Debussy, (Achille-)Claude

(*b* St Germain-en-Laye, 22 Aug 1862; *d* Paris, 25 March 1918). French composer. One of the most important musicians of his time, his harmonic innovations had a profound influence on generations of composers. He made a decisive move away from Wagnerism in his only complete opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and in his works for piano and for orchestra he created new genres and revealed a range of timbre and colour which indicated a highly original musical aesthetic.

FRANÇOIS LESURE (1–9, 11–12, work-list, bibliography), ROY HOWAT (10)

Debussy, Claude

1. Childhood and studies.

Debussy's family was originally of modest peasant stock, settled in the Auxois district of Burgundy from at least the 17th century, and moving to the Paris region around 1800. The composer's grandfather was a wine seller and later a joiner. His father, Manuel-Achille, served in the marine infantry for seven years, then settled with his wife in St Germain-en-Laye to run a china shop. Their first son, Achille-Claude, was born there, although it was two years before he was baptized. His father dreamt of making a sailor of him. In 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War, the family took refuge in Cannes with Manuel's sister, Clementine, who arranged for Debussy to have his first piano lessons with an Italian musician, Jean Cerutti. Meanwhile in Paris, the war had robbed Manuel of his employment and he joined the forces of the Commune, with the rank of captain. He was arrested and condemned to four years imprisonment in 1871, but after a year in detention the sentence was commuted to suspension of his civil rights. On the advice of Charles de Sivry, Achille was entrusted to Antoinette Mauté, Verlaine's mother-in-law, who prepared him for entrance to the Paris Conservatoire, to which he was admitted in 1872 (he never attended an ordinary school). His first Conservatoire teachers were Antoine Marmontel for piano and Albert Lavignac for solfège. They quickly recognized that he had a good ear and was an able sight-reader, although they regarded him as ‘a little backward in the rudiments’. In 1875–7, he won minor prizes for solfège and for piano, but having failed to win a *premier prix* for piano he was forced to give up the idea of a career as a virtuoso; he enrolled in Emile Durand's harmony class, then in August Bazille's accompaniment class, in which he won his only *premier prix*. He began to compose *mélodies* in 1879, on texts by Alfred de Musset (*Madrid*, *Ballade à la lune*). In the summer of 1880 he was engaged by Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky's patron, to teach her children and to play duets with her, first in Arcachon and then in Florence, where he wrote his first piece of piano music and the Piano Trio (fig.1). On his return to Paris he enrolled in Ernest Guiraud's composition class, supporting himself by working as accompanist in the singing classes of Victorine Moreau-Sainti. It was there he met his first love, Marie Vasnier, for whom he wrote *mélodies* on poems by Gautier, Leconte de Lisle and Banville. He joined Mme von Meck in Russia for two months in 1881, and again in Moscow in the following summer, followed by two months in Vienna. He was runner-up for the Prix de Rome in 1883, with his cantata *Le gladiateur*; by that time his works already included more than 30 *mélodies*, two *scènes lyriques*, choruses, a cello suite, and a symphony (scored only for piano four hands). He became accompanist for the Concordia choral society, where Gounod took him under his wing, and meanwhile composed yet more *mélodies* for Marie Vasnier, on texts by Bourget and Verlaine. In 1884, his cantata *L'enfant prodigue* won him the Prix de Rome. He spent two years in Rome at the Villa Medici, where the director, the painter Hébert, thought highly of him. He met the requirement to write a series of ‘envois’ for the Institut with *Zuleima* (lost), the symphonic suite *Printemps* and *La damoiselle élue*, completed after his return to Paris in 1887.

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2. The ‘bohemian’ and symbolist years.

The next few years were a time of financial struggle for Debussy. He frequented the literary and artistic cafés where the symbolists gathered, and formed friendships with Paul Dukas, Robert Godet and Raymond Bonheur (fig.2). Two of his *Ariettes oubliées* were performed by the Société Nationale de Musique and he began to compose the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* and the *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra. It was the most Wagnerian period of his life: he went to Bayreuth in 1888 and 1889, but eventually recognized that he had to free himself from Wagner's influence. He became fascinated by the theatre of Annam and the Javanese gamelan at the Universal Exposition of 1889, a discovery which completed the formation of his aesthetic beliefs. He embarked on an opera, *Rodrigue et Chimène*, with a text by the Parnassian poet Catulle Mendès based on the story of El Cid, although Mendès's ardent Wagnerism was at the opposite extreme from his newly developed tastes. He worked on it for two years, while enjoying a relatively stable emotional life thanks to his long relationship with Gabrielle (Gaby) Dupont. Towards the end of 1890 he came into contact with Mallarmé, who asked him to write a musical contribution to a theatre project (never realized) centred on the poem *L'après-midi d'un faune*. He made the acquaintance of Satie, and published

mélodies and piano pieces including a *Marche écossaise* for piano duet (later orchestrated), commissioned by an American diplomat of Scottish ancestry in honour of his clan. He discovered Poe and Maeterlinck, and for a while hoped to set the latter's *La princesse Maleine*. In 1892 he started to compose his *Proses lyriques* on texts written by himself under the influence of symbolist poets.

Debussy made his first appearance on the larger stage of Parisian artistic society in 1893, with performances of *La damoiselle élue* at the Société Nationale and of the String Quartet by the Ysaÿe Quartet. He became a close friend of Ernest Chausson, who gave him both financial and moral support (fig.3). He discovered Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* around the same time that he attended a performance of Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Bouffes-Parisiens. He had been going to Mallarmé's Tuesday salon for two years, and returned to the *L'après-midi d'un faune* project, producing the *Prélude*. At the end of the year he met Pierre Louÿs, and travelled with him to Ghent to obtain Maeterlinck's permission to compose *Pelléas*. He began work on it during the summer, having abandoned *Rodrigue et Chimène* once and for all.

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3. 'Pelléas et Mélisande'.

Debussy finished a first version of the opera in 1895. He considered a number of projects with Pierre Louÿs, notably an opera based on his *Cendrelune*; a ballet on the novel *Aphrodite* came to nothing; *La saulaie*, on a poem by Rossetti, went no further than some sketches; the only collaboration with Louÿs to bear fruit was the *Chansons de Bilitis* (1897–8). But Debussy had at last found a publisher, Georges Hartmann (then covertly directing the firm of Fromont), who not only believed firmly in his talent but also paid him a monthly retainer. Several attempts were made to get *Pelléas et Mélisande* staged (complete or in part): at the Théâtre Libre, by Ysaÿe in Belgium, at Robert de Montesquiou's Pavillon des Muses and at Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, but these foundered. Debussy's other chief preoccupation was an orchestral triptych, *Nocturnes*, which he intended at first for Ysaÿe, as a work for solo violin and orchestra; he decided to make the three pieces purely orchestral in 1897, but their long gestation went on until the end of 1899; the first two ('Nuages' and 'Fêtes') were performed a year later under Camille Chevillard and were coolly received by the critics.

In 1901 Debussy himself joined the critical fraternity. Writing for the *Revue blanche*, at first under the pseudonym 'Monsieur Croche', he used his column to develop some of his less orthodox ideas: favourable to Musorgsky, hostile to Saint-Saëns and the weighty conventions of traditional genres, indulgent towards Massenet and often ironic about the conditions of musical life. At last, on 3 May 1901, the director of the Opéra-Comique, Albert Carré, gave him a written undertaking to put on *Pelléas*. Preparations were held up by Maeterlinck, who wanted his mistress Georgette Leblanc to take the role of Mélisande. In spite of public demonstrations at the dress rehearsal and first performance (30 April 1902), and a chilly reception from several of the critics, the work caught on and made a powerful impression on the musical world at large (fig.4).

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4. 'Debussyism'.

Armed with new authority, Debussy returned to criticism in 1903 in the pages of *Gil Blas*: it was there that he first wrote in praise of Rameau and the French national tradition, which he felt had been diverted from its proper path by German influences. He undertook a new orchestral triptych, *La mer* ('three symphonic sketches'), and signed a contract with Durand for a major series of 'Images': six pieces for solo piano and six for two pianos or orchestra; these eventually became the two sets of *Images* for solo piano and one for orchestra.

Four years after his marriage to Lilly Texier (a model) in autumn 1899, Debussy met Emma Bardac, an amateur singer and the wife of a banker. When he went to live with Emma in 1904, Lilly attempted suicide: a drama which led to the rupture of several friendships. Shortly after this, in 1905, Debussy entrusted exclusive rights in his works to the publisher Durand. His compositions were now frequently played at concerts and the term 'debussysme' came into vogue, used both as a compliment and as a term of abuse. Debussy also published *Masques* and *L'isle joyeuse* for piano (originally intended as the first and last pieces of a triptych), and two collections of mélodies: *Chansons de France* and a second book of *Fêtes galantes*; he finished scoring *La mer*, the first performance of which, on 15 October 1905, under the indifferent direction of Camille Chevillard, once again drew a cool response from the critics. Debussy's daughter Claude-Emma (Chouchou) was born two weeks later. At this time Debussy's long-term project was *Images* for orchestra, but several other works preoccupied him more immediately: an opera based on Bédier's *Le roman de Tristan*, *Siddhartha* (a Buddhist drama by Victor Segalen) and two operas on works by Poe, *Le diable dans le beffroi* and *La chute de la maison Usher*. Both Poe projects were very important to him though he had difficulty finding the right musical character and colour for them.

He made his conducting debut in 1908, directing *La mer* for the Concerts Colonne, with greater success than any previous performances of the work. *Pelléas* was given in Germany and New York, and his first biography, by Louise Liebich, was published in London (1908), a year before the one by Louis Laloy, published in Paris. After the first season of the Ballets Russes, Diaghilev asked him to write a ballet set in 18th-century Venice: Debussy drafted the scenario of *Masques et bergamasques* but quickly decided against composing it.

In 1909 Debussy accepted Fauré's invitation to become a member of the advisory board of the Conservatoire, and the young composer and conductor André Caplet became his collaborator and confidant. During a visit to Britain at the end of February 1909, the first signs of illness manifested themselves. He returned to composing for the piano and started the first book of *Préludes* at the end of the year. *Ibéria* and *Rondes de Printemps* received their first performances in 1910, directed by Pierné and the composer, but it was another three years before the complete *Images* for orchestra were performed together. On his return from a tour to Vienna and Budapest in 1910, Debussy agreed to compose *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien*, a 'mystery' in five acts by Gabriele D'Annunzio, for the dancer Ida Rubinstein. He wrote it in two months, with Caplet's help for the orchestration (1911), but critical opinion was divided about its success (fig.6). A commission from another dancer, the Canadian Maud Allan, led him to compose a ballet, *Khamma*, on a scenario set in ancient Egypt, but tiring of Allan's demands he left the orchestration to Charles Koechlin. A request from Diaghilev in 1912 produced *Jeux*, a 'poème dansé' on a scenario by Nizhinsky, who also did the choreography. The first performance (15 May 1913) was somewhat overshadowed by another

première given two weeks later in the same Ballets Russes season: that of *The Rite of Spring*. A friendly relationship had existed between Debussy and Stravinsky since 1910, and Debussy admired both *Firebird* and *Petrushka*; in June 1912 he had played Part 1 of *The Rite* with Stravinsky in its piano four-hand version at Louis Laloy's house. He started to write reviews again in 1913, this time for the *Revue musicale S.I.M.*, and conducted the first performance of the complete *Images* for orchestra (26 January 1913). He composed a second book of *Préludes* for piano, a 'ballet for children' *La boîte à joujoux* (piano solo version), and the *Trois poèmes de Mallarmé*. On the invitation of Serge Koussevitzky he spent a fortnight in Russia, giving concerts in St Petersburg and Moscow; early in 1914, he went to Rome, Amsterdam, The Hague, Brussels and London. The essential purpose of these travels was to support his family.

