is transformed into a far richer orchestral texture (Examples 2.33 and 2.34)).

Ex. 2. 33. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (PV) Epilogue Bars 55-56

The musical score for Example 2.33 consists of two staves. The upper staff is for the piano, and the lower staff is for the violin. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piano part features a melody with slurs and accents, marked with *pp* and *Un peu plus lent*. The violin part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, marked with *sourdine* and *Rit.*. The score is divided into two measures, with a bar line between them.

Ex. 2. 34. *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (OV) Epilogue Bars 51-56.

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The musical score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes parts for Gdes Fl., Htb., Cor A., Cl., Bons, 1er et 2e Cors, and Trg. The second system includes parts for 4.ers vons Soli, Tutti, 2.2ds vons Soli, Tutti, 2 Alt. Soli, Tutti, 1 velle Solo, Tutti, and 1 C.B. Solo, Tutti. The score is marked 'Sans ralentir' and 'Un peu plus lent Rit.' with a boxed section indicating a tempo change. Dynamics range from *pp* to *mf*. Performance instructions include 'Div.', 'pizz.', 'arco', 'Col tutti', and 'sur la touche'.

The music gradually thins out until the clarinet reiterates the melody of the second waltz over sustained strings and sparse interjections on harp and celeste, before winding its way down to nothingness. In *Adélaïde*, the guests depart one by one during this passage, a

scenario which, in its mix of memory and loss, finds a parallel in the closing pages of James Joyce's 'The Dead'.

2.1.1 Conclusion

In contrast to the great pains which Ravel took in the later orchestration of *La valse*, the *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* were orchestrated, at extraordinary speed, in just two weeks for *Adélaïde, ou le langage des fleurs*. It is possible that the rather whimsical subject of the scenario influenced some of the orchestral choices which Ravel made. Certainly, the sharply etched lines and glittering sonorities of the piano writing are somewhat softened in the orchestral writing. Brass writing is sparse and only used for climactic moments or for muted effects. Prominence is given to individual woodwind lines and to complex multi-voiced techniques in the string writing. However, the orchestra provides tremendous colouristic resources. Ravel rarely orchestrates two consecutive phrases in the same way. The ear is constantly drawn to new combinations and colours. The piano and orchestral versions defy comparison with each other, such are their individual characteristics. Michael Russ writes:

Ravel's transcription technique was strict; indeed, this was part of the challenge. But he does not simply dress the originals in pretty colours. Instead he clarifies shapes, adds appropriate effects, energises and adds weight in a way not possible with the piano ... The symbiotic relationship between the piano and orchestral realisations of certain of Ravel's work-concepts is illustrated by the way in which his piano scores often imitate instruments and voices, and his orchestral ones sometimes recreate piano sounds, while translating pianistic into orchestral virtuosity.²¹

Russ's writing echoes Rosenthal's recollection of Ravel invoking the two pedals of the piano in his description of the difference between 'instrumentation' and orchestration'.

²¹ Michael Russ, 'Ravel and the Orchestra' in Deborah Mawer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 135.

Similarly, for pianists, the rich orchestral colours and ‘truly creative interpretations, clarifications, even analyses of Ravel’s orchestration’,²² can inform the phrasing, tone quality, pedalling and rhythmic clarity of performance. In the case of a composer so skilled in writing for both piano and orchestra, the command of both disciplines renders both versions as original and free-standing achievements.

2.2 The Relationship of Music and Virtuosity in the Piano and Orchestral Versions of Ravel’s ‘Alborada del gracioso’

‘Alborado del gracioso’, the fifth piece of the cycle *Miroirs* by Maurice Ravel, has long been a virtuoso piano showpiece. In particular, its rapidly repeated notes, single and double note glissandi and rhythmic *élan* create exhilarating challenges for pianists. Ravel orchestrated ‘Alborada del gracioso’ at the request of the impresario Diaghilev, for a ballet called *Les Jardins d’Aranjuez*. The ballet was choreographed by Massine and also featured Ravel’s orchestration of Chabrier’s *Menuet Pompeux* alongside music by Satie, Fauré and Manuel de Falla.²³ The different impressions and effects of the piano and orchestral versions of ‘Alborada’ are examined here.

There are three outstanding contrasts between the piano and orchestral versions. Firstly, the pianistic and orchestral textures differ in their treatment of the piquant dissonances within the music. Secondly, the performance element of individual virtuosity differs fundamentally from its orchestral equivalent. There is no doubt that only a very fine orchestra can do justice to the orchestral version, yet some of the music’s challenges speak even more impressively when played by a virtuoso pianist. Thirdly, in the orchestral version, Ravel extends some passages to facilitate a greater orchestral crescendo.

²² Ibid., 135.

²³ See Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 203.

The piece opens with alternating figures between right and left hand accenting a characteristically Spanish rhythm (Example 2.35).

Ex. 2. 35. Ravel: ‘Alborada del gracioso’ (PV), Bars 1-4

IV. Alborada del gracioso

The image shows a musical score for the first four bars of 'Alborada del gracioso' by Maurice Ravel. The score is written for piano and is in 3/4 time. It is marked 'Assez vif' with a metronome marking of quarter note = 92. The dynamic is 'mf' and the performance instruction is 'sec les arpèges très serrés'. The music consists of alternating figures between the right and left hands, creating a characteristic Spanish rhythm. The first bar features a dissonant minor second interval between E flat and D.

The ambiguity of rhythm between 3/4 and 6/8 is a recurring feature of Ravel’s music which can be seen in the ‘Forlane’ of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and the string quartet second movement (Example 1.1a). This rhythmic ambivalence is often clearer in the orchestral scores, where certain cross rhythms can be isolated in, for example, strings or percussion.

The dissonant minor second E flat against the D major chord in the first bar gives the opening a percussive effect. As ever with Ravel, the metronome marking is on the brisk side.²⁴ The marking of *mf sec les arpèges très serrés* (Dry with very tight arpeggiation) suggests a degree of percussive attack by the pianist to create sonority which, if not aggressive, should be incisive and acerbic. The opening of the orchestral version, however, presents a somewhat different texture:

²⁴ Ravel clearly preferred brisker *tempi* if his metronome markings are to be followed. In particular, the marking of crotchet = 144 for *Jeux d’eau* is rarely followed by pianists, Robert Casadesus being one exception: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYzkat9n-CQ>> [accessed 5 July 2019].

Ex. 2. 36. Ravel: 'Alborada del gracioso' (OV), Bars 1-5

The image shows a page of a musical score for Maurice Ravel's 'Alborada del gracioso'. The score is for the first five bars. It includes parts for the Harp (1^{re} HARPE and 2^de HARPE), Violins (1^{er}s VIOLONS and 2^ds VIOLONS), and Alts (ALTOS). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor). The tempo is 'Assez vif' with a quarter note equal to 92 beats per minute. The harp part is marked 'f' and 'près de la table'. The string parts are marked 'pizz.' and 'f pizz.'.

The use of pizzicato strings and harp, notwithstanding the replacement of *mf* with *f*, gives the music a lighter, guitar-like texture and the dissonance of the phrygian minor second D to E flat is softened by the gentler attack of the pizzicato strings. Additionally, the references to 'dryness' and 'tightness' are removed in the orchestration. The effect is to make the opening statement more graceful and courtly and to reduce the more percussive *commedia dell'arte* effect which is so evident in the piano writing.²⁵ The orchestral version is, at once, more balletic and draws the listener into its sound-world in a more coaxing manner than the forthright snappiness of the piano version's opening bars. Conversely, the orchestration should perhaps encourage a lighter touch than is common in many piano performances of 'Alborada'.

In 1925 Scott Goddard wrote that 'Ravel never alters a note of the works that he takes from the pianoforte and places in the orchestra'.²⁶ While the spirit of this assertion may be true,

²⁵ In its biting bitonality and explosive gestures and, not least, in its title, *Alborada del gracioso* anticipates Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, written five years later.

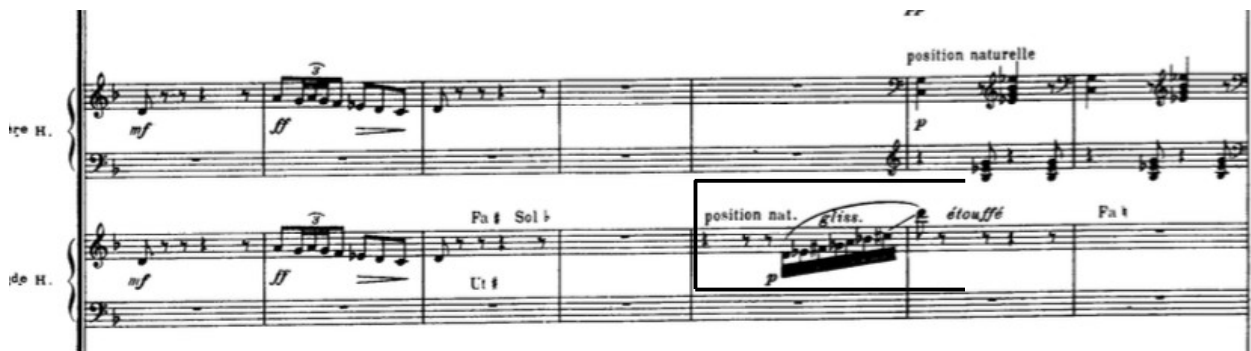
²⁶ Scott Goddard, 'Maurice Ravel: Some Notes on His Orchestral Method', *Music and Letters* 6 (1925), 293.

the letter of it does not hold up to more recent analyses. In fact, Ravel is often quite free in the arrangement of certain details in his orchestrations. A good example is the upbeat to bar 12 of ‘Alborada’, where the harmonic effect is considerably different in the piano and in the orchestral version (Examples 2.37 and 2.38).

Ex. 2. 37. ‘Alborada del gracioso’ (PV), Bars 9-12



Ex. 2. 38. ‘Alborada del gracioso’ (OV), Bars 7-13, Hps.



A simple C minor over D chord in the piano is embellished by the addition of F sharp and C sharp in the harp glissando creating a more complex harmony, suitable for the fuller effect of an orchestral version. In the ensuing passage, oboe and pizzicato strings combine to reinforce the impression of lightness and grace. The contrast with the ensuing, explosive ‘feria’ passage is, therefore, even more pronounced in the outburst of orchestral sonority which follows:

Ex. 2. 39. 'Alborada del gracioso' (OV), Bars 29-33.

ALBORADA DEL GRACIOSO 7

3

3

Woodwinds and strings play the melody over three octaves while the brass creates the rhythmic delineation, along with castanets, tambourine, cymbals, bass drum and triangle.

The castanets and tambourine, in particular, give an evocatively Spanish character to the music.

A contributing factor to the incisive, crystalline quality of Ravel's piano writing is suggested by Roy Howat:

Ravel also exploited what was available as much as he stretched beyond it, and his writing strongly reflects the Érard pianos that were his norm. Besides their lighter, shallower touch (facilitating lightly repeated notes and sophisticated glissandos) a now rare quality is the distinct colour of each register ... The instrument itself also accounts for some essential differences in flavour between Ravel's *Miroirs* and Debussy's contemporary piano Images ... Debussy enjoyed writing for the more sensuous (but arguably less sensual) ... Bechstein, Blüthner and Pleyel.²⁷

Howat goes on to describe the Érard's 'jazzier bite'²⁸ and along with the repeated notes and glissandos, this is evident in 'Alborada del gracioso'. Indeed, many of the difficulties of execution in the piece are the result of the heavier touch of modern concert grand pianos.²⁹ It is almost impossible to play this score accurately, with a suitably light texture, on a modern Steinway. In assessing the relationship of orchestrations to their piano originals it can be helpful to reference the significantly different sonority of pianos of the period with their 'distinct colour of each register'.³⁰ In this regard, Arbie Orenstein's related description of Ravel's process of orchestration is telling:

He stated that he composed as much at the piano as at his desk, and when orchestrating, he felt the need to isolate the notes of each family of instruments at the keyboard and observe,

²⁷ Roy Howat, 'Ravel and the Piano' in Deborah Mawer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, 77-78.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁹ Gwendolyn Mok has recorded all of Ravel's piano works on an 1875 Érard piano with fascinating results: *Ravel Revealed*, Gwendolyn Mok, CD, MSR Classics, MS1070, 2002.

³⁰ These distinct registral colours can be heard clearly in Mok's recording.

for example, what the woodwinds were doing at a particular moment.³¹

Armed with this knowledge of Ravel's process and of the distinct tonal colours of his piano, it is difficult to play his music without specific orchestral sounds coming to mind.

The two most notable piano techniques in 'Alborada' are the repeated note triplets and the glissandi. Ravel translates both, with characteristic skill, in his orchestration (Example 2.40).

Ex. 2. 40. 'Alborada del gracioso' (PV), Bars 41-48.



The rapid repeated note triplets, played by alternating fingers at the piano, are first given to muted trumpet, while the rising and falling figure is played by flutes. The trumpet is then reinforced by muted horns playing triplets. The flute takes over the more subdued triplets which follow. The orchestral colour can be instructive in the interpretation of the piano

³¹ Arbie Orenstein, 'Maurice Ravel's Creative Process', *The Musical Quarterly* 53 (1967), 471-472.

version, by informing a passage, which pianists may primarily (and understandably) think of in terms of its technical difficulty, with broader colouristic possibilities.

If the preceding passages demonstrate the more spectacular facets of Ravel's orchestral skill, then the more measured middle section shows his extraordinary attention to detail in pursuit of the exact sonority he wishes to employ. The piano plays a wistful recitative-like melody punctuated by pianissimo bell-like chords in the higher and lower registers of the piano (Example 2.41).

Ex. 2. 41. 'Alborada del gracioso' (PV), Bars 67-84

The musical score for 'Alborada del gracioso' (PV), Bars 67-84, is presented in three systems. The first system shows a wistful melody in the right hand and bell-like chords in the left hand. The second system features a '1er Mouvement très mesuré' section with a '3' marking. The third system includes a 'Plus lent' section with 'mf' dynamics and a '2 Ped.' marking. The score is annotated with various performance instructions such as 'pp', 'ff', 'mf expressif en récit', and 'enlevez la sourdiné'.

In his orchestration, Ravel assigns the melody to bassoon. It is in the string writing of the ensuing chords that he employs all his subtlety: first and second violins are both divided into six parts, violas into five, cellos into four and basses into three. Each group is divided into multi-stopped pizzicato and harmonics to create an extraordinary, ethereal sonority.

Ravel's great skill lies in his identification of the sonority of every individual instrument in the orchestra, rather than as a collective of string, woodwind, brass and percussion groups.

The attribution of the central melody to the bassoon, playing in its upper register, gives the music a somewhat plaintive quality suggestive of the wry melancholy of a Shakespearean clown. This melancholy finds a parallel in Ravel's earlier orchestration of Chabrier's *Menuet Pompeux* with its limpid woodwind writing. The bassoon melody of 'Alborada del gracioso' is close to an inversion of the flute solo which begins the corresponding passage in the Chabrier work (Examples 2.42a and 2.42b).

Ex. 2. 42a: 'Alborada del gracioso' (OV), bars 72-76 bassoon.


16 ALBORADA DEL GRACIOSO

9 Plus lent

1^o Solo

mf *expressif quasi recitativo*

au Mouvt

A single staff of music for the first bassoon (1^o B^{on}). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo marking is 'Plus lent' with a circled '9'. The performance instruction is 'mf expressif quasi recitativo'. The music features a long, melodic line with a fermata over the first five measures, followed by a change in tempo to 'au Mouvt'.

Ex. 2.42b: Chabrier orch. Ravel, *Menuet Pompeux*, (OV), bars 58-63.

12 (2^o Allargando)

Fl.

Ott.

Ob.

Cl.

Fag.

Segue

Per finire

10 Solo

A woodwind section score for five instruments: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ott.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Fag.), and Bassoon (Fag.). The tempo marking is '(2^o Allargando)'. The score is divided into sections: 'Segue' and 'Per finire'. A circled '10' indicates a measure number. The Flute part has a 'Solo' marking. Dynamics include 'p' (piano) and 'II' (second ending).

Tellingly, in contrast to his orchestration of the central melody of the *Menuet Pompeux*, in 'Alborada del gracioso', Ravel assigns the melody solely to the bassoon (with subsequent

doubling by cellos and violas), rather than sharing it through the woodwinds. Perhaps, because of the specifically ‘characteristic’ nature of the piece, he wished to evoke the ‘yawn’ of the waking clown with this somewhat sleepy timbre. The massive orchestral interpolations throughout this section are more grandiose than their quicksilver equivalent in the piano version. Indeed, the fleetness and lightness of the piano piece often gives way to more *maestoso* textures throughout the orchestral version. Further disproving Goddard’s assertion that ‘Ravel never alters a note of the works that he takes from the pianoforte and places in the orchestra’, following the woodwind and harp glissandi there are four bars of descending chromatic scales in the woodwind, which have no correspondence in the piano notation. Moreover, the final crescendo in the recapitulation of ‘Alborada del Gracioso’ is extended by six bars to allow for the wider dynamic range of the orchestral crescendo.³² The paradox of such orchestral virtuosity is that it more explicitly evokes the characteristic elements of the music and, in its very explicitness, makes the music less suggestive and more distant, a recurring conundrum in orchestration. The excitement of hearing a great performance of ‘Alborada del Gracioso’ lies, partly, in the pianist’s ability to create the illusion of orchestral colour and sonority. When that illusion is made real, invariably something is both gained and lost. Virtuosity at the piano is not just in prestidigitation but also in the ability to create an illusion of orchestral sonority. In both these senses, ‘Alborada del Gracioso’ presents the pianist with formidable challenges. The thrill, for example, of listening to a swashbuckling execution of the double glissandi towards the end of ‘Alborada’ is difficult to match in orchestral terms (Example 2.43).

³² Colin Matthews, who, in his orchestrations of Debussy’s *Préludes*, specifically invokes the influence of Ravel’s ‘Alborada’ orchestration, does something similar in his orchestration of ‘Le vent dans la plaine’. See Appendix A, 194.

Ex. 2. 43. 'Alborada del gracioso' (OV), Bars 172-176, Ww.

32 ALBORADA DEL GRACIOSO

24

Fl. Fl.
Gdes Fl.
Hrb.
C. A.
Cl.

In the orchestral versions, the glissandi are divided between the woodwinds (with harp) and though the effect is powerful, it diminishes the pure virtuosity of the pianistic pyrotechnics on display in the corresponding passage.

Ex. 2. 44. 'Alborada del gracioso' (PV). Bars 170-176.

glissando

p

glissando

In describing his orchestrations of Debussy's *Préludes*, Colin Matthews observes: 'It's almost as if they were transcriptions of music for the orchestra arranged for the piano, so

the process has been to turn it back into that.’³³ It can be argued that Debussy’s piano music is essentially more orchestral in conception than Ravel’s (with the exceptions of the latter’s early *Pavane pour une Infante défunte* and *Menuet antique* and, later, ‘Scarbo’ from *Gaspard de la nuit*). Ravel’s piano music is, broadly, more overtly pianistic than Debussy’s, and therefore the nature of its orchestral translation is somewhat different. In the brilliance of his orchestration of ‘Alborada del gracioso’, Ravel’s extraordinary skill is apparent. The collective virtuosity of an orchestra and individual virtuosity of a pianist will, of course, have contrasting effects on listeners. The speed of finger, colouristic control and emotional projection of a solo pianist contributes, by itself, an important element to this music which, for all its glittering brilliance and weight of sonority, its orchestral manifestation cannot.

2.3 Questions of Style and Contradiction in *Le Tombeau de Couperin*; How its Orchestration Can Aid a Deeper Understanding of Performance Style in the Piano Version

The six pieces which make up *Le Tombeau De Couperin* were composed between 1914 and 1917. The suite is the last published work for piano solo that Ravel completed. It serves two extra-musical purposes. Firstly, it is an homage, not just to Couperin, but also to the great French keyboard composers of the seventeenth century. Secondly, each of the six pieces is dedicated to the memory of friends of Ravel who were killed in the course of the First World War.³⁴ The contrasting, some might argue conflicting, demands of these elements call for a subtle balance of emotion and restraint from pianists. On the one hand, the music can sound too aloof and stylised to fulfil its commemorative purpose; on the other,

³³ Colin Matthews, ‘Orchestrating Debussy’, Interview with New World Symphony <<https://musaic.nws.edu/videos/orchestrating-debussy>> [accessed 12 December 2019].

³⁴ ‘Prélude’ is dedicated to Lieutenant Jacques Charlot, ‘Fugue’ to Sous-Lieutenant Jean Cruppi, ‘Forlane’ to Lieutenant Gabriel Deluc, ‘Rigaudon’ to brothers Pierre and Pascal Gaudin, ‘Menuet’ to Jean Dreyfus and ‘Toccata’ to Capitaine Joseph de Marliave.

Ravel was highly wary of his music being ‘interpreted’.³⁵ For him, personal expression was of little value if it was not refracted through the lens of his exacting craftsmanship:

The fact is that I refuse simply and absolutely to confound the artist’s *conscience*, which is one thing, with his *sincerity*, which is quite another. Sincerity goes for nothing if the artist’s conscience is not engaged in the process. Our conscience requires that we develop our craft. So my objective is the perfection of technique. I aim constantly striving toward this, knowing I will never achieve it. The important thing is to get closer all the time. Art, without doubt, has other *effects*, but the artist, to my mind, should have no other aim.³⁶

In Ravel’s music, the acts of composition and of orchestration occupy an unusual proximity, given that both are high manifestations of the technique on which he placed such value. Recalling a discussion about Puccini’s *Tosca*, Ravel’s student Manuel Rosenthal recalls:

Finally, he took down the score to show me how perfect the orchestration is. He said, ‘This is exactly what I did with *Le Tombeau de Couperin*: this economy of means by which two solo instruments in Puccini’s orchestra produce such an impact – that is the mark of a great artist.’³⁷

It appears that, for all his orchestral virtuosity, it was the simple combinations of the correct instruments which gave Ravel the greatest satisfaction.

Many listeners have been struck by the light, joyful and occasionally reflective character of the music in *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, and its apparent contrast in tone to the tragic events which inspired its composition. Ravel’s response that ‘the dead are sad enough in their

³⁵ ‘Once again, one has to seek one’s own interpretation in accordance with the exact indications of the composer’, H el ene Jourdan-Morhange in Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel according to Ravel*, 77.

³⁶ Ravel in Arbie Orenstein, (ed.), *Maurice Ravel: Lettres,  crits, entretiens* (Paris: Flamarrion, 1993), 47.

³⁷ Manuel Rosenthal, interview with R emy Stricker, ‘France Culture,’ quoted in Marcel Marnat, *Maurice Ravel* (Paris: Fayard, 1986), 145.

eternal silence' suggests his desire to commemorate the joy and vigour of these young men when alive. It is also, however, indicative of the emotional objectivity with which he pursued his art. His manifesto that the artist should have no other aim but art itself is strikingly reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's 'Art for Art's sake' aesthetic, and the depth concealed within the glittering surfaces of Wilde's plays finds a parallel concealment in Ravel's immaculately constructed works.³⁸ In other words, the emotional impact lies within the beauty of the work itself. Pianists who perform *Le Tombeau de Couperin* are, therefore, presented with a number of challenges of texture, tempo, ornamentation, emotional projection and stylistic understanding. Regrettably, Ravel only orchestrated four of the six movements of the Suite: The 'Prélude', 'Forlane', 'Meneut' and 'Rigaudon'. He omitted the 'Fugue' and 'Toccata'.³⁹ Nevertheless, the orchestrations of the four remaining pieces contain numerous insights for pianists wishing to play the original piano cycle.

Le Tombeau de Couperin is lightly scored for strings, two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and cor anglais, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, trumpet and harp. The absence of percussion and low brass gives the scoring a light, *quasi-baroque* texture. The most prominent feature of the orchestration is its use of the oboe. This occurs to such a degree that it is not an exaggeration to describe the suite as a kind of concertino for oboe. Clearly, the eighteenth-century associations of the instrument are an important element in such a referential piece. In addition, the oboe's expressive and plaintive tone quality reveals a poignant quality within the music which might otherwise sound a touch objective, or even aloof. As Nichols observes:

³⁸ Wilde's assertion in his preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that 'All art is quite useless' uncannily mirrors the de Regnier quotation at the beginning of *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*: '*le plaisir délicieux et toujours nouveau d'une occupation inutile.*'

³⁹The Hungarian pianist Zoltán Kocsis orchestrated the 'Fugue', for woodwinds alone and the 'Toccata' for a larger orchestra than Ravel's original forces. It was recorded on Hungaroton records by the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra with Kocsis conducting:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZYHCIXY_PI> [accessed 20 June 20].

In 1919 Ravel orchestrated four of the movements ... and, although the reordering destroys the progress from E minor to E major, by giving a primary and taxing role to the oboe he underlined the inherent pathos which some critics had not appreciated when Marguerite Long gave the first performance of the original work on 11 April 1919.⁴⁰

The frequent use of *pizzicato* often gives the strings a somewhat rustic character. This is particularly in evidence throughout the 'Forlane' – the most directly 'eighteenth-century', in style and rhythm, of the four movements. There is no record as to why Ravel chose not to orchestrate the 'Fugue' and 'Toccata'. However, it is perhaps significant that the two omitted pieces represent the extremes of the suite: the 'Fugue' is the most inward and severe of the movements while the 'Toccata' is its most virtuosic and pianistic. Assuming the 'Prélude' has the rhythmic and formal structure of a *Gigue*, these two are also the only non-dance movements in the suite. The four remaining movements are, arguably, closer to eighteenth-century dance antecedents than the omitted pair.

