ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: EXTRA-MUSICAL ELEMENTS IN SELECTED PIANO WORKS, 1874-1917

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As a piano performer, I have experienced much pleasure in playing several Debussy preludes. During the performance, my imagination expanded in a pictorial way, creating special experiences. I felt as if I were on a canvas or portraying the imaginary scenes. I found myself attracted to piano pieces that reflect pictorial images or scenes, especially in works by Debussy, Ravel, Mussorgsky, and Rachmaninoff written during a certain period of time, 1874-1917. I also wanted to add this music to my repertoire, so I could perform it together as one category.

It is interesting to me that musicians, writers and artists became very close and often influenced each other, especially during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Although their professions were different, they were able to understand and motivate each other by sharing their arts and thoughts. This dissertation includes the recordings of selected piano works by these four composers, all inspired by extra-musical elements. These recordings are archived in the Mitchelle Smith Performing Arts Library of the University of Maryland at College Park.

EXTRA-MUSICAL ELEMENTS IN SELECTED PIANO WORKS, 1874-1917

by

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Achille-Claude Debussy

According to Robert Schmitz, Debussy was born in St. Germaine-en-Laye on August 22, 1862 and died on March 25, 1918. Rollo Myers adds that neither of Debussy's parents were acquainted with music. Schmitz mentions that *Madame Mauté*, "the mother-in-law of the poet *Verlaine*"[1] and "a pupil of Chopin, took him in hand and in 1873 he was admitted to Lavignac's *solfège* class at the Conservatory, there to win the medal for *solfège* and to follow up in Marmontel's piano class."[2] Debussy studied composition with Albert Lavignac, Ernest Guiraud, and later with César Franck. Myers mentions that Debussy admired the music of Russian composers, Borodin and Tchaikovsky, at the age of eighteen.

The poems of Stéphane Mallarmé, a Symbolist poet, inspired Debussy to write *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un Faune* . Later, Debussy became involved in the *Librairie de 'Art Independent,* a literary circle in Paris. Debussy's piano compositions are often accompanied by evocative words, lines, or epigraphs. The titles of his preludes always appear at the end of each composition, as with paintings. This has led to suggestions that they may not be intended to guide the imagination. Debussy became exposed to oriental music at Paris International Exhibition (1889) and was fascinated by Javanese *gamelang*. Edward Lockspeiser said,

> Many fruitful hours for Debussy were spent in the Javanese kampong of the Dutch section listening to the percussive rhythmic complexities of the gamelan with its inexhaustible combinations of ethereal, flashing timbres, while with the amazing Bedayas the music came visually alive. Interpreting some myth or legend, they turned themselves into nymphs, mermaids, fairies and sorceresses. Waving like the ears of corn in a field, bending like reeds

[1] Rollo Myers, *Claude Debussy: The Story of his Life and Work* (Great Britain: Boosey and Hawkes, 1972), 5.

[2] Robert Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*, ed. Merle Armitage (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce publishers, 1950), 3.

or fluttering like doves, or now rigid and hieratic, they formed a procession of idols or, like intangible phantoms, slipped away on the current of an imaginary wave. [3]

Debussy composed many piano pieces related to Impressionism and Symbolism. Schmitz remarks that "True, impressionism has been from time to time reassessed and redefined, for instance by Oscar Thompson in 1937, as follows: 'In literature, in painting, in music, the aim of these kindred artists was to suggest rather than to depict; to mirror not the object but the emotional reaction to the object; to interpret a fugitive impression rather than to seize upon and fix the permanent reality.'"[4] According to Paul Roberts, Monet admired the piano music of Debussy. Jean-Michel Nectoux claimed, "Debussy was particularly fond of the works of Thaulow (1847-1906), an artist whose position could be compared to that of Lerolle himself in that it bordered the movements of both impressionism and Symbolism."[5]

Debussy wrote 24 preludes, divided into two volumes, and also 12 etudes for the piano. Each prelude has a descriptive title at the end, like the titles of the paintings. According to Louis Laloy, Debussy dedicated the etudes "to the memory of Frédéric Chopin".[6] According to Schmitz, "These Etudes, the last works for piano solo written by Debussy, are a gift of his life-blood, and were to him a sublimation and escape from intense physical and mental sufferings."[7] I chose five preludes: *Les Collines d'Anacapri, La Cathédrale engloutie, Minstrels, Bruyères,* and *Feux d'artifice,* and two etudes, *Pour les degrés chromatiques* and *Pour les arpèges composées.*

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[3] Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd, 1962), 113.