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5. The last years.

At first the war depressed Debussy into a state of creative sterility from which he produced only the *Berceuse héroïque* for piano (later orchestrated), commissioned by the *Daily Telegraph* for *King Albert's Book*. The summer of 1915, spent in a villa on the channel coast at Pourville, was a productive one: in quick succession he composed the Cello Sonata, *En blanc et noir*, the *Etudes*, and the Sonata for flute, viola and harp, but at the end of the year he underwent a debilitating colostomy (for rectal cancer). Suffering both pain and financial difficulties, he took up one of his old projects again, *La chute de la maison Usher*. He wrote another version of the libretto but composed a complete sketch of only one scene. In March 1917 he finished the Violin Sonata but three other sonatas remained unrealized projects. His last concert appearance was to play the Violin Sonata with Gaston Poulet at St Jean-de-Luz in September 1917.

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6. Debussy and currents of ideas.

The tenacity with which the label 'Impressionist' has clung to Debussy, and the consequences of this for the understanding of his work, calls for discussion of his allegiances to the literary and artistic movements of his time.

Never having been to school, and aware of the gaps in his intellectual training, Debussy was an autodidact (except in music) who was conscious early in life of the values that could enrich his personality. His late but most enduring education came between the ages of 25 and 30 from his contacts with the symbolists. The French symbolist movement lasted scarcely more than a dozen years, from 1885 onwards, and affected poetry, art and, to a lesser extent, the theatre. It was characterized by rejection of naturalism, of realism and of overly clearcut forms, hatred of emphasis, indifference to the public, and a taste for the indefinite, the mysterious, even the esoteric. Debussy felt as powerfully as the symbolists the impact of the 'decadent' novels of Joris Karl Huysmans, and shared their admiration of Baudelaire; he was personally acquainted with writers such as Paul Bourget, Henri de Régnier, Paul Valéry and André Gide, and became an intimate friend of Pierre Louÿs. He was an habitué of Stéphane Mallarmé's salon, the movement's temple, and he flirted with the occultists he encountered at Edmond Bailly's bookshop L'Art Indépendant (where *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* went on sale). Besides the tastes he shared in common with the symbolists, we can find more personal tendencies, such as his admiration for the poems of Jules Laforgue, which left traces when he wrote his own poetry for the *Proses lyriques*. Music was at the centre of much artistic activity at the time. Following Verlaine's lead, René Ghil and, above all, Mallarmé held the idea of a 'musicalization' of poetry, while Odilon Redon called himself a 'musiciste', and placed music, like his own paintings and drawings, 'in the ambiguous world of the indeterminate'. But the overriding meeting point was Wagner. Never had so many writers and painters attended the Concerts Lamoureux. The passion for the 'total art' depicted by the high priests of the *Revue wagnérienne* (edited by Edouard Dujardin, whom Debussy met) fascinated the symbolists. At first Debussy was swept up in the current, which leaves strong traces in *La damoiselle élue* and *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*, but after his second visit to Bayreuth (1889) he became increasingly detached to the point of being regarded as a heretic by his Wagnerite friends. In 1893 he announced an article to be entitled 'The Futility of Wagnerism' but it never appeared. In February 1897 he was the only musician present at the banquet given for Mallarmé to celebrate the publication of *Divagations*.

The links which Debussy maintained with the visual arts were just as significant. During his stay in Rome he wrote: 'I've had enough of music, of the same everlasting landscape; I want to see a Manet and hear some Offenbach'. Louis Laloy, his first French biographer, revealed in 1909 that 'He received his most profitable lessons from poets and painters, not from musicians', while he himself told Varèse in 1911 'I love pictures almost as much as music'. He met Toulouse-Lautrec, knew Maurice Denis, who designed the cover of *La damoiselle élue* (fig.8), Odilon Redon, who gave him a lithograph, and Whistler, from whom he borrowed the title of his *Nocturnes*; he may also have met Gauguin, who had a 'mania for relating painting to music' and likened colours to instrumental timbres. He subscribed to magazines such as *Pan* in which he found reproductions of work by Khnopff, Vallotton, Crane and Munch. He regarded Turner as 'the finest creator of mystery in art' and went to see his paintings in London in 1903, confiding a little later to Ricardo Viñes that *Masques* and *L'isle joyeuse* owed something to them. On the whole, the artists he knew personally (Henri Lerolle, Alfred Stevens, Henry de Groux) were not of the same stature as the poets. His friendship with the sculptress Camille Claudel (the poet Paul Claudel's sister) was particularly important; Robert Godet recounted that they established agreement instantly on a number of essential points: love of Degas, indifference or scepticism towards some of the Impressionists who had become ubiquitous, and admiration for Japanese artists, especially Hokusai (whose work adorns the cover of *La mer*; for illustration *see* Durand). Debussy was impressed by the private world sculpted by this young pupil of Rodin: her piece *La valse* remained on Debussy's desk until his death. One of his rare piano pupils, Mademoiselle Worms de Romilly, went so far as to write that he 'always regretted not having worked at painting instead of music'. Ever since his years at the Conservatoire, Debussy had felt that he had more to learn from artists than from career-obsessed musicians: 'You are getting nowhere, M. Croche will tell them, because you know nothing but music and obey barbaric laws'. Three of his works were dedicated to artists: one of the *Images* for piano to Alexandre Charpentier, one of the *Proses lyriques* to Henri Lerolle, and *Estampes* to Jacques-Emile Blanche.

Although the nature of influences exerted at one remove is not easy to define, it must be acknowledged that the development of free verse in poetry and the disappearance of the subject or model in painting made Debussy think

about issues of musical form. Furthermore, the virtues of stylization (Japanese prints), the value of the quick sketch (Camille Claudel), the qualities associated with the 'arabesque' and the possibilities of a dreamlike world bordering on anguish (Munch, Poe) were all aesthetic notions that Debussy retained from his association with poets and artists of the symbolist era. He often discussed music with a vocabulary borrowed from the visual arts; in the guise of M. Croche, he 'talked about a score as if it were a picture'; he liked to use the word 'arabesque' to describe widely different kinds of music, from plainsong to Javanese music, by way of Bach. The very titles of his works are indicative of his closeness to the visual arts (*Arabesques*, *Nocturnes*, *Images*, *Estampes*) while critics compared him to Monet, Le Sidaner or even Klimt.

It was the members of the Institut de France who were the first to call his music 'Impressionist', in 1887, with reference to *Printemps*, his second 'envoi' from Rome. This was the first instance of a misunderstanding which has persisted to the present day. The term took hold in particular after *La mer*. Debussy himself was sometimes careless about its use, allowing the following to be written about *La mer* in the Concerts Colonne programme note: 'It is, in a word, musical impressionism, following an exotic and refined art, the formula for which is the exclusive property of its composer'. When he tried to counteract the usage, for example by placing the titles in small type at the end of each of the *Préludes* for piano, it was too late. He wrote to his publisher in 1908: 'I'm attempting "something different", *realities* in some sense – what imbeciles call impressionism, just about the least appropriate term possible'.

Pelléas can be considered as the masterpiece of French symbolism, though the movement which inspired the opera came to an end at the same time as its first performances. Debussy should not be confined only to the symbolism in which he steeped himself as a young man, and which helps us to understand the formation of his personal language. But it is even more important to refute the label of 'Impressionist', which is still applied to him even today. The stylistic features which are usually advanced to justify the label (veiled, iridescent lines, disintegration of sounds, predominance of colour in the orchestration) are based on misinterpretations both of the nature of painting and of the true originality of Debussy's musical style. However, the composer occasionally provided evidence to support the 'Impressionist' tag, notably when he wrote to Emile Vuillermoz in 1916; 'You do me a great honour by calling me a pupil of Claude Monet'.

Once he was famous, the composer was receptive to the ideas spread by writers in favour of a return to the classics, which led him to extol the values of a national tradition (Rameau) and to choose to set poems by Charles d'Orléans and Tristan Lhermite. The decisive turning-point in his aesthetic evolution came between *Pelléas* and *La mer*: he no longer referred to poets or visual artists in his correspondence as ideals on which to model himself or his music. He rejected the Fauves and made gentle fun of the production style of the Ballets Russes. Eventually he came close even to rejecting the stimulus of other music, writing early in 1914: 'There comes a moment in life when one wants to concentrate, and now I've made a resolution to listen to as little music as possible.'

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7. Models and influences.

The elements from which Debussy gradually built up his personal style were of course many. Though he spent a dozen years at the Conservatoire, he instinctively picked up there only what seemed to suit his natural bent; he explained to a journalist from the *New York Times* in 1910 that as a student he had striven to compose as he was expected to, adopting a more personal style for the works he wrote outside the Conservatoire. At the Conservatoire he acquired a knowledge of the traditional musical canon (Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Weber), and to this he added an acquaintance with the choral works (Handel, Liszt, Gounod) which he accompanied for the rehearsals of the Concordia choral society, and with the earlier repertory (Palestrina, Lassus, Victoria) which he heard in Rome and at St Gervais in Paris. The significance of some models was observable only in certain details of his technique: for example, the unconventional use of unresolved 7th and 9th chords, in the manner of Chabrier and Grieg, found in the *Tarentelle styrienne*, or the pedal effect borrowed from Ravel's *Sites auriculaires* for *La soirée dans Grenade* (which in fact can be traced back to his own *Prélude à l'après-midi*). The different levels of these influences, their nature and degree of importance require clarification. The first level is that of simple reminiscence, especially before Debussy forged his own personal style. If the manner of Massenet and Gounod is not absent from the first 30 *mélodies* (mostly written for the soprano voice of Marie Vasnier), no study of them has succeeded in uncovering actual borrowing; equally, Marguerite's monotone recitative in *Faust* ('Je voudrais bien savoir') cannot be considered a direct model for *Pelléas*. An orchestral coloration not far removed from that of Lalo can be found in some of the pieces written with a view to winning the Prix de Rome, and an orientalism reminiscent of Delibes is evident in the Piano Trio. Debussy's attitude towards Franck, whose classes he attended only sporadically, varied without ever being very positive. He evolved in the very influential ambience of the 'bande à Franck', of which d'Indy was later the leader. Though he criticized Franck's somewhat schematic use of modulation and four-square phrasing, he picked up his technique of cyclic form as a means of ensuring the unity of a work: it left its mark on the Quartet and the *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra as well as *La mer*.