The opening of the 'Prélude' alternates triplet figurations between oboe and clarinet and gradually develops through the woodwind with *pizzicato* violins and violas providing the most delicate of shading – an example of Ravel's orchestral technique as recalled by Ralph Vaughan Williams:

'Complexe mais pas compliqué' was his motto. He showed me how to orchestrate in points of colour rather than in lines. It was an invigorating experience to find all artistic problems looked at from what was to me an entirely new angle.⁴¹

If, in the orchestral textures of Debussy, one hears the aural equivalent of a Monet painting, perhaps, in its precision and 'points of colour' Ravel's textures are more reminiscent of the paintings of George Seurat and the pointillists (Example 2.45).

⁴⁰ Nichols, *Ravel*, 195.

⁴¹ Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R. V. W. A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1964), 79.

Ex. 2. 45. Ravel: *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, 'Prélude' (OV), Bars 1-4.

I - PRÉLUDE

(18) Vif. ♩. = 92

2 FLÛTES

HAUTOIS

COR ANGLAIS

2 CLARINETTES en LA

2 BASSONS

2 CORs chromatiques en FA

TROMPETTE en UT

HARPE

Vif. ♩. = 92

VIOLONS

ALTOS

VIOLONCELLES

CONTREBASSES

In Bar 14, the material is taken over by the strings marked *pianissimo*. Even within this short musical excerpt there is much for a pianist to absorb. The resonance of each woodwind instrument can be a helpful guide to the degree of pedalling required. In the 'Prélude', too little pedal can make the music sound dry and academic, too much can make it overly pianistic and obscure its *quasi claveciniste* style. Perlemuter suggests 'pedalling by little dabs'.⁴² The doubling by woodwind of the pizzicato 'left hand' E quavers in bars 1-2 mirrors the slurs which follow the same notes in the piano part. Ravel employed a

⁴² Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel according to Ravel*, 68.

similar combination in the opening passage of his orchestration of *Pavane pour une Infante défunte*.

The constant movement of the material through the woodwind in a ‘call and reply’ manner informs the pianist of the evenly matched ‘dialogue’ between treble and bass lines. Vlado Perlemuter studied this music with Ravel:

For the beginning of the ‘Prélude’, Vlado Perlemuter indicated Ravel’s fingerings, then started to play and said to the student: “I use less pedal than you”. Reminding us that Ravel had orchestrated *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, he added: “It’s in the pianist’s interest to know which instrument the composer used for such and such a passage. Here, it’s the oboe. Try therefore to find a sonority which resembles the oboe. Try that, and you’ll find that makes for a lot of progress!”⁴³

Suggesting that a piano should sound like an oboe is one thing – how it may be achieved is quite another! Perhaps a clue lies in Yvonne Lefébure’s reminiscence of playing for the composer: ‘As a student in Cortot’s class she played *Jeux d’eau* to Ravel, daring (despite the printed slurs) to start with a light staccato touch over the pedal: This prompted Ravel’s immediate reply, “That’s it”.’⁴⁴ Maybe it is in the varying degrees of legato employed that pianists may imitate the different articulations of, for example, the various woodwind instruments.

In the absence of pedal markings, the left hand staccato notes with slurs attached suggest a light half pedal, long enough to make the note resonant, but not so long that it becomes a crotchet. These notes are taken by pizzicato violins and violas in the orchestral version. Further justifying this articulation in the piano part, they are written as crotchets, rather than the original quavers (Example 2.45a).

⁴³ Vlado Perlemuter, masterclass at the *École Normale*, Paris, July 1998; quoted in Jean Roy, *Rencontres avec Vlado Perlemuter* (Paris: Alinéa, 1989), 91.

⁴⁴ Yvonne Lefébure, in Arbie Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader, Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975, rev. Ed. New York: Dover, 1991), 571.

Example 2.45a: Ravel: *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, ‘Prélude’ (OV), Bars 1-4.



This music can easily succumb to a French school of piano playing which values clarity and articulation above all, playing primarily from the fingers, rather than the arms and back (Roy Howat suggests that Marguerite Long, who premiered *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, ‘could be needle-fingered’).⁴⁵ It can result in an overly pointillist, dry sonority, which is certainly not borne out by either the implied pedal marking or the mellifluous lines of the oboe and bassoon in the orchestral version. For sure, this music is not resonant and lush, but nor should it be as crisp and angular as eighteenth-century music on the harpsichord.

The transition to strings in bar fourteen suggests an altogether different coloration in the piano part. In the piano score the dynamic marking moves from *piano* to *pianissimo* and the use of the *una corda* pedal can create a parallel change of texture (Examples 2.46 and 2.47).

⁴⁵ Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music*, 213.

Ex. 2. 46. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, 'Prélude' (OV), Bars 13-16

The image shows a musical score for the 'Prélude' from *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (orchestral version), bars 13-16. The score is arranged in two systems. The top system includes parts for Horns (Hib.), Cor Anglais (Cor A.), and Clarinet (Cl.). The bottom system includes parts for Violins (Vln), Violas (Vla), Cellos (Vcl), and Double Basses (Cb). A box highlights the string parts from bar 13 to bar 16. The strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with the first violin part marked 'Unis arco' and 'ppp'. The woodwinds play a melodic line in the first system, which continues in the second system.

Ex. 2. 47. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, 'Prélude' (PV), Bars 14-17

The image shows a musical score for the 'Prélude' from *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (piano version), bars 14-17. The score is written for piano and features a complex texture with multiple voices. The right hand plays a melodic line with a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a bass line with sustained chords and moving lines. The score is marked 'ppp' and includes various articulation marks such as slurs and accents.

In this way, that which has been translated from piano to orchestral sonority can be 're-translated', to better inform issues of style and texture in the piano originals. For students, thinking of the bass line in terms of the sustained string polyphony of the orchestration can help to achieve the necessary finger legato required. There is a well-known joke concerning an actor playing the doctor in 'Macbeth'. When he goes home his wife asks him what the play is about. He replies – 'well, it's about this doctor'. Perhaps pianists should sometimes imagine the bassoon player who, when asked about the meaning of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* replies – 'well it's about this bassoon player'. To fully realise this

music, each line must be shaped with the care and attention to detail that an individual performer would give it.

In the ‘Forlane’, notwithstanding the alterations in some of the ornamentation, the most striking difference between piano and orchestral versions is the significantly different phrasing and articulation employed throughout. Long phrase marks in the piano are replaced by shorter slurs and staccato markings in the orchestral parts (Examples 2.48 and 2.49).

Ex. 2. 48. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, ‘Forlane’ (PV), Bars 1-4

PIANO
(*)

Allegretto ♩ = 96

p

Ex. 2. 49. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, ‘Forlane’ (OV), Bars 1-5, Stgs.

VIOLONS

Allegretto. ♩ = 96

p

pizz.

arco

pizz.

In practice, this means that, interpreted at face value, the piano version sounds more long-phrased, the first and second notes of each phrase played legato, and harmonically driven while the orchestral version sounds closer to its eighteenth-century antecedent – more rustic and playful in the manner of a Couperin *forlane*.⁴⁶ The change in the rhythmic articulation from dotted quaver/semiquaver/quaver in the piano to quaver/semiquaver

⁴⁶ Alfred Cortot argued that the *Forlane* found its definitive form only in the orchestral score. Cortot, in Jeanne Thieffry (ed.), *Alfred Cortot, cours d'interprétation, recueilli et rédigé par Jeanne Thieffry* (Paris: Legoux, 1934), 85.

rest/semiquaver/quaver gives the music a somewhat different articulation and character in both pieces. The result is that the piano score invites a more fluid reading whereas the orchestral realisation points more towards an authentic eighteenth-century recreation. The more rustic, cheerful nature of the rhythmic articulation of the orchestral 'Forlane' distances it further from the melancholic undertow of its subject matter. The ambiguity of the word 'Tombeau' – both tomb and homage – is neatly encapsulated here, the former better evoked in the piano version, the latter in the orchestra. The questions remain – how valid is it for pianists to retroactively introduce the articulation of the orchestral version into their performances? Should we accept that Ravel had different expressive purposes in mind for each version?

Curiously, the metronome markings in the 'Menuet' differ significantly in both versions. In the piano score the tempo is marked crotchet = 92 while in the orchestral version it is crotchet = 120. Roy Howat writes that the metronome markings in the piano score were only added to later editions by Marguerite Long after Ravel's death, attributing this information to a direct conversation with Perlemuter.⁴⁷

The effect is, once again, greater enhancement of the dance-like quality of the music at the expense of its pathos. This progression is consistent with the increasing detachment inherent in Ravel's later music (with the notable exception of the darkly-coloured Concerto for the Left Hand). Pierre Boulez writes:

After the war, the second period is, for me, much less attractive, although very attractive from outside. He tends to be too much self-restricted, he doesn't want to go outside of himself. After the Trio you don't find the same deep feeling as before, but more a kind of stylistic game, which is absolutely extraordinary. Only in the song of *Don Quichotte à*

⁴⁷ Howat, 'Ravel and the Piano', in Deborah Mawer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, 88.

Dulcinée does he go back to something very genuine.⁴⁸

In the 'Menuet', the prominence, again, of the oboe and the use of pizzicato strings and harp, as well as shorter phrases and a faster tempo, brings the listener closer to eighteenth-century style and give the music a more courtly, even cheerful quality than its pianistic antecedent. If Ravel's emotional restraint has provoked a degree of reservation from Boulez, it could also be suggested that, in its celebration of French values of the eighteenth century, this music is a quite deliberate counterweight to Germanic romanticism and individualism in art and politics.

The 'Rigaudon' presents fewer divergences of tempo and interpretive difficulties in its high-spirited splendour. It also gives full range to Ravel's orchestral virtuosity in writing for strings, employing triple-stopped pizzicato *divisi* techniques. The middle section, marked *moins vif* in both versions, however, provides a good interpretative hint to pianists. This section can easily succumb to a melancholic sentiment and concurrent slowing of tempo. The orchestration makes it clear, in its graceful *pizzicato* accompaniment that, though the tempo relaxes slightly, the dance element must be maintained (Example 2.50).

⁴⁸ Pierre Boulez, in conversation with Roger Nichols: quoted in Nichols, 'Ravel and the Twentieth Century', in Deborah Mawer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, 242.

Ex. 2. 50. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, 'Rigaudon' (OV), 34-46

Fl. à 2 à 2 **5 Moins vif**
Hrb.
Cl.
Bons
Cora
Trp.
Harpe
Piano: Unis. arco, pizz., Div. pizz., pp

Mit Fa#
Ut# Re#
Moins vif

D & F. 9794

Div. pizz.
pizz.
pp
pizz.
pp

In summing up *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, writes:

The whole suite shows in each of its movements a skill of the most extreme refinement, and, at the same time, the full aesthetic of renunciation ... All self-torture, all renunciation of love, all tragedy over the loss of a mother and of fallen friends have here found concealment under a protective arch of artistry. Ravel's heart has been transformed into sheer music.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Hans Stukenschmidt, *Maurice Ravel, Variations on his Life and Work* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1969), 177-178.

While the emotional climax of the ‘Menuet’ and the pianistic challenges of the ‘Toccatà’ go some way towards contradicting Stuckenschmidt’s thesis (and the rather flowery notion of Ravel’s heart mutating into music itself, which seems rather at odds with the cool classicism of this music), the ‘aesthetic of renunciation’ which he describes can be traced even further in the journey from the piano to the orchestral versions of the suite.

In interpreting Ravel’s music, pianists must consider issues of style, tempo, texture, pedalling, technique, dynamics and the emotional content and projection of his works. It is, therefore, of great help to consider the alternative orchestral version of the music and also the cultural, historical and critical framework in which it was created. This is especially true of a work such as *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, which contains the dual (though connected) extra-musical factors of its eighteenth-century antecedents and its commemorative purpose. Roger Nichols quotes a letter from Roger-Ducasse decrying the verve and high spirits of the music; Nichols then quotes Roy Howat’s response that ‘these qualities tallied with the old French tradition that a posthumous tribute had no need to be sombre.’⁵⁰ In interpreting a work of such ambiguity and in resolving the apparent inner contradictions of its intentions, all of this information is invaluable in creating the right balance between style and pathos, between valediction, celebration and commemoration.

The ideal performances of Ravel balance control with expressive freedom, rhythmic accuracy with plasticity and generous tone with clarity of detail and pedaling. Performances by Perlemuter in the ‘Toccatà’ from *Le Tombeau de Couperin*⁵¹ and Casadesus in the third movement of the *Sonatine*⁵² reveal an extraordinary physical freedom and tonal generosity at odds with ideas of Ravel’s music being overly restrained

⁵⁰ Roy Howat, private conversation with Roger Nichols, recounted in Nichols, *Ravel*, 195.

⁵¹ Ravel, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, ‘Toccatà’, performed by Vlado Perlemuter is available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbX6NFTyjZw>> [accessed 23 June 2020].

⁵² Ravel, *Sonatine*, 3rd movt., performed by Robert Casadesus is available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aapoz3MRpnM>> [accessed 23 June 2020].

and controlled. Yes, performance of Ravel's music must have great clarity of texture and technique. This clarity, however, must not be at the expense of the music's sweep and line.

In paying tribute to Sviatoslav Richter, Heinrich Neuhaus writes: 'That is why I so much admire the rhythm of Richter's performances: one feels clearly that the whole work, even if it is of gigantic proportions, lies before him like an immense landscape, revealed to the eye at a single glance and in all its details from the eagle's flight, from a tremendous height and at an incredible speed.'⁵³ Familiarity and study of Ravel's orchestral scores can raise pianists' perspective, so that they too may see his musical landscape in its entirety.

⁵³ Heinrich Neuhaus, K.A. Leibovitch (trans.), *The Art of Piano Playing*, (London: Kahn and Averill, 1993), 48.

Chapter Three: Orchestrating Debussy

3.1 Debussy's Orchestrations of Two Solo Piano Pieces, Four Songs and the *Première Rhapsodie for Clarinet and Piano*

Debussy orchestrated two of his solo piano pieces, *La plus que lente* and the *Berceuse héroïque*. Of the two, *La plus que lente* underwent the greater transformation in the process. It was originally published by Durand in 1910 as a solo piano piece and in an arrangement for violin and piano (by Léon Roques), possibly intended for the violinist Leoni. Leoni, 'who played in the bar at the Carlton Hotel, was a different kind of artist, although his style also resembled that of the Gypsies.'¹ Although Leoni never performed the violin transcription, the Gypsy style had a marked influence on Debussy's orchestration, published first by Durand in 1912, with the inclusion of a cimbalom, alongside strings, flute and piano. The cimbalom gives the orchestration a distinctly 'café music', Gypsy flavour and should point the way for any pianists tempted to play the piece in an overly restrained, 'classical' style.² The orchestration, like the violin transcription, transposes the key up a semitone from G flat in the solo piano piece, to the eminently more playable (from a string player's point of view) G major. The third major intervention is the addition of a four-bar cadenza at the start of the piece, followed by an elongation of the two upbeat crotchets in the piano version to two bars of dotted minims in the orchestra³ (Examples 3.1 and 3.2).

¹ François Lesure, Marie Rolf (trans.), *Debussy, A Critical Biography* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2019), 265.

² Debussy's own piano roll recording (from the Welte Mignon piano rolls, re-engineered by Kenneth Caswell) would also appear to support a rhythmically flexible, improvisatory approach. It is available on Debussy, *Debussy, The Composer as Pianist*, Claude Debussy and Mary Garden, CD, Pierian Recording Society, PIR0001, 2010.

³ Perhaps in offering alternative cadenzas for flute and cimbalom, Debussy was accommodating the practicality that a cimbalom might not be always to hand.

Ex. 3. 1. Debussy, *La plus que lente* (PV), Bars 1-5

Lent (Molto rubato con morbidezza)

PIANO

Ex. 3. 2. Debussy, *La plus que lente* (OV), Bars 1-10

VALSE CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Lent

FLÛTE Cadenza (*)

CLARINETTE en Sib *P ad. lib.*

PIANO concertant

CYMBALUM Cadenza (*)

f *ad. lib.* *dim.*

VIOLONS **Lent**

ALTOS

VOLONCELLES

CONTREBASSES

(*) Ces cadences ne doivent pas s'exécuter ensemble; il faut choisir ou l'une ou l'autre.

The image shows a page of a musical score for Debussy's 'Berceuse héroïque'. It features two systems of staves. The first system consists of two vocal staves (soprano and alto) and two piano staves (treble and bass). The vocal parts are marked with 'pp dolce'. The piano accompaniment is marked with 'pp'. The second system is marked 'Molto rubato con morbidezza' and includes the same vocal and piano staves. The vocal parts in this system are marked with 'p' and 'dim.', and the piano accompaniment includes 'pp pizz.' and 'pp' markings. A double bar line is present at the end of the second system.

Debussy's explanation of this alteration was that 'it's impossible to start a piece in a brasserie the way you would in a salon; you simply must have a few introductory bars.'⁴ Curiously, Debussy's motivation in orchestrating the piece was his dissatisfaction with an orchestration by Hubert Mouton (also commissioned by Durand).⁵

Debussy's only other orchestration of his solo piano music is the *Berceuse héroïque*, for *King Albert's Book*, commissioned and published by the *Daily Telegraph* (and published by that newspaper in 1914; Durand published it a year later) to offer 'A Tribute to the Belgian King and People, from Representative Men and Women Throughout the World.'⁶ A sombre and in no way jingoistic piece of music, the piece has a title whose contradictory elements perhaps reflect Debussy's ambivalent attitude to the enterprise. The piece integrates phrases from the *Brabançonne*, the Belgian national anthem, and it is in this

⁴ Debussy, letter to Durand, 25 August 1910, in François Lesure (ed.) and Roger Nichols (ed. and trans.), *Debussy Letters*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 224.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁶ Subtitle to Hall Caine (ed.), *King Albert's Book*, (London: Daily Telegraph, 1914).

regard that the most significant alteration occurs between the piano and orchestral versions. In the final bars the anthem is recalled in the horns, an interpolation missing from the rather bare closing bars of the piano piece (Examples 3.3 and 3.4).

Ex. 3. 3. Debussy, *Berceuse héroïque* (PV), Bars 60-69

The musical score for Debussy's *Berceuse héroïque*, bars 60-69, is presented in two systems. The first system, labeled "En retenant jusqu'à la fin", shows the piano part with dynamics *pp*, *m.g.*, and *m.g.*, and the horn part with dynamics *pp* and *ppp*. The second system, labeled "Lent", shows the piano part with dynamics *ppp* and *ppp*, and the horn part with dynamics *ppp* and *ppp*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 3. 4. Debussy, *Berceuse héroïque* (OV), Bars 64-69

The image shows a page of a musical score for Claude Debussy's *Berceuse héroïque*, specifically bars 64-69. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The instruments listed on the left are: Flute (Fl.), Horn (H^{tb}), Trumpet (Trimp.), Trombone (Trimb.), Tuba (Tuba), Timpani (Timp.), Harp (Harpe), Violins (1^{re} and 2^{de} Vins), Viola (Alt.), Cello (C.), and Double Bass (B.).

Key musical details include:

- Flute:** Starts with a melodic line marked *p* and *pp*.
- Clarinets:** Play sustained notes marked *pp*.
- Violins:** The 1^{re} Violin part is marked *p plus lointain*. The 2^{de} Violin part has a *pp* marking.
- Cor Anglais:** A box highlights this part with the instruction "sans Sordine 1º".
- Trumpets and Trombones:** Various dynamics like *pp* and *ppp* are used.
- Timpani:** Features a rhythmic pattern marked *pp*.
- Harp:** Provides a harmonic accompaniment with *pp* markings.
- Violins:** The 1^{re} Violin part has a *ppp* marking and a *Soli* instruction. The 2^{de} Violin part has a *pp* marking.
- Viola, Cello, and Double Bass:** All have *pp* markings.

Pointing out that ‘Debussy’s piano roll of *La plus que lente*, recorded after he had orchestrated the piece, differs sufficiently from the printed piano score to have justified transcribing it in the *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy*, Roy Howat speculates whether Debussy’s performance of the *Berceuse héroïque* might have been similarly transformed

after its orchestration.⁷ In any event, these alterations and additions caution against interpreting any piece as the composer's definitive last word on the subject. Knowledge of orchestral alterations and reconsiderations should encourage pianists towards bolder, more improvisatory, though informed, performance of these works.

In addition to the two solo pieces, Debussy orchestrated the piano parts of his *Trois Ballades de François Villon*. The piano version was published by Durand in 1910, the orchestral version a year later. The first of the *Ballades* is a lament for spurned love.

Fausse beauté, qui tant me couste cher, False beauty, who costs me so dearly,

Rude en effect, hypocrite douceur, Harsh indeed, hypocritical sweetness,

Ex. 3. 5. Debussy, *Trois Ballades de François Villon*, no. 1, 'Ballade de Villon à s'amyé' (PV), Bars 1-2

(avec une expression où il y a autant d'angoisse que de regret)
with an expression of anguish and regret

CHANT

Triste et lent

Faul-se beau-té, qui tant me cous-te
False love-li-ness, cost-ing a hea-vy

PIANO

Triste et lent

p

doux et expressif

Debussy was a reluctant orchestrator of his songs for voice and piano and, maybe, here we can see one of the reasons. There is a certain loss of the bleak intimacy of the piano version, whose falling motif resembles an inversion of 'Des pas sur la neige', (from his first book of *Préludes*, written during the same period) when translated to the larger

⁷ Roy Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 245.

orchestral canvas (Example 3.6).

Ex. 3. 6. Debussy, *Trois Ballades de François Villon*, no. 1, ‘Ballade de Villon à s’amey’ (OV), Bars 1-3

TROIS BALLADES 1
de François VILLON CLAUDE DEBUSSY

I. BALLADE
de Villon à s'amey

Triste et lent

1^{re} et 2^e GRANDES FLÛTES
3^e GRANDE FLÛTE
2 HAUTBOIS
1 COR ANGLAIS
2 CLARINETTES en LA
1^{er} et 2^e BASSONS
3^e BASSON
1^{er} et 2^e CORN en FA
3^e et 4^e CORN en FA
CHANT
VIOLONS
ALTOS
VIOLONCELLES
CONTRABASSES

(avec une expression où il y a
autant d'angoisse que de regret)

Fau, se beau - té, qui tant me couste cher, Rude en effect,

Triste et lent

As he does in the solo piano orchestrations, Debussy occasionally adds a countermelody (usually in the woodwinds) to the orchestral version of the *Ballades*. Aside from that, the orchestrations are economical in their treatment of the piano part. The most richly

'orchestral' is the third song, 'Ballade des femmes de Paris', which is probably the closest Debussy ever came to writing a patter song. The virtuoso piano part of this song itself sounds like an orchestral reduction (Examples 3.6a, 3.7 and 3.8).

Example 3.6a: Debussy, 'La sérénade interrompue', Bars 1-13

Modérément animé

quasi guitarra

pp (comme en préludant) *pp*

mf *pp*

Ex. 3. 7. Debussy, *Trois Ballades de François Villon*, no. 3, 'Ballade des femmes de Paris' (PV), Bars 1-4

Alerte et gai

CHANT

Alerte et gai

PIANO

p

Ex. 3. 8. Debussy, *Trois Ballades de François Villon*, no. 3, 'Ballade des femmes de Paris' (OV), Bars 1-5

The musical score for the first five bars of 'Ballade des femmes de Paris' is written for four string parts: Violons, Altos, Violoncelles, and Contrebasses. The tempo and mood are marked 'Alerte et gai'. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 2/4. The score includes various performance instructions such as 'pizz.' (pizzicato), 'sfz' (sforzando), 'p' (piano), 'p léger' (piano léger), 'p léger et détaché', 'f' (forte), 'dim.' (diminuendo), 'Div. arco' (divisi arco), and 'pp' (pianissimo). The lyrics 'sur le chevalet' are written below the strings in the final bar.

Another of his songs orchestrated by Debussy is *Le jet d'eau*, the third song from *Cinq Poèmes de Charles Baudelaire*. This orchestration is bookended by two variants to the piano score – an extra bar of introduction at the beginning and a distant fanfare, absent from the piano part, three bars from the end of the work. The orchestration of this particularly pianistic original, features complex *divisi* string writing, extensive use of harp and celeste and much use of arpeggiated textures passed between the woodwinds. It is very much, *à la Ravel*, an orchestration, rather than an instrumentation, of the work. *Le jet d'eau*, composed between 1887 and 1889, has further Ravelian echoes in the proximity of its title and composition to Ravel's *Jeux d'eau*, composed in 1901.

The *Première Rhapsodie* for clarinet and piano was first published in 1910 and Debussy's orchestration was published a year later. Originally written as a test piece for the Paris Conservatoire, the orchestration follows the piano version closely, and is notable for a characteristic reticence in its use of percussion at the climax, here limited to cymbal and triangle. A feature of the piano version is the use of tremolo figurations in the bass between bars 45 and 52. Debussy habitually fully wrote out tremolos in his solo piano works. The orchestral shorthand here perhaps suggests an orchestral conception from the outset (Example 3.9).

Ex. 3. 9. Debussy, *Première Rhapsodie* (PV), Bars 45-57

4

Le double plus vite

Le double plus vite

p

pp

p

p

p *marqué*

p *marqué*

4

Un peu retenu

p e cre . . scen . . do

Un peu retenu

p e cre . . scen . . do

A letter of 26 August 1911 from Debussy to Durand suggests a certain professional dutifulness in the task of orchestrating the music: ‘The orchestration of the *Rhapsodie* (sic) is almost entirely sketched and when I get back to Paris, that is on 1 September, I’ll just have to write it out. It’s impossible for me to do it here being, as you know, a man of settled habits.’⁸

⁸ Debussy, letter to Jacques Durand, 26 August 1911, in *Debussy Letters*, 247.