[4] Robert Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*, ed. Merle Armitage (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce publishers, 1950), 13.

[5] Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Debussy Studies*, ed. Richard Langham Smith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 115.

[6] Louis Laloy, *Louis Laloy (1874-1944) on Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky*, trans. Deborah Priest (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999), 229.

[7] Robert Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*, ed. Merle Armitage (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce publishers, 1950), 191.

Victor Lederer said, "…*Les Collines d'Anacapri* (The Hills of Anacapri), …Ana capri is the name of one of the two little towns on Capri, the exquisite island in the Bay of Naples that has since antiquity been a favorite resort of all with the good sense and means to get there."[8] Schmitz describes the beauty of Anacapri as "A garden of song, pastel houses, vivid flowers, pungent scents, blatant sun, sky, sea, and hills, it is famous throughout the world for its beauty and joyous spirit."[9] This exquisite prelude opens with questions, an imitation of quiet bell sounds, and leading to a tarantella. Schmitz continues: "A joy so well expressed in the Neapolitan songs and in their national dance, the tarantella, which was adopted by the inhabitants of Napoli."[10]

La Cathedrale engloutie (The Submerged Cathedral) has a legendary story behind it. Alfred Cortot briefly explains the story,

> A Breton legend tells that in clear mornings when the sea is transparent, the Cathedral of Ys, which lies slumbering and accursed under the waves, emerges sometimes slowly from the depth of the ocean and of the ages. The bells ring and the chanting of priests is heard. Then the vision disappears again under the indolent ocean.[11]

The calm opening chord progression portrays the bells in a somber way. The mingling sounds of the sustained chords represent the resonance of the bells. Schmitz notes "… for here a legend of the fifth or sixth century, in association with organum of the ninth or tenth century, in association with church arches, evolved from Roman to Gothic forms over some six centuries, and bells calling the congregation to worship, yet

[8] Victor Lederer, *Debussy: The Quiet Revolutionary* (New York: Amadeus Press, 2007), 95.

[9] Robert Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*, ed. Merle Armitage (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce publishers, 1950), 142.

[10] Robert Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*, ed. Merle Armitage (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce publishers, 1950), 142.

[11] Alfred Cortot, *The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, trans. Violet Edgell (London: J. & W. Chester Ltd.),18.

produces a closely integrated mood to which each element has contributed immeasurably, by its strong psychological association."[12]

Minstrels is characteristically full of humor. It makes me picture a clown in a circus. It is a fun piece to play! Thompson says, "Debussy made liberal use of what have been styled 'gliding chords,' in which there is an exact repetition of a given chord formation on different fundamental tones, as in certain measures of *Jardins sous la pluie*, *Minstrels*, and *Reflets dans l'eau*."[13]

Cortot describes *Bruyères* (Heather, but also the name of a town in Eastern France) as "the pastoral and familiar poetry of a thicket where the penetrating perfume of the earth joins the dull splendour of purple patches."[14] Schmitz remarks, "One is suddenly reminded of the Paris exhibits of the years 1900 to 1914, with the annual reappearance of the works of a painter who specialized in hilly landscapes at sunset, with blond wheat in the foreground, the lavender heather above it, and the reddish-purple sun setting in a seashore horizon."[15]

Feux d'artifice (Fireworks) opens with rapid ostinato, "alternating white notes and black notes, … The fingers set up a mesmerizing buzzing, creating sounds … Indeed, with the title in mind, we see this passage for both the sound and the electrifying expectancy created by a firework about to ignite."[16] Cortot adds, "'Feux d'artifice' expresses more than the sound and visual excitement of fireworks."[17]

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[12] Robert Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*, ed. Merle Armitage (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce publishers, 1950), 155-6.