Debussy admired Chabrier from his youth, taking from him examples of formal and harmonic liberty analogous to those he found in poets and visual artists. The affinities between *La sulamite* and *La damoiselle élue* and between *Pièces pittoresques* and *Suite bergamasque* have often been mentioned; other affinities can be found with the *Valses romantiques* (especially the third one), which Debussy played to Liszt and even with *Gwendoline*, the overture of which Debussy conducted. In the case of Chopin, to whose memory Debussy dedicated his *Etudes* and whose works he edited for Durand, the lineage is a spiritual one in terms of formal and harmonic freedom; while exact audible allusions are rare, the tactile sense of Chopin's pianism can be felt throughout Debussy's mature piano writing. As M. Croche, he expressed gratitude that Chopin had written not true sonatas but 'very highly elaborated sketches', and Chopin's *Barcarolle* was one of his favourite pieces. It is not known what he thought of the concert his friend Godet conceived for the pianist Marie Panthès in Geneva during the last few months of his life, based on a series of comparisons between his own *Etudes* and pieces from Chopin's op.10 and op.25.

The Russian influence was the most obvious one to Debussy's contemporaries, and its significance was emphasized by Cocteau after the composer's death. On the eve of the first performance of *Nocturnes*, after sight-reading works by Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov, André Gide found that they 'oddly diminished Debussy' for him.

The influence is most explicit in the Balakirev-like 7/4 episode of the piano *Nocturne* of 1892. Debussy was between 18 and 20 when he spent one summer in Arcachon and Florence and one with Madame von Meck in Russia, where he discovered a number of works, and took the scores of some of them home to Paris. He was greatly struck by Madame von Meck's idol, Tchaikovsky (as can be heard in the *Danse bohémienne*, his first surviving piano piece), but even more by Balakirev, Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin. Traces of their influence can be found in his youthful *mélodies*, and his memories were revived by the Russian concerts at the 1889 Exposition in Paris. He discovered Musorgsky later, in the 1890s. There has been much debate about precisely when Debussy first became acquainted with *Boris Godunov*: the only certainty is that he already knew the opera by the time he started *Pelléas* in 1893. Apart from the expressive correspondences between the deaths of Boris and Mélisande, its influence extends to the somewhat Musorgskian character of Golaud and above all of Yniold, whose vocal inflections are very close to those of the Russian composer's *Nursery*. The final F–E ostinato of *Boris Godunov* recurs in the grotto scene of *Pelléas*. In a more general way, it may have been from the Russians that Debussy acquired his taste for ancient and oriental modes and for vivid colorations, and a certain disdain for academic rules; he himself wrote that in Musorgsky form 'is built up by means of a succession of little touches mysteriously linked together'. 'Nuages' and 'Fêtes' undoubtedly owe something to the distinctive repetitive rhythms of Borodin's *In the Steppes of Central Asia*. And it was again to Musorgsky that he turned when he wanted to re-create the world of childhood: even in a late work such as *La boîte à joujoux* there are passages which draw on *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Debussy knew nearly all Wagner's works long before he went to Bayreuth, but his Wagnerism reached its peak in 1887–8 when, according to Pierre Louÿs, he made and won a bet that he could play *Tristan* by heart. His apostasy after his second visit to Bayreuth was above all the result of his quest for a personal style somewhere beyond Wagner. Before beginning *Pelléas*, he confided to Louÿs that he did not see 'what anyone can do beyond *Tristan*', and as late as 1896 he still gave Wagnerian sessions at the home of a society hostess, Madame Godard-Decrais. The early works in which the Wagnerian influence is most evident are *La damoiselle élue* and the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*; the latter pieces are exceptional among Debussy's output of songs in their length, their wide intervals and their chromatic harmonies, even more marked in *Recueillement* than in *Le jet d'eau*. *Pelléas* owes much to Wagner, except in respect of two essential points, denounced by Debussy, Wagner's 'homogenized orchestration' and 'the symphonic development responsible for the dramatic action', or 'making symphonic music in the theatre'. The first sketches for *Pelléas* show Wagner's fingerprints very clearly, as Debussy was only too aware, writing to Chausson that he was finding it very difficult to avoid 'the ghost of old Klingsor, alias Richard Wagner, appearing at the turning of a bar'. In the final version, the most Wagnerian passages are in Act 4 scene iv (*Tristan*) and the interludes in Act 2 (cf the third acts of *Meistersinger* and *Tristan*), where it is a matter as much of orchestration as of harmonic structures. Although the influence is less distinct in later work, Debussy continued to be fascinated by certain of Wagner's orchestral effects. The beginning of the second movement of *La mer* perhaps recalls the Act 2 prelude in *Tristan*. In the context of expressing his admiration for *Petrushka*, Debussy told Stravinsky that 'there is an orchestral infallibility that I have found only in *Parsifal*' (1912) and, at much the same time, concerning the orchestration of *Jeux*, he explained to Caplet that he had in mind 'that orchestral colour which seems to be lit from behind, of which there are such marvellous effects in *Parsifal*'.

It was at the precise moment when he first turned his back on Wagner that Debussy discovered the music of East Asia at the 1889 Exposition. For him the revelation was far removed from the attraction of the exotic or the picturesque that it meant for many French composers, and concerned essentially the use of musical scales obeying conventions other than those of the West. He listened spellbound to the 'infinite arabesque' of the Javanese gamelan with its percussion – the Western equivalent of which he likened to the 'barbaric din of a fairground' – and the counterpoint 'beside which Palestrina's is child's play', and he was equally fascinated by the Annamite theatre, which impressed him by its economy of means: 'an angry little clarinet' and a tam-tam. He himself never introduced any form of unmediated exoticism into his music, except arguably into *Pagodes*, but the gamelan has been suggested as one influence in the *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra, and in the Toccata of the suite *Pour le piano*, composed shortly after the 1900 Exposition. Debussy was always consistent on the point that a folk or national music should not be used for its themes but rather in the manner of Albéniz: 'Without using actual popular tunes he is the kind of person who has them in his blood. They have become so natural a part of his music that one barely distinguishes a demarcation line'. To a Hungarian friend, he wrote: 'Your young musicians could usefully take inspiration from them, not by copying them but by trying to transpose their freedom, their gifts of evocation, colour, rhythm … One should only ever use the folk music of one's country as a basis, never as a technique'. All music relying on improvisation enthralled him and, although he was normally parsimonious with praise, he displayed boundless enthusiasm for the gypsies he heard in Russia, for a violinist (Radics) in Budapest, and even for the violinist of the Carlton Hotel in Paris (Leoni, for whom he is said to have composed *La plus que lente*). What he particularly liked in Albéniz were the 'brusque awakenings' and 'nervous starts', as if emanating from a guitar. A concert in 1913 revived his memories of the 1889 Exposition, leading him to describe Spanish folk music as 'one of the richest in the world'. In the same year he received a visit from four Sufi Indian musicians, led by Inayat Khan, who aroused his interest in their repertory and are said to have demonstrated to him the technique of one of their instruments, the *vina*.

Debussy, Claude

8. Sources and interpretation.

Debussy seldom regarded a work as finished once and for all, even after its publication. He subjected some of his works to major revisions over many years, such as the *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra and the *Nocturnes*. *Pelléas* was the object of substantial corrections – well after first publication – intended to refine the flexibility of the vocal lines.

Complex editorial problems still exist in certain cases; that of 'Sirènes', for instance, the third of the *Nocturnes*, in which Debussy wanted to make the women's voices 'blend' with the orchestra, rather than to sound like an addition to it. Having heard several unsatisfactory performances after 1900, he made various emendations during the rest of his life without ever arriving at a definitive solution; this is demonstrated by two copies marked with different, and in places incompatible corrections. When Ernest Ansermet asked Debussy, in 1917, which corrections to retain, the

composer, a sick man, is said to have replied: 'I don't really know any more … use what seems good to you'.

The chronology of Debussy's juvenilia has only recently been established; the manuscripts of these early works are often problematic, especially with regard to accidentals. Second versions of some of the *mélodies* on poems by Verlaine (*Fantoches*, *Clair de lune*, *En sourdine*) were composed in 1891. Finally, the existence of unpublished material for *Rodrigue et Chimène* and for one scene of *La chute de la maison Usher* helps to show his evolution as a dramatic composer.

Debussy called on the help of others in several of his works, essentially to orchestrate on occasions when he was pressed for time: André Caplet for *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* (1911), Henri Busser for *Printemps* (1912) and Charles Koechlin for *Khamma*. In these three cases the orchestration was done under his strict control. There is an impressive list of projects which Debussy conceived, especially after *Pelléas*, but did not carry out, denoting a kind of constant striving for a form of imaginary theatre. Musical fragments are all that survive of *La saulaie* (Louÿs, after Rossetti, 1896–7), *Le roi Lear* after Shakespeare (1904), *Psyché* by Gabriel Mourey (*Syrinx* for flute, 1913), *Le palais du silence*, a ballet by Georges de Feure (1913–14), *Crimen amoris* after Verlaine (Charles Morice, Louis Laloy, 1914), and *Ode à la France* on a text by Laloy (1916–17). He was always hesitant about orchestrating his *mélodies*: he first promised to orchestrate two of the *Proses lyriques*, then changed his mind; only *Le jet d'eau* was performed in his own orchestration but it was criticized even by his friends. Finally, his promise to Bernardino Molinari, to orchestrate *L'isle joyeuse*, was an expression of intent eventually realized by Molinari following Debussy's indications.

The increasing care with which he notated his works reflects his stringent requirements in the matter of interpretation. There is ample evidence of his dissatisfaction with singers and pianists: though Mary Garden escaped any censure, and Ninon Vallin received exceptional praise, Maggie Teyte, Rose Féart and Marguerite Carré were the objects of pitiless reproach. Among pianists, Viñes gave the first performances of his works for a dozen years, but was criticized in 1908 for having failed to understand the architecture and thus 'falsified the expression' of the second series of *Images*. Debussy went so far as to generalize his opinion of performers: 'Pianists are bad musicians and chop the music into unequal portions, like a chicken'; or: 'It's impossible to imagine how my piano music has been distorted, so much that I often can hardly recognize it' (to Varèse, 1910). In Debussy's later years, Walter Rummel was a trusted interpreter who gave the first performances of several of the *Préludes* and *Etudes*. As for conductors, he was grateful to André Messager for having launched *Pelléas* but soon wanted to hear a less prosaic interpretation; Camille Chevillard, the first conductor of *La mer*, was his bête noire, and Gabriel Pierné, an old friend, was accused of failing to understand the structure of *Jeux*.

Debussy, Claude

9. Theatre works and projects.

Even if Debussy completed very few works for the theatre, he devoted much time to various projects and expressed opinions on the subject which give us a precise idea of the range of his tastes. The theatre fascinated him from childhood, and he even appointed himself teacher of dramatic art to his friend René Peter. He had a profound admiration for Shakespeare and cherished an intention to write incidental music for *As you like it* for 30 years. He admired the work of Ibsen among his contemporaries, because it was 'exceptional'.