3.2 Andre Caplet's orchestration of Debussy's Children's Corner – Orchestrator as amanuensis

To the end [Debussy] remained what the French called *Grand Enfant*. That same wonderful innocence and limpidity of feeling which is the fundamental characteristic of his art transpired in all his deeds and words. At fifty he amused himself more than did his little daughter Chouchou with the toys brought home for her by her mother.⁹

André Caplet (1878-1925), orchestrator of Debussy's *Children's Corner*, is a musician who is little known today, despite being a celebrated composer and conductor during his relatively short life. The composer of a number of large-scale works for voice and orchestra and voice and piano, he was also a renowned conductor. He conducted the premiere of Debussy's *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* at the Châtelet Theatre in Paris on 22 May 1911, as well as the American premiere of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in January 1912 and the British premiere at Covent Garden in June 1913. Correspondence between the two men reveals Debussy's deep respect and admiration for his younger friend:

But you have, to the highest degree, the beautiful qualities of tenacity, particular to your race, to which you add a prodigious musical instinct. Therefore, I am sure that we can cry: Vive la France! Vive Caplet, in all confidence ... your return ... and rather quickly! And don't try to economize by taking a slave boat! If necessary, you should try to cross the ocean in an airplane or cannon ball.¹⁰

As well as *Children's Corner*, Caplet's other arrangements of Debussy's work include an orchestration of 'Pagodes' from *Estampes*, 'Clair de Lune' from the *Suite Bergamasque* and a transcription of *La Mer* for two pianos. He was also responsible for the completion of the orchestration of *La Boîte à Joujoux* after Debussy's death. Caplet finished the

⁹ Alfredo Casella, 'Claude Debussy', *The Monthly Musical Record* (1933) quoted in Roger Nichols, *Debussy Remembered* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1992), 97-98.

¹⁰ Debussy, letter to Caplet, 24 November 1911, quoted in Williametta Spencer, 'The Relationship Between André Caplet and Claude Debussy', *The Musical Quarterly* 66 (1980), 123.

orchestration of *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* from Debussy's instructions regarding scoring. It is evident, therefore, that Debussy entirely trusted Caplet in the matter of scoring, arranging and transcribing his works.

The arrangement of *Children's Corner* was premiered in Boston by the Orchestra of the Boston Opera House conducted by Caplet, early in 1911. It had Debussy's full endorsement as he wrote to Caplet of the '*somptueux vêtement*' of orchestration. An approving review appeared in *The Boston Globe* on 5 February 1911:

Debussy's suite, *The Children's Corner*, orchestrated by Mr. Caplet, was played for the first time anywhere by an orchestra ... Remembering Debussy's *Children's Corner* as Felix Fox played it here upon the piano November 18, 1906, and comparing the numbers as then with those heard last night, there are some that were better characterized by the piano and others that have gained by the sensitive, imaginative and well-wrought orchestration by Mr. Caplet.

There is no instrument that could reproduce the exquisite and clumsy drollery of the "Jumbo's Lullaby" [sic] as the wooden, blunt tones which may be produced from the low register of the piano. The speech of the double-basses, even when punctuated by the bassoons is too remote, intangible and serious.

The pulsatile instrument is again the gainer in the clear, crystalline brilliancy of "The Snow is Dancing" although Mr. Caplet made the rhythmic figure of the violins suggest well the continuity of the snowfall, but there was not the scintillating shower of dancing and reflected lights in the eyes.

However, the richness of the scoring and in the plasticity and warmth of the strings Mr. Caplet has made the "Serenade of the Doll" a charming bit of salon music.

In "The Little Shepherd" Mr. Caplet has evidenced his skill and sense of color contrasts in the use of wind instruments. Following the oboe's announcement of the Shepherd's theme – he has secured some beautiful timbres of tone by combinations of horns with

woodwinds.

Best of all is the concluding “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” [sic] with its ragtime introduction. and that by Debussy, shades of Pete Daily, its piquant, breezy rhythm and its sudden, yet flashing accents. Mr. Caplet has caught its rollicking spirit, yet throughout there is the trace of his sensitive hand, and no taint of coarseness to mar it.¹¹

This chapter explores the orchestration of each piece in relation to how the piano sonority is translated and re-imagined for orchestra. It is striking how faithfully the arrangements represent the piano score and how little ‘re-composition’ is involved. It is clear, for example, in Ravel’s orchestration of his own works, that he occasionally adds lines and textures to the music which did not exist in the original piano versions, as he does in the fourth movement of the *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* and in the extra bars added to support the final orchestral crescendo in ‘Alborada del Gracioso’. Moreover, in comparing the orchestrations of Caplet and Leopold Stokowski of *Clair de Lune*, the latter uses far more orchestral ‘effects’ than the purer Caplet.

Caplet was more an amanuensis to Debussy than a re-inventor or re-interpreter. In the review in *The Boston Globe* phrases such as ‘sensitive’, well-wrought, and ‘no taint of coarseness’, positive though they may be, suggest that Caplet’s orchestration was a reverential act of homage to a more senior composer, rather than a freely creative endeavour. One could never imagine him halving the speed of a piece in his orchestration, as Colin Matthews does in ‘La fille aux cheveux de lin’.

The orchestra in Caplet’s *Children’s Corner* consists of double woodwind (with one extra flute), four horns, two trumpets, triangle, cymbals, bass drum, snare, harp and strings. It is a conventional ensemble, notable for the absence of low brass and of exotica in either

¹¹ Editorial in *The Boston Globe*, 6 February 1911: quoted in Williametta Spencer, ‘The Influence and Stylistic heritage of André Caplet’, (PhD Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1974), 90-91.

percussion or woodwind. To what degree these constraints were dictated by the requirements of the Boston Opera House orchestra is not known. Perhaps the lighter, more transparent textures of the original piano works led to these scoring decisions.

3.2.1 ‘Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum’

This piece, a wry commentary on Muzio Clementi’s series of piano exercises ‘Gradus ad Parnassum’, begins with a series of rising semiquaver phrases, mimicking the exertions which have tormented so many young pianists through the centuries (Examples 3.10 and 3.11).

Ex. 3. 10. ‘Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum’ (PV) Bars 1-2



Ex. 3. 11. ‘Doctor gradus ad Parnassum’ (OV) bars 1-3

Musical score for orchestra (OV) bars 1-3 of 'Doctor gradus ad Parnassum'. The score is in 4/4 time and features three staves: 2 GRANDES FLÛTES, 2 HAUTBOIS, and 2 CLARINETTES en si b. The tempo is marked 'Modérément animé'. The woodwinds play a series of rising semiquaver phrases, with the clarinet and flute parts mirroring each other. The dynamic marking is *mf*.

Although the joke is partly lost in the absence of a piano, the orchestration deftly handles the *moto perpetuum* style by passing material between the woodwinds, from clarinet to flute and back to bassoon/clarinet mirroring the right hand/left hand piano figuration. A tonic pedal point is provided by the horns while pizzicato strings lightly sketch the melodic

implications hidden within the flowing semiquaver figurations.¹²

Immediately apparent is the economy of means characteristic of the best orchestrators. The challenge facing Caplet was to maintain the childlike (as opposed to childish) simplicity, as seen through a most sophisticated and refined lens. This is, after all, music about childhood, but not written specifically for children. In that sense, it bears comparison with Schumann's *Kinderszenen* (*Scenes from Childhood*, 1838), though without the latter's undertones of sadness and regret. Although 'Doctor Gradus Ad Parnassum' pays humorous tribute to Clementi, the humour is wry and affectionate and the labours of pianists with Clementi should not be imitated. The choice of mellifluous woodwinds in the opening passage suggest a smooth legato, a suggestion reinforced by Debussy's own piano roll recording.

Paul Roberts disparages the following, frankly creepy, quote by Alfred Cortot regarding *Children's Corner*: 'Debussy portrays in *Children's Corner* the quiet, decorous games of a sophisticated little town girl, already a small coquette with her prudent frolics and coaxing ways.'¹³ Roberts retorts that 'to embellish in this way the archetypal images of the nursery contained in the individual titles of *Children's Corner*, is to bring to Debussy's art exactly that patronising attitude to childhood that it so definitively avoids.'¹⁴

In its limpid and uncluttered textures, Caplet's work successfully avoids the 'patronising attitude' that Roberts decries.¹⁵ The slower middle section is played by interlocking woodwinds with the four horns sustaining the harmonic texture underpinned by long bass

¹² Piano teachers will often seek to point out melodic shapes implied within such *moto perpetuum* figures. It is instructive to hear them made explicit in an orchestration of the same passage.

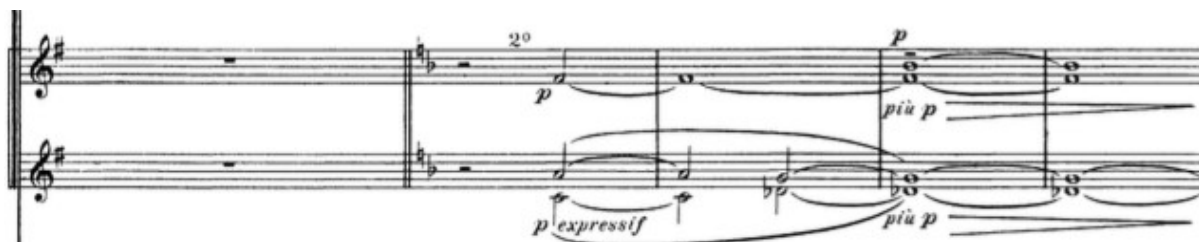
¹³ Alfred Cortot, Hilda Andrews (trans.), *French Piano Music*, (London: Oxford University press:1932),19, quoted in Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1996), 205.

¹⁴ Roberts, *Images*, 205.

¹⁵ There is an extraordinary short film in this 'coquettish' vein by Marcel l'Herbier of Cortot performing parts of *Children's Corner* available at:
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcDmOHfEkLA>> [accessed 14/5/2020].

notes. In the same way that study of Ravel's orchestrations of his piano works may be beneficial, pianists can usefully analyse the harmonic progressions implicit in the piano textures by studying the more sustained voice leading in the equivalent horn parts (Example 3.12).

Ex. 3. 12. Debussy Orch. Caplet: *Children's Corner*, 'Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum' (OV), Bars 32-36 Horns (sounding pitch a fifth lower)



After the return of the original theme, now more fully realised by the addition of strings tracing the harmonic line in crotchets, Caplet unleashes the full orchestra in the climatic pages. It is here that his skill as an orchestrator is most in evidence (Example 3.13).

Ex. 3. 13. *Children's Corner*, 'Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum' (OV), Bars 62-66

Divisi violins, trumpets, horns, flutes and octave bassoons play the melody while the remaining woodwind play the accompanying figures in triplet quavers against the rapid

semiquaver figuration of second violins and violas.¹⁶ Staccato quaver figures in the horns create an effect of great energy while the addition of triangle and, at the climatic point, cymbal, brings the piece to a festive close.

3.2.2 ‘Jumbo’s Lullaby’

If the absence of piano somewhat defeats the extraneous joke in ‘Doctor Gradus Ad Parnassum’, the transition to orchestra of ‘Jimbo’s Lullaby’ (the ‘Jimbo’ of the piano version was changed to ‘Jumbo’ in the orchestration) poses a different problem (or, more positively, creates another possibility). The lugubrious simplicity of the opening theme in the bass, marked *doux et un peu gauche*, suggests the innocent, and touching, clumsiness of the toy baby elephant, gently bumping along its way (Example 3.14).

Ex. 3. 14. *Children’s Corner*, ‘Jimbo’s Lullaby’ (PV), Bars 1-8

The image shows a musical score for 'Jimbo's Lullaby' (PV), Bars 1-8. The score is for piano and features a bass line with a semiquaver figure and a treble line with a staccato quaver figure. The tempo is marked 'Assez modéré' and the dynamics are 'p' and 'pp'.

In Caplet’s orchestration, however, the opening melody is played by the basses, with the interjections in bars four and five played by bassoons with pizzicato cello. Whether intentional or not, the orchestration creates a far darker sound-world, which anticipates the ominous textures of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* (1913). It is undoubtedly a most

¹⁶ The technique of superimposing triplets over semiquavers in fast passages is also used by Ravel in the *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*. The effect creates a blur of dynamism and momentum in both cases.

effective combination of instruments but the inward, childlike atmosphere is lost here. There follow some exquisite textures with notable melodic lines assigned to horns (which aptly convey the elephantine mood), solo violin and oboe. Notable, too, is the skill with which Caplet orchestrates the bass textures in ‘Jumbo’ with very precise combinations of low strings (notably the bold use of *divisi* bass), harp and bass drum, which manage to avoid any thickness or heaviness of sonority (Example 3.15).

Ex. 3. 15. *Children’s Corner*, ‘Jumbo’s Lullaby’ (OV), Bars 15-20

The musical score for 'Jumbo's Lullaby' (bars 15-20) is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is for Horns, showing a melodic line with dynamics *pp* and *morendo*. The second staff is for Grand Cymbal (Gr.C.), featuring a rhythmic pattern with dynamics *pp* and *ppp*. The third staff is for Harpe (Harp), with a rhythmic pattern and dynamics *pp* and *morendo*. The fourth staff is for Violin, with a melodic line and dynamics *pp* and *ppp*. The fifth staff is for Cello/Double Bass, with a rhythmic pattern and dynamics *pp* and *ppp arco*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

3.2.3 ‘Serenade for the Doll’

The particular quality of Caplet’s choices here gives the music a markedly Ravelian air. The interplay of woodwinds and pizzicato strings recalls the orchestral version of ‘Laideronette, impératrice des pagodes’ from *Ma mère l’oye* (though without the exoticism of the latter’s tuned percussion). Caplet uses long pedal points in the cellos to create a sustained ‘pedal’ effect while the portato accompanying figure is largely taken by woodwinds, capable of creating the detached but not overly short sonority required. The sustained cello and horn sonorities with which Caplet fills out the textures of the piece

somewhat diminish the intimacy of the music, a difficulty which is intrinsic to the orchestration of such small-scale music. A further recurring difficulty in the orchestration is that the imitative, suggestive qualities of the original can lose their ambiguity and subtlety in the more explicit, colouristic possibilities of the orchestra. In this regard, Caplet's arrangement of 'Serenade for the Doll', with its super refined timbres, somewhat diminishes the suggestiveness of 'toy instruments' in the piano original. In a letter dated 21 November 1910 Debussy wrote to Caplet:

I'd be most grateful for your own, written, comments on the performance of *Children's Corner* which, thanks to you, is so gorgeously apparelled. I do wonder if it will behave as it should in this new guise? I should be sorry if it looked pretentious: I have every confidence in you, all the same.¹⁷

Evidently Debussy was anxious, not without reason, that his pieces would lose some of their charm and intimacy in the larger setting. The difficulty for Caplet in 'Serenade for the Doll' lay in the necessity of these sustained sonorities to avoid the orchestration sounding thin or under-powered. Though he navigates the challenge with subtlety and taste, the intimate nature of the music is somewhat compromised, as Debussy had feared.¹⁸

3.2.4 'The Snow is Dancing'

In this highly atmospheric music, Caplet translates the shimmering piano textures into a delicate orchestral sound-world. The first challenge, for an orchestrator of the piano version, is the pianistic writing of the *moto perpetuo* semiquaver figures alternating between right and left hands (Example 3.16).

¹⁷ Debussy, letter to André Caplet, 21 November 1910, in *Debussy Letters*, 225.

¹⁸ I sometimes wondered whether the title may have been inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Steadfast Tin Soldier', in which the eponymous hero falls in love with the ballerina doll.

Ex. 3. 16. *Children's Corner*, 'The Snow is Dancing' (PV), Bars 1-3

PIANO

Modérément animé

pp doux et estompé

p

Rather than simply assigning each staff to individual instruments, with the attendant problems of ensemble, Caplet reconfigures the right-hand part as running semiquavers while the left hand is played in unison by the second violins and violas – the former playing pizzicato while the latter play legato in bar-long phrases (Example 3.17).

Ex. 3. 17. *Children's Corner*, 'The Snow is Dancing' (OV), Bars 1.5, Stgs.

VIOLONS

ALTOS

Modérément animé
sur la touche

pp doux et estompé

pizz.

pp très doux

ppp très doux

This texture, with its subsequent variations, recurs throughout the piece as a bedrock, above which Caplet employs delicate combinations of woodwinds, harp and horns, as well as solo strings and woodwinds (Example 3.18).

Ex. 3. 18. *Children's Corner*, 'The Snow is Dancing' (OV), Bars 42-48, Ww

The image displays a musical score for 'The Snow is Dancing' (Bars 42-48) from 'Children's Corner'. The score is arranged for five instruments: Gdes Fl., Htb, Cl., and Bsns. The top system (bars 42-48) features the vocal line 'Cédez un peu' with dynamics *mf* and *pp*. The Gdes Fl. and Htb parts have *mf* and *pp* dynamics. The Cl. part has *p* and *pp* dynamics. The Bsns part has *p* dynamics. The bottom system (bars 49-52) is marked 'au Mouvt' and features repeated notes in the Htb and Cl. parts with *p* and *pp* dynamics.

Another notable instrumental choice is the use of repeated notes in muted horns doubled with harp against interjections from pizzicato strings, here in the piano (Example 3.19).

Ex. 3. 19. *Children's Corner*, 'The Snow is Dancing' (PV), Bars 49-51



And in Caplet's arrangement (Example 3.20).

Ex. 3. 20. *Children's Corner*, 'The Snow is Dancing' (OV), Bars 50-54 Hns.

Caplet's orchestration of 'The Snow is Dancing' is, arguably, the most successful of the set. The piece is the most 'impressionistic' of the cycle. Its melodic content is more fragmented and the textures and sound world which it creates are at the heart of the music. Therefore, it benefits more from the translation from piano to orchestral sonority while there is no loss to intimacy as the music itself possesses a cool detachment in keeping with its subject matter.

3.2.5 'The Little Shepherd'

The most striking feature in this orchestration is the prominent use of the oboe to convey

the ‘shepherd’s pipe’, giving the music a melancholic, lonely quality.¹⁹ Woodwinds and horns are prominent throughout, with the strings playing a largely accompanying role. Also striking is the economy of means and fidelity to the source material. There are no extraneous effects or added octaves – just clear voicing in winds and strings and an accurate realisation of the piano part.

In common with ‘Serenade for the Doll’ and, to a degree, ‘Doctor Gradus Ad Parnassum’, something is lost in the explicit rendering by the orchestra of that which is implicit in the piano part. The piano may be perceived as being part of the array of toys in the nursery and the music as part of child’s playful imagination. The greater sonority and tonal palette somewhat reduces this playful element. It is further diminished by the loss of rhythmic, improvisatory freedom which a solo pianist can convey more readily than a symphony orchestra.

3.2.6 ‘Golliwogg’s Cakewalk’

In its 1911 editorial *The Boston Globe* considers ‘Golliwogg’s Cakewalk’ to be the most successful of the orchestrations and it is easy to see why. It commends the ‘rollicking spirit’ of the piece while also admiring its ‘lack of coarseness’.²⁰ One can imagine how much fun Caplet must have had while working on this piece. Similarly, to the closing measures of ‘Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum’, he fully utilises the brass to create an exuberant orchestral showpiece.

Unusually, for him, Caplet even adds some percussion figures which are not in the original piano music, towards the end of the piece. ‘Golliwogg’s Cakewalk’ is the most explicitly referential of the pieces, reflecting, as it does, a specific style. The orchestration adroitly

¹⁹ The brevity of this piece also poses problems for the orchestrator, insofar as the scale of orchestral music seems to rather dwarf the parameters of the music itself. Colin Matthews, in his much later orchestration of the similarly proportioned *La Fille aux cheveux de Lin*, resolves the problem by halving the tempo of the music, thereby doubling its duration.

²⁰ See footnote 11, page 94.

captures the importance of off-beats in the cakewalk style, itself closely related to ragtime, in the reinforcement of the accents by trumpets and horns (Example 3.21).

Ex. 3. 21. *Children's Corner*, 'Golliwogg's Cakewalk' (OV), Bars 1-4 Brass

The image shows a musical score for brass instruments, specifically for three parts: Cors en FA (F Horns), Trompettes en UT (Trumpets in C), and Trompettes en UT (Trumpets in C). The score is written in 3/4 time and features a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The music is characterized by a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes, with a strong emphasis on off-beats. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* (forte), *sf* (sforzando), *piu f* (pizzicato forte), and *sfz* (sforzando). The notation includes various articulations like accents and slurs, and a triplet marking (*3^o*) is present in the first staff. The overall style is reminiscent of a cakewalk, with a focus on rhythmic drive and accentuation.

The lighter reinforcement of the accompanying figures is provided by woodwind against rolling quavers in the pizzicato strings. In the same way as Stravinsky would shortly afterwards orchestrate *sforzandi* in *The Rite of Spring*, Caplet uses additional instruments to create the accents, rather than disrupting the pulse of the playing by inserting *sforzandi* in the rolling figurations (Example 3.22).

Ex. 3. 22. *Children's Corner*, 'Golliwogg's Cakewalk' (OV), Bars 7-13

64

The musical score for 'Golliwogg's Cakewalk' (bars 7-13) features the following parts and markings:

- Gdes Fl.:** Rests throughout.
- Htb:** Rests until bar 10, then *sf*.
- Cl.:** Rests until bar 10, then *sf*.
- Bons:** *f* (bars 7-8), *mf très net et très sec* (bars 9-10), *sf* (bars 11-13).
- Cors:** *f* (bars 7-8), *p* (bars 9-10), *sfz* (bars 11-13).
- Tromp.:** Rests until bar 10, then *sfz sec*.
- Tamb.:** *mf* (bars 7-8), *sfz sec* (bars 11-13).
- Harpe:** Rests until bar 10, then *sfz sec*.
- String Quartet:**
 - Violins: *pp* (bars 7-8), *p* (bars 9-10), *pizz* (bars 11-13).
 - Violas: *pp* (bars 7-8), *arco* (bars 9-10), *mf très net et très sec* (bars 11-13).
 - Cellos: *pp* (bars 7-8), *p* (bars 9-10), *mf très net et très sec* (bars 11-13).
 - Basses: *pp* (bars 7-8), *p* (bars 9-10), *mf très net et très sec* (bars 11-13).

It is typical of Caplet's restraint that the famous syncopated theme of the cakewalk is initially assigned to bassoon doubling first violins rather than, for example, trumpets or piccolo. This restraint parallels Debussy's own caution in assigning melodic material to brass instruments.

The second subject is given to the horns (an unusual degree of syncopation for that instrument), to create a more relaxed, jaunty, rather than brash, effect. Typical of Caplet's skill is the economy with which he arranges the accompanying figures, simply for pizzicato strings and two horns, reinforced by woodwind, third and fourth horns and harp providing the *sforzando* accents. The middle section of 'Golliwogg's Cakewalk' is the only part of the cycle in which Caplet makes any addition to the musical texture by the addition of the main syncopated rhythmic figure in the snare drum (Example 3.23).

Ex. 3. 23. *Children's Corner*, 'Golliwogg's Cakewalk' (OV) Bars 58-64

The image shows a musical score for 'Golliwogg's Cakewalk' (OV) Bars 58-64. The score is arranged in a system with five staves. From top to bottom, the staves are: Snare Drum (Snb), Tambourine (Tamb.), Harp, and two staves for strings. The strings are marked 'arco' and 'p avec une grande émotion'. The snare drum and harp parts are marked 'pp' and 'pizz.'. The tempo marking 'Cédez - - - a Tempo' is present. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

If the orchestration here has more of the feeling of 'arrangement' perhaps it is because the music itself is, in a sense, an arrangement of a pre-existing dance form – an arrangement of an arrangement, as it were. Debussy's relationship with his source material is, here, far more direct and unmediated than, for example, Stravinsky's *Ragtime* (1919-1920), which refracts the form through his own lopsided rhythmic techniques. If Caplet's orchestration, by comparison, feels a little buttoned up, it is perhaps in the nature of the music itself –

playful and urbane, rather than raucous.

3.2.7 Conclusion

Caplet's orchestration of Debussy's *Children's Corner* displays great skill, sensitivity and empathy towards the source material. Despite Debussy's initial concerns, he was evidently sufficiently pleased by Caplet's work to conduct the piece himself, at a concert at the Queen's Hall in London, on 17 July 1914.²¹ The work has, moreover, been included in the recent *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy*.²² Yet an impression of distance is hard to avoid. What is gained in orchestral colour is lost in childlike intimacy, and the greater sonority of the orchestra comes at the cost of the plasticity of the solo pianist. Moreover, the miniature nature of the six pieces seems to be ill-suited to the dimensions of orchestral music, leaving the listener with the impression that the music is consistently, to use Colin Matthews's phrase, 'disappearing into thin air so soon.'²³ It is telling that the review in *The Boston Globe* refers to the orchestration of the 'Serenade for the Doll' as a 'charming bit of salon music'.²⁴ Maybe the orchestra is too expansive for this salon (echoing Debussy's concern) and if the setting is too large for the music, the music paradoxically becomes less than the sum of its parts. Its 'gorgeous apparel' conceals more than it reveals.

In addition, Caplet's orchestration demonstrates the inherent difficulty in orchestrating the music of a friend and mentor. In not wishing to do a disservice to music which he so admired, it was almost, paradoxically, impossible for him to do justice to the original work. The finest orchestrations of piano music have in common some element of re-composition. Ravel often strips down his music, deconstructs it and then re-invents it in an orchestral context, notably in the *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*. It is, however, easier to do this

²¹ Lesure, *Debussy*, 317.

²² François Lesure (ed.), *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy* (Paris: Durand-Costallat, 1986).

²³ Colin Matthews, in his orchestration of the *Préludes*, occasionally surmounts this impression by adding some bars of his own: 'Extended composition' was used, particularly in the case of *Le vent dans la plaine*, because I felt that the piano original needed expanding in order to take the weight of the orchestra – that particular prelude disappears into thin air so soon. See Appendix A, 193.