[13] Oscar Thompson, Debussy: Man and Artist (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967), 243.

[14] Alfred Cortot, *The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, trans. Violet Edgell (London: J. & W. Chester Ltd.), 19.

[15] Robert Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*, ed. Merle Armitage (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce publishers, 1950), 171.

[16] Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1996), 184.

[17] Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1996), 185.

According to Oscar Thompson, "In writing of the Etudes to Durand, Debussy said: 'You break your left hand in them, in gymnastics almost Swedish. They all conceal a rigorous technique beneath flowers of harmony where flies are not caught with vinegar!' About the one in sixths he observes: 'The continual use of sixths reminds me of pretentious young ladies sitting in a drawing room doing slovenly work on tapestry, while they envy the scandalous laughter of the mad ninths!'"[18] It is interesting how Debussy compares certain intervals to some imaginary scene.

Pour les degrés chromatiques is challenging technically for producing even sonorities throughout the piece and dealing with big contrasts of volume. However, Oscar Thompson notes that "Debussy resorted to chromaticism in the melodic line sparingly as compared to Wagner and certain others of the day but some of his most beautiful effects are achieved chromatically."[19]

Pour les arpèges composèes opens with beautiful resonating sound in the right hand and bell sounds in the left hand. It is difficult to produce a clear, light and fast sound and huge leaps in a brief time without disrupting the sublime atmosphere. Yet one can draw calm and charming scenes related to bells and nature in this piece.

Modeste Mussorgsky

Modeste Mussorgsky (1839-1881) is a well-known Russian composer, and was a member of the 'Mighty Handful'. His music was influenced and inspired by Russian history, literature, paintings, and folklore. Michael Russ mentions that "Schumann's translation of poetic fantasies and visual images into music was to have a particular

[18] Oscar Thompson, Debussy: Man and Artist (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967), 227-228.
[19] Oscar Thompson, Debussy: Man and Artist (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967), 242.

attraction for the Russians. Herke introduced Schumann's music to Mussorgsky, who was among the first of the Russians to appreciate it."[20]

Victor Seroff explains that "Tolstoy and Mussorgsky did not know each other, but both were undoubtedly influenced by the writings of Nikolai Dobrolyubov and Nikolai Chernyshevsky, two champions of artistic realism, as was almost the entire Russian intelligentsia."[21] According to Seroff, Mussorgsky was interested in "the idea of re-creating human speech in music that he had trained himself to hear spoken words as a musical phrase."[22] Russ remarks that "The scholarly Mussorgsky was out of the ordinary, spending much time studying philosophy, history and foreign languages: the latter being reflected in the variety of languages employed in Pictures."[23] Mussorgsky knew how to reflect his own language and his philosophy into music, so he could express emotions and share his thoughts.

According to Seroff, "Through Stassov he met a large number of writers, painters, poets, and sculptors, and he developed close friendships with Repin, Antakolsky, and Hartmann. … Victor Hartmann, four years older than Mussorgsky, an architect, water colorist, and designer."[24] Seroff also quotes Mussorgsky's and Stassov's comments about Hartmann: "Modest became very attached to Hartmann, 'whose small body was always in motion,' according to Stassov, 'who always strove to create, and on whom one could always count to invent something that had never occurred to anyone else

[20] Michael Russ, *Musorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 4.
[21] Victor Seroff, *Modeste Moussorgsky* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 119.
[22] Victor Seroff, *Modeste Moussorgsky* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 80.
[23] Michael Russ, *Musorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 1.
[24] Victor Seroff, *Modeste Moussorgsky* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 114-115.

before.'"[25] David Brown notes that Victor Hartmann had died on August in 1873. In February of 1874, an event in memory of Hartmann took place that displayed the late artist's works. Mussorgsky visited this exhibition and began composing a piano suite called *Pictures at an Exhibition* in honor of his dear friend.