M. Croche complained about the 'pathological need to write operas'; he reproached Gluck for harbouring 'the infancy of Wagnerian formulas' and for failing to understand French prosody, making of it 'a language of stresses when it is a language of nuances'; he claimed to like Rameau for being 'lyrical', but his campaign on Rameau's behalf was perhaps more one of national principle than of reverence for a possible model. He spoke out vigorously against Italian *verismo* composers and even more so against Charpentier and his claims to express the reality of life. As for Wagner, after the infatuation of his youth, Debussy remained faithful to *Parsifal* and *Tristan* all his life, in spite of the polemical character of his utterances on the subject.

Two non-traditional forms of theatre had an appeal for him as a young man. One was the little puppet theatre in the passage Vivienne where Maurice Bouchor practised the art of pantomime; the atmosphere was unreal, the puppets moving with hieratic slowness to incidental music composed by Bouchor's friends Chausson and Paul Vidal. The other was the shadow plays created by Henri Rivière at Le Chat Noir, which involved the projection of silhouettes against various scenic backgrounds, and was influenced by *japonisme*. But after André Antoine's Théâtre Libre, it was the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, run first by Paul Fort then by Lugné-Poe, which most held his attention, and which alone represented symbolist tendencies in the theatre after 1891; the plays by Ibsen and Maeterlinck which were staged by the company embodied a drama of great suggestive power in which destiny and fate loomed large.

Apart from *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* and his two ballets, most of the stage projects to which Debussy devoted himself were not commissioned, but belonged to his 'imaginary' theatre. Some were merely transient ideas (*Salammbô*, *La grande bretèche*, *Dionysos*, *L'Orestie*), others were indefinite promises that were not kept (*Les noces de Sathan*, *Le pélerin d'amour*), or sketches that were soon abandoned (*L'histoire de Tristan*, *Le chevalier d'or*).

Debussy himself explained that he had tried to write for the theatre before composing *Pelléas*, but the form in which he had wanted to do it was 'so unusual that after various attempts' he had given up. This was a reference to his attempt to write a *scène lyrique* on a text by Theodore de Banville, *Diane au bois*, on which he worked during his stay in Rome; he observed at the time that he had no precedents for it and that he needed to 'invent new forms' in order to ensure that 'the emphasis remained lyrical without being swamped by the orchestra' (fig.9). He is also reported to have set one scene of Villiers de l'Isle Adam's *Axel*, a play with very strong Wagnerian associations, but the manuscript is lost. The next and most surprising project was an opera on a libretto by Catulle Mendès, a member of the 'Parnassian' school, *Rodrigue et Chimène*, on which he spent more than two years in 1890–92. The libretto itself was over 12 years old and treated the story of El Cid in a very conventional format in the tradition of grand opera; nothing could have been further from Debussy's symbolist notions, but nevertheless he sketched three acts (out of what seems to have planned as a four-act work). Mendès's influence in theatrical circles, in addition to Debussy's own chronic lack of money, are the only plausible explanations for this curious diversion on the composer's aesthetic path. The score does not feature musical motives associated with individual characters; the

vocal style is very lyrical and entails quite wide intervals. That the style is partly Wagnerian is not surprising but it also exhibits anticipations of *Pelléas*, notably in the second act. Later, Debussy must have blotted out his memories of the work when he told a journalist: 'I have never written duets and I never shall' (1909); in fact, duets are found not only in *Rodrigue* but also in *Diane au bois*. Only a few months passed between his abandonment of *Rodrigue* and the shock of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Maeterlinck's play, performed at the Bouffes-Parisiens on 17 May 1893, and the answer to the dream that Debussy had revealed to Guiraud four years earlier: a text 'half saying things', with characters 'of no time, of no place', which did not impose on him an obligatory big scene (*scène à faire*). Maeterlinck gave him permission to make cuts and he undertook the composition of one of the scenes in August 1893.

Meanwhile, Debussy had discovered *Boris Godunov*, with its supple and finely shaded melodic recitative and its great harmonic freedom which helped him to distance himself from the Wagnerian model. He finished a first version of *Pelléas* during 1895 and many of his friends were struck by the modernity of the excerpts they heard in private. Various plans to get it staged came to nothing, while Debussy refused to allow excerpts to be given in concert performance despite Ysaÿe's encouragement. Before he had orchestrated it, he was certain that he wanted to see it performed not in one of the large national theatres but in a more modest venue, such as Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. In the end he had to accept the offer of André Messager and Albert Carré to produce *Pelléas* at the Opéra-Comique, where it became necessary at the last moment to prolong four interludes to allow time to change the sets. Although the first performances were not a truly popular success, a large artistic and musical constituency recognized them as an event that overthrew all the traditions of operatic composition, as well as presenting the masterpiece of the symbolist movement late in its history.

In *Pelléas* singing remains on the threshold of speech, ideally adapted to the specificities of language, but it brings out the interior music of the text and succeeds in revealing the hidden nuances of a scenario which might otherwise appear, at first sight, to be a simple family drama. Commentators have counted varying numbers of identifying motives in the score, associated with the characters, or with certain symbols and ideas. There are essentially only three that truly play a role in the melodic fabric: Pelléas, Mélisande and Golaud; they do not always recur in exactly the same form but change shape and colour according to the changing situations. They are not leitmotifs but are woven into the orchestral texture in order to unify and energize the discourse. The tension and progression of the drama are ensured by the subtlety of the orchestra – seldom used at full strength – which constantly serves to change the work's mood. After the score was published, Debussy carried out a number of changes, notably in order to improve the balance of winds and strings and to refine the timbres and sonorities. But the permanent contrast between shadow and light, the atmosphere of dream and mystery, the expression of a view of the role of fate and destiny which is close to that of the ancient Greek theatre: all are obtained by the totality of the elements of the musical language, deployed in a profoundly personal manner.

Debussy next turned to a different form of theatre with two works that he himself adapted from stories by Edgar Allan Poe. He told a journalist in 1908 about his new taste for short pieces, the 'condensed forms of opera'. After *Pelléas* he put all his hopes into the search for a theatre of fear and 'progressive anguish' inspired in him by Poe's *The Devil in the Belfry* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. He envisaged the two works being performed as a double bill, and even signed a contract with the Metropolitan Opera in New York, before finally allowing the Opéra-Comique in 1911 to announce their performance in the following season. Only opening fragments have been found for *Le diable dans le beffroi*, in which Debussy said he wanted 'extremely simple but at the same time extremely flexible choral writing'. Three versions survive of the libretto for *La chute de la maison Usher*, written between 1908 and 1916, but only fragments remain of the music in short score, including an incomplete monologue for Roderick Usher, in which a *parlando* style is pushed to an extreme, along with some passages of great expressive intensity. But the reconstruction of the fragments first performed in 1977 does not allow a clear idea of it to emerge, mostly because of unidiomatic orchestration and misinterpretation of keys and clefs. These uncompleted projects constituted the principal disappointment in Debussy's artistic career, and were undoubtedly the reason for his statement that 'perhaps we have not yet found the lyric form answering to our present state of mind'.

Among the many proposals for stage works that were put to Debussy, it was almost by chance that he came to write incidental music for *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien*, written by Gabriele d'Annunzio in five long acts ('mansions') for Ida Rubinstein. Assisted by André Caplet, Debussy took only two months to write a score which uses very large forces (notably six horns, four trumpets and three harps) and displays an eclecticism perhaps more marked than that of other mature works, expressing the ambiguity of a text which oscillates between Christianity and paganism, eroticism and mysticism. Certain unifying motives run through the work: that of the Cross, that of the Passion (third and fourth 'mansions') and the invocation 'Sébastien'. It is characterized by the sharpness of dissonances (especially in the third 'mansion') and a harmonic language imprinted with modal clashes and ambiguities (in the 'Danse extatique'). At the end of his life Debussy wanted to revise the work, reducing the text and adding to the music; in 1916, with Jacques Rouché, director of the Opéra, he conceived the project of transforming *Le martyre* into a *drame lyrique*. As it is, it represents a somewhat hybrid genre incorporating elements of oratorio, sacred dramatic mime and ballet.

Debussy was rather reserved in his attitude to the aesthetic of the Ballets Russes, and seems to have preferred the idea of rejuvenating the old form of opera-ballet (*Fêtes galantes* after Verlaine, renamed *Crimen amoris*). He wrote the scenario – but not the music – of *Masques et bergamasques*, but he detested the choreography which Diaghilev commissioned from Nizhinsky for *Jeux*, a work which finally found a new life for itself in the concert hall. He fell out with Maud Allan who commissioned the ballet *Khamma*; the score, which has its Stravinskian moments, was not played in his lifetime.

Debussy did not like the atmosphere in big theatres, and distrusted producers. He generally avoided going to performances of his own works; when he made an exception for *Pelléas*, in Brussels and London, he escaped before the première; he never attended a performance of the opera in conditions that completely satisfied him.

He showed a real interest in the cinema. Having been won over by the use of cinematic technique in a realization of Eugène Sue's *Juif errant* at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu, he suggested using cinematographic projections to enhance a non-staged performance of *Das Rheingold* in 1903. In another review, in 1913, he predicted a role for the new art

form as ‘a means of reviving the taste for symphonic music’. He responded with positive interest to a proposal for a film version of *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* in 1914, but nothing came of it.