²⁴ See footnote 11, page 94.

when it is your own music to begin with. A similar re-invention is considerably more complicated when working on the source material of a revered friend and colleague. Ravel, in orchestrations of his own piano works, is less reverent to the primary source, himself, than Caplet is to Debussy. Conversely, in his orchestrations of Debussy, Percy Grainger (who probably cared a great deal less about Debussy's opinion) uses the piano pieces as a springboard for his own, occasionally eccentric, sonic explorations.²⁵

Finally, Paul Roberts suggests that in *Children's Corner*, 'Debussy asks us to regard a child's toys, not sentimentally in the usual manner of an adult, but with the simple unaffected faith of a child'. Perhaps the dimensions of piano music are crucial to the expression of this simplicity.²³

3.3 Colin Matthews's Orchestration of Debussy's Préludes

3.3.1 Introduction

Amongst recent arrangements of Debussy's piano works for orchestra, most significant is the English composer Colin Matthews's orchestration of the complete Debussy preludes. This significance is due to the scale and ambition of his achievement coupled with the abundance of performances the work has received, both in the concert hall and on record. The complete Matthews orchestrations have been recorded by both the Hallé Orchestra, conducted by Mark Elder, and the Orchestre National de Lyon conducted by Jun Markl. Selections have also been recorded by the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Simon Rattle.²⁶

In his introduction to the complete Naxos Debussy edition of 2011 Matthews describes the process whereby this work came about:

²⁵ Grainger's arrangement of *Pagodes* for piano and tuned percussion, effectively attempts to retro-translate that piano piece into the gamelan origins from which it was inspired.

²⁶ Roberts, *Images*. 205.

I did not originally plan to orchestrate all of Debussy's *Préludes*. For the opening concert of the Hallé Orchestra's 2001/2 season, its newly appointed principal conductor, Mark Elder, asked to include a work of mine: but what emerged instead was the idea of orchestrating several of the *Préludes*. At that stage I had no thought of going any further but I did decide that I would go in at the deep end by tackling two of the most pianistic preludes, *Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest* and *Feux d'artifice*, virtuoso pieces of almost Lisztian bravura. I added *Feuilles mortes*, one of my favourites, as a gentle interlude.

Why undertake such a project? In my own (very inadequate) playing of the pieces I had always heard the sounds of the orchestra, and had in fact annotated two of them (*Voiles* and *La sérénade interrompue*) with possible instrumentation sometime in the 1970s. I have always enjoyed working with the music of other composers and the insights that this brings, and the challenge of adding around ninety minutes to Debussy's orchestral sound-world proved irresistible.

I decided early on that I would remain faithful to that remarkable sound-world, and not try to convert the *Préludes* into something that they were not. But in order to avoid contriving a pastiche of Debussy's orchestral style I kept the sound in my head and did not look at a single orchestral score of Debussy's while working on the project. Some of them needed to be transposed into different keys in order to work orchestrally; and in some I made compositional changes – usually small – that the orchestral version seemed to demand. In only one did I make a radical change – *La fille aux cheveux de lin* is a miniature portrait so simple and straightforward that I felt that the only way I could make it work orchestrally in the context of the other preludes was to slow it down to half speed.²⁷

Matthews is, of course, not the first composer to have orchestrated Debussy's *Préludes*. The Royal Scottish National Orchestra has released a disc of the complete *Préludes*, orchestrated by the Slovak composer Peter Breiner.²⁸ The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra have performed selections of the *Préludes*, orchestrated by the Dutch pianist Hans

²⁷ Colin Matthews, Liner notes for the Orchestre National de Lyon recording of the *Préludes*. Debussy, *Preludes, Books 1 and 2 (arr. C. Matthews)*, Lyon National Orchestra, Märkl, CD, Chandos 9.70215, 2013.

²⁸ Debussy, *Claude Debussy: 24 Preludes, (orch. P. Breiner)*, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, cond. Jun Märkl, CD, Naxos, 8.572.584, 2012.

Henkemans.²⁹ Arguably the best-known orchestration of any of the *Préludes* is Leopold Stokowski's arrangement of 'La Cathédrale engloutie', a blazing orchestral showpiece which makes an interesting contrast to Matthews's more restrained version.

3.3.2 Critical reaction

Critical reaction to the Matthews orchestrations have been largely positive, with some dissenting voices. Nick Barnard compares Matthews's orchestrations and André Caplet's orchestrations of 'Clair de Lune' and *La Boîte à joujoux*: 'Caplet's remit seems to have been to mimic Debussy. Matthews' brilliance, and this is why these should be treated as a major cycle of orchestral works, is that he has absorbed the essence of Debussy utterly yet refashioned it into something that is both modern and personal'.³⁰ In *The Guardian*, Andrew Clements writes that 'Matthews's exquisite treatment of this supremely pianistic music goes far beyond mere orchestration ... pieces such as 'Bruyères' and 'Feux d'artifice' are virtually recomposed, though they never trespass beyond Debussy's own musical world.'³¹ A more qualified assessment occurs in *BBC Music Magazine* where Christopher Dingle writes:

In 'Danseuses de Delphes', there is a preponderance of blurred textures, like a pianist shoving down the sustain pedal in a wrongheaded attempt to create an 'impressionist' aura.

While the Hallé sound wonderful, Elder is often cautious in his tempos, so that the fairies of 'Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses' are leaden-footed, and 'Ondine' comes

²⁹ These live performances of the Henkemans orchestrations by the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra conducted by Bernard Haitink are available at:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHjpM8k7moo>> [accessed 20/6/20].

³⁰ Nick Barnard, review on *MusicWeb international* of Debussy's *Préludes* orch. Colin Matthews, Hallé orchestra cond. Mark Elder.

<https://www.musicwebinternational.com/classrev/2010/Aug10/Debussy_Matthews_preludes_CDHLL7527.html> [accessed 20/6/20].

³¹ Andrew Clements, 'Classical Review: Debussy: Jeux, 12 Preludes (arr. Matthews): Hallé, Elder', *Guardian*, 19 February 2009.

<<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/feb/19/debussy-jeux-12-preludes>> [accessed 4/7/2019].

across as insipid rather than capricious.³²

It is telling here that the piano pedals can be invoked both positively, by Ravel³³, and negatively, by Dingle, as metaphors for the art of orchestration. Another recurring issue is the distinction between Caplet's 'translation' of Debussy and Matthews's 're-fashioning' of the *Préludes*.

3.3.3 'La Cathédrale engloutie'

'La Cathédrale engloutie' has been orchestrated many times. Henri Busser made an orchestration under the supervision of Debussy,³⁴ and Leopold Stokowski made an elaborate version which, though effective on its own terms, employs textures and sonorities which are somewhat at odds with Debussy's refined sound-world.³⁵ Colin Matthews is clearly aware of these precedents and acknowledges that his instrumental choices in the climactic moments of the piece were influenced by a reaction against Stokowski's 'all-guns-blazing' treatment of the same passages in his version:

CL: In the same piece, you avoid the use of trumpets at the big climactic moment of the orchestral version in bar 43. Was this a reaction to the very filmic Stokowski orchestration or did you feel it would compromise the 'submerged' sonority you have created?

CM: You've hit the nail on the head again! Stokowski's version seems to me as if it was The Great Underwater Gate of Kiev, and I wanted to achieve something notably more subdued, or, as you say, submerged.³⁶

³² Christopher Dingle, 'Debussy; Colin Matthews', *BBC Music Magazine*, 20 January 2012.

<<https://www.classical-music.com/reviews/orchestral/debussy-colin-matthews/>> [accessed 8 October 2021].

³³ See Chapter 2, page 24.

³⁴ 'La Cathédrale engloutie', performed by the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra conducted by JoAnn Falletta:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nzNYG5XkxI>> [accessed 18 October 2021].

³⁵ 'La Cathédrale engloutie' (arr. Stokowski), performed by the Philharmonia Orchestra cond. Geoffrey Simon :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZU5NfIST_W8> [accessed 18 October 2021].

³⁶ See Appendix A, 'An interview between Conor Linehan and Colin Matthews', 194.

A further influence, acknowledged by Matthews, is Debussy's own piano roll recording of 'La Cathédrale engloutie'. Beneath the tempo marking *Calmissimo*, Matthews gives the metronome mark of minim = 66. In a footnote to this marking he writes, 'Metronome marks are taken from Debussy's 1913 piano roll, but it is suggested that slower tempi are more appropriate for this orchestral version.'³⁷ A couple of issues arise from this note. Firstly, the exact fidelity of playback tempo on the Debussy roll is in question. Roy Howat writes: 'Last but far from least comes tempo. For all the inbuilt safeguards, two expertly set Welte machines recently produced such variant timings from Debussy's 'Cathédrale engloutie' roll as 5'01" (on Kenneth Caswell's Pierian CD) versus 5'35" on Denis Condon's).³⁸

Secondly, it is a strange decision to provide a metronome mark and then instruct conductors to ignore it! One wonders why Matthews did not decide the tempo that he would, roughly speaking, like the piece to be performed at and set that as the metronome mark. As things stand in the score, he hedges his bets somewhat. The ambiguity of this marking gives considerable scope to conductors. In the Hallé Orchestra's recording Mark Elder takes an initial tempo of minim = 44. The result is a lengthy performance duration of just under eight and a half minutes. Conducting the Orchestre National de Lyon, Jun Märkl takes a more flowing tempo of minim = 57-60 resulting in a duration of just over seven minutes, a good minute and a half faster than the Hallé (and consistent with the suggested duration of seven minutes on the score itself). Elder's relishing of the sheer beauty of sonority in Matthews's orchestration is at the expense of the shape and line of the musical narrative. Märkl's tempo, on the other hand, allows for both Matthews's desire for a more expansive orchestral tempo combined with a stronger musical narrative and shape. A

³⁷ Colin Matthews, footnote to the first page of the score of his orchestration of 'La Cathédrale engloutie' (London: Faber and Faber Music, 2012).

³⁸ Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music*, 317.

significant intervention in Matthews's orchestration is the spelling of the opening notes as minims, rather than the crotchets of the piano score. This ensures that the tempo of crotchet = minim at bar seven, which Debussy adopts in his piano roll recording of the piece, is integrated into the score to create a continuous sounding metre.

CL: In 'La Cathédrale engloutie' you changed the opening crotchets to minims. Was this to avoid the ambiguity at bar 7 of the piano score which has vexed so many performers?

CM: Precisely that! Debussy simply got the notation wrong, and I followed his own piano roll version.³⁹

This contentious issue has long divided pianists. Charles Burkhart first broached the issue in an article titled 'Debussy Plays La Cathédrale Engloutie and Solves Metrical Mystery' in the Autumn 1968 issue of *Piano Quarterly*.⁴⁰ Paul Roberts points out that Alfred Cortot adopted the same practice, as did Roberts's teacher Vivian Langrish who, he surmises, would have heard Debussy playing the piece in London.⁴¹ If we accept that Debussy either took this change for granted or forgot to mark the change in the score (or, indeed, that the time signature of $6/4 = 3/2$ implies that metric equivalence) we may also ask why he notated the same tempo in crotchets and then minims. Perhaps the 'in between' approach taken by many pianists (including contemporaries of Debussy such as George Copeland, Marcelle Meyer and Jacques Février) was his intention and the marking 'Doux et fluide' at this point reflects Debussy's desire for a flexible approach. Paul Roberts observes that 'Alfred Cortot doubles the tempo, at the appropriate places, in his recording, but who in today's climate of authentic performance and fidelity to the score would dare to do so just because of Cortot?'⁴² Roberts observation highlights just how problematic the terms 'authenticity' and 'fidelity' have become for performers. As a composer, Matthews has no


³⁹ See Appendix A, 193.

⁴⁰ Charles Burkhart, 'Debussy Plays La Cathédrale Engloutie and Solves Metrical Mystery', *Piano Quarterly* 65 (Autumn 1968), 14-16.

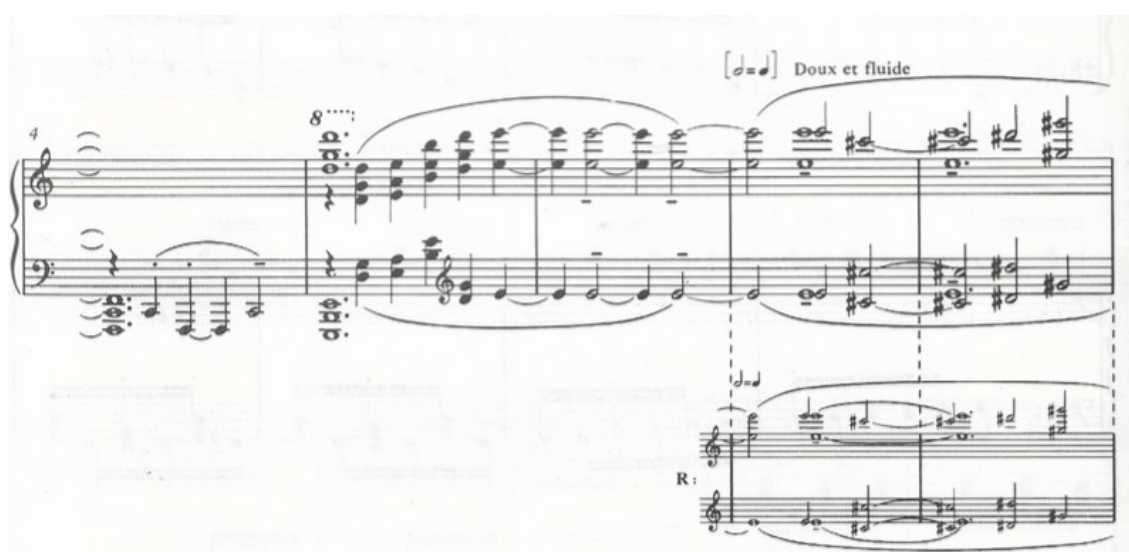
⁴¹ Roberts, *Images*, 260-261.

⁴² *Ibid*, 261.

such qualms.⁴³

Roy Howat, in his Durand edition of the *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy*, accommodates the issue by bracketing the  suggestion and adding an *ossia* stave with the letter **R** signifying that the information is based on Debussy's recording of the piece (Example 3.24).

Ex. 3.24: 'La Cathédrale engloutie (PV), Durand edition of the Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy, Bars 4-8



Debussy had an aversion to overly rigid rhythm. Of the metronome, he wrote to Jacques Durand, ‘You know what I think about metronome marks: They’re right for a single bar, like roses, with a morning’s life. Only there are ‘those’ who don’t hear music and who take their absence as authority to hear it still less!’⁴⁴ In doing away with this metrical equivalence, Matthews creates a visual unity to the piece, which may not be entirely in line with Debussy’s intentions. While there is a strong case for the sounding continuity of the

⁴³ See Matthews, Appendix A, 194.

⁴⁴ Debussy, letter to Jacques Durand, 9 October 1915. The quote is mistranslated in *Debussy Letters*, page 276. Roy Howat points out that ‘his remark has often been misconstrued through mistranslation of the rest of the sentence (misreading his word *manque* as *marque*): In fact, he’s elegantly explaining to Durand why he nonetheless *does* want to add metronome marks ...’, Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music*, 368.

metre, the distinct spellings of the two sections suggest a greater flexibility than the continuous minim re-write implies.

In orchestrating the effect of the sustaining pedal, Matthews employs a similar technique in 'La Cathédrale engloutie' and 'La fille aux cheveux de lin'. Employing elaborate *divisi* string writing, he overlaps each chord with the next to build up a block of sustained sonority:

Ex. 3. 25. Debussy, orch. Matthews, 'La Cathédrale engloutie' (OV), Bars 1-7

The image shows a musical score for the first seven bars of 'La Cathédrale engloutie' by Debussy, as orchestrated by Matthews. The score is for five string parts: Violin 1 (div. in 8), Violin 2 (div. in 4), Viola (div. in 10), Cello (div. in 5), and Bass (div. in 5). The tempo is marked 'Calmissimo' with a quarter note equal to approximately 66 beats per minute. The music features dense, overlapping chords in each part, creating a sustained, atmospheric sonority. The dynamics are marked 'pp' (pianissimo) throughout. The score is written in G major and 3/4 time.

One feature of this approach is that though the sonority itself is highly atmospheric, it prevents any melodic shaping of the music, each note being played by a different group to its neighbours (suggestive, perhaps, of a gamelan group). The slurs which Debussy writes over each group of ascending chords suggest a more linear, phrased, interpretation than is possible in Matthews's treatment. That said, it is clear throughout his orchestrations of the *Préludes* that it is not his primary aim to accurately replicate the piano originals à la Busser or Caplet. Rather, each of his orchestrations is a reflection, even an interpretation of his impressions of the music as a pianist and listener (Example 3.26).

Ex. 3. 26. 'La Cathédrale engloutie' (PV), Bars 1-3

X

Profondément calme (Dans une brume doucement sonore)



The musical score shows three bars of music. The top staff is in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature. The music is characterized by a thick texture with sustained bass notes and complex chordal structures. The tempo is marked 'Profondément calme' and the mood is 'Dans une brume doucement sonore'. The score includes dynamic markings like 'pp' and 'p'.

In Matthews's version, the *divisi* basses sustain the opening G-D-G bass chord. This quite thick texture again demonstrates the difficulty in orchestrating this music. The natural decay of piano tone is intrinsic to the harmonic balance of the piece. A *diminuendo* in the strings does not quite achieve the same effect as the decay of piano tone, an issue which Matthews acknowledges:

CL: How would you characterise the main challenge in translating the sound of the piano to an orchestral sonority? (I'm aware that the challenge differs considerably from piece to piece)?

CM: Probably trying to emulate both the decay which is an intrinsic part of the piano sound and the sustaining effect of the pedal...⁴⁵

In comparing the recordings of the Hallé Orchestra and the Orchestre National de Lyon, it is striking how much the impression of an orchestration's success or otherwise is bound up with the performances themselves (truism though it may be). As well as the more flowing tempo with which Märkl shapes the music, the slightly drier acoustic allows for more clarity of detail to come through. In bar 43 of the score, the *fortissimo* passage is handled quite differently by the two conductors. Märkl (possibly with the help of his engineers)

⁴⁵ See Appendix A, 192.

brings forward the trombones to create a more conventional orchestral *tutti*. As we have seen, Matthews's orchestration deliberately avoids the blazing trumpets of Stokowski's version. In this instance, Märkl's balance suggests a desire to push the music towards a more conventional climactic orchestral texture, while Elder's balances are probably closer to the 'more subdued' texture that Matthews was aiming for. In any case, Debussy rarely used trumpets for sustained melodies at climactic moments and was greatly wary of blaring brass. An exception to this principle occurs in the closing bars of 'De l'aube à midi sur la mer' and 'Dialogue du vent et de la Mer' the first and third movements respectively of *La mer* where the trumpets and trombones are marked, unusually, *ff* followed by *fff*.

Matthews, in a bold reversal of Stokowski's approach to the climax at bar 28 in the piano score, eschews the use of trumpets (and violins) altogether, only using trombones and horns in the brass and employing two harps, celeste and flutes in the top line. In pianistic terms, Matthews goes out of his way to avoid the orchestral equivalent of the powerful fifth finger of virtuosos, which Debussy denounced to Marguerite Long.⁴⁶ Although Matthews, by his own account, avoided listening to any of Debussy's orchestral music for fear of ending up with 'pastiche Debussy', the avoidance of a blaring orchestral *tutti* (notwithstanding the previously mentioned passage in *La mer*) is certainly characteristically Debussyan, as is the use of *forte* rather than *fortissimo* dynamics.

3.3.4 'Ondine'

If Ravel's assertion that the best treatise on his orchestrations would consist solely of his self-perceived 'mistakes', then it is instructive to look at Matthews's orchestration of *Ondine* as, by his own admission, this was the prelude which gave him the most trouble:

⁴⁶ Henri Busser's orchestration, however, reportedly under Debussy's supervision, employs a trumpet chorus at this point. He also adds harp glissandi to the score at various points. Although I did not have access to a score, a recording by the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra, cond. JoAnn Falletta, is available at:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nzNYG5XkxI>> [accessed 29 September 2021].

‘The one I’m least happy with is ‘Ondine’, perhaps because it’s one of the ones that I know best, and however hard I tried couldn’t get quite right.’

There may be a few reasons for Matthews’s difficulties. Is it significant that ‘Ondine’ is one of the *Préludes* most familiar to him? Perhaps the strong imprint of the piano piece in his mind acted as an inhibiting rather than an inspiring factor. Matthews, in these orchestrations, tends to lean more towards the ‘impressionist’ rather than ‘modernist’ Debussy. As he demonstrates in ‘La Cathédrale engloutie’, he prefers a more subtle and nuanced approach to a ‘filmic’ orchestration. Woodwinds tend to take preference over brass and the use of percussion is often sparing and delicate. In the case of ‘Ondine’, this approach bends the music toward a more pastoral, gentle sound-world at the expense of the underlying sense of danger in this most mercurial of music; if Ondine is a sort of ‘Underwater Interrupted Serenade’, perhaps Matthews is not sufficiently bold in his instrumental choices to fully realise the fragmented narrative of the music (Examples 3.27 and 3.28).

Ex. 3. 27. 'Ondine' (PV), Bars 1-10

Scherzando

pp

mf

pp

mf

p

m. d. m. g.⁵

m. d. m. g.⁵

pp

Retenu - - - //

Ex. 3. 28. Debussy orch. Matthews: 'Ondine' (OV), Bars 1-5

Ondine

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
orchestrated by Colin Matthews

Scherzando $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 66$ **molto rubato**

1 Flutes
Piccolo
1 Oboes
English Horn
1 Clarinet in B \flat
Bass Clarinet in B \flat
1 Bassoons
Contrabassoon
4 Horns in F
3 Trombones
Tuba
Percussion
Harp 1
Harp 2
Cello

Scherzando ($\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 66$) **molto rubato**

2 desks, pizz.
pp leggiero
2 desks, pizz.
pp leggiero
2 desks, pizz.
pp leggiero

1st half, tutti, pizz.
mf sub.
2nd half, tutti, pizz.
mf sub.
1st half, tutti, pizz.
mf sub.
5 soli (back players)
pp
sul pont.
p
6 sole
p
1st half solo
pp
2nd half, pizz.
pp

2 desks
pp
2 desks
pp
2 desks
pp
nat.
p
nat.
p
pp

The opening phrases are here assigned to two flutes and alto flute, while the *forte* interjection at bar five is played by two clarinets. Herein lies the problem. There is insufficient contrast of sonority within the woodwind group to differentiate between these most contrasting ideas. The tonal contrast does not sufficiently differentiate between Ondine and the ocean in which she lives; between her allure and her danger. The sonorities, though beautiful, dilute both the theatrical and improvisatory character of the piano music.

3.3.5 ‘Feux d’artifice’

One of the first *Préludes* orchestrated by Matthews, who expressed an ambition to ‘go in at the deep end’, was ‘Feux d’artifice’. Certainly, ‘Feux d’artifice’ is a particularly pianistic piece of music and the challenges of transcribing its many arpeggiated gestures and pedal washed sonorities are manifold.

Ex. 3. 29. ‘Feux d’artifice’ (PV) Bars 1-4

Modérément animé
léger, égal et lointain

The image shows two systems of musical notation for the first four bars of 'Feux d'artifice'. The first system shows the piano introduction with a 'pp' dynamic marking and a tempo of 'Modérément animé' and character 'léger, égal et lointain'. The second system shows the continuation of the piano introduction, with the right hand playing arpeggiated chords and the left hand providing a steady accompaniment.

In his orchestration of the opening passage, above, Matthews employs the Debussyan technique of heterophonic doubling. He re-writes the opening passage in triplets (alto flute), semiquavers (clarinets), semiquaver triplets (celeste), quavers (second violins *divisi*

á 3) and semiquavers (violas *divisi á 3*). The octave interpolations (bars 3 and 4) are assigned to xylophone (doubling *divisi* first violins).

In the ninth bar Matthews does something entirely unexpected. He telescopes the next seven bars of 4/8 in the piano part into six bars of 3/4 and 4/4, displacing the interjections from their regular pulse. It is a fascinating technique which gives the music further forward impetus while destabilising its metric regularity. These alterations allow the orchestra to mimic the kind of rhythmic flexibility which a pianist, as a solo player, unburdened with issues of ensemble, can more easily achieve (Example 3.30).

Ex. 3. 30. Debussy, orch. Matthews: 'Feux d'artifice' (OV) Bars 13-16

This musical score page contains the following elements:

- Top System:** Four staves with complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include *f* and *mf*.
- Middle System:** A xylophone part labeled "XYLO." and a suspended cymbal part labeled "SUSP. CYM." with dynamic markings *pp*, *mf*, and *f*. A trill is marked "TRL." and a *tr.* (trill) is also indicated.
- Bottom System:** A piano part with a sixteenth-note accompaniment. It includes markings for *molto cresc.*, *f*, and *arco*. A section is marked "div. in 5" with a *p* dynamic.
- Other Staves:** Several empty staves for other instruments, with some containing *f* markings.

Matthews observes:

CM: In *Les tierces alternées* I turned a number of 2/4 bars into 5/8 because I wanted to get away from the rather four-square original, which the pianist can play around with, but the orchestra could only do with some difficulty.

CL: Did you change the metrical scheme at bar 9 of 'Feux d'artifice' for similar reasons?

CM: Yes, that was the intention (and I think there are a few other examples). Obviously, any conductor needs to employ a certain amount of rubato, and occasionally I pointed in that direction with additional tempo directions and/or metronome marks.⁴⁷

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges of orchestration is the transposition of explicitly pianistic arpeggiation, such as we see below, into orchestral texture (Example 3.31).

Ex. 3.31. 'Feux d'artifice' (PV), Bars 25-28

The image displays two systems of musical notation for 'Feux d'artifice' (PV), Bars 25-28. The first system shows a piano accompaniment with a right hand playing arpeggiated chords and a left hand playing a bass line. The second system shows the same piano accompaniment, but with a new orchestral texture. The right hand is now played by piccolos and oboes, and the left hand is played by cellos and double basses. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'f' and 'très en dehors'.