This work is divided into 16 small sections. Each section is titled in a descriptive way, similar to the titles of paintings, such as "Dispute between Children at Play," "the Old Castle," "Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks," and "the Market."

According to Michael Russ, "*Pictures* is a truly Russian work in its directness of expression, its form arising from content and summing of parts rather than organic growth. There is rhythmic drive, excitement, colourfulness; these too are Russian characteristics, as is the use of harmony to support and give colour and weight to lines rather than to control functionally. Mussorgsky prefers to depict real life rather than the spiritual, romantic, sensuous or erotic."[26] Russ also analyzes the piece as follows:

> Even without a text, realistic depiction of character types is important in Pictures and may be achieved through manner of speech: the shouts of children and their playing rhymes in 'Tuileries', and the contrasting speech characteristics of the two Jews in 'Samuel Golden berg'---. In 'Limoges' we hear various shouts and calls. Placing particular character-type in particular places is very much part of realism—A number of other features of musical realism may be identified in Pictures. Truth of expression is emphasized over beauty in 'Catacombs', 'Gnomus' and to an extent 'Baba-Yaga'. Unbalanced or dissonant, ugly piano-writing is used to create particular effects, as in the lumbering of the ox-cart in 'Bydlo'. The depiction of motion in music is a feature of realism apparent in Musorgsky shambling round the exhibition, the awkward motion of the gnome, the lumbering cart in 'Bydlo', the fluttering chicks and Baba-Yaga's flight. Stylistic consistency is often compromised by realism.[27]

Russ also suggests that *Pictures at an Exhibition* was inspired by the folk music of Russia. There are many Russian folk music influences in the piece, such as "modal alterations, a narrow range, obsessively reiterated small diatonic collections,

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[25] Victor Seroff, *Modeste Moussorgsky* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 116.

[26] Michael Russ, *Musorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 7.

[27] Michael Russ, *Musorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 10-11.

heterophony, parallelism and the use of pedals."[28] Victor Seroff quotes Debussy as complimenting Mussorgsky's artistic talent:

> It is apparent from these dates Mussorgsky was born in 1839 and died in 1881 that to become a genius he had little time to lose. And indeed he lost none, and he will leave an indelible impression on the minds of those who love him or will come to love him. No one has ever appealed to the best in us in a deeper and more tender expression. He is unique and will remain so, for his art is free from artifice and arid formulas. Never was refined sensitivity interpreted by such simple means. It is like the art of a wild creature who discovers music in each of his emotions. … Sometimes, too, Mussorgsky produces the effect of shuddering, restless shadows, which close around us and fill the heart with anguish.[29]

Debussy's compliment toward Moussorgsky reflects the musical influences between Russia and France. It is interesting to note that Ravel orchestrated *Pictures of an Exhibition*.

The opening Promenade announces the opening of the exhibition in memory of Hartmann. This Promenade establishes a feature of Russian church music and folk music: it is divided into two corresponding parts, solo voice and chorus. The Promenade reappears throughout the piece in both identical and different styles, representing the viewer moving from one image to the next.

Gnomus changes the opening energetic mood into a frightening atmosphere. It reflects the movements of a monster in a fairy tale. David Brown notes as follows:

> What makes the unpredictable 'Gnomus' (no. 1) so unnerving is the sudden alternations of its three savagely differeing musics—violently convulsive, forcefully leaping and stumbling, menacingly creeping—each marked out from the others as much by stark contrasts of texture as of melodic character. Grotesques of this sort have had a significant history in Russian music ever since Glinka created the dwarf, Chernomor, in *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, though none is more brilliant than Musorgsky's 'fantastic, lame figure on crooked little legs' (Stasov).[30]

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[28] Michael Russ, *Musorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 50.