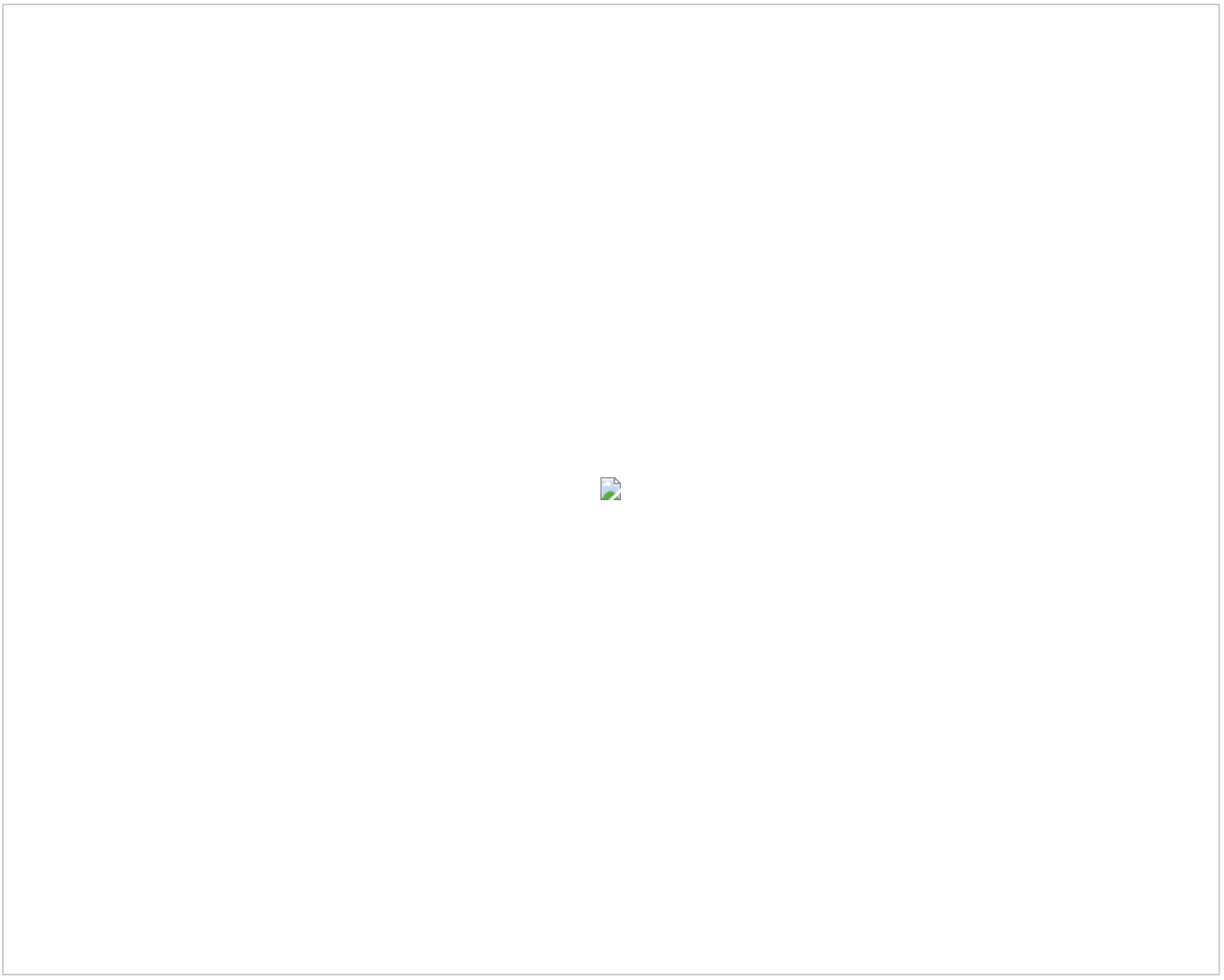
Debussy, Claude

10. Musical language.

Debussy's inventions bear equally on harmony, rhythm, texture and form, and might be summarized as a lifelong quest to banish blatancy of musical expression. His harmony inseparably binds modality and tonality: although French music never lost its variety of modes. Debussy extended and revitalized their range and tonal potential, developing the explorations of Chabrier and Russian composers and the different modal languages of Asian music. According to Maurice Emmanuel, Debussy was claiming in 1889–90 that ‘music is neither major nor minor’ and rebelling even against the rule of equal temperament; around the same time Edmond Bailly was reportedly educating him about Indian rāga, just as he was discovering Javanese gamelan.

Audible energy level accounts for much in Debussy's use of tonality: in *Reflets dans l'eau* the tonal structure involves not just key centres (a surprisingly classical sequence of D♭–D♭–E♭–A♭7–D♭) but a polarity of diatonic stability versus chromatic instability; this equally goes for *La mer*. Contrasted modes perform a similar function: in *Voiles* the outer whole-tone sections surround a climactic pentatonic passage, which replaces the opening section's notes C, D and E by the semitones in between (D♭ and E♭) leaving the other notes of the opening scale unaffected (exx.1*a* and 1*b*). The indeterminacy of the whole-tone opening thus resolves to E♭ minor (still veiled by remaining in second inversion), while the opening pages' emphasis of B♭, D and A♭/G♯ emerges in retrospect as a preparatory dominant 7th, avoiding cadential obviousness by means of the symmetrically balanced semitone shifts at the point of modal transition (ex.1*c*). This reflects a wider practice in the first book of piano *Préludes*, which opens by modally splitting the first chord's tonic B♭ to A and B. Another piece with no tonal modulation in the accepted sense is *Pagodes*, whose switches between B major and G♭ minor simply reflect bass pedals that shift a degree down or up the piece's basic pentatonic scale, while the progressive addition of E, D♭, A♭, G/F♭ and E♭ gradually intensifies the energy, not unlike the unfolding of an Indian rāga.

Like Fauré, Debussy often juxtaposes the same basic material in different modes or with a strategically shifted bass – arguably his most literal approach to true Impressionist technique, the equivalent of Monet's fixed object (be it cathedral or haystack) illuminated from different angles. In *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* the first three musical paragraphs open with the same flute arabesque at the same pitch, but to totally different effect each time by virtue of the opening C♭ first being unharmonized, then sounded over a D major chord and finally over an E major chord. The opening of *La cathédrale engloutie* compresses an analogous sequence into six bars, with a shifting bass to provide the varying source of illumination for the ‘fixed object’ above. In the central part of *Hommage à Rameau* Debussy plays this device on two simultaneous levels, letting a modal juxtaposition across two bars (ex.2*a*) form the bridge for a larger-scale juxtaposition across eight bars (exx.2*b* and 2*c*).



L'isle joyeuse relates to this by contrasting various scales on A: major, whole-tone, Lydian, and a combination of Lydian and Mixolydian with sharpened fourth and flattened seventh, somewhat like an overtone series. Sometimes known accordingly as the ‘acoustic scale’, this mode (already seen in ex.2*b*, and classed in Karnatic tradition as *Vachaspati*) is also prominent in the first movement of *La mer*, where it emerges from the D major pentatonic by the addition of the tritonally opposed dyad G–C.

Debussy's avoidance or softening of obvious cadences – or his reservation of them for comic contexts – can be linked to Chabrier, who often foils a leading-note implication by pulling the major 7th down stepwise to the 5th (throughout *España* or in the central part of his piano *Impromptu*); this became a characteristic Debussy fingerprint, as at the end of *Jardins sous la pluie*, *Les collines d'Anacapri* and *Hommage à S. Pickwick*, as well as in the ostinato that launches the coda of *L'isle joyeuse*. Another characteristic fingerprint – a consonant 10th chord slipping down to a 9th, as first heard in the *Petite suite* of 1889 – can be traced to Chabrier's *Trois valses romantiques* (1883), which Debussy played to Liszt in 1886.

Whether Debussy's first teacher Mme Mauté was, as she claimed, a Chopin pupil is still debated, but Debussy apparently believed her, and Chopin's suppleness of language, gesture and rhythm, as well as his gracefully powerful aesthetic, underlies Debussy's mature works even more than his early ones. This is a subtle aspect to trace as it avoids mere imitation: it manifests itself especially in the piano music through physical patterns, like the opening of the first book of *Préludes* (published in the Chopin centenary year) relative to the close of Chopin's B Prelude from op.28, or the opening chordal motions of the étude ‘Pour les accords’ relative to the Scherzo of Chopin's Second Sonata (second page onwards). A powerful correlation can be traced between the closing pages of *L'isle joyeuse* (bar 186 onwards) and Chopin's Third Ballade (bar 183 onwards), in terms of a crescendo sequence (a bass octave ostinato with added dissonant semitone), followed by a first tonic arrival, a tonal disruption, a second tonic arrival combined with an increase in tempo, and finally a rapid descent with added major 6th across most of the keyboard.

This emphasizes the spatial or visual element in Debussy's musical thinking, and on a smaller scale his musical shapes are often visually driven, as in the rising layers of arabesque in bar 4 of *Pagodes* (like the layers of a pagoda roof), or bars 2–4 of *Feuilles mortes* (which suggest a breath of wind followed by leaves fluttering to earth). Lockspeiser's discussion of geotropism in Debussy's melodic shapes relates to this, and if it does not immediately concern conventional key procedures, it reminds us that conventional tonal analysis alone is insufficient to map a way through Debussy's musical thinking. Yet in the most elementary sense his harmonic thinking is functional, in that each harmonic step sets up implications that he answers, even if not in the way or at the place we expect. His range of modality, especially in pieces like *Cloches à travers les feuilles*, often makes his procedures – logical enough to our ears – impervious to modally closed analytic systems like Schenker's. Pitchclass set analysis can show more abstract intervallic relationships lurking under the music's audible tonality, but the nature of this analytic

system – essentially designed for atonal music – makes it an incomplete tool for music that always preserves some form of tonality.

Debussy's farthest tonal outreaches are probably found in the second books of piano *Images* and *Préludes*: in *Et la lune descend* the modal E minor tonality is masked and considerably compromised by added 4ths in all the chords of the piece's main motive (a technique that possibly influenced Ravel's 'Le gibet' a year later); in *Brouillards* the left hand's clear tonality is literally fogged by the right hand's chromatic overlay. Here the musical language is again sensuously driven, combining auditory, visual and tactile elements. In the second book of *Préludes* this forms a larger structural motive, for the opening pattern in *Brouillards* – left hand on white keys overlaid by right hand mostly on black keys – recurs at the start of *Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses*, but with the tonal sense reversed: the left-hand notes now form appoggiaturas to the right hand. The last prelude, *Feux d'artifice*, opens with the same hand layout but with the tonality ambiguous; only on the last page is it resolved, in a way that inversely mirrors the opening of *Brouillards*, with right-hand fragments of 'La marseillaise' in C major merely forming modal colour over the bass D. Tonally this pattern is established by *La puerta del vino*, whose main theme features sustained melodic notes decorated by rapid Moorish ornaments; in normal harmonic practice the former would be consonant and the latter dissonant, but Debussy does exactly the opposite.

Along with *Khamma* and *Jeux*, the second book of *Préludes* mostly abandons the whole-tone scale for exploration of the octatonic scale with its tonal ambiguities: for example, two of the three possible octatonic collections are juxtaposed in the first two beats of *Brouillards*, and the third collection follows a page later. In this regard Debussy follows Rimsky-Korsakov, Ravel and Stravinsky, or indeed Chopin (coda of the Fourth Ballade). This contrasts with the octatonic patterns in his earlier music, which are mostly audible as diminished 7th sequences with passing notes, as already used by Berlioz, Chopin and Liszt. His last works move on again, leaving octatonicism largely to the finale of *En blanc et noir*. Behind the apparent return to diatonicism of the sonatas and *Etudes*, however, lurk many surprises, not least the dramatic B minor ending of 'Pour les tierces' whose inevitability can, in retrospect, be traced back to the piece's opening bars.

The major extra-musical structural formant in Debussy's musical language was poetry: this allowed his songs, until the 1890s, to be more fluid and tonally adventurous than his instrumental music, whose more static sectionality is more explicitly marked by fixed keys. His first instrumental masterpiece, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, essentially stretches its canvas over a poem (as Arthur Wenk observed, it comprises the same number of bars as Mallarmé's poem has lines). If Wagner's influence is most obvious in the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* of 1887–9, it never vanishes entirely: like Chabrier, Debussy subsumed it to his own ends, retaining its harmonic riches while jettisoning (or transforming) its bombast – a topic explored with relish by Robin Holloway (D1979).