Matthews, in a feat of virtuosic orchestral technique, achieves a complete transformation of this most pianistic of passages. The distribution of the arpeggiated right hand between piccolos and oboes, doubled by celeste and harp works exceptionally well (Example 3.32).

⁴⁷ Matthews, see Appendix A, 196.

Ex. 3. 32. Debussy orch. Matthews, 'Feux d'artifice' (OV) Bars 23-25

The image displays a page of a musical score for 'Feux d'artifice' by Debussy, orchestrated by Matthews, covering bars 23 to 25. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The instruments and parts shown are:

- Flute (Fl.)
- Oboe (Ob.)
- Clarinet (Cl.)
- Bassoon (Bsn.)
- Horn (Hn.)
- Trumpet (Tpt.)
- Percussion (Perc.) including Glock, Trl, and Susp. Cym.
- Harp 1 (Hp. 1)
- Harp 2 (Hp. 2)
- Cello (Cel.)
- Violin 1 (Vln. 1)
- Violin 2 (Vln. 2)
- Viola (Vla.)
- Violoncello (Vlc.)

The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs, particularly in the woodwinds and strings. Dynamics such as *mf*, *p*, *f*, and *dim.* are indicated throughout. Performance instructions like 'sim.' and 'div. in 5' are also present. The page number '25' is visible in the top left corner.

It is indicative of the difficulties in orchestrating highly pianistic music that Ravel chose not to orchestrate *Jeux d'eau*, a piece which is largely dependent on similar types of Lisztian gestures. Perhaps he felt that the music was simply too pianistic to successfully speak in orchestral language. Indeed, the one piece in this vein which he did orchestrate,

‘Un barque sur l’océan’, pleased him so little that he withdrew it after one performance.⁴⁸

Roy Howat explores the difficulties of translating such textures.

Ironically, the strongest sense of orchestral reduction comes from the one piece – ‘Une barque sur l’océan’ - whose orchestration left Ravel dissatisfied. Two reasons can be seen. Orchestral though they seem, the piece’s rolling arpeggios lose much of their dynamism when orchestrated (inevitably) with string tremolo. In addition, the piece’s dynamics are pianistically conceived: waves that take the piano from *ppp* to *fff* and back over just a bar or two leave insufficient time to open up the dynamic range of an orchestra, even though Ravel lengthened bars 28 and 29 for that purpose in the orchestral score. As with Debussy’s *L’isle joyeuse*, orchestral though it feels, the structure is essentially and skilfully pianistic.

The paradox here is that piano music which sets to create a quasi-orchestral effect can be particularly difficult to orchestrate. Russ writes of Ravel’s orchestration ‘the blurring suggested by the ‘*Très enveloppé de pédales*’ in the piano score is recreated by a complex orchestral texture in which the chord is both sustained and presented in arpeggios with various rhythmic values simultaneously.⁴⁹

This could also describe Matthews’s technique in the creation of blurred arpeggiated textures. In this instance, he is attempting to defy Messiaen’s words, ‘there exists an orchestral kind of piano writing which is more orchestral than the orchestra itself and which, with a real orchestra, it is impossible to realise.’⁵⁰

The temporal displacements, multi-rhythmic textures and acute sonic gestures in Matthews’s orchestration serve to make the music sound even more forward looking and ‘modern’ than many performances of the piano version. Paul Griffiths, in his study of

⁴⁸ It would only be published much later by Durand in 1950.

⁴⁹ Russ, ‘Ravel and the orchestra’, in Deborah Mawer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 135.

⁵⁰ Olivier Messiaen, in Antoine Goléa, *Rencontres avec Olivier Messiaen* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1984), 158.

György Ligeti (1923- 2006) invokes 'Feux d'artifice' as 'one of the most Ligetian pieces composed before Ligeti was born.'⁵¹

Another striking element of the orchestration is the way in which it makes the relationship of 'Feux d'artifice' to Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and, particularly, the movement 'Chez Petrushka', most transparent. The use of brass in the commediaesque outbursts in Matthews's orchestration immediately recall the brass outbursts in Stravinsky's piece. The alteration of long-limbed arpeggiated textures with short, biting interjections is characteristic of both pieces. Matthews again disavows any explicit connections: 'Although I can see the *Petrushka* similarity, that had never occurred to me at the time, or subsequently until you suggested it.'⁵² Notwithstanding Matthews's disavowals, this elucidation of Debussy's influences and those who he influenced occur across the orchestrations, from Stravinsky to Gershwin, to Vaughan Williams.

3.3.6 Conclusion

Colin Matthews' achievement in orchestrating Debussy's *Préludes* merits an entire thesis to itself. In adding ninety minutes to the Debussy orchestral repertoire (to use Matthews's own words) he has created a body of work which has been taken up by some of the world's leading orchestras and conductors. If some attention is drawn to the less successful of the orchestrations, it is only because, as Ravel noted, the problems of orchestration are so illuminating. In his audacious re-imagining of 'La fille aux cheveux de lin', in his transitions linking 'Le vent dans la plaine' with 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' and 'Des pas sur la neige' with 'Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses' he brings the sensibilities of a first-rate composer to the orchestrator's task. Matthews explains that he was more indebted to Ravel than Debussy in the orchestration of the *Preludes*: 'In fact, I tried to think of how

⁵¹ Paul Griffiths, *György Ligeti* (London: Robson Books, 1983), 71.

⁵² Matthews, see Appendix A, 192.

Ravel might have orchestrated the preludes, and during the work on them I never once looked at a Debussy orchestral score ...'⁵³

Ravel, in his description of *L'isle joyeuse* as an orchestral reduction for piano (a description he also gave to his own 'Scarbo'), both inverts and echoes Matthews aesthetic in orchestrating the *Préludes*. Matthews writes that 'My overall aim was to rethink them in orchestral terms so that if a piano reduction of the orchestrations were to be made it wouldn't look much like the original. I really shouldn't say it, but having lived so long with thinking of them orchestrally, I find piano performances a bit monochrome.'⁵⁴ In their breadth of expression, their multitude of styles and their extraordinary pianistic colour, Debussy's *Préludes* offer great attractions to an orchestrator. Matthews's creative, highly personal and occasionally audacious engagement with this music is never less than stimulating and often revelatory in the originality of his interpretations.

3.4 Performance Implications

Debussy's piano music displayed an extraordinary development of style, harmony and texture through his life. Many of his piano works, for example 'Hommage à Rameau' and 'La Cathédrale engloutie', include practically un-realisable sustained bass notes. Pianists can choose between using the sostenuto pedal, various half-peddalling effects, or voicing in such a way that allows for long pedal points without unpleasantly jarring harmonies. The passage (below) from bars 26-30 of 'La Cathédrale engloutie' is a good example (Example 3.33).

⁵³ See Appendix A, page 194.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 194.

Ex. 3. 33. 'La Cathédrale engloutie' (PV) bars 26-30

The musical score for 'La Cathédrale engloutie' (PV) bars 26-30 is presented in a grand staff format. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The tempo is marked 'Sonore sans dureté' and the dynamics are 'ff'. The bass line includes a marking '8va bassa'.

By voicing the fortissimo chords without overly projecting the inner parts this passage can be played over one pedal without creating unpleasant clashes of overtones. Perhaps Debussy adds the qualification *sans dureté* to the *sonore* for this reason. In refraining from brass at this point, Colin Matthews follows Debussy's orchestral style of rarely employing trumpets in climactic melodies.

Debussy's monophonic textures, such as the openings of 'The Little Shepherd', 'Bruyères' and 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' require the use of little, or no pedal. There is really no compelling reason to pedal the opening bars of 'La fille aux cheveux de lin'. No pedal is marked in the score and a shroud of pedal works against the essential simplicity of the music (Example 3.34).

Ex. 3. 34. 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' (PV), bars 1-3

The musical score for 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' (PV) bars 1-3 is presented in a grand staff format. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The tempo is marked 'Très calme et doucement expressif (♩ = 66)'. The dynamics are 'p sans rigueur'.

In Matthews's orchestration of the piece, each note is played by a different grouping of *divisi* strings, creating a halo of sound. It is a lovely sonority, achieved, however, at the expense of the music's innate simplicity. This technique of overlapping sonorities is further used by Matthews to create a sense of 'pedal' in the opening bars of 'Voiles' and 'La Cathédrale engloutie'. The effect is the same – a beautiful sonority taking precedence over the through-line of the music. Conversely, to ignore the sweep and sonority that the pedal can create would also be a mistake. In Gustave Cloëz's (1890-1970) orchestration of the 'Prélude' from Debussy's *Suite Bergamasque*, the rather literal orchestration of the opening flourish, creates a somewhat plodding lack of momentum from which the music never quite recovers. Cloëz interprets the opening bar's note values quite literally. Practically every pianist pedals through this bar so that the opening bass F underpins the harmony. Ideally, any orchestration should sustain this F through, thereby invoking the spirit, if not the letter, of the music.⁵⁵ (Example 3.35).

Ex. 3. 35. Debussy, *Suite Bergamasque*, 'Prélude', possible arrangement of bar 1

The image shows a musical score for the first bar of Debussy's 'Prélude' from Suite Bergamasque. The score is arranged for five instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The Violin I and Violin II parts are in treble clef and play a whole note chord (F4, C5) marked *sf*. The Viola part is in alto clef and plays a half note (F3) followed by a quarter note (C4). The Violoncello part is in bass clef and plays a half note (F2) followed by a quarter note (C3). The Contrabass part is in bass clef and plays a whole note (F1) marked *sf*.

Reflecting on the ambiguity of 'Feux d'artifice', Howat writes: 'A debatable case is the start of 'Feux d'artifice', which can be read as either *sec*, as if evoking sparklers or

⁵⁵ Debussy, 'Prélude' from *Suite Bergamasque* orch. Gustave Cloëz, Orchestre National de Lyon, cond. Jun Märkl is available at:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMqhzvuM3Js>> [accessed 24 June 2020].

Catherine wheels, or with a discreet mask of half-pedal like a haze of cordite.⁵⁶ In fact, such issues recur frequently through Debussy's music. How sharp are the raindrops at the beginning of 'Jardins sous la Pluie'?⁵⁷ How thick is the fog in 'Brouillards'? How heavy the snowfall in 'The Snow is Dancing'? These issues are crucial to both interpreting the music and orchestrating it. The rhythmic flexibility of Debussy's own playing can be heard to good effect in his piano roll recording of 'La Soirée dans Grenade' and in the easy swing of his opening phrases in 'La fille aux cheveux de lin'. Such rhythmic plasticity would be almost impossible to catch in an orchestral setting.

By considering the orchestral possibilities of Debussy's piano music, both realised and imaginary, pianists can articulate and resolve questions of pedalling, touch, dynamics, rests and style. After all, a piano score, as an inert, or frozen, object, must be interpreted and 'orchestrated' as much by a pianist as by an orchestrator. Every decision of voicing, attack and coloration should be made with the same care by the pianist as the assignation of instruments, the balance of sonorities and the foregrounding of lines within the music by an orchestrator such as Caplet, Busser, Matthews or Stokowski.

⁵⁶ Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music*, 311-312.

⁵⁷ According to Marguerite Long, Debussy claimed that the music, in fact, 'evoked children playing in the Luxembourg Gardens after the rain, while everything still sparkled'. Marguerite Long, in Cecilia Dunoyer, 'Early Debussyses at the Piano', in James Briscoe (ed.), *Debussy in Performance*, 107.

Chapter Four: Orchestrations of the Piano Music of Erik Satie – Footsteps on the White Road.

4.1 Introduction

Could Erik Satie orchestrate? On the evidence of his orchestrations for the ballet *Parade* he was perfectly capable of a highly effective arrangement of his piano short score. The music displays a wind and brass led astringency in which strings play a subsidiary role. Six years later, in the same city, Stravinsky was to take this style of orchestration to its natural conclusion by eliminating strings (except double basses) altogether in his Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments. Jean Cocteau in *Le Coq et L'Arlequin* writes that 'we may soon hope for an orchestra where there will be no caressing strings. Only a rich choir of wood, brass and percussion'¹ Satie himself certainly seemed pleased with his efforts, telling Poulenc that 'it showed that I can orchestrate no worse than the next man. For many people said the work only sounded well on the piano. Pure legend!!!'² An alternative to Robert Orledge's suggestion that 'Satie emerged as an orchestrator who seems to have been paranoid about any form of orchestral doubling', the sparse, limpid textures and many empty bars of the orchestration remind us of Debussy's advice to Manuel de Falla that 'you must always use the instruments in such a way that the effect they produce in performance is exactly what is needed. One should never use them to fill up holes or to realise a sonority or a mixture *approximately*.'³

¹ Jean Cocteau, Rollo H. Myers (trans.), *A Call to Order*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1926), 7.

² James Harding, *Erik Satie*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975), 162.

³ Debussy, from an undated document in the Falla archives in Granada (S-AMF 9001-36), cited in Yvan Nommick, 'La presence de Debussy dans la vie et l'oeuvre de Manuel de Falla. Essai d'interprétation,' *Cahiers Debussy* 30 (2006), 37; quoted in Robert Orledge, 'Debussy's Concept of Orchestration' in François de Médicis and Steven Huebner (eds.), *Debussy's Resonance*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2018), 258.

In any event, Satie was not averse to occasional doublings, as can be seen from this excerpt from *Parade*, where the *Petrushka*-like theme is doubled in octaves by viola and oboe (Example 4.1).

Ex. 4. 1. Erik Satie, *Parade*, 'Prestidigitateur chinois' (OV), Bars 16-20

10

Picc.
Fl.
Htb.
C. Angl.
picc^eClar.
Clar. en Sib.
B.^{ons}
Cors
Timb.
Hpe
1
2
viols
All.
v.^{lles}
C.B.

In the piano score of *Uspud*, Satie marks instrumental suggestions which, if taken literally,

are unplayable within the instruments' range (Example 4.2).

Ex. 4. 2. Satie, *Uspud*, (PV) Bars 18-20



It would be absurd, however, to imagine that Satie was so unfamiliar with the range of woodwind instruments. These markings would be better read as general orchestral ideas and aspirations than a specific instruction. It is, on the other hand, fascinating to see a score in which instrumental ideas are so directly invoked. With the works of Debussy and Ravel, pianists can speculate on instrumental colours at the piano, or infer them from subsequent orchestrations. In *Uspud* they are, quite literally, spelled out.

Paul Zukofsky asserts that ‘Debussy’s orchestration of *Gymnopédies* is lovely, but the work is no longer Satie.’⁴ Zukofsky earlier suggests that ‘Satie’s orchestrations were wrong, according to convention, and therefore had to be made fit for proper society, somewhat like Eliza being taught to speak. In their attempt to fix him up, people other than Satie attempted to orchestrate some of Satie’s early music, using their own style, or Satie’s dance-hall style with results that are remarkably unsuccessful ...’⁵ Perhaps Satie’s orchestral style was not so much the result of a lack of technique as a desire to retain his own uniqueness and angularity; to smooth out his edges would have been entirely anathema to his aesthetic. In this regard, Satie recalls Groucho Marx’s desire not to be part of any club that would have him as a member.

⁴ Paul Zukofsky, ‘Satie Notes’, programme notes for the 1991 Summergarden Concert Series of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<<http://www.musicalobservations.com/publications/satie.html>> [accessed 4 July /2020].

⁵ Ibid.

Satie was something of an outlier in French music. He lived most of his adult life in a decrepit house in the suburb of Arcueil, around eight kilometres from the centre of Paris and far from the bohemian and creative areas of that city. He was, in many ways, a musical prophet, equally lauded and derided during his lifetime, and a composer whose influence was far greater than the import of his works themselves. Much of his work survives as fragments and he was a less than careful curator of his manuscripts. It is a reflection of both Satie's influence and also his scattered and incomplete output that so many orchestrations, by illustrious contemporaries, exist of his work. As Cocteau writes, 'Satie shows us a white road on which anyone can leave his own footprints'.⁶ Ravel expressed an estimable debt to Satie's musical experiments:

Another significant influence, somewhat unique, and deriving at least partially from Chabrier, is that of Erik Satie, which has had appreciable effect upon Debussy, myself, and indeed most of the modern French composers. Satie was possessed of an extremely keen intelligence. His was the inventor's mind par excellence. He was a great experimenter. His experiments may never have reached the development or realization attained by Liszt but, alike in multiplicity and importance, these experiments have been of inestimable value. Simply and ingeniously Satie pointed the way, but as soon as another musician took to the trail he had indicated, Satie would change his own orientation and without hesitation open up another path to new fields of experimentation. He thus became the inspiration of countless progressive tendencies; and while he himself may, perhaps, never have wrought out of his own discoveries a single complete work of art, nevertheless we have today many such works which might not have come into existence if Satie had never lived.⁷

In his humorous, often surreal and playful writings and compositions Satie's reputation may have fallen victim to the tendency described by Sydney Smith: 'You and I are exceptions to the law of nature: you have risen by your gravity, and I have sunk by my

⁶ Cocteau, *Le Coq Et L'Arlequin, Notes Autour De La Musique* (London: Wentworth Press, 2018), 7.

⁷ Maurice Ravel, 'Musique Contemporaine', lecture delivered at the Scottish Rite theatre, Houston, Texas on April 7, 1928, quoted in Arbie Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 145.

levity.’⁸ An allergic reaction to this playful aesthetic is displayed in a scathing review of Satie by the English critic Ernest Newman:

One or two French musicians of standing take him with a certain amount of seriousness. Roland-Manuel, who has done a biography of Ravel, has orchestrated Satie’s *Prélude de la Porte Heroique du Ciel*, and no less a person than Debussy himself has orchestrated his *Gymnopédies* ... Satie takes some of his laborious joking with the same appalling seriousness as those poets of the Montmartre cafes who are traditionally credited with amusing us with their verses. Those may laugh at *Le Fils des étoiles* who can; for my own part I find it merely stupid.⁹

This attitude goes some way towards explaining the diminished reputation of Satie in relation to his more celebrated contemporaries. It is a tribute to Satie’s influence on those same contemporaries that there exist so many orchestrations of his piano pieces: Debussy orchestrated two of the *Gymnopédies*, Francis Poulenc orchestrated two of the *Préludes* and one of the *Gnossiennes* and Darius Milhaud orchestrated the three-movement suite *Jack in the Box*, while Roland-Manuel orchestrated the three ‘Préludes’ from *Le fils des étoiles*, Satie’s incidental music for the play by the occultist Josephin Péladan. Each of these orchestrations were acts of respect and homage, refracting Satie’s music through the personalities of their orchestrators. In all of them the question can be asked – are they still Satie?

4.2 Debussy’s Orchestration of the *Gymnopédies* nos. 1 and 3

Erik Satie writes:

When I first met Debussy, at the beginning of our relationship, he was full of Mussorgsky and very conscientiously was trying to find a path which was not easy to discover. In this

⁸ Sydney Smith as related by Samuel Rogers to Henry Crabb Robinson in Robinson, *Diary Reminiscences and Correspondence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 344.

⁹ Ernest Newman, *A Musical Motley* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925), 285.

respect, I myself had a great advance over him: no ‘prizes’ from Rome, or any other town, weighed down my steps, since I do not carry any of these things around on me, or on my back ... At that time, I was writing my *Fils des Étoiles* – to a text by J. Péladan – and I explained to Debussy how we French needed to break away from the Wagnerian adventure, which did not correspond with our natural aspirations. And I told him that I was not at all an anti-Wagnerian, but that we needed a music of our own – preferably without sauerkraut.¹⁰

Why not use the representational methods demonstrated by Claude Monet, Cezanne, Toulouse-Lautrec and so on ...? Why not make a musical transposition of these methods? Nothing more simple. Are they not expressions?

This was the profitable starting point for experiments abounding in tentative – and even fruitful results ... Who could show him examples? Reveal to him lucky finds? point out the ground to be explored? Give him the benefit of experience? ... Who? I shall not reply: that interests me no more.¹¹

Numbers one and three of Satie’s *Trois Gymnopédies* were published in Paris in 1888, while number two had been published in 1885. Their title derives from ‘gymnopaedia’ the ancient Greek word depicting a series of exercises in which a group of young men danced naked, or unarmed. The *Trois Gymnopédies* have now attained canonic status in the repertoire and have exercised huge influence over composers such as John Cage as well as the minimalist and ambient music movements. However, their original popularity owed a great deal to the orchestration of numbers one and three by Debussy in 1897, when Debussy’s fame was at its height and Satie was struggling. Robert Orledge writes that ‘their friendship was ‘tempestuous ... each constantly on his guard against the other, without being able to stop loving him tenderly. A musical brotherhood yet a rivalry of

¹⁰ Erik Satie, excerpt from an article for *Vanity Fair*, 1923 in Nigel Wilkins (ed.), *The Writings of Erik Satie* (London: Eulenberg, 1980), 110.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

musicians. Debussy got on best with Satie before he [Satie] achieved fame in his own right in 1911'.¹² Ironically, this fame was largely created by Debussy's orchestrations of the *Gymnopédies*. Alan M. Gillmor writes:

As once before, fourteen years previously, the enthusiastic reception of the *Gymnopédies* in their lovely 'impressionistic' orchestral dress reflected most favourably on Debussy, causing the wounded Satie to register a complaint about his old friend: 'Why won't he let me take just a little corner of his shade? ... I don't want to take any of his sun.'¹³

The orchestrations were an act of promotion and friendship by one composer to another and it was initially as orchestral pieces that the *Gymnopédies* achieved their fame (or more precisely numbers one and three. Debussy did not orchestrate number two, deeming it to be inappropriate for translation from the pianistic to the orchestral). Satie attached great importance to the orchestral versions of the *Gymnopédies*. In a letter to the publisher Rouart, he wrote 'I greet you flat on my face and ask, as nicely as I am able, if you will be coming this evening to hear the *Gymnopédies*. If so, I shall be very pleased'.¹⁴ It was a source of some dismay to him, later, that Debussy appeared not to take any great pleasure in the success of his orchestrations and the greater standing of Satie which resulted.

In Debussy's version of *Gymnopédies* number three becomes number one, and number one becomes number two. In both versions, Debussy adds to the mono-textural piano versions with extremely delicate interventions. The most notable is number one (piano version) in which the interpolations of triplet figures in the harp and gentle notes on the cymbal, using a timpani stick, create an impression of ritual and procession in keeping with the origins of

¹² Robert Orledge, 'Debussy the man', in Simon Trezise (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 12.

¹³ Alan M. Gillmor, *Erik Satie* (Woodbridge: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 144.

¹⁴ Satie, letter to M. Rouart, June 1911, in Nigel Wilkins, 'Erik Satie's Letters', *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes* (Toronto: Canadian University Music Society, 1981), 209.

the title 'Gymnopédie'.(Examples 4.3 and 4.4).

Ex 4.3 Erik Satie: *Gymnopédies* no. 1 (PV), Bars 1-10

The image shows the musical score for Erik Satie's *Gymnopédie* no. 1, bars 1-10. The score is written for piano (PV) and is in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo and mood are indicated as "Lent et douloureux". The score consists of two systems of music. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The second system continues the piece, featuring a crescendo leading to a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic. The music is characterized by its sparse, minimalist texture, with long intervals and a slow, melancholic feel.

Ex. 4.4 Erik Satie: *Gymnopédies* no. 3 (in Debussy's version) (OV) bars 1-8

The image shows the musical score for Erik Satie's *Gymnopédie* no. 3 (in Debussy's version), bars 1-8. The score is for an orchestra (OV) and is in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo and mood are indicated as "Lent et douloureux". The score is arranged for various instruments: 2 FLUTES, HAUTOIS, 4 CORS EN FA, CYMBALE, 1^{re} HARPE, 2^{de} HARPE, 1^{er} VIOLONS, 2^{ds} VIOLONS, ALTOS, VIOLONCELLES, and CONTRE BASSES. The score is characterized by its delicate and intricate orchestration. The first harp part features a melodic line with a *p* dynamic. The second harp part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with a *pp* dynamic. The string parts are also delicately written, with the first violins playing a melodic line and the second violins providing a rhythmic accompaniment. The cymbal part is marked "frappez avec une baguette de timbale" and plays a rhythmic pattern. The basses play a steady, rhythmic accompaniment with a *pp* *pizz.* dynamic.

It can be seen in the above example how texturally delicate Debussy's orchestration is.

The left-hand accompaniment is assigned to the second harp with the downbeats doubled

in the basses. The melody itself is played by first violins, *divisi* and playing in octaves. This produces a more ‘neutral’ expressive quality than the use of the more plaintive oboe in the equivalent passage in no. 3 (Debussy’s no. 1 in the orchestral version). However, woodwinds soon take up the melodic material. The most telling alteration Debussy has made is the addition of accompanying triplets in the first harp part. If the cymbal hits are considered a purely coloristic effect, these triplets are the only ‘compositional’ element in the orchestration. Though delicate, they create a major expressive shift in the context of such a sparse landscape. In Debussy’s arrangement, the music becomes somewhat idyllic and pastoral, an impression that is somewhat at odds with Satie’s ‘white road’. No doubt it was, in Alan Gillmor’s phrase, ‘Debussy’s ‘lovely “impressionistic” orchestral dress’ that led to the enduring success of the first ‘Gymnopédie’.¹⁵ However, it also gave rise to an idea of Satie’s music being pleasant, easy listening fare. In this, Debussy’s advocacy of his friend’s work became at once the source of his greatest success, but also of the enduring misunderstanding of his work.

In assessing the differing effects of the piano and orchestral versions, Cocteau’s assessment of Satie is relevant:

The profound originality of a Satie teaches young musicians a lesson that doesn’t mean abandoning their own originality. Wagner, Stravinsky, and even Debussy, are beautiful octopuses. Anyone who goes near them will have trouble extricating himself from their tentacles. Satie shows us a white road on which anyone can leave his own footprints.¹⁶

If ‘Gymnopédie no.1’ represents a white road, Debussy in his harp and cymbal interpolations has left his footprints in the snow. The question remains – is it still Satie? The undulating harp lines, airy octave violins and plaintive woodwind are far from the

¹⁵ Gillmor, *Erik Satie*, 144.