[29] Victor Seroff, *Modeste Moussorgsky* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 136-137.

[30] David Brown, *Musorgsky: His Life and Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 235.

Il vecchio castello begins *pianissimo* and introduces a beautiful melody over steady bass. This is the most lyrical piece in the set, establishing the mood of an ancient, deserted castle.

Tuileries reflects the quarrel of children after playing. According to Brown, "Stasov vouched for a group of children playing with their nurse in Hartmann's 'Tuileries Garden', and Rosa Newmarch suggested that Musorgsky may have conceived the drooping two-note figure that opens the piece and runs insistently through the first section as the children calling 'Nyanya!' ('Nanny!') like the child in *The Nursery*."[31] It is a charming piece, vividly depicting the antics of children.

Bydlo depicts a heavy loaded ox-cart. Playing this piece makes me exhausted emotionally. The repeated patterns in the bass describe the heavy cart while the right hand represents the exhausted driver of the cart.

Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks has a witty, humorous character. David Brown notes that "the cute scherzino 'Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks' (No. 5) seems composed against the background of the trio to Chernomor's March in Glinka's *Ruslan*."[32]

Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle describes 'two Jews: rich and poor'. The rich Jew is portrayed with loud and pompous sound at the beginning. In contrast, the poor Jew begging to the rich is depicted only medium loud with continuous rising and falling rapid notes. Brown mentions that " 'Samuel' Goldenburg und 'Schumÿle' is both a dual portrait and a dramatic incident. The characters are presented separately, the one insufferably overbearing, the other abjectly importuning. They confront each other, the former abruptly curtails the latter's supplications: a last cringing appeal, finally a

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[31] David Brown, *Musorgsky: His Life and Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 235-7.
[32] David Brown, *Musorgsky: His Life and Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 237.

peremptory dismissal. Such would seem to be the scenario of this vivid one-to-one scena."[33]

Limoges describes a crowd scene in a market filled with women quarreling. The fast tempo with repeated chords conveys the lively activity. *Sforzando* markings appear frequently and short slurs and staccato signs add to the bustling.

Catacombae creates an image of a tomb. Brown comments as follows:

> This first part of 'Catacombae' is the weirdest piece Musorgsky ever created, and in 'Con mortuis in lingua mortua' the tension eases with the stabilizing of harmonic order and movement. Hartmann's sketch had depicted the artist himself and a friend of or guide viewing a skull-stacked catacomb by lantern-light, and Musorgsky now imagines himself their companion. 'A Latin text would do well: the creative spirit of the dead Hartmann leads me to the skulls, apostrophizes them; slowly the skulls begin to glow', he wrote in the autograph's margin.[34]

Baba Yaga is about a flying witch that appeared in Russian fairy tales. Michael Russ describes *Baba Yaga* as follows:

> She lives deep in the woods in a hut whose hen's legs allow it to rotate to face each unfortunate newcomer. There she lures lost children to eat them, crushing their bones in the giant mortar in which she rides through the woods propelling herself with the pestle and covering her tracks with a broomstick.[35]

Brown notes that "Russian mythology visualized Baba-Yaga variously. …The chromatically descending tremolando of the central Andante mosso returns a chill to the music, … ."[36]

The Great Gate of Kiev opens with the majestic sound of bells with chordal progressions in rondo form. Russ remarks as follows:

> Musorgsky's piece matches the grandness of Hartmann's concept. 'Kiev' is a collage of hymn and bell sounds which moves to a mighty climax only fully attainable in the orchestra. The key is Eb, the pitch associated in *Boris* with the 'impending death of the tsar' (a deathly reference to this key already occurred towards the end of 'Catacombs'). The opening

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[33] David Brown, *Musorgsky: His Life and Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 238.
[34] David Brown, *Musorgsky: His Life and Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 239.
[35] Michael Russ, *Musorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 47.
[36] David Brown, *Musorgsky: His Life and Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 240.