Major antidotes to Wagner, evident from *Pelléas et Mélisande* onwards, came from the colourful directness of Russian music, the discreet grace of Massenet and the vocal inflections of the French language – one of many qualities that link Debussy to the era of Rameau and Lully. Discretion shows in his precise focussing of dynamics: for example, of the 570 bars that make up the two series of piano *Images*, less than 30 reach the level of *fortissimo* and not many more reach *forte*. (Even this total reveals more robustness than Debussy is often credited with.) The revelation of Javanese gamelan arguably gave Debussy the confidence to embark (after the 1900 world exhibition) on his fully characteristic mature piano works, with their many bell- and gong-like sonorities and brilliant exploitation of the piano's natural resonance. The music's top line is increasingly given over to arabesque figurations, with slower-moving melodic lines lower in the texture; not only is this important for performers to recognize, but for Debussy it solved problems of piano texture and balance, moving the lines that most need sustaining away from the instrument's shortest strings, and letting the layers of musical texture support one another, often in rhythmic polyphony. *Rondes de printemps* reveals how thoroughly Debussy had worked this sophisticated rhythmic and textural polyphony into his orchestral writing by 1908.

Although Debussy's Classical preoccupation is most explicit in his last works, he always considered himself essentially Classical, to the extent that clarity of form and expression are themselves an integral part of the music's expression (as a pianist he was noted for playing in time, without exaggeration or left-hand anticipations). Rhythmic augmentations of an almost archaic kind occur in the closing pages of works from the *Suite bergamasque* to *En blanc et noir*, and hemiola is a basic element of the piano pieces *Danse* and *Masques*. Dance is endemic to his idiom, and the enormous variety of rhythm on the music's surface includes rubato and flexibility written into the notation, for example through tied-over beats. (Any rhythmically sloppy performance therefore shreds his carefully designed architecture, both within phrases and on a larger scale.) His notation is more descriptive than Ravel's, and a passing indication like 'Lent' (as on the last page of *Reflets dans l'eau*) often indicates an effect written into the notation without requiring any change in underlying pulse. In *Jeux* and the piano *Préludes* especially, double bars are usually signposts of surface texture rather than larger structural transitions, requiring no tempo fluctuation except where indicated; his frequent indication // in later works (as in ex.1) merely signals the end of a nuance, not a hiatus.

In major scores from the late 1880s onwards, especially *La mer*, *L'isle joyeuse* and the piano *Images*, the many precisely focussed tonal, thematic and other turning points have been shown, in analyses by Roy Howat, to form sophisticated proportional structures based on symmetry and the golden section (often following the numbers of the Fibonacci series), as measured by notated bars or beats, usually focussing on the music's climactic points. How consciously this came about is unproven, and the subject can still be contentious; its main interest lies in linking different aspects of the structure into a naturally balanced dramatic flow. It occurs very precisely in the climactic Act 4 scene 4 of *Pelléas et Mélisande*; the dramatic shaping of this scene, and indeed of the whole opera, can be related to other symphonic movements including 'Jeux de vagues', *Gigues*, *Rondes de printemps* and *Jeux*, which focus their dramatic intensity in a sequence of two culminating crescendos. All that said, Debussy was ever suspicious of systems and formulas and, in his own words, 'would rather devote myself to cultivating pineapples' than lapse into repeating what he had already achieved.

Debussy, Claude

11. Orchestration and timbre.

Debussy confided to Robert Godet that his prime model of orchestration was Weber. He cited the 'sylvan charm' of a quartet of horns in the overture to *Der Freischütz*, the music for the appearance of the ghost in *Euryanthe* and the muted violins in the overture to *Oberon*. He was unstinting in his criticism of the 'orchestre-cocktail' of Wagner and Richard Strauss. From the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* onwards, he treated the orchestra according to his own sound ideals, creating a very personal mixture from its traditional components: violins commonly in eight, ten or even twelve parts, generous use of harps, woodwind unmixed and seldom used to reinforce other parts, brass veiled and often muted, with very restrained use of trumpets and trombones. His percussion writing is usually discreet, except in *La mer* and, above all, in *Ibéria*. Textbooks of instrumentation frequently cite the polyphonic subtlety of the divided cellos in the first movement of *La mer* which create such an original sonority. When Debussy doubles parts it is in order to create a particular colouring: the mixture of horns and low violins at the end of the *Prélude*, english horn and two cellos in *La mer*, piccolo and harp in *Jeux*. He uses the low notes of the flute to express anguish or melancholy, and likes to give solos to harps and percussion; for Debussy the bassoon (which often accompanies Golaud in *Pelléas*) tends to become a vehicle for dramatic expression, and he creates a notably plaintive effect with his use of the oboe d'amore in *Gigues*. His pedal indications for the piano are notable for their infrequency and apparent imprecision, and his interest in resonances is reflected in his own salon piano, a Blüthner boudoir grand with the Aliquot system of a supplementary string to each note in the upper register which resonates sympathetically without being struck. From his youth, Debussy tended to treat the singing voice like an instrument, integrating it into the orchestra, as in *Printemps* where, he wrote, 'the choral part is wordless and treated, rather, as a section of the orchestra', and then in 'Sirènes', the third of the orchestral *Nocturnes*, in which 16 women's voices vocalize, while trying to blend into the orchestra. His experiments with sonorities were also directed towards individualization of timbres. Working in 1894 on an early version of the three *Nocturnes* for violin and orchestra (now lost), he conceived of one part consisting of strings, another of flutes, four horns, three trumpets and two harps, and a third 'which reunites these two combinations'; and he compared this kind of construction to 'various relationships which a single colour can produce' in painting.

He went so far as to imagine a complete revolution in the seating arrangement of the orchestra in order to realize his dream of an ideal sound, with the strings forming a circle round the other instruments, the woodwinds dispersed, the bassoons among the cellos, and the clarinets and oboes among the violins 'so that their intervention becomes something other than the dropping of a parcel' (from a conversation with Victor Segalen). Perhaps no other composer made such telling use of silence as a means of expression: 'the empty bars in *Pelléas* bear witness to my love for this type of emotion', he wrote, and he was lavish with directions to the interpreter on how to achieve it ('losing itself', 'scarcely', 'almost nothing').

For Debussy, timbre was not merely a coat to be added to the musical texture, but became an essential element of his musical language, and *La mer* and the orchestral *Images* show how he treated strings, wind and percussion sometimes almost interchangeably. In its purest state, his exploitation of timbre can be found in the *Etudes* for piano, one of his greatest late works. Sheltering behind a pedagogic exterior, these 12 pieces explore abstract intervals, or – in the last five – the sonorities and timbres peculiar to the piano. Debussy's satisfaction at having conceived something hitherto 'unheard of' also embraced the calligraphy of these complex pieces: 'the most meticulous of Japanese prints is child's play beside the penmanship of some of these pages'.

Debussy, Claude

12. Reception and influence.

Between the Prix de Rome and the first performance of *Pelléas*, no work by Debussy had a success in Paris sufficient to attract critical attention. The performances at the Sociéte Nationale of the String Quartet (in 1893) and the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (in 1894) passed almost unnoticed outside a small circle of friends, and the *Nocturnes* caused scarcely any more stir in 1900 and 1901. It was *Pelléas* which propelled the composer to the forefront, and drew his earlier works in its wake. By the end of 1902, the *Prélude* had been given in Marseilles, for example, and two *Nocturnes* ('Nuages' and 'Fêtes') in Pau; the following year the same two *Nocturnes* were played in Bordeaux (where they received a hostile reception from the audience); Lyons held a virtual Debussy festival, with two concerts of *mélodies* and piano pieces before a select audience, and this was also the first city outside Paris where *Pelléas* was presented (in 1908, to half-empty houses). The year 1905 saw an upsurge in the diffusion of his work – it even infiltrated the Paris Conservatoire. People began to speak of 'debussysme' and to denounce his followers (Florent Schmitt, Grovlez, Séverac); a deepening gulf formed between his adherents (Marnold, Laloy and soon Vuillermoz) and his detractors (including Pierre Lalo, who had championed *Pelléas* but rejected *La mer*).

Outside France, in the majority of countries where the Austro-German influence (not Wagner alone) was predominant, several of his works were heard before *Pelléas*: the *Prélude* was performed in Boston in 1902, in Berlin in 1903, and in London, Pavlovsk and Constantinople in 1904; the first two *Nocturnes* in Berlin and Boston in 1904, Oslo in 1906, Milan in 1907. Certain conductors played a crucial role in these initiatives, such as Busoni in Berlin and Toscanini in Italy. But, as in France, it was the stagings of *Pelléas* which first made the composer famous. They were by no means always triumphs: after an initial success in Brussels in 1907, the opera was received relatively favourably in Frankfurt, much less so in Munich and Berlin, where the public was uncomprehending; reception was muted in New York and Milan in 1908, a poor reward for Toscanini's efforts; in the following year, after a fiasco in Rome, *Pelléas* was received in London with something approaching enthusiasm.

It is quite surprising to see that in Germany the *Prélude* was performed some 40 times between 1903 and 1914, and that in 1904 one critic, incredibly, described Pfitzner as 'Germany's Debussy'. Strauss conducted the *Nocturnes* in Berlin in 1912, but remained hostile to the aesthetic of *Pelléas*. Many German musicians regarded the music of Bruneau and Charpentier as more typically French than Debussy's. Nevertheless, he influenced certain German and Austrian composers, such as Reger (op.125) and Schreker. Among Viennese composers, Schoenberg's knowledge of Debussy's music appears to date only from 1907 and coincides with his abandonment of tonality. Among Schoenberg's pupils, Berg was the one to rate the French composer most highly. More works by Debussy were featured in the programmes of the Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen between 1918 and 1921 than by any other composer except Reger.

The English public's access to Debussy was smoothed by his symbolist and pre-Raphaelite associations. His own

anglophilia led him to visit England seven times up to 1914, more often than any other country. Although the *Prélude* was heard in 1904 and the Quartet in 1907, it was in 1908 that his reputation was established in London: the very first monographs about him were published there in that year (Daly and Liebich), and the critic Arthur Symons called him 'the Mallarmé of music'. A performance of *La mer* led many reviewers to attach the epithet 'atmospheric' to his music, while most continental Europeans preferred 'Impressionist'. Before long his influence could be discerned in the work of such composers as Bridge, Ireland, Goossens, Holst and Cyril Scott, who was sometimes called 'the English Debussy'. The enthusiasm seemed to be confirmed in 1916 when Debussy's Cello Sonata was given its world première in London on 4 March 1916.

Italy's reception of Debussy begins in Turin in 1906 with Toscanini's performances of the *Prélude* and 'Nuages', which he then took to Trieste and Venice; he gave the two *Nocturnes* in Milan in the following year. In general, the critics were struck by the harmonic language and judged Debussy to be an innovator of great refinement, but the public were alienated by a melodic sense they found disconcerting. From 1909 onwards it was in Rome that his works, notably *La mer*, were heard most often, thanks principally to the Augusteo orchestra conducted by Bernardino Molinari. As for Puccini, though he admired the French composer's harmonic language, it is perhaps not surprising that he thought *Pelléas* had as much relief as a Franciscan's habit. The overall verdict was that Debussy was a better painter than musician, that he sacrificed melody to harmonic experiment, and that his art was some sort of isolated exception. Casella added that Impressionism would not work in Italy.