¹⁶ Jean Cocteau, from *Le Coq Et L’Arlequin, Notes Autour De La Musique*: quoted in Jann Passler, *Writing through music, Essays on Music, Culture and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 48.

blocks of sonorities which Satie employed in his own orchestral style. Debussy's pictorial instinct works against the cool dispassion of Satie's aesthetic.

Satie cherished his artistic independence while being, at the same time, keenly desirous of further training, resulting in a less than happy period of study with d'Indy:

In 1905, I started work with d'Indy. I was tired of being reproached for an ignorance I felt I must possess, since competent people pointed it out in my works. Three years later, after much very hard work, I obtained my Diploma in Counterpoint at the Schola Cantorum, initialled by my excellent teacher; the which is certainly the most knowledgeable and the best man in this world. So there I was, in 1908, holding in my hands a diploma which entitled me to call myself a contrapuntist. Proud of my knowledge, I started to compose. My first work of this type is a chorale and fugue for piano duet. I have been much abused in my poor life, but never was so much scorn poured upon me. What on earth had I been doing with d'Indy? Before, I had written pieces of such immense charm. And now! How pretentious! What a bore! ¹⁷

There is certainly a case against too much 'polish' in music. Who would wish the orchestral works of Janáček, for example, to be any less angular than they are? Satie decries the teaching which left him a far more capable, yet less interesting and original musician than before. In this light, Debussy's sensitive orchestral 'polishing' of the *Gymnopédies* did Satie a great service and yet contributed to a persistent misunderstanding of his work.

¹⁷ Satie, letter to his brother Conrad ca.1900, quoted in Harding, *Erik Satie*, 114.

4.3 Francis Poulenc's Orchestration of two Satie Préludes

Francis Poulenc writes of Erik Satie:

Whereas so many composers, even well-known ones, too often have a tendency to regard the piano as a makeshift, capable of dealing with anything, Satie, being punctilious in all things, knew exactly what suits the keyboard. His writing so direct, so new, in such bold reaction against the bewitchment of Debussy and Ravel, surely found an echo as late as the *Sonata for two pianos* of 1944 by the great Stravinsky.¹⁸

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) was one of the younger composers whom Satie championed and defended during his lifetime. Poulenc, in return, was a keen promoter of Satie's music after the older man's death (despite the falling out between them – a sadly recurring feature of Satie's relationships with his friends and colleagues). In his lecture 'My teachers and my friends' Poulenc writes, 'Erik Satie had a considerable influence on me, both spiritually and musically. He saw things in such a true light, to the point of limiting himself through self-control, that a young composer could only profit by being in contact with him.'¹⁹ Therein lies the central contradiction of Satie's music. The rigorous, somewhat austere self-controller was obscured, perhaps deliberately, by the surrealist joker and ironist. Poulenc invokes the Stravinsky *Sonata for two Pianos* in the above quotation, and his orchestration of the *Prélude* 'Fête donnée par des Chevaliers Normand' gives the music a distinctly Stravinskian sonority in its use of alternating blocks of woodwinds and strings. (Example 4.5).

¹⁸ Roger Nichols (trans.) and Nicolas Southon (ed.), *Francis Poulenc: Articles and Interviews, notes from the heart* (Ashgate, 2014), 51-52.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

Ex. 4.5 Satie, Prelude no. 1, 'Fête donnée par des chevaliers Normands en l'honneur d'une jeune Demoiselle' (PV), (no bars)

4 Préludes

ERIK SATIE

Fête donnée par des Chevaliers Normands en l'Honneur d'une jeune Demoiselle.

XI^e SIÈCLE

Lent

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system begins with a treble clef and a bass clef. The right hand (treble clef) starts with a series of chords, including a G major triad, a G major triad with a sharp fourth, and a G major triad with a sharp fifth. The left hand (bass clef) plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system continues with similar chordal textures in the right hand and a more varied eighth-note accompaniment in the left hand. The score is marked 'mp' (mezzo-piano) and 'Lent'.

In Poulenc's orchestration, the right-hand chords are assigned without transposition to the high woodwinds, while the left-hand octaves are played by basses and celli. The wide spacing of treble and bass sonorities is a direct transference of the piano writing, in keeping with Satie's own orchestral style. In not attempting to smooth out the angular writing in the piano piece, Poulenc displays a idiomatic faithfulness to Satie's stylistic intentions.²⁰

4.4 Darius Milhaud's orchestration of *Jack in the Box*

Another orchestration which acted as a tribute and gesture of friendship and gratitude was Darius Milhaud's arrangement of *Jack in the Box*, a ballet which Satie had conceived with the comic artist Jules Depaquit (1869-1924), an eccentric character who went on to become the self-styled 'Mayor of Montmartre'. According to Harding '*Jack in the Box* was

²⁰ Poulenc's recordings of Satie's *Gymnopédies* are available at:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVES7gYefjM>> [accessed 10 June 2020].

intended as a ballet. Depaquit's scenario has not survived ... Darius Milhaud orchestrated the ballet with finesse [perhaps a little too much] for a performance later organised by Diaghilev as a tribute to Satie. The settings were by Andre Derain.²¹ Satie's witty cabaret-like score, consists of three good natured pieces in the manner of a cakewalk.²² The three movements are titled, 'Prélude', 'Entr'acte' and 'Finale'. The tripping 2/4 meter is occasionally wittily disrupted by a 3/4 bar (Example 4.6).

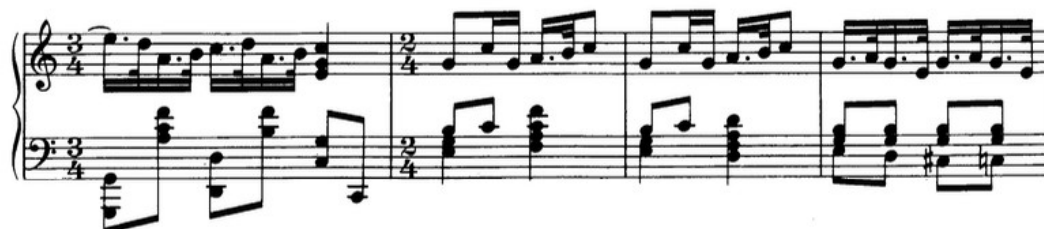
Ex. 4. 6 Satie, 'Prélude', from *Jack in the Box*, (PV), Bars 19-27



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3



Milhaud's skilful orchestration of *Jack in The Box* imbues the piece with a range of colours which, while relieving the music of a somewhat relentless texture, creates a certain formal archness, at odds with Satie's suggestion that the piece 'consoles me a little and will be my

²¹ Harding, *Erik Satie*, 82.

²² Curiously, this piece, which predates Debussy's *Children's Corner* by nine years, shares both cakewalk rhythms and an English title with 'Golliwogg's Cakewalk'.

way of cocking a snook at the wicked men who people our world.²³

Steven Moore Whiting suggests:

Satie intended orchestral performance. The draft in No.15 bears numerous indications of instruments, though only for the *Prélude*, as if prospects for performance soured after that point. Hence, in the form published by Darius Milhaud, *Jack in the Box* is not so much a piano piece as a short score.²⁴

Whiting's assertion highlights an important distinction between the orchestrations of works which were solely intended as piano pieces and those which were short scores or sketches, intended, ultimately, for larger forces. The symbiotic nature of much orchestral and piano music of this period makes it almost impossible to neglect the orchestral elements throughout the canon, whether the piece in question has been orchestrated or not. Satie's own *Parade* exists in his original two piano version as well as in his own orchestration.²⁵

4.5 Alexis Roland-Manuel's Orchestration of Three 'Préludes' from *Le fils des étoiles*

The three preludes from *Le fils des étoiles* originated in Satie's music for the play of the same name by the writer Josephin Pelédan (1858-1918), an occultist who, after hearing Parsifal in Bayreuth returned to Paris to found the *Theatre de la Rose + Croix*.²⁶ James Harding writes of the theatre:

The project was to be funded by Lady Caithness, herself the author of theosophical works. She was not the only Anglo-Saxon (sic) to come under his spell. On his visits to France the poet W.B. Yeats, who dreamed of founding on the Irish coast a druidic settlement, paid his respects (to Pelédan) while making the rounds of occultist writers. While he

²³ Erik Satie, letter to his brother Conrad Satie, 15 May 1899 in Ornella Volta, *Satie Seen* (London: M. Boyars, 1989), 78-79.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 250.

²⁵ This was the first of his works which he himself orchestrated, albeit with the addition of a few bizarre touches by Jean Cocteau, who was responsible for the scenario.

²⁶ From whence comes the term Rosicrucian.

continued to play the piano in Montmartre cabarets to make a living, what gave him a sense of fulfilment was composing music dedicated to the service of a philosophy which, for the moment at least offered him spiritual comfort.²⁷

It may be helpful to understand Satie as a man endlessly commuting between the cabaret and the chapel. To the former we owe such works as *Parade* and *Jack in the Box*, to the latter *Le fils des Étoiles* and *Trois Gymnopédies*.

The three ‘Préludes’ are, in fact, only part of *Le fils des étoiles*. They serve as entr’actes between longer pieces which must have underscored the play itself. The ‘flatness’ of much of these longer pieces owes a great deal to Satie’s ‘furniture music’ theory, in which music on stage performed an entirely abstract function. This idea profoundly influenced John Cage and specifically his collaborations with Merce Cunningham in which music and movement were not required to have any interacting relationship.²⁸ Michael Nyman writes:

In advising Debussy to steer clear of the overpoweringly unhealthy influence of Wagner, Satie said some very pertinent things about the nonsense of dramatic symbolism, which for Wagner meant that sounds were not used for their own sake but for their ability – real or imagined – to duplicate, conjure up, imply or express something outside of the sounds themselves. ‘There is no need, Satie said, ‘for the orchestra to grimace when a character comes on the stage. Do the trees in the scenery grimace?’²⁹

Nyman also writes of the influence of Satie on the white paintings of Robert Rauschenberg

²⁷ Harding, *Erik Satie*, 50.

²⁸ ‘The non-subordination of parts would allow them to be developed independently and largely in isolation, resulting in all the parts of the performance parts (dance, music, lighting, costumes and set) coming together at the last minute before the curtain rises’. From Beth Weinstein, ‘The Collaborative Legacy of Merce Cunningham’:

<<https://placesjournal.org/article/the-collaborative-legacy-of-merce-cunningham/?cn-reloaded=1>> [accessed 20 June 2020].

²⁹ Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 36.

(1925-2008), reminiscent of Cocteau's description of Satie's music as 'a white road'³⁰. There are none of Debussy's bells, terraces, or gardens in the rain to be found here. Nor are there Ravel's clowns, boats on the ocean, sentimental waltzes or baroque dance forms. In its empty whiteness, Satie's music offers many possibilities to the orchestrator, but few clues.

The first 'Prélude', in its piano original version, was performed by Ravel at a *Société Musicale Indépendante* concert on 16 January 1911. Ravel also performed the second 'Sarabande' and the third 'Gymnopédie' at the same concert. Tantalizingly, he also orchestrated the first 'Prélude', but this orchestration has, sadly, since been lost. In the programme notes for this concert the author writes, 'M. Maurice Ravel, by playing today the second *Sarabande*, which bears the amazing date of 1887, proves the esteem in which the most "advanced" composers hold this creator who, a quarter of a century ago, spoke the daring 'slang' of the future.'³¹

Alexis Roland-Manuel was an important member of French musical life in the early twentieth century as a composer, critic and polemicist. Born in Paris in 1891, he studied composition with Albert Roussel and, subsequently, counterpoint and fugue with Ravel. In his essay 'Roland-Manuel', Paul Landormy writes:

Intellectually he is allied to Gabriel Fauré and Maurice Ravel, but not to Stravinsky ... He takes no risks; everything is matter for calculation. His effects are not the results of chance.

A certain discretion and an unerring style are among his most striking characteristics.³²

This opinion is borne out by listening to Roland-Manuel's String Trio, whose slow movement is strikingly similar reminiscent to the opening bars of Ravel's 'Mother Goose

³⁰ See Introduction, footnote 1.

³¹ Nichols, *Ravel*, 119.


³² Landormy, 'Roland Manuel', 1081.

Suite³³ (Examples 4.7 and 4.8).

Ex. 4. 7: Roland-Manuel, *String Trio*, 2nd Movt., Sarabande, Bars 1-4

II. - SARABANDE

Grave et doux
(comme une élegie)



pp doux et expressif

Ex. 4. 8: Ravel: *Ma mère L'Oye*, 'Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant' (PV), Bars 1-4

I.- Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant.

Lent ♩ = 58 SECONDA



PIANO

Little of Roland-Manuel's music remains in the repertoire. He was, however, a noted writer on Ravel, Stravinsky and Satie and subsequently became professor of aesthetics at the Sorbonne and Paris Conservatoire.³⁴ What of his Satie orchestrations? In many regards, they share characteristics with Poulenc's orchestrations of the 'Prélude de Nazarin'.

³³ Alexis Roland-Manuel: Trio for Strings, movement 2. Sarabande, performed by David Gilbert / Manchester Music Festival Symphony Orchestra (members) is available at:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDlZpBgp9ys>> [accessed 19 June 2020].

³⁴ For more information go to <<http://rolandmanuel.blogspot.com>> [accessed 10 June 20]. A recording of Roland-Manuel's orchestration, performed by the Utah Symphony Orchestra conducted by Maurice Abravanel, is available at:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSkrJh1gzY>> [accessed 14 June 2020].

Roland-Manuel uses contrasting sonorities in each of the thirty blocks of four chords in parallel fourths in the opening prelude.³⁵ He alternates between flutes/clarinets and oboes/bassoons in the opening four chords, then introduces horns/clarinets in the fifth and seventh groups, alternating with the distant sonority of muted trumpets/trombones in the sixth and eighth groups (Example 4.9).

Ex. 4. 9: Satie: *Le fils des étoiles*, ‘Prélude’ to Act 1 (PV) Opening,

The image shows a musical score for the opening of Satie's 'Le fils des étoiles'. It consists of three systems of music, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first system is labeled 'En blanc et immobile' and features a series of parallel fourth chords. The second system is labeled 'Toujours' and continues the sequence of parallel fourth chords. The third system is unlabeled and also consists of parallel fourth chords. The music is characterized by its static, block-like structure and the use of parallel fourths.

Josephin Péladan claimed that in the play the music was performed by harps and flutes. However, this claim has been queried by Alex Ross: ‘Péladan made a mysterious comment to the effect that the music was played on flutes and harps - unlikely, given how difficult it would have been to play Satie’s harmonies on harps of the period.’³⁶ Nevertheless, using the more advanced harmonic possibilities of later harps an arrangement of the music in this very form was made by Toru Takemitsu, in an arrangement which makes the music sound

³⁵ These parallel fourth chords, were, incidentally, to become absolute mainstays of a far later form of jazz than that which influenced Satie during his lifetime. They can be heard in the music of Bill Evans, John Coltrane, and many exponents of modal jazz from the 1960s on. Most famously, the opening track of Miles Davis’s *Kind of Blue*, titled ‘So What?’ is comprised of a harmonic structure entirely based on descending chains of fourths.

³⁶ Alex Ross, ‘More on Satie’s *Le Fils Des Étoiles*’.

<<https://www.therestisnoise.com/2017/06/le-fils-des-etoiles.html>> [accessed 2 June 2020].

uncannily like Takemitsu's own.³⁷

Robert Orledge writes of Satie's own orchestration techniques, 'they were somewhat unorthodox, grouping as they did, instruments in terms of their ranges rather than in the conventional strings, woodwind etc.'³⁸ This description chimes rather neatly with Poulenc's groupings of instruments in the 'Prélude' orchestrations discussed above.

Another celebrated musician to orchestrate Satie's music was his former protégé Roger Désormière, who arranged the *Trois Morceaux en Forme de Poire* (*Three Pieces in the Form of a Pear* or, more colloquially, *Three Pear-shaped Pieces*). Désormières was one of the small group to first visit Satie's house in the aftermath of his death. His colourful orchestrations are a great deal more picturesque than either Poulenc's or Roland-Manuel's reflecting, perhaps, both the more popular, café-style nature of the music (which, after *Trois Gymnopédies*, was arguably Satie's most popular) and that his is the work of, primarily, a conductor and not a composer. Here is found none of the Stravinskian stringency and lean textures of the Rose-Croix period.³⁹ When listening to these different orchestrations, however, one aspect of Satie's style is sharpened by the expanded sonic palette. Often, the most lyrical of passages are violently interrupted by march-like interjections, as if to undercut any sense of complacency or sentimentality in the music. In the orchestra, they often come in the form of blasts by the brass, rudely interrupting any feelings of sentimentality or relaxation.

³⁷ 'Prélude' from *Le fils des étoiles*, arranged by Toru Takemitsu; Flute, Viola, Harp Ensemble: 'Le vent, le ciel et l'eau... pour l'espace' is available at:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aw6vkDTYT3c>> [accessed 15 December 2022].

³⁸ Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1990), 105.

³⁹ Satie orch Désormière, *Trois morceaux en forme de poire*, performed by Utah Symphony Orchestra cond. Maurice Abravanel is available at:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJMTv06OhRQ>> [accessed 4 June 2020].

4.6 Conclusion

Satie was a man and musician of many contradictions: a devout occultist and an ironic surrealist; an archetypal bohemian who walked home to the suburbs each evening (a home, it seems, few ever visited); the composer of some of the most famous piano music ever written, who only ever owned a barely-playable battered upright piano. Finally, and most significantly, he kept a devoted group of friends and acolytes, yet appeared to be in some form of discord with some or all of them throughout those friendships.

It is doubtful whether any composer of, primarily, piano music, enjoyed such a celebrated group of orchestrators. The reasons for this are manifold. Most importantly, Satie's lack of early success meant that many works remained in their piano originals. Much of the theatre and ballet music saw the light of day in smaller-scale productions, rendering the use of large ensembles unviable or unnecessary. Some productions never made it off the ground. A somewhat self-ordained and self-created outsider, it is, nevertheless, poignant and shocking to know the abject conditions in which as significant a figure as Satie lived. Perhaps he can be viewed as one of the primary musical 'catalysts' of his time. All those who orchestrated his music did so in homage to him and through the lens of their own orchestral styles, and their interpretation of this most ambiguous of composers. Debussy's 'lovely impressionist clothes', Poulenc's neoclassical angularity, Manuel-Ducasse's formal Ravelian lucidity and Désormière's lush 'filmic' orchestral colour all owe as much to the orchestrator's styles and aesthetics as to Satie's original music.

Caroline Potter writes: 'The enigmatic, ironic is-he-being-serious-or-not quality of Satie's thought has a level of ambiguity which allows room for personal interpretation, and the deadpan quality of much of his music facilitates its perception as a blank canvas on which

others can project their own creativity.’⁴⁰

Perhaps Satie described his own orchestral philosophy best in expressing his admiration for Stravinsky:

His method of orchestration is new and bold. He never orchestrates in a ‘woolly’ way, avoiding ‘orchestral pot-holes’ and ‘haze’ – which causes the loss of more musicians than sailors – he goes where he wants to. Note that Stravinsky’s orchestration is the result of a deep and precise knowledge of how to write for instruments. The whole of his ‘orchestra’ is built on instrumental timbre. Nothing is left to chance, I tell you.⁴¹

In the perceptiveness of this appraisal, and in the clear and uncluttered textures of his own orchestrations, Satie easily disproves any preconceptions of him as an incompetent or ‘naïve’ orchestrator. Any peculiarities or idiosyncrasies in his orchestral writing occur because that is exactly how he wanted them. If this strange and prophetic musician, leaves endless voids and ambiguities on his musical ‘white road’, the footprints left by his acolytes and friends in their orchestrations elucidate, for better or worse, both his work and their own.

4.7 Performance Implications

One wonders why Debussy considered Satie’s ‘Gymnopédie no. 2’ unsuitable for orchestration. Could it be that so similar is it in texture and tone to no. 1 (in the piano version) that Debussy felt he had nothing further to offer in terms of creative orchestration? His addition of harp triplets and gentle cymbal hits, in what he ordained no. 3, constitute a major intervention in such ‘white’ music. The piano, in its tonal uniformity, is best suited to the expression of this music, whose cool melancholy can be somewhat misrepresented

⁴⁰ Caroline Potter, *Erik Satie, A Parisian Composer and His World* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), 251.

⁴¹ Erik Satie, ‘Igor Stravinsky’, article in *Vanity Fair*, February 1923, quoted in Wilkins (ed.), *The Writings of Erik Satie*, 105.

by the plaintive tones of oboe and flute. Francis Poulenc's recording of the third *Gnossienne* offers a refreshingly flowing account of the piece, imbuing it with an improvisatory charm, and his orchestration of that piece is, to this listener, more compelling than Debussy's orchestration of the *Gymnopédies*. The real difficulty with orchestrating the *Gymnopédies* and *Gnossiennes*, however, is that there is, quite intentionally, too little going on to merit the full spectrum of orchestral colour available.

If Milhaud's orchestration of *Jack in the box* should caution pianists against an overly mannered performance of the work, Roland-Manuel's orchestration of *Le Fils des Étoiles* adroitly captures the compelling strangeness of this singular music. Perhaps the most compelling motivation to discover the many and various orchestrations of Satie, is to make pianists aware of the wealth of music beyond the *Gymnopédies* and *Gnossiennes*. Within the 'Rosicrucian' Satie and the 'Cabaret' Satie there is a large amount of less familiar and fascinating music for pianists who wish to go beyond more familiar canonical choices.

Chapter Five: Three Orchestrations of Music for Piano Duet

5.1 Introduction

The piano duet, as a form, lends itself more readily to orchestration than solo piano music. After all, four hands at the piano can fill in a good deal more orchestral detail than two, making the music sound intrinsically more orchestral. However, the very ‘translatability’ of the music can be a barrier to creative orchestration, and the intimate and playful pleasures of playing music for piano four-hands can be difficult to translate, in spirit, to the larger medium. In these three, very different, orchestrations by Henri Busser, Maurice Ravel and Henri Rabaud, the various challenges, successes and drawbacks are examined, always with the principle of orchestration as a creative (and re-creative) act to the fore.

5.2 Claude Debussy: *Petite Suite*

Petite Suite is not the lightweight effusion it is sometimes taken to be, but a delicate homage to early eighteenth-century taste and elegance. All pianists who have read it through will know its subtleties of rhythm and phrasing, which require an almost Mozartian touch – or perhaps more appropriately the taste and technique of the French harpsichordist, organist and composer François Couperin.¹

The *Petite Suite* for piano duet was composed in 1889 around the same time as the *Deux Arabesques* and the *Suite Bergamasque*. It is music which is more pictorial than impressionistic in style. Stephen Walsh, describing Debussy’s later *Nocturnes* writes:

‘[they are] the first in which the visual idea is worked into the bones of the music, rather than being merely a picturesque programme, as in ‘En Bateau’ in the *Petite Suite* or ‘Clair de Lune’

¹ Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1996), 91-92.

in the *Suite Bergamasque*.²

Paul Roberts's reference to the music of Couperin places the *Petite Suite* as a forerunner to the later *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, though without the sublimated grief of the later cycle. The somewhat light, almost incidental (though beautifully wrought) nature of the *Petite Suite* makes it a better candidate for orchestration than, for example, Caplet's arrangement of the *Children's Corner* suite, which is somewhat overshadowed by the iconic status of Debussy's original, highly pianistic writing.³ Henri Busser's orchestration, on the other hand, is more successful on its own terms as an orchestral suite. Busser (1872-1973) was a conductor and composer who went on to teach composition at the Paris Conservatoire, where one of his most celebrated students was Henri Dutilleux.⁴ Busser conducted early performances of *Pelléas et Mélisande*.⁵

Busser first heard the *Petite Suite* when Debussy and Paul Dukas performed the work in a Paris Conservatoire composition class in 1889. At Debussy's request, he undertook the orchestration eighteen years later. The work is scored for strings, double woodwind, two horns, trumpets and percussion, the relative lightness of the scoring reflecting the baroque origins of the music (similar scoring is employed in *le Tombeau de Couperin*). He manages the difficult task of investing the music with a wealth of orchestral colour without ever sounding showy or unnatural. Moreover, there are some moments of real revelation: Bars 67-77, before the return of the main theme prefigures the whole-tone techniques which would later become such a significant part of Debussy's writing. The strangeness of this passage, within the more conventional harmonic language of the surrounding music, can

² Stephen Walsh, *Debussy: A Painter in Sound* (London: Faber and Faber, 2018), 133.

³ There are parallels here with Schubert's extraordinary settings of Müller's poetry in the late song cycles. The poems, beautiful and evocative though they are, are not of such profundity and perfection that they stand untouchable in their perfection. Therefore, they invited, and were amplified by, a musical setting.

⁴ Henri Dutilleux (1916-2013), French composer.

⁵ Busser was chorus master for the original performances conducted by André Messager and conducted subsequent performances: see François Lesure, Marie Rolf (trans.), *Debussy, A Critical Biography* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2019), 185-187.

escape notice in the piano version. Busser's scoring heightens its arresting nature with the use of doubled harp harmonics, gentle cymbal *frappé avec une baguette*, and clarinets playing a tone apart (Example 5.1).

Ex. 5. 1. Debussy orch. Busser, 'En Bateau' from *Petite Suite* (OV), bars 67-71

The musical score for 'En Bateau' from *Petite Suite* (orchestral version) by Busser, bars 67-71, is presented. The score is for orchestra and harp. The tempo is 'Un peu retenu'. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *dim.*, *pp*, *ppp*, *mf*, and *pp*. Performance instructions include '1^o Solo' for the flute, 'frappée avec une baguette' for the cymbal, and '(Sourdines)' for the horn. The harp part is marked 'un peu en dehors'.