processional melody must be played with power, but something should be left in reserve for the final pages. The first forty-six bars are remarkable for their completely unadorned chordal writing and lack of pianistic figuration. Musorgsky's method of construction is typically Russian. The opening processional tune is presented in three guises, first plainly, then adorned with pealing bells and finally it is given a climactic triplet rhythm. In between we get the stark statements of 'As you are baptized in Christ' (marked *senza espressione*) and one massive interlude of Russian bell sounds (bars 81-112) which incorporates the return of the opening 'Promenade' theme. The bell sounds form a pulsating, dissonant mass (…). Bell sounds are employed elsewhere in Musorgsky, notably in *Boris Godunov*. Pedals are very much part of this piece and no more so than in the final coda for which the greatest weight should be reserved. The influence of this piece is widespread, and can be strongly felt in 'Borodin's 'Au Couvent' (1885) and Debussy's 'La Cathédrale engloutie' (1910).[37]

This section concludes the pictures in a grand manner.

Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff

Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) was an accomplished Russian pianist, composer, and conductor. He inherited Romanticism from the German tradition, composing and performing consistently throughout his lifetime. Rachmaninoff was influenced by many musicians and composers, especially Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov, Arensky, and Scriabin. Chopin, Liszt, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Mussorgsky and Medtner also inspired him. Barrie Martyn quotes Rachmaninoff as saying, "I am a Russian composer, and the land of my birth has influenced my temperament and outlook. My music is the product of my temperament, and so it is Russian music."[38] Andrea Wehrmeyer quotes Rachmaninoff from an article in *The Étude*,

Music must come from the heart and go to the heart… Composing is as essential a part of my being as breathing or eating; it is one of the necessary functions of living… What I try to do, when writing down my music, is to make it say simply and directly that which is in my heart when I am composing. If there is love there, or bitterness, or sadness, or religion, these moods become a part of my music.[39]

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[37] Michael Russ, *Musorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 49.

[38] Barrie Martyn, *Rachmaninoff: Composer, Pianist, Conductor* (Brookfield: Gower Publishing Company Limited, 1990), 27.

[39] Andrea Wehrmeyer, *Rakhmaninov*, trans. Anne Wyburd (London: Haus Publishing, 2000), 30.

Andrea also quotes Prokofiev from *Prokofiev über Prokofiev*,

> I think that Rakhmaninov's music contains certain melodic phrases which are typical of him and extraordinarily beautiful. There are not many, and once one has found them one keeps meeting them again in other compositions of his.[40]

He composed 24 preludes in all the major and minor keys, Op.23 and Op.32. Rachmaninoff also composed 17 etudes, divided into two sets (Op.33 and 39) called "Etudes-Tableaux". Andreas Wehrmeyer remarks that "The Études resemble the Preludes both in size and content and might seem to be their successors, but from the very first bars they surpass the earlier works in their evocative tone painting. Though their title points to the pictorial, the individual pieces have no specific content."[41] Max Harrison compares the etudes to other composers:

> Many of Chopin's etudes are based on one technical idea that generates poetic expression and in this sense they are classically contained, whereas Liszt's more overtly pictorial etudes are romantically expansive. Alkan's to a considerable extent fused both tendencies, as do the etudes of Scriabin, Debussy, Szymanowski---. Rachmaninoff's etudes-tableaux in particular, while exploiting a variety of themes, investigate the transformation of rather specific climates of feeling via piano textures and sonorities.[42]

According to Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, Ottorino Respighi proposed to transcribe selected Etudes-Tableaux of Rachmaninoff into orchestral versions through Koussevitzky's music house. It is interesting to note that Rachmaninoff gave names to certain etudes with explanations in order to help Respighi in orchestrating them. Bertensson and Leyda note that "The first Etude in A minor [Op. 39, No. 2] represents the Sea and Seagulls. [This program was suggested by Mme. Rachmaninoff.] The second Etude in A minor [Op. 39, No. 6] was inspired by the tale of Little Red Riding Hood and