In the United States, New York and above all Boston made Debussy's acquaintance quite early: the *Prélude* in 1902, *Nocturnes* in 1904, and *La mer* in 1907, while Mahler conducted *Ibéria* and *Rondes de printemps* in 1909. Several players (George Copeland, Harold Bauer, Heinrich Gebhard) introduced his piano works, mainly in Boston from 1904 onwards, and Walter Rummel gave the world première of *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest* at Stockbridge in 1910. Some composers, such as Charles Griffes, the Alsace-born Charles Loeffler and Aaron Copland, reveal his influence.

Many of Debussy's works, including *Nocturnes* and *La mer*, had already been heard in Russia when the composer visited Moscow and St Petersburg in 1913, at the invitation of Koussevitzky. The critics as a whole were not very receptive and judged his works to be monotonous and lacking in form, an opinion shared by composers of the Cui and Rimsky-Korsakov generation. Almost alone, Myaskovsky deemed Debussy an 'incomparable poet', while two former students of Rimsky-Korsakov held almost diametrically opposite views of the French composer's music, Prokofiev finding it rather bloodless, and Stravinsky (associated with Diaghilev since 1909) affirming his total admiration. When *Pelléas* was performed in St Petersburg in 1915 (cut and in a bad translation) the critic Karatïgin praised its 'profound inner truth'.

On his visit to Hungary in 1910, Debussy was surprised to discover that his works were already well known in Budapest (notably *La mer*, performed there in 1909), 'better known than in Paris', he told a journalist. Bartók and Kodály had discovered his music at the latest by 1907, the year in which the latter wrote his *Méditation sur un motif de Claude Debussy*. Bartók was to dedicate the seventh of his *Improvisations* op.20 to Debussy, and described him as 'the greatest composer of our time'. As much as by his emancipation from the hegemony of German music, both were struck by his pentatonicism, in which they found analogies to Hungarian folk music.

Johan Halvorsen conducted the *Prélude* and two *Nocturnes* in Oslo in 1906 at a concert where Grieg was the first to applaud; in Tokyo in 1909, the concert's first item (the Sarabande from *Pour le piano*) was preceded by appreciations from two Japanese writers (A. Naïto and K. Nagaï) who had been to France and gave a very poetic description of their impressions, emphasizing the beauty of the colours, while a third (T. Shimazaki) found affinities in Debussy's music to the *shamisen* and Japanese music. In Rio de Janeiro, the *Prélude* was conducted by Nepomuceno at the National Exhibition in 1908.

The *Prélude à l'après-midi* was not heard in Tokyo until 1921, but *Pelléas* was performed, for example, in Zagreb in 1923 and in Copenhagen in 1925. In France itself, six weeks before Debussy's death, Jean Cocteau published *Le coq et l'arlequin*, airily accusing him of having fallen into 'the Russian trap' and proclaiming a new aesthetic. Three months later, the Groupe des Six gave their first concert at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier. If Les Six did not wholeheartedly follow their ideologue in his critique of Impressionist 'woolliness' ('flou'), they broadly shared his devotion to Satie, who wanted to put it behind him. Somewhat in spite of themselves, they were implicated in the relative purgatory in which Debussy's music was confined after the Great War. However, hearing *Pelléas* was the experience that made composers such as Maurice Delage and Roland-Manuel recognize their vocations and led to the constitution of Les Apaches, the informal group which included Ravel. Certainly, Debussy did not disappear from concert programmes in France between the world wars, but the most advanced aspect of his musical language was clouded by the nodish avant-gardism of Les Six. To some extent, the French movement had been anticipated in Italy: from 1913 onwards, the futurists, led by Pratella, had manifested their hostility towards 'gracefulness' in music and the 'Impressionism' of Debussy.

At the Paris Conservatoire, Messiaen was responsible for introducing Debussy's music to a new generation of French postwar composers. In an article of 1958, his pupil Pierre Boulez rejected an increasingly pejorative notion of Impressionism, minimized the importance of *Pelléas* and insisted on the modernity of *La mer* and above all of *Jeux*, with its dispersal of timbre throughout the orchestra and its conception of 'irreversible time'. With Cézanne and Mallarmé, Debussy was one of the three great pillars of French modernism.

Debussy, Claude

WORKS

Edition: *Oeuvres completès*, ed. F. Lesure (Paris, 1985–)Catalogue: F. Lesure: *Catalogue de l'oeuvre de Claude Debussy* (Geneva, 1977); errata by Y. Lado-Bordowsky, *Cahiers Debussy*, no.14 (1990)

operas

Title	Acts: libretto	Composed
Rodrigue et Chimène	3; C. Mendes, after G. de Castro	vocal score of Acts 1 (in part), 2 and 3, 1890–93
Firs/performance : Lyons, Opéra, 14 May 1993 (reconstruction, R. Langham Smith, orchd E. Denisov)		
Publication : short score, ed. R. Langham Smith (in preparation)		
Pelléas et Melisande	5; M. Maeterlinck, abridged Debussy	1893–5, 1898, 1900–02
Firs/performance : Paris, Opéra-Comique, 30 April 1902		
Publication : vocal score (1902, rev. 1907), full score (1904, rev. 1907, 1964)		
Remarks : sketches facs. (Geneva, 1977)		
Le diable dans le beffroi	2 tableaux; Debussy after E.A. Poe	1902–?12
Remarks : inc.; sketches for scenario and music in Lockspeiser: *Debussy et Edgar Poe* (1962)		
La chute de la maison Usher	2 scenes; Debussy after Poe	1908–17
Firs/performance : New Haven, 25 Feb 1977		
Publication : vocal score, ed. J. Allende-Blin (1979)		
Remarks : inc., orig. planned as 3 scenes; complete text and vocal score of scene i and part of scene ii (Usher's monologue) in Lockspeiser: *Debussy and Edgar Poe* (1962)		
Fêtes galantes (orig title, Crimen amoris)	opéra-ballet, 3 tableaux: C. Morice and L. Laloy after P. Verlaine	1913–15
Remarks : libretto and sketches for scene i in Orledge: *Debussy and the Theatre* (1982)		

ballets

Title	Description; scenario	Composed	First performance	Publication	Remarks
Khamma	légende dansée; W.L. Courtney, M. Allan	1910–12	Paris, Opéra-Comique, 26 March 1947	pf score (1916)	beginning orchd Debussy, rest Koechlin under Debussy's supervision
Jeux	poème dansé; V. Nizhinsky	1912–13	Paris, Champs-Elysées, 15	pf score (1912), full score	

La boîte à joujoux	ballet pour enfants; A. Hellé	1913	May 1913 Paris, Lyrique, 10 Dec 1919	(1914) pf score (1913), full score (1920)	beginning orchd Debussy, rest Caplet from Debussy sketches
No-ja-li (Le palais du silence)	ballet; G. de Feure	1913–14			sketches for prelude and scene i in Orledge: *Debussy and the Theatre* (1982)

incidental music

Berceuse for La tragédie de la mort (R. Peter), 1v, 1899; unpubd
Le roi Lear (W. Shakespeare) 1904–5, inc., 7 sections sketched, 2 completed and orchd Roger-Ducasse (1926): Fanfare d'ouverture, Le sommeil de Lear
Le martyre de St Sébastien (mystère, 5, G. D'Annunzio), 1910–11, orchd Debussy and Caplet; Châtelet, 22 May 1911; vocal score (1911), full score (1911); La cour de lys, La chambre magique, Le concile des faux dieux, Le laurier blessé, Le paradis
Piece for Psyché (Flûte de Pan) (G. Mourey), fl, 1913; pubd as Syrinx (1927)

other dramatic works

early choral works from dramatic sources

Hélène (Leconte de Lisle), S, chorus, orch, frag., 1881, unpubd
Hymnis (T. de Banville), scenes i, ii (in part) and vii, 1882; 'Il dort encore' (scene i) (1984)
Diane au bois (Banville), overture (pf duet), vocal score of end of Act 2 scene iii and scene iv, 1883–5; unpubd

music to accompany readings of poems

Chansons de Bilitis (Louÿs), 2 fl, 2 hp, cel, 1900–01, lost cel part reconstructed Boulez (1954) and Hoérée (1971); recomposed as 6 épigraphes antiques, pf 4 hands, 1914 (1915)

projects

Salammbô (op, Debussy, after G. Flaubert), 1886
L'embarquement pour ailleurs (sym. commentary, G. Mourey), 1890–91
Les noces de Sathan (incid music, J. Bois), 1892
Oedipe à Colonne (op, P. Louÿs and A.F. Hérold), 1894
La grande bretèche (op, Debussy, after H. de Balzac), 1895
Cendrelune (conte lyrique, Louÿs), 1895–8; text extant
Daphnis et Chloé (ballet, Louÿs, after Longus), 1895–7
Les uns et les autres (op, P. Verlaine), 1896
Aphrodite (ballet, Louÿs), 1896–7
Le chevalier d'or (pantomime, Mme J.-L. Forain), 1897
Orphée (ballet, P. Valéry), *c*1900
Le voyage de Pausole (sym. suite, Louÿs), 1901
Comme il vous plaira (op, P.J. Toulet, after W. Shakespeare), 1902–4
Le pèlerin d'amour (incid music, V.-E. Michelet), 1902–3
Dionysos (tragédie lyrique, J. Gasquet), 1904
L'histoire de Tristan (op, Mourey, after J. Bédier), 1907–9
Orphée-roi (op, V. Segalen and Debussy), 1907–9
Siddartha (op, Segalen), 1907–10
L'Orestie (op, Laloy, after Aeschylus), 1909
Masques et bergamasques (ballet, Debussy), 1909–10, scenario (1910)
La dame à la faulx (incid music, Saint-Pol-Roux), 1911
Crimen amoris (poème chanté et dansé, L. Laloy and C. Morice, after Verlaine), 1914, later Fêtes galantes [see operas]

orchestral

Symphony, b, 1880–81; Allegro, pf 4 hands (1933), not orchd
Intermezzo, vc, orch, 1882 (1944) [after poem by H. Heine]; also arr. pf 4 hands
Le triomphe de Bacchus, suite after T. de Banville, 1882; Allegro arr. pf 4 hands (1928), orchd Gaillard (1928)
Première suite, 1883–4: Fête, Ballet, Rêve, Bacchanale; also arr. pf; unpubd
Printemps, sym. suite, female chorus, orch, 1887, orig. score lost; arr. pf 4 hands (1904); reorchd from pf version by Busser under Debussy's supervision, 1912 (1913)