It is notable that a gap of eighteen years separates the piano and orchestral versions of the *Petite Suite*, a period during which Busser would have been intimately familiar with Debussy's intervening output. Perhaps subsequent developments in Debussy's style influenced Busser's later orchestration of passages such as the one above.

A recurring feature of the suite is the use of parallel thirds, something of a gift to the woodwinds in Busser's orchestration. This is particularly evident in the 'Cortège' and, strikingly, the opening of the 'Menuet' (Examples 5.2 and 5.3).

Ex. 5. 2. *Petite Suite*, 'Cortège' (OV), bars 1-3 (Ww)

II. - CORTEGE

Musical score for 'Cortège' from *Petite Suite*, bars 1-3. The score is for two flutes and two oboes. The tempo is *Moderato*. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The flute part is marked *Soli* and *p*. The oboe part is marked *Soli* and *poco*. The flute part features a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, while the oboe part has a simpler, more melodic line.

Ex. 5. 3. *Petite Suite*, 'Menuet' (OV) bars 1-6 (Ww)

III. - MENUET

Musical score for 'Menuet' from *Petite Suite*, bars 1-6. The score is for a full orchestra: two flutes, oboe, English horn, two clarinets in Bb, and two bassoons. The tempo is *Moderato*. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The flute part is marked *p*. The oboe part is marked *p*. The English horn part is marked *p*. The clarinet part is marked *p*. The bassoon part is marked *p*. The flute part features a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, while the other instruments have simpler, more melodic lines.

The recurring question of the relative rhythmic freedom which an orchestra will find harder to achieve than a pianist (or two) is illustrated in the following recollection by conductor Camille Chevillard: 'Chevillard, having just conducted the (orchestrated) version of the *Petite Suite*, asked Debussy if he were satisfied. "Certainly, but I would have liked a bit more suppleness". To which Chevillard replied with incomprehension, "Suppleness? What

the heck! *Faster or slower?*”⁶ This difficulty is, of course, not merely confined to orchestrations of piano music. A measure of any great orchestra is its ability to play with the freedom and plasticity of a soloist. One of the great sportive pleasures of duet playing is the challenge to the players of achieving matching *rubati* and nuance. Familiarity with the suppleness of the originals heighten our awareness of any ‘squareness’ in the performances of the same music by orchestra. This can often be attributed to insufficient rehearsal time.⁷ In its chamber music-like passing of the melody between strings and alternating woodwinds, the ‘Menuet’ further brings to the orchestra some of the pleasures of duet playing – a sportive, playful quality which is a quintessential part of this music.

In the ‘Ballet’, Busser allows the orchestra its full range for the first time with sonorous brass *tuttis*. Enjoyable though this music is, in both composition and orchestration it seems less unique and delicate than the other movements. There is, however, some lovely use of the triangle and tambourine to create a festive atmosphere (Example 5.4).

⁶ James R. Briscoe, ‘Debussy and Orchestral Performance’, in James Briscoe (ed.), *Debussy in Performance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 73.

⁷ Colin Matthews, discussing the same difficulty writes: ‘Obviously, any conductor needs to employ a certain amount of rubato, and occasionally I pointed in that direction with additional tempo directions and/or metronome marks. What is often noticeable in rehearsal is the relative difficulty of achieving freedom - but then the same would be the case if they were sight reading *La Mer* for the first time!’. See Appendix A, 196.

Ex. 5. 4. *Petite Suite*, 'Ballet' (OV) bars 137-142

66

The musical score for Maurice Ravel's *Petite Suite*, 'Ballet' (OV), bars 137-142, is presented for a full orchestra. The score includes parts for Flutes (1st and 2nd), Oboe, Horns (1st, 2nd, and 3rd), Clarinet, Bassoon, Cor Anglais, Trumpets, Trombones, Timpani, Triangle, Cymbals, Harp, and Violins/Violas/Violas/Violas. The music is in 3/8 time and features a 'cresc. poco a poco' dynamic marking across most instruments. The Violin and Viola parts include 'arco' and 'pizz. f' markings.

Busser's orchestration of the *Petite Suite* is one of those happy events in art – a piece of work which fits perfectly within its own parameters. Its instrumental choices, deft use of

combinations and deep understanding of the source text give this work, to borrow Roberts's description, a sparkling Mozartean spirit and sense of proportion.⁸

5.3 Ravel's *Ma mère l'Oye*

Of all Ravel's transcriptions of his works for piano, solo or duet, it is, arguably, in the orchestration of *Ma mère l'Oye* that the music gains most. Rather than being an equal to the piano duet original, it surpasses and amplifies its deliberately, and beautifully simple source material to a degree in which the music achieves a rare degree of transformation. As with *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*, the orchestrated suite was subsequently expanded into a ballet scenario, reflecting the further musical potential latent in the piano suite.⁹ The piece was written for Mimi and Jean, the children, aged six and seven of Ravel's friends Ida and Cipa Godebski and, as such, is playable by accomplished young pianists. The rarefied simplicity of the music calls for, and receives, an extraordinarily light hand in the orchestration, particularly in the balance of strings and woodwind. The following account by Sir Henry Wood of Ravel rehearsing this music is telling in this regard.

Exactly at ten o'clock I led him to the rostrum where he received a great welcome. He opened the score, turned several pages and then back to the first. At this he gazed for some seconds. He then turned to me in the Grand Circle.

'How many *pupitres* (desks) of first violins are there?' 'Eight, sir.'

A long silence. Then (very slowly): 'I will take only five *pupitres*'

Ravel turned over more pages. 'How many *pupitres* are there of second violins?' 'Eight, sir'

⁸ Roberts, *Images*, 91-92.

⁹ Ravel himself conceived the scenario and added two new movements and four interludes to the music. The ballet was first performed on 29 January 1912. In 1975, the American choreographer Jerome Robbins presented his own version of the work with New York City Ballet. A review of the work's 1976 revival appears in the New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/01/30/archives/the-ballet-robbinss-mere-loye.html> [accessed 22 June 2020].

‘I will take only five *pupitres*’

This went on for some time because he asked the same question about the violas, cellos and basses. The orchestra behaved like angels; not a muscle was moved, not a sound uttered. *But the first note they played was at 10.23 by my watch!* And, I may add, I had a concerto and a symphony to rehearse.¹⁰

The precision with which Ravel dictated the size of each string section is significant. The primacy of woodwind writing is a striking feature of the orchestration of *Ma mère l'Oye* and an overly large string section could fatally undermine the required balance of textures.¹¹ No doubt the larger string section was already in place for the ensuing Schubert symphony. It is a strange fact of orchestration that, quite often, in contrast to specific details of percussion, woodwind and brass, the actual size of each string grouping is omitted. In fact, a great deal of detail in orchestral music can often be swallowed up by an overly large and enthusiastic string section. Manuel Rosenthal felt that ‘the very opening of the “Pavane”, where the lower line is entrusted to the solo horn and pizzicato violins, both muted, perfectly demonstrates the craft of true orchestration.’¹² (Examples 5.5 and 5.6).

¹⁰ Sir Henry Wood, recalling a concert at the Queen’s Hall. Ravel conducted *Ma mère L'Oye* while Wood conducted the remainder of the concert which included Schubert’s 9th Symphony and Saint-Saëns 4th Piano Concerto; quoted in Nichols (ed.), *Ravel Remembered*, 95-97.

¹¹ Readers familiar with the norms of orchestral rehearsals will appreciate the huge respect for Ravel which allowed such an indulgence of time.

¹² Manuel Rosenthal, from a conversation with Roger Nichols, in Nichols (ed.), *Ravel Remembered* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 67-68.

Ex. 5. 5. Ravel, *Ma mère L'Oye*, 'Pavane' (PV) Bars 1-10

I.- Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant.

Lent ♩ = 58 SECONDA

PIANO

Ex. 5. 6. Ravel, *Ma Mère L'Oye*, Pavane (OV) Bars 1-6

Lent ♩ = 58

1^{re} GRANDE FLÛTE

2^{de} GRANDE FLÛTE

1 HAUTBOIS

1 COR ANGLAIS

2 CLARINETTES en SIB

1 BASSON

1 COR en FA Chromatique

HARPE

VIOLONS

ALTOS

VIOLONCELLES

CONTREBASSES Div.

It is not an accident that Rosenthal would choose such a delicate and precise passage as the essence of good orchestration over the more elaborate climactic *tutti* that finishes the suite. Ravel characterised the precise sonic combination of instruments, no matter how simple a

texture, as the ‘mark of a true artist’.¹³

In ‘Petit Poucet’ (or ‘Tom Thumb’ in its English translation) two features stand out. The use of continual chains of thirds (and sixths) evokes the world of Debussy’s *Petite Suite*.¹⁴

The second, altogether more striking, feature, is the orchestration of the birdsong at figure 5 in the score. This transfigures a passing allusion in the piano work and creates a sonority which prefigures the works of Messiaen in their representation of birdsong (Examples 5.7 and 5.8).

Ex. 5. 7. Ravel, *Ma mère L’Oye*, ‘Petit Poucet’ (PV), Bars 108-112

PRIMA

9

¹³ See Chapter 1, footnote 31.

¹⁴ This may not be entirely coincidental as one of the great pleasures of duet playing is the synchronisation of thirds and sixths between the two pianists.

Ex. 5. 8. Ravel, *Ma mère L'Oye*, 'Petit Poucet' (OV), Bars 107-111

The image shows a page of a musical score for Maurice Ravel's 'Petit Poucet' from the suite 'Ma mère L'Oye'. The score is for bars 107-111. It includes staves for the following instruments: piccolo flute (pte Fl.), flute (gde Fl.), cor Anglais (Cor A.), clarinet (Cl.), bassoon (Bass), horns (Cora), violin soloists (vln Solo), viola soloist (vln Solo), tutti violin (Tutti), viola (vln Vols), cello (celles), and double bass (C. B. Div.). The score is in 3/4 time and features various dynamics and performance instructions such as 'Solo', 'sans Sourdine', 'sur la touche', and 'arco'. A box highlights the section from bar 107 to 111, which is the focus of the example.

Messiaen's relationship with the music of Ravel was complex and not always friendly. His student George Benjamin reveals that 'Messiaen was rather 'iffy' about quite a lot of Ravel – he would play *Ma Mère l'Oye* on the piano and be in tears; *Gaspard* too. But he would try and find a flaw in Ravel – maybe that's part of the question of growing away from something you're very fond of ...'¹⁵ In the glissando harmonics and muted trills in the solo

¹⁵ George Benjamin, quoted in Roger Nichols, 'Ravel and the Twentieth Century, in Deborah Mawer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 246.

violin parts, the flutter tongue techniques and ‘cuckoo’ figurations in the flutes be seen to have been given the most fleeting glance into the future of Messiaen’s *Oiseaux Exotiques*. Listening to this passage, it is doubtful whether the latter could have existed without the former.¹⁶

Much has been written about the use of the pentatonic scale in the third movement, ‘Laideronette, Impératrice des Pagodes’. It clearly references the gamelan music which similarly inspired Debussy’s ‘Pagodes’. However, Ravel, unlike, Percy Grainger in his orchestration of ‘Pagodes’, displays no inclination to imitate the gamelan. The power of implicit suggestion holds far greater interest for him. Ravel uses tam-tam, tambourines and xylophone in ‘Laideronette’, but such is his sparing and precise use of these exotic instruments that the music never feels overloaded or muddy in its textures.¹⁷

The fourth movement of the suite, ‘Les Entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête’, arguably benefits most of all from the expanded orchestral palette, which turns a playful waltz into a far richer programmatic drama in which the contrasting sonorities of elegant clarinet in Belle’s waltz is beautifully contrasted with the growl of contra-bassoon as the *Bête* arrives (Examples 5.9 and 5.10).

¹⁶ Curiously, the opening chord of *Oiseaux Exotiques* is exactly the same and in the same key as the first Satie Prelude for *le Fils d’Etoiles*. It is not known whether the homage was intentional. Satie’s block chords certainly find an echo in the spacious harmonies of Messiaen’s *Vingt Regards sur l’Enfant-Jesus*.

¹⁷ An overlooked factor in this music is the pleasure which children take in messing around on the black notes of the piano! This exuberant playfulness is reflected in both versions of the piece.

Ex. 5. 9.: Ravel, *Ma mère L'Oye*, 'Les Entretiens de la Belle et la Bête' (OV), 1-8 (Ww.)

Mouv't de Valse modéré $\text{♩} = 50$

2 GRANDES FLÛTES *pp*

2 HAUTOIS

2 CLARINETTES en SI \flat 1^o Solo *pp expressif*

Ex. 5. 10. Ravel, *Ma Mère L'Oye*, 'Les Entretiens de la Belle et la Bête' (OV) 49-53 (Ww.)

Solo *p*

C. Bon

Cors 2^d ôtez la Sourdine *p*

The sense of the *Bête* circling inward on *Belle* is powerfully contained in the ever-ascending register of the contra-bassoon which is passed over to bassoon as it moves out of the lower instrument's range. Somewhat unusually for Ravel, the orchestration creates a narrative, programmatic structure which, if not entirely absent, is a great deal less evident in the piano duet version.

The final piece of the Suite, 'Le jardin féerique', begins in sombre fashion, scored for strings alone in the orchestration. This scoring, and the subsequent use of solo violin accompanied by woodwinds and *pizzicato* strings, gives the music a beautiful elegiac quality, which is less evident in the piano duet version.¹⁸ In the final pages Ravel unleashes a torrent of orchestral colour and texture, with ascending and descending *glissandi* on harp, celeste and glockenspiel. It is a rare moment of coloristic indulgence by this most refined

¹⁸ Orchestral performances tend here to be significantly slower than piano duet ones, as if the sheer beauty of sonority does not allow the conductor to hasten too much.

of orchestrators, not without parallels to the closing passages of Stravinsky's *Firebird*. The two works of music were written in the same year (1910) and the resemblance of this effusive finale to the final ostinato of the *Firebird* is more than a little striking.

In the *Ma Mère l'Oye* suite, Ravel, once again, demonstrates the crucial distinction between orchestration and instrumentation. His coloristic sensibilities, textural additions and keen sense of instrumental characterisation transform an exquisite miniature for piano duet into a compelling orchestral narrative. The emotional weight of the music also gains from its new orchestral clothing. It is a virtuosic transformation and exposition of music and message which, without Ravel's alchemy, may have forever remained as an implication in its original, charming and child-like setting.

5.4 Fauré's *Dolly*, Orchestrated by Henri Rabaud

Fauré's popular suite of piano duet pieces was written between 1893 and 1898 and orchestrated in 1906 by Henri Rabaud, a noted composer, conductor and teacher.¹⁹ Rabaud's version was later turned into a ballet by Louis Laloy.²⁰ It is a most faithful and accomplished piece of craftsmanship, while never achieving the same degree of creative transformation, in its realisation, as Busser's and Ravel's orchestrations.²¹ It is a piece, however, well worth examining, not to diminish its achievement, but to explore the infinite subtleties which can distinguish a well-crafted arrangement from a truly creative orchestration.

The primary characteristic of Rabaud's technique is the treatment of the four sections of

¹⁹ Henri Rabaud (1873-1949) succeeded Gabriel Fauré as director of the Paris Conservatoire until his retirement in 1941. He also served as Music Director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1918 to 1919.

²⁰ The ballet was first staged in Monte Carlo on 6 December 1906 under the direction of Léon Jehin.

²¹ Ravel, on the other hand, gave a favourable account of Rabaud's orchestration, when reviewing the Laloy ballet of *Dolly*, praising 'the most ingenious tact and subtlety' of Rabaud's work. Maurice Ravel, review in *Comoedia illustré*, 5 February 1913, in Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré, A Musical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 63.

the orchestra as homogenous entities. In his string writing, there are very few solo assignments. Each string part is never divided by more than two. There are few unusual combinations of instrumental sonorities of the sort which so impressed Manuel Rosenthal in the opening bars of *Ma mère l'Oye*. In the opening 'Berceuse' the Primo material is assigned to flutes and clarinets in octaves while the Secondo part is efficiently assigned to second violins, violas, cellos and basses. A horn pedal point underpins the whole passage (Example 5.11).

Ex. 5. 11. Fauré orch. Rabaud, *Dolly*, Berceuse (OV) Bars 1-5

DOLLY.
Six Pièces pour Piano à quatre mains
de GABRIEL FAURÉ (Op. 56)
Orchestrées par HENRI RABAUD.
Nº1. BERCEUSE.

Allegretto moderato.

2 Flûtes. *p*

2 Hautbois.

2 Clarinettes en la. *p*

2 Bassons.

4 Cors en fa. *fpp*

Harpe.

Allegretto moderato.

(Sordines) Violons. *fp*

(Sordines) Altos. (Sordines) *fp*

Violoncelles. (Sordines) *fp*

Contrebasses. *ten.* *fp*

While there is nothing amiss, and nothing incorrect in this assignment of the instruments, neither is there anything to especially pique the interest of the listener in its use of instrumental colour. It is the kind of result any skilful arranger might come up with. In that

sense, it is very much at the ‘instrumentation’ end of Ravel’s distinction.²² This straightforward and skilful technique of orchestrating continues throughout the Suite.

The most salient features of the second movement, ‘Mi-a-ou’,²³ are the elegant use of pizzicato strings in the opening bars and, strikingly, the use of stopped horns underpinned by cellos at figure 6. These imaginative touches in the orchestration focus the listener, who may otherwise be lulled into a pleasant reverie (Example 5.12).

Ex. 5. 12. *Dolly*, ‘Mi-a-ou’, (OV) Bars 93-101

There is, of course, an important question of balance in the finessing of orchestral detail. Too gimmicky or localised an orchestration can draw attention away from the inherent qualities of the music itself, yet too schematic and respectful an arrangement can, paradoxically, do the same music a disservice. The occasional creative, even compositional, intervention can do the music some service at the right moments.

²² Manuel Rosenthal, in conversation with Roger Nichols; quoted in Nichols (ed.), *Ravel Remembered*, 67-68.

²³ The titles ‘Mi-a-ou’ and Kitty-Valse are, in fact, mis-renderings of Fauré’s original titles, respectively ‘Messieu Aoul’ and ‘Ketty-Valse’. See Jean-Michel Nectoux, Roger Nichols (trans.), *Gabriel Fauré, A Musical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2004), 62.

In 'Le Jardin de Dolly' the harp, an oft-used substitute for arpeggiated piano writing, does just that in its accompaniment to the melodic interplay between flute and horn. There is nothing wrong or incorrect about this scoring. It would be the first choice of many orchestrators, though perhaps the mark of a truly individual orchestrator is to instinctively seek out the alternative options (Example 5.13).

Ex. 5. 13. Dolly, 'Le Jardin de Dolly' (OV), Bars 1-3

xx

Nº 3.
LE JARDIN DE DOLLY.

Andantino.

2 Flûtes. Solo.
dolce

2 Hautbois.

2 Clarinettes en la.

2 Bassons.

4 Cors en fa. p

Timbales.

Harpe. p

Andantino.

Violons.

Altos. div. pp

Violoncelles. div. pp

Contrabasses. pp

In the middle section, *divisi* strings and cello, doubling the horn, create a heavier, thicker texture than the piano version surely suggests (Example 5.14).

Ex. 5. 14. *Dolly*, 'Le Jardin de Dolly' (OV), Bars 16-18

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (bars 16-18) includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Clar.), Horns (Bons), and Horn I/II (Corn I, II). The second system includes parts for Violins (Vons), Viola (Vla.), and Cello/Double Bass (Vcllo/Vcllo). The third system includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Clar.), and Horn I/II (Corn I, II). The score features various musical notations, including dynamics (p, pp, ppp, pppp), articulation (pizz., div.), and performance instructions (à 2., p espress.). A box with the number '2' is present in the first system, and a box with the number '25' is in the top right corner of the first system.

The use of solo strings and removal of the horn/cello doubling here would have lightened the texture. It is, however, in keeping with Rabaud's 'sectional' orchestration. He appears reluctant to make too many bold creative decisions, perhaps out of deference to Fauré, his senior colleague. In this respect, his method recalls some of the issues around Caplet's orchestration of *Children's Corner*. Both are working on material by respected, even

revered, senior colleagues and both seem somewhat constrained in their application of orchestral colour to the original works of their peers. One can only reflect on what Ravel might have done with the same passage.

In 'Kitty-valse', Rabaud presents the melody in the strings with horn accompaniment followed by the melody in the woodwinds accompanied by strings, while a curious, and pleasing, feature of 'Tendresse' is the effect that Rabaud's string writing has on the plaintive music of the opening, imbuing the tender simplicity of the piano duet version with an almost Mahlerian intensity (much as Ravel does in the final movement of *Ma Mère L'Oye*). Here is a foreshadowing of the intensity of Fauré's late work, such as the tortured and tortuous counterpoint of the thirteenth Nocturne. It is a rare moment of creative expansiveness in Rabaud's work (Example 5.15).

Ex. 5.15. *Dolly*, 'Tendresse' (OV), Bars 1-4

The musical score for 'Tendresse' (OV), Bars 1-4, is presented for Violons, Altos, Violoncelles divisés, and Contrebasses. The tempo is marked 'Andante. ♩ = 72.' The key signature has two flats. The Violins part begins with a melody marked 'p. dolce express.'. The Alto part features a 'div.' marking. The Violoncelles and Contrebasses parts are marked 'pp dolce' and 'p dolce' respectively. The score shows four measures of music.

The middle section is an elegant duet between oboe and horn accompanied by harp and pizzicato strings. To this listener, along with the concluding movement, 'Le Pas Espagnol',

this is the most successful of the orchestral movements, imbued, as it is, with feeling for the inner workings of the music. In 'Le Pas Espagnol', Rabaud unleashes a wealth of percussion, including triangle, cymbals and tambourine. It is a pity that he only uses the coloristic possibilities of the percussion section in this section, when its delicate employment earlier in the suite might have coloured the textures with more variety of texture and mood. There is beautiful woodwind writing and skittering strings to create a joyful, gallant flavour, entirely congruent with the spirit of the original.

Rabaud's orchestration is a fascinating example of a work in which, for the last two movements, the 'arranger' throws off his shackles to become the 'orchestrator'. The listener immediately sits up with renewed attention. If orchestration is a craft, in its most exalted forms it is also a creative act which rewards the greater risks of re-imagination and intervention.

5.5 Conclusion

The orchestration of music for piano duet is a subtly different art from that of music for solo pianist. In its ability to create a fuller range of details, there is an implied 'orchestral' texture to the four-hand form which renders the work a stage closer to orchestral form. This has obvious advantages in the translation of musical thought from one medium to another.

Busser's work on Debussy's *Petite Suite* happily sits entirely comfortably within its framework. It offers sufficient original coloristic touches to avoid the charge of 'instrumentation', yet the music maintains the elegance and wit of Debussy's piano duet original. Rabaud, however, succumbs to a somewhat dutiful transcription of Fauré's *Dolly* in the manner of Ravel's definition of 'instrumentation'. Ravel's orchestration of *Ma Mère L'Oye* is outstanding, never being constrained by an attachment to a particular *timbre* and

demonstrating his ability to render his work infinitely transmutable from one form to another in the most creative of re-imaginings.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

No art is immutable. Every work exists in a state of flux, continually being re-interpreted, re-evaluated, adapted, translated, restored or re-contextualised. The ethics of these changes are often the cause of debate, argument and sometimes even litigation. The estate of Samuel Beckett has fought tooth-and-nail to maintain the strict parameters of his play-texts, on threat of all future rights being withheld. When copyright on the fiercely-guarded works of James Joyce expired in 2012, a glut of adaptations of his work followed soon after. Mediocre novels, such as Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* have been adapted into magnificent films. On the other hand, Brian Friel's great play *Dancing at Lughnasa* became a much-diminished film, in part due to the latter's explicit rendering of a world that the former so often evoked, remembered or imagined. Peter Brook's iconic 1970 Royal Shakespeare Company production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, performed on trapezes and now acclaimed as one of the greatest, was, according to Trevor Nunn, artistic director of the company at the time, the cause of outrage and near-mutiny among the company during rehearsals.¹ Each of these examples points to a living, breathing engagement with the material, even when wrong-headed or simply wrong! It is rare for this engagement to be damaging. On the contrary, if the original work is sufficiently robust, it can withstand, and even benefit, from all manner of alterations.

In 2017 I was engaged as pianist, musical director and adaptor on a musical play, *Woyzeck in Winter*, which amalgamated Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* with the twenty-four songs of Schubert's *Winterreise*. The songs were performed by the actors of the company. What surprised me most about the reaction, both of audiences and critics, was that the most

¹ Trevor Nunn, in conversation with Conor Linehan, Royal National Theatre, 2000.

enthusiastic response came from those who had the closest familiarity with *Winterreise*. Rather than being offended by the relative roughness of the singing and the improvisations around the piano parts, they were often fascinated to hear the works in such a radical re-contextualisation. After all, they could still return to Ian Bostridge at the Wigmore Hall, or their favourite Fischer-Dieskau recording. The greatness of *Winterreise* could easily withstand any damage which I might have visited upon it!

In relation to the music I have written about in this thesis, the point of these examples is this – orchestrations, arrangements and transcriptions of this canon of piano music are a creative engagement with the source material which sustain it as a living, evolving entity. When a work has ‘frozen’ and is no longer open to debate or evolution, it is surely in a state of perpetual decline, destined to be repeated over and over within ever-narrowing interpretative parameters. Jazz musicians, unencumbered by the same sense of duty to composers’ wishes as their classical colleagues, often come to a highly creative engagement with the classical canon. Herbie Hancock’s improvisations in the second movement of Ravel’s Concerto in G or Gil Evans’s and, later, Italian pianist Enrico Pieranunzi’s re-workings of *La plus que lente* all show a deep engagement with the harmonic and rhythmic structures of the works.² Further afield, American piano trio The Bad Plus have recorded a version of *The Rite of Spring* and Brad Mehldau has recorded a selection of Bach preludes interspersed with improvisations on their themes.