[40] Andrea Wehrmeyer, *Rakhmaninov*, trans. Anne Wyburd, (London: Haus Publishing, 2000), 82.
[41] Andrea Wehrmeyer, *Rakhmaninov*, trans. Anne Wyburd, (London: Haus Publishing, 2000), 74.
[42] Max Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 177.

the Wolf. The third Etude in E-flat major [Op. 33, No.4] is a scene at a Fair."[43] Norris adds that "All the etudes-tableaux explore, in their various ways, the palette of keyboard colours and technique which, by this time in Rachmaninoff's career, was broad and rich."[44] Rachmaninoff's pianistic stature was acknowledged by peer musicians such as Scriabin and Prokofiev.

I have chosen five preludes and two etudes, written between 1901 and 1917. The first prelude is Op. 23 No. 4 in D major. My impression is that it is telling me the story of lovers. In the tempo marking, "Andante cantabile", Rachmaninoff emphasizes a rich singing melody, a typical quality in Romantic music. According to Max Harrison, this prelude "is another lyric essay yet, again, of no little contrapuntal virtue: note the adroit shaping of inner voices."[45] This piece also creates a calm atmosphere and various colors throughout.

The second prelude is Op. 23 no. 5 in G minor. Norris notes that "but perhaps it is the most popular, the G minor (no.5), which best illustrates the direction of Rachmaninoff's style in the set: the opening and closing sections, tautly constructed, are derived from the simple *alla Marcia* idea of the first bar, while the central section consists of a broad lyrical melody typical of the Rachmaninoff of the early 1900s, sumptuously accompanied by sweeping left-hand arpeggios."[46] This energetic prelude opens with marching rhythm with repetitive patterns, followed by a beautiful middle section with lyrical melody, and ends with a return of the march. The ending shows the humor of Rachmaninoff.

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[43] Sergei Bertensson and Jay leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 262-3.

[44] Geoffrey Norris, *Rachmaninoff* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1994), 85.

[45] Max Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 112.

[46] Geoffrey Norris, *Rachmaninoff* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1994), 83.

The third prelude is Op. 23 no. 7 in C minor. This piece requires a continuous hand-crossing technique. It contains contrasting figures between sustained long notes and rapid middle voices. The swirling figurations make me imagine a storm at sea.

The fourth prelude is Op. 32 no. 10 in B minor. According to Michael Scott, "It is hardly surprising that some of them [Preludes] reveal the influence of church music, given that he was working on them at the same time as the Liturgy. --- The tenth in B minor, considered one of the best, recalls a tale of Moiseiwitsch's which he recounted in his obituary of the composer. He told Rachmaninoff that it seemed to him reminiscent of a painting by Boecklin, 'The Return', 'in which an old man is sitting by a still pool, his reflection in it, gazing at a cottage nearby.' Rachmaninoff expressed his astonishment, admitting that that had in fact been his inspiration."[47] It begins in stillness and slowly develops intensity.

The last prelude is Op. 32 no. 12 in G-sharp Minor. Max Harrison believes this prelude to be "the purest expression of lyricism in all Rachmaninoff's piano music. The melody sings limpidly above evanescent arpeggios and the somewhat baroque-sounding demisemiquaver ornaments may remind us of the Allemande of Bach's Partita No. 6."[48] The opening six-sixteenth note figure is repeated throughout the piece. The main melody is often in left hand. Frequent changes of tempo markings make this piece a challenge for some pianists.

The first etude is Op. 33 no. 3 in C minor. According to Harrison, this piece "begins as a funeral piece but changes as the first page ends and there is a shift from minor to major and from quasi-orchestral to strictly pianistic textures. The melody of the

[47] Michael Scott, *Rachmaninoff* (Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2008), 89.
[48] Max Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 172.

final page is one that we shall meet again in Concerto No. 4."[49] It is divided into two different sections, depicting totally different characteristics. The second section has beautiful resonating high-pitch melodies over quiet arpeggiated accompaniments. It reminds me of a boat floating on the water.