Fantaisie, pf, orch, 1889–96; full score (1920, rev. edn, 1968)
Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune, 1891–4 [after poem by S. Mallarmé]; full score (1895), arr. 2 pf (1895)
Nocturnes, 1897–9: Nuages, Fêtes, Sirènes; full score (1900–01, rev. edn, 1930)
Rapsodie, a sax, orch, 1901–8, orch realized Roger-Ducasse, 1919; red. sax, pf by

Roger-Ducasse, 1919
La mer, 3 sym. sketches, 1903–5: De l'aube à midi sur la mer, Jeux de vagues, Dialogue du vent et de la mer; full score (1905, rev. edn, 1910), arr. pf 4 hands (1905)
Deux danses, chromatic hp, str, 1904: Danse sacrée, Danse profane; full score (1904), arr. 2 pf (1904)
Images, 1905–12: Gigues, 1909–12, full score (1913); Ibéria, 1905–8, full score (1910); Rondes de printemps, 1905–9, full score (1910)

orchestrations

Marche écossaise sur un thème populaire, 1893–6, completed 1908 (1911) [after pf work]
Deux gymnopédies, 1896 (1898) [nos.1 and 3 of Satie: Trois gymnopédies]
Rapsodie, a sax, orch, 1901–11 [after chbr work]; short score orchd Roger-Ducasse (1919)
Première rapsodie, cl, orch, 1911 [after chbr work]; full score (1911)
La plus que lente [after pf work]; full score (1912)
Berceuse héroïque, 1914 [after pf work]; full score (1915)

projects

Symphony, after E.A. Poe, 1890
Trois scènes au crépuscule, after H. de Régnier, 1892–3
Marche triomphale des drapeaux, 1893 [for Chat noir]
Trois nocturnes, vn, orch, 1894–6

vocal orchestral

Daniel (cant., E. Cécile), 3 solo vv, orch, scene i, part of scene ii, 1882; unpubd
Le printemps (Comte de Ségur), female chorus, orch, 1882; pubd as Salut printemps, chorus, pf, arr. Gaillard (1928); full score (1956)
Invocation (A. de Lamartine), male chorus, orch, 1883; vocal score with pf 4 hands (1928), full score (1957)
Le gladiateur (cant., E. Moreau), 3 solo vv, orch, 1883; unpubd
Le printemps (J. Barbier), chorus, orch, 1884; unpubd
L'enfant prodigue (scène lyrique, E. Guinand), 1884; vocal score (1884); rev. 1907–8, full score (1908); Prélude, Cortège et air de danse arr. pf 4 hands (1884)
Zuleima (ode sym., G. Boyer, after Heine), chorus and orch, 1885; lost
La damoiselle élue (poème lyrique, D.G. Rossetti, trans. G. Sarrazin), S, female chorus, orch, 1887–8, reorchd, 1902, vocal score (1892), full score (1902); Prélude arr. pf
La saulaie (Rossetti, trans. P. Louÿs), 1v, orch, 1896–1900, facs. in D. Herlin, *Cahiers Debussy*, no.20 (1996)
Ode à la France (L. Laloy), S, chorus, orch, sketched 1916–17; orchd Gaillard (1928)

orchestrations

Le jet d'eau, 1v, orch, 1907 [after song]; full score (1907)
Trois ballades de Villon, 1v, orch, 1910 [after songs]; full score (1911)

choral

Chanson des brises, S, 3 female vv, sketch, 1882
Trois chansons de Charles d'Orléans: Dieu! qu'il la fait bon regarder!, 1898; Quand j'ai ouy le tabourin, 1908; Yver, vous n'estes qu'un villain, 1898 (1908)

Noël pour célébrer Pierre Louÿs, pour toutes les voix y compris celle du peuple (Debussy), 1903; unpubd

chamber

Premier trio, G, pf trio, 1880 (1986)
Nocturne et scherzo, vc, pf, 1882
Premier quatuor, op.10, g, str qt, 1893 (1894)
Première rapsodie, cl, pf, 1909–10 (1910)
Morceau à déchiffrer pour le concours de clarinette de 1910; pubd as Petite pièce, cl, pf (1910)
Syrinx, fl, 1913 (1927) [see incidental music]
Sonata, vc, pf, 1915 (1915)
Sonata, fl, va, hp, 1915 (1916)
Sonata, vn, pf, 1916–17 (1917)

projects

String Quartet no.2, 1894
Violin Sonata, 1894
Sonata, ob, hn, hpd, 1915
Sonata, cl, bn, tpt, pf, 1915
Sonata, pf, ens, 1915

songs

for solo voice and piano unless otherwise stated

Ballade à la lune (A. de Musset), 1879
Madrid, princesse des Espagnes (A. de Musset), end 1879
Nuit d'étoiles (T. de Banville), early 1880 (1882)
Rêverie (Banville), 1880 (1984)
Caprice (Banville), end 1880 (1966)
Aimons nous et dormons (Banville), end 1880 (1933)
Les baisers (Banville), early 1881
Les papillons (T. Gautier), 1881
Rondel chinois, 1881
Tragédie (L. Valade, after H. Heine), 1881
Jane (Leconte de Lisle), 1881 (1966)
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Rondeau (Musset), 1881 (1932)
Triolet à Philis [‘Zéphir’] (Banville), 1881 (1932)
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Eglogue (Leconte de Lisle), S, T, pf, 1881
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Les roses (Banville), 1882 (1984)
Sérénade (Banville), 1882 (1984)
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Clair de lune (Verlaine), 1st version, 1882 (1926)
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Mandoline (Verlaine), 1882 (1890)
Pantomime (Verlaine), 1883 (1926)
Coquetterie posthume (Gautier), 1883 (1983)
Chanson espagnole (Musset), 2 equal vv, pf, 1883 (1982)
Romance: Silence ineffable (P. Bourget), 1883 (1983)
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Apparition (S. Mallarmé), 1884 (1926)
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Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire (1890): Le balcon, 1888; Harmonie du soir, 1889; Le jet d'eau, 1889; Recueillement, 1889; La mort des amants, 1887
La belle au bois dormant (E.-V. Hyspa), 1890 (1903)
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Trois mélodies (Verlaine), 1891 (1901): La mer est plus belle, Le son du cor, L'échelonnement des haies
Fêtes galantes (Verlaine), set 1, 1891 (1903): En sourdine [2nd version], Fantoches [2nd version], Clair de lune [2nd version]
Les angélus (G. Le Roy), 1892 (1893)
Proses lyriques (Debussy) (1895): De rêve, 1892; De grève, 1892; De fleurs, 1893; De soir, 1893
Chansons de Bilitis (Louÿs), 1897–8 (1899): La flûte de Pan, La chevelure [pubd separately, 1897], Le tombeau des naïades
Nuits blanches (Debussy), 1898 [Proses lyriques, set 2]: Nuit sans fin; Lorsqu'elle est entrée
Dans le jardin (P. Gravollet), 1903 (1905)
Trois chansons de France, 1904 (1904): Rondel I, Le temps a laissié son manteau (C. d'Orléans), La grotte (T. Lhermite), Rondel II, Pour ce que Plaisance est morte (d'Orléans)
Fêtes galantes (Verlaine), set 2, 1904 (1904): Les ingénus, Le faune, Colloque sentimental
Le promenoir des deux amants (Lhermite), 1904–10 (1910): La grotte, 1904 [no.2 of Trois chansons de France]; Crois mon conseil, chère Climène, 1910; Je tremble en voyant ton visage, 1910
Trois ballades de Villon, 1910 (1910): Ballade de Villon à s'amye, Ballade que

Villon fait à la requeste de sa mère, Ballade des femmes de Paris
Trois poèmes de Mallarmé, 1913 (1913): Soupir, Placet futile, Eventail
Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maison (Debussy), 1915 (1916), arr. children's chorus 2vv, pf (1916)

piano

solo

Danse bohémienne, 1880 (1932)
Deux arabesques, *c*1890 (1891)

Mazurka, *c*1890 (1903)
Ballade slave, *c*1890 (1891), repubd as Ballade (1903)
Rêverie, *c*1890 (1891)
Suite bergamasque, *c*1890, rev. 1905 (1905): Prélude, Menuet, Clair de lune, Passepied
Tarentelle styrienne, *c*1890 (1891), repubd as Danse (1903)
Valse romantique, *c*1890 (1890)
Nocturne, 1892 (1892)
Images, 3 pieces, 1894 (1978) [no.2 (1896) differs only in detail from Sarabande of Pour le piano]
Valse, 1894, lost
Pour le piano, 1894–1901 (1901): Prélude, Sarabande, Toccata
Images, series 1, 1901–5 (1905): Reflets dans l'eau, Hommage à Rameau, Mouvement
Estampes, 1903 (1903): Pagodes, La soirée dans Grenade, Jardins sous la pluie
D'un cahier d'esquisses, 1904 (1904)
L'isle joyeuse, 1903–4 (1904)
Masques, 1903–4 (1904)
Pièce pour piano, 1904 (1905) [based on sketch from Le diable dans le beffroi]
Sérénade à la poupée, 1906 (1908), incorporated in Children's Corner
Children's Corner, 1906–8 (1908): Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum, Jimbo's [Jumbo's] Lullaby, Serenade for the Doll, The Snow is Dancing, The Little Shepherd, Golliwogg's Cake-Walk; orchd A. Caplet, 1910 (1911)
Images, series 2, 1907 (1908): Cloches à travers les feuilles, Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut, Poissons d'or
Hommage à Haydn, 1909 (1910)
The Little Nigar, 1909 (1909)
Préludes, bk 1 (1910): Danseuses de Delphes, 1909; Voiles, 1909; Le vent dans la plaine, 1909; ‘Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir’, 1910; Les collines d'Anacapri, 1909; Des pas sur la neige, 1909; Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest; La fille aux cheveux de lin, 1910; La sérénade interrompue; La cathédrale engloutie; La danse de Puck, 1910; Minstrels, 1910
La plus que lente, 1910 (1910)
Préludes, bk 2, 1911–13 (1913); Brouillards, Feuilles mortes, La puerta del vino, ‘Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses’, Bruyères, General Lavine – eccentric, La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune, Ondine, Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C., Canope, Les tierces alternées, Feux d'artifice
Berceuse héroïque, 1914 (1915)
Elégie, 1915 (1916)
Etudes, 1915 (1916): bk 1: Pour le cinq doigts, Pour les tierces, Pour les quartes, Pour les sixtes, Pour les octaves, Pour les huit doigts; bk 2: Pour les degrés chromatiques, Pour les agréments, Pour les notes répétées, Pour les sonorités opposées, Pour les arpèges composés, Pour les accords; facs. ed. R. Howat (1989); 1st version of Pour les arpèges composés (facs., realized R. Howat as Etude retrouvée, 1980)
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four hands

Andante, 1881; unpubd
Ouverture ‘Diane’, 1881
Divertissement, 1884
Petite suite, 1886–9 (1889): En bateau, Cortège, Menuet, Ballet; orchd H. Busser, 1907 (1907)
Marche écossaise sur un thème populaire (Marche des anciens comtes de Ross), 1890 (1891)

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two pianos

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