Set against these highly interventionist approaches, even Colin Matthews’s most radical interventions in his orchestrations of Debussy’s *Préludes* remain essentially respectful of the source material. When Matthews alters the metric scheme in ‘Feux d’artifice’, it is with the intention of creating an impression of greater rhythmic freedom – a sort of built in

² Enrico Pieranunzi, *La plus que lente/ La moins que lente* is available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icxC4B2g2m8>> [accessed 16 October 2021].

rubato. Matthews's comment about freedom in an orchestral setting is relevant: 'What is often noticeable in rehearsal [of the orchestrations] is the relative difficulty of achieving freedom – but then the same would be the case if they were sight reading *La Mer* for the first time!'³ In fact, Debussy praised Gabriel Pierné's conducting of *Ibéria* with the remark that 'You can't imagine how naturally the transition works between 'Parfums de la nuit' and 'Le matin d'un jour de fête'. *It sounds as though it's improvised ...*'.⁴ It is a contradiction in the performance of classical music that the ideal performance should be imbued with a spirit of spontaneity and improvisation, while, at the same time, fully absorbing and observing the minutiae of the score. In this respect, that contradiction can be more easily resolved by one pianist than an orchestra of eighty players. Rare, indeed, is an orchestral performance that 'sounds as though its improvised.' The difficulty is probably even more perceptible when we have the relative freedom of the original piano version in our memories. It is well-nigh impossible for an orchestra to match the plasticity of Debussy's rhythm in 'La Soirée dans Grenade' in his piano roll recording, or to achieve the 'general flexibility' he required of the triplet rhythms in 'Clair de Lune'.⁵

At around eight minutes, Ravel's orchestration of 'Alborada del Gracioso' is the longest of the pieces examined in this thesis, closely followed by Colin Matthews's orchestration of 'La Cathédrale engloutie'. The shorter form of much of this repertoire certainly poses challenges to the orchestrator. In relation to 'Le vent dans la plaine' Matthews writes, 'Extended composition' was used, particularly in the case of 'Le vent dans la plaine', because I felt that the piano original needed expanding in order to take the weight of the orchestra – that particular prelude disappears into thin air so soon.' In the case of Caplet's *Children's Corner* orchestrations, the feeling of 'disappearing into thin air' is acute in each

³ See Appendix A, 196.

⁴ Debussy, letter to André Caplet, 25 February 1910 in Roger Nichols (ed.) and François Lesure (trans.), *Debussy Letters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 217.

⁵ Debussy, in Maurice Dumesnil, 'Coaching with Debussy', *The Piano Teacher* 5 (1962), 10-13, quoted in Roger Nichols (ed.), *Debussy Remembered* (London: Faber and Faber 1992), 159.

piece. However, as we have seen, it was not Caplet's style to start tinkering with the structure of Debussy's music. Ravel, being author of the original piano works, felt no such constraints, though only rarely extending his orchestrations.

The disparity of orchestrations of Satie's piano music are indicative of both the elusiveness of his music and of the desire of his colleagues to 'explain' him. Debussy's 'prettification' of the *Gymnopédies* and Milhaud's 'jollification' of *Jack in the Box* diminish the essential strangeness and originality of each work.

There is no 'one way' to play a piece of music. I had the good fortune to hear a piano piece, which I composed for the 2018 Dublin International Piano Competition, played by six of the semi-finalists. The variety of interpretations was pleasantly striking. Some, which followed the score with great accuracy of detail and execution, seemed lacking in the emotional core of the music. Others, less precise and detailed, revealed an intuitive empathy with it. Occasional accidentals were misread. A final tempo marking was universally ignored. Yet all had a great deal to commend as well. As Roy Howat writes: 'All composers ultimately depend on the performer's sense, and it's therefore sometimes a matter of discretion where we take the composer's word exactly and where a degree of licence is needed.'⁶ Performers can certainly benefit from the clues that the orchestrations explored in this thesis provide. Do the sustained strings under the pizzicato opening of Caplet's 'Serenade for the Doll' caution against an overly dry pedalling in the piano part? Should the sharper rhythms of the orchestral version of the 'Forlane' from *Le Tombeau de Couperin* be retrospectively introduced to the piano version, or did Ravel simply want different articulations for each version? Can Debussy's orchestral balances of melody and accompaniment inform his piano music (as they did Molinari's and Matthews's orchestral

⁶ Roy Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 221.

treatments in, respectively, *L'isle joyeuse* and 'La Cathédrale engloutie'). Dare we add a few introductory bars to *La plus que lente* in the manner of its orchestration? Is there, in fact, room for improvisatory passages leading into this music, or is this a step too far? If these questions cannot be definitively answered, in the asking of them pianists can, nevertheless, engage, with fresh perspectives and insights, with this repertoire, as a living, evolving document – not so much a checklist as a 'call to arms'.

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Appendices

Appendix A: An Online Interview between Conor Linehan and Colin Matthews (25-29 June 2019)

CL: How would you characterise the main challenge in translating the sound of the piano to an orchestral sonority? (I'm aware that the challenge differs considerably from piece to piece)?

*CM: Probably trying to emulate both the decay which is an intrinsic part of the piano sound and the sustaining effect of the pedal. Also, being aware in a few instances of the need to transpose because the tessitura is not suited to the orchestra (for instance, *La Puerta del Vino*). My overall aim was to rethink them in orchestral terms so that if a piano reduction of the orchestrations were to be made it wouldn't look much like the original.*

CL: It struck me how many influences, both on Debussy and by him on others became more evident in the orchestrations. I'm thinking of pieces like 'Feux d'artifice', where suddenly 'Chez Petrushka' came vividly to mind; or the slowed down 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' which evokes an almost Vaughan Williams like pastoralism. Conversely, in 'Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir', I was reminded of the ballet sequence in 'An American in Paris'. How much were these influences in your mind and did they influence your decision making? (I realise I've just fallen into the opinionating trap I had promised to avoid.)

CM: Your suggestions are quite understandable from a listener's point of view, but don't reflect my approach, which was always to find the best way to represent the prelude in question, never to consider it in terms of other music. So, although I can see the *Petrushka* similarity, that had never occurred to me at the time, or subsequently until you suggested it. I think even now, at quite some distance, hardly any of the preludes reflect*

anything but themselves for me, although inevitably they are going to recall other contemporaries to some extent. The one exception is *La fille aux cheveux de lin*, whose solution took me a long time to reach, and is in some ways the most radical change to any of them. My approach was somewhat tongue in cheek, and to me it sounds almost like the 'studio strings' of Mantovani (Annunzio not Bruno!) – and not Vaughan Williams, although I see what you mean.

* I did though make a point of emulating Scriabin in *Les fées*, where Debussy comes very close to the opening harmony and theme of Prometheus (which is almost exactly contemporary but which he's unlikely to have heard at that time)

CL: I loved the extended composition in such pieces as 'Brouillards' and 'le vent dans la plaine'. It almost seemed like you were so caught up in such enthusiasm for the music that the composer in you didn't want it to end! I know Ravel, who didn't change many details in his orchestrations of his own piano works, did lengthen the number of bars leading up to the climax of 'Alborada del Gracioso'. What was your guiding principle when deciding to 'compose' into the works?

*CM: 'Extended composition' was used, particularly in the case of *Le vent dans la plaine*, because I felt that the piano original needed expanding, in order to take the weight of the orchestra — that particular prelude disappears into thin air so soon. The only other substantial addition is the end of *Les collines*, but most of the rest are fairly small, and just seemed to be part of the process. In *Les tierces alternées* I turned a number of 2/4 bars into 5/8 because I wanted to get away from the rather four-square original, which the pianist can play around with, but the orchestra could only do with some difficulty.*

CL: In 'La Cathédrale engloutie' you changed the opening crotchets to minims. Was this to avoid the ambiguity at bar 7 of the piano score which has vexed so many performers?

CM: Precisely that! Debussy simply got the notation wrong, and I followed his own piano roll version.

CL: *In the same piece, you avoid the use of trumpets at the big climactic moment of the orchestral version in bar 43. Was this a reaction to the very filmic Stokowski orchestration or did you feel it would compromise the 'submerged' sonority you have created?*

CM: You've hit the nail on the head again! Stokowski's version seems to me as if it was The Great Underwater Gate of Kiev, and I wanted to achieve something notably more subdued, or, as you say, submerged.

CL: *Do you have a favourite interpreter of the Préludes?*

CM: I was lucky enough to hear Vlado Perlemuter live, and I think Michelangeli's recordings (I didn't hear him live) are outstanding. I would find it difficult to point to one contemporary performer, though I've greatly enjoyed Jean-Efflam Bavouzet. I really shouldn't say it, but having lived so long with thinking of them orchestrally, I find piano performances a bit monochrome ...

CL: *Were you in any way influenced by Ravel's orchestrations of his own piano works?*

CM: Very much so — *Alborada del gracioso* above all. In fact, I tried to think of how Ravel might have orchestrated the preludes, and during the work on them I never once looked at a Debussy orchestral score for fear of ending up with pastiche Debussy.

CL: *Could you comment on the use of a kind of English vaudevillian humour in pieces such as 'Minstrels' and 'Homage a S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C.' It seems that the*

orchestral colour points up this humour even more effectively. (I ask this question, as persuading serious classical piano students to embrace the theatricality and comedy of this music is a challenge for me as a teacher)?

CM: Yes, and *Général Lavine* as well. Easy to take Debussy too seriously, and those three were enjoyable to do — although *Pickwick* not as easy to translate as it might seem on the surface. If those orchestrations can help their interpretation I'd be delighted.

CL: *I know this is like asking if you have a favourite child, but are there any of the orchestrations which give you particular satisfaction?*

CM: Difficult! Perhaps *La Cathédrale* most of all, *Pas sur la neige* moving into *Les fées*, and *Les collines* (because of its extended ending). The one I'm least happy with is *Ondine*, perhaps because it's one of the ones that I know best, and however hard I tried couldn't get quite right.

CL: *Finally, how, if at all, has this tremendous act of creation/recreation influenced your subsequent work?*

CM: Initially it had a big effect, because my thinking tended to contract into three minute miniatures and large-scale composition became difficult for a while. I'd hoped to exorcise this with *Monsieur Croche*, but it took a long while to move away from that way of thinking. The lasting effect is probably in a different use of orchestral colour — I'd say my Violin Concerto benefited most from that, and there was a remarkable performance with the Orchestre National de Lyon where the players seemed to take to it naturally.

CL: *Could you comment briefly on your decision to stay (almost entirely) within Debussy's own instrumental parameters?*

CM: I think the only instruments that aren't genuine Debussy are alto flute, optional

contrabass clarinet and sizzle cymbal. I did think about expanding the orchestral palette, but decided against it. This was confirmed when, presenting some of the early preludes to students at the RNCM one of them asked why I hadn't used, for instance, electric guitar or harpsichord. If I'd started down that path every prelude might have demanded different styles of orchestration, and I wanted them to be unified.

CL: You wrote in response to my 3rd question 'about extended composition':

"In Les tierces alternées I turned a number of 2/4 bars into 5/8 because I wanted to get away from the rather four-square original, which the pianist can play around with, but the orchestra could only do with some difficulty."

Did you change the metrical scheme at bar 9 of 'Feux d'artifice' for similar reasons and could you comment on the difficulties of achieving pianistic rhythmic freedom (occasionally excessive) within an orchestral setting?

CM: Yes, that was the intention (and I think there are a few other examples). Obviously, any conductor needs to employ a certain amount of rubato, and occasionally I pointed in that direction with additional

tempo directions and/or metronome marks. What is often noticeable in rehearsal is the relative difficulty of achieving freedom - but then the same would be the case if they were sight reading La Mer for the first time!

CL: Could you comment on the pairings of 'Le vent dans la plaine'/'La fille aux cheveux de lin' and 'Des pas sur la neige'/'Les fées sont d'exquises danseuse'.. They do seem to transition beautifully into each other.

CM: Thank you! I can only say that it just happened that way — the ordering of the Hallé recording* was to some extent, although not entirely, dictated by the fact that the first

performances had all been in groups of 3 or 4 preludes. Obviously, I didn't want to simply work my way through from *Danseuses de Delphes* to *Feux d'artifice*, and the two pairings arose from that process. I did think to link more than those 4, but decided against, partly because it might have been difficult to detach them for separate performance (as happens in the Naxos recording, which is in Debussy's order). The question of ordering is an interesting one, as I don't think Debussy was necessarily prescribing a rigid order. But it hasn't yet come up in performance as conductors usually select a group of their own choice, and no one has (yet!) performed all 24 in one go — although Gergiev tried to persuade the LSO to do this.

* 'My' Book 1 was in fact recorded before I had completed Book 2, so it was never practical to follow Debussy's order.

Appendix B: Ravel, Debussy and Satie’s orchestrations of their piano music and piano transcriptions of their orchestral works

Abbreviations used in Appendix 2:

OVYOP Orchestral Version Year of Publication

PVYOP Piano Version Year of Publication

OI Original Instrumentation

OTPVYP Orchestral, Transcribed and Parallel Versions Year of Publication

1. Maurice Ravel’s orchestrations and transcriptions of his own works

Table 1: Maurice Ravel’s orchestrations and transcriptions of his piano works

Work	OI	PVYOP	OVYOP
<i>Pavane pour une Infante défunte</i>	Solo piano	1900	1910
<i>Une barque sur l’océan</i>	Solo piano	1906	1950
<i>Ma mère l’Oye</i>	Piano duet	1910	1912
<i>Valses Nobles et Sentimentales</i>	Solo piano	1911	1912
<i>Alborada del gracioso</i>	Solo piano	1906	1923
<i>Le Tombeau de Couperin</i>	Solo piano	1918	1919
<i>Menuet antique</i>	Solo piano	1898	1930

Table 2: Maurice Ravel’s orchestrations of piano parts of his chamber works

Work	OI	PVYOP	OVYOP
<i>Tzigane</i>	Violin and piano	1924	1924
<i>Shéhérazade</i>	Voice and piano	1904	1914
<i>Don Quichotte à Dulcinée</i>	Voice and piano	1934	1934

Table 3: Maurice Ravel's piano transcriptions of his orchestral works

Work	OI	OVYOP	PVYOP	Notes
<i>Rapsodie Espagnole</i>	Orchestra	1908	1908	For piano four-hands and two pianos
<i>Boléro</i>	Orchestra	1929	1929	For piano four-hands (1929) and two pianos (1930)
<i>Piano Concerto for the left hand</i>	Piano and orchestra	1931	1937	For two pianos

Table 4: Maurice Ravel's piano transcriptions of his ballet music and operas

Work	OI	OVYOP	PVYOP	Notes
<i>Daphnis et Chloé</i> (selection)	Orchestra	1912	1913	For solo piano
<i>La Valse</i>	Orchestra	1920	1921	For solo piano and for two pianos
<i>Fanfare for the ballet, L'éventail de Jeanne</i>	Orchestra	1929	1929	For piano four-hands
<i>L'heure espagnole</i>	Vocal score	1911	1908	
<i>L'enfant et les sortilèges</i>	Vocal score	1925	1925	

Table 5: Maurice Ravel’s orchestrations of piano music by other composers

Composer	Work	OI	PVYOP	OVYOP	Notes
Erik Satie	<i>Prélude to Le Fils des étoiles</i>	Solo piano	1896	?	Ravel’s score is lost
Robert Schumann	Four movements from <i>Carnaval</i>	Solo piano	1879	?	Remaining movements are lost
Frédéric Chopin	<i>Les Sylphides</i>	Solo piano	various	1909	One page extant
Emmanuel Chabrier	<i>Meneut Pompeux</i>	Solo piano	c.1881	1937	
Modest Mussorgsky	<i>Pictures at an Exhibition</i>	Solo piano	1886	1929	
Claude Debussy	<i>Sarabande</i>	Solo piano	1901	1923	
Claude Debussy	<i>Danse</i>	Solo piano	1903	1923	

Table 6: Notable orchestrations of Maurice Ravel’s piano music by other composers

Orchestrator	Work(s)	OI	PVYOP	OVYOP
Marius Constant	<i>Gaspard de la Nuit</i>	Solo piano	1909	1988
Zoltán Kocsis	<i>Fugue and Toccata from Le Tombeau de Couperin</i>	Solo piano	1918	?

2. Claude Debussy's orchestrations and transcriptions of his own works

Table 7: Claude Debussy's orchestrations of his piano works

Work	OI	PVYOP	OVYOP
<i>La plus que lente</i>	Solo piano	1910	1912
<i>Berceuse héroïque</i>	Solo piano	1914	1915
<i>Marche Écossaise</i>	Piano four-hands	1891	1911

Table 8: Claude Debussy's orchestrations of songs for voice and piano

Work	OI	PVYOP	OVYOP
<i>Trois Ballades de François Villon</i>	Voice and piano	1910	1911
<i>Le jet d'eau</i> from <i>Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire</i>	Voice and piano	1907	?

Table 9: Claude Debussy's orchestrations of chamber music piano parts

Work	OI	PVYOP	OVYOP
<i>Prèmiere rhapsodie</i>	Clarinet and piano	1910	1911

Table 10: Claude Debussy's orchestrations of his ballet music

Work	Year commenced	Year completed	Notes
<i>La Boîte à joujoux</i>	1913	1920	Debussy orchestrated the first 93 bars only, the remainder completed by Caplet
<i>Khamma</i>	1912	n.d.	Orchestration started by Debussy, completed by Charles Koechlin

Table 11: Claude Debussy's piano transcriptions of his orchestral works

Work	OI	OVYOP	PVYOP	Notes
<i>La Mer</i>	Orchestra	1905	1905	For piano four-hands
<i>Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune</i>	Orchestra	1895	1895	
<i>Jeux</i>	Orchestra	1912	1913	

Table 12: Claude Debussy's vocal scores for opera

Work	Original score published	Vocal score published
<i>Pelléas et Mélisande</i>	1902	1904

Table 13: Notable orchestrations of Claude Debussy's piano music by other composers

Orchestrator	Work(s)	OI	PVYOP	OVYOP
Maurice Ravel	<i>Sarabande</i>	Solo piano	1901	1923
Maurice Ravel	<i>Danse</i>	Solo piano	1903	1923
Percy Grainger	<i>Bruyères</i> from <i>Préludes, Book 1</i>	Solo piano	1910	1918
Percy Grainger	<i>Pagodes</i> from <i>Estampes</i>	Solo piano	1903	1928
André Caplet	<i>Children's Corner</i>	Solo piano	1908	1911
André Caplet	<i>Clair de Lune</i> from <i>Suite Bergamasque</i>	Solo piano	1905	n.d.
André Caplet	<i>Pagodes</i> from <i>Estampes</i>	Solo piano	1903	1923
Henri Busser	<i>La Cathédrale engloutie</i>	Solo piano	1910	n.d.
Henri Busser	<i>La soirée dans Grenade</i> from <i>Estampes</i>	Solo piano	1903	n.d.
Henri Busser	<i>Petite Suite</i>	Solo piano	1889	1907
Leopold Stokowski	<i>La Cathédrale engloutie</i>	Solo piano	1910	n.d.
Leopold Stokowski	<i>Clair de Lune</i> from <i>Suite Bergamasque</i>	Solo piano	1905	n.d.
Colin Matthews	<i>Préludes, Book 1</i>	Solo piano	1910	2001-2006
Colin Matthews	<i>Préludes, Book 2</i>	Solo piano	1913	2001-2006
Colin Matthews	<i>Images, Book 2, Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut</i>	Solo piano	1908	2109

Colin Matthews	<i>Symphony in B minor</i>	Piano four-hands	1933	2009
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Table 14: Piano transcriptions of Debussy's orchestral music by other musicians

Transcriber	Work(s)	OI	OVYOP	PVYOP	Notes
Maurice Ravel	<i>Nocturnes</i>	Orchestra	1900	1909	For two pianos
André Caplet	<i>La Mer</i>	Orchestra	1905	1905-1909	For two pianos
Maurice Ravel	<i>Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune</i>	Orchestra	1895	1910	For piano four-hands
Léon Roques	<i>Jeux</i>	Orchestra	1913	1914	For piano four-hands
André Caplet	<i>Images</i> (complete)	Orchestra	1913	1913	For piano four-hands

3. Erik Satie – Orchestrations, transcriptions and parallel versions of Satie's piano works by himself and others

Table 15: Orchestrations, transcriptions and parallel versions of Satie's piano works by himself and others

Orchestrator-Transcriber	Work(s)	OI	PVYOP	OTPVYP	Notes
Claude Debussy	<i>Gymnopédies</i> Nos. 1 and 3	Solo piano	1888	1898	In Debussy's orchestration Satie's no. 3 becomes no. 1 and his no. 1 becomes no. 2
Maurice Ravel	<i>Le fils des étoiles</i>	Solo piano	1896	?	Orchestration lost
Alexis Roland-Manuel	<i>Le fils des étoiles: 'Trois Préludes'</i>	Solo piano	c.1896	1912	

Erik Satie	<i>Parade</i>	See notes	1917	1917	Parallel orchestral and piano four hand versions
Erik Satie	<i>Trois Petites pieces montées</i>	See notes	1920	1921	Parallel orchestral and piano four hand versions
Erik Satie	<i>Mercure</i>	See notes	1924	1924	Parallel orchestral and piano solo versions
Erik Satie	<i>Relâche</i>	See notes	1924	1924	Parallel orchestral and piano solo versions
Darius Milhaud	<i>Jack in the box</i>	Solo piano	1929	1926	Piano version composed in 1899, published posthumously
Darius Milhaud	<i>Cinq Grimaces</i>	Orch.	1929	1928/1929	Orchestral version composed in 1915, published posthumously
Roger Désormière	<i>Trois Morceaux</i>	Piano four-hands	1911	1911	
Roger Désormière	<i>Geneviève de Brabant</i>	Voice and piano	1930	1924	Composed 1899-1900

Appendix C: A Note on Editions

As a composer, I can readily attest to the number of changes that a work goes through in its journey from conception to performance and beyond. In numerous rehearsals, I have altered percussion, added mutes to brass, made pencil corrections to string parts, changed piccolo to flute and corrected a tempo misunderstanding which, if left alone, would have resulted in a good deal of the performance being played at half-speed! I have heard unintended pitches, resulting from the original accidental, in a grace note, not being followed through for the rest of the bar (my fault for neglecting the addition of a cautionary accidental.) At a player's suggestion, I have marginally slowed the tempo of a passage, ensuring greater confidence and playability in the subsequent performance of the work. Conversely, in my performances of works by other composers, I have usually found them to be highly receptive, even grateful, for any practical suggestions I might make which would enhance the performance of their works.

It makes a great deal of sense to me, therefore, when editions take account of reliable evidence from performers, recordings, and orchestrations. In his preface to the London Peters Ravel edition, Roger Nichols details his primary and secondary sources. Among the former are Ravel's own corrections of scores (where available). It is from such a correction in Vlado Perlemuter's score, as well as the orchestration of the work, that the tenor voice in the fourth movement of *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*, absent in the first edition, is added. In his secondary sources, Nichols includes recollections of Ravel's coaching, from both Vlado Perlemuter and Henriette Faure, as well as recordings by Perlemuter, Robert Casadesus and Jacques Février (1900-1979). He is careful to emphasise that 'the secondary sources are considered when they shed further light on an established text, or when problems in the text are not fully elucidated by the primary sources'.¹ As well as including

¹ Roger Nichols, 'Ravel's Piano Music – A New Edition' in *Ravel: Ma mère l'Oye* (London: Peters Edition, 2008).

the tenor line of *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*, mentioned above, the Bärenreiter edition, edited by Nicolas Southon, adds pedal markings (with an explanatory footnote) to the opening bars of *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*, (see Ex 2.3a) which are in line with Ravel's coaching, as recollected by Perlemuter.²

Roy Howat, in his (and Claude Helffer's) 1985 edition of Debussy's *Préludes*, part of the *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy*, breaks new editorial ground by incorporating information gleaned from Debussy's piano roll recordings, into the text, denoting them in 'La Cathédrale engloutie', with an *ossia* stave marked **R**, to signify evidence based on the piano roll recording. This information in 'La Cathédrale engloutie', regarding the tempo equivalence at bar seven of the piece, is supported by Henri Busser's orchestration, where Busser employs a similar continuity of meter, a continuity which Colin Matthews adopts in his orchestration. Howat has written extensively on his editorial principles and choices, in both *Debussy's Resonance*³ and *The Art of French Piano Music*.⁴

In demonstrating the practical effects of the new information available in the *Œuvres complètes*, Howat notes that 'the *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy* can account for many differences between recent performances and recordings and those from prior decades, by dint of not just the enhanced data now at the performer's disposal, but also the confidence engendered in performance by texts reliable enough not to need intermittent massage.'⁵

Satie's piano works exist in editions by London Peters (Roger Nichols), Bärenreiter (Jens Rosteck and Stefan Schleiermacher), and in a Dover edition which gathers together the

² Vlado Perlemuter and Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel according to Ravel*, trans. Francis Turner, ed. Harold Taylor (London: Kahn and Averill, 1988), 45.

³ Roy Howat, 'The *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy* Thirty Years On' in *Debussy's Resonance*, ed. François de Médicis and Steven Huebner (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2018).

⁴ Roy Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009)

⁵ Howat, 'The *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy* Thirty Years On' in de Médicis and Huebner (eds.), *Debussy's Resonance*, 50.

first editions published by Eschig, E. Demetz and Rouart, Lerolle. In his unconventional notation and his colourful performance instructions, Satie's work constitutes a primary editorial intervention all by itself. Orchestrations of Satie's music reflect Caroline Potter's description of 'a blank canvas on which others can project their own creativity.'⁶ After all, one could look on orchestration as the most radical act of editorializing imaginable.

⁶ Caroline Potter, *Erik Satie, A Parisian Composer and His World* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), 251.