The second etude is Op. 39 no. 6 in A minor. According to Riesemann, some of the Etude-Tableaux originated in "Böcklin's paintings: No. 8, Op. 39 (G minor), can be traced back to *Morning*. No.1, Op. 39 (F minor), to *The Waves*. Sometimes the inspiration for the Etudes-Tableaux has been, for instance, No. 7, Op.33 (E flat minor), which represents the gay bustle of a Russian fair, or No. 6, Op. 39 (A minor), the fairy-tale of *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf*."[50] Here the fast sections describe red riding hood frantically trying to escape from the wolf.

Maurice Ravel

Roland-Manuel, a friend and a pupil of Ravel, notes that "At No.12, on the quayside of the Nivelle, Joseph Maurice Ravel was born on the 7th March, 1875."[51] Joseph Ravel, the father of Maurice Ravel, was a fine engineer, worked in the motor industry, and was interested in music. Roland-Manuel adds, "Maurice Ravel's Basque origin impressed itself in a peculiarly significant manner on his character. … Ravel's native country is the classic home of nimble wits, bold and stubborn pride and unswerving purpose."[52]

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[49] Max Harrison, *Rachmaninoff: Life, Works, Recordings* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 178.
[50] Oskar von Riesemann, *Rachmaninoff's Recollections told to Oskar von Riesemann* , trans. Dolly Rutherford (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1934; reprint, 1970), 237.
[51] Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, ed. Scott Goddard, trans. Cynthia Jolly (London: Dennis Dobson, 1947), 15.
[52] Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, ed. Scott Goddard, trans. Cynthia Jolly (London: Dennis Dobson, 1947), 15.

His first music education began with piano at the age of six, when he studied with Henri Ghys. He later became more involved with music and entered "the Conservatoire as a pupil in Anthiome's class for preparatory piano."[53] There, he was exposed to the Javanese music, which fascinated him. Roger Nichols notes that a "'Picturesque effect' was also inspired by the Javanese gamelan music at the Exhibition, and Ravel's music for the next fifteen years or so was to be shot through with the resonance of bells, explicit or implicit, and with the gapped scales that, together with modes, were to be one of his ways of rejuvenating the conventional tonal system." [54] As with Debussy, Javanese music made a large impact on Ravel's music.

He was also influenced by music of many different composers and musicians such as Ricardo Viñes, Emmanuel Chabrier, Schumann, Weber, Chopin, Liszt, Erik Satie, André Gedalge, Gabriel Fauré, Debussy, Glinka, Glazunov, Tchaikovsky, Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Musorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and others. It is also essential to point out his deep interests in literature; he was acquainted with *Philosophy of Composition* and *Poetic Principle* by Edgar Allan Poe, the *Art romantique, Curiosités esthetiques* and *Hournaux intimes* by Baudelaire, *Itraite des Sensations* by Condillac, poems by Mallarmé.

From Ravel's works I chose *Miroirs*, a suite reflecting pictorial images and scenes. According to Roger Nichols, Ravel commented as follows in his autobiographical sketch,

> The title Miroirs…has authorized my critics to consider this collection as being among those works that belong to the Impressionist movement. I do not contradict this at all, if one understands the term by analogy. A rather fleeting analogy, at that, since Impressionism does not seem to have any precise meaning outside the domain of painting. In any case, the word 'mirror' should not lead one to assume that I want to affirm a subjectivist theory of art. A

[53]Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, ed. Scott Goddard, trans. Cynthia Jolly (London: Dennis Dobson, 1947), 18-19.

[54]Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), 11.

> sentence by Shakespeare helped me to formulate a completely opposite position: 'the eye sees not itself / But by reflection, by some other things' (Julius Caesar, Act I, Scene 2).[55]

Marguerite Long also mentions in her book that

> This title in itself is an aesthetic proposition. It underlies what the Impressionists have amply proved—the pre-eminence of reflected light from the direct image in the appeal to our sensibility and in the creation of the illusion. These pieces are intensely descriptive and pictorial. They banish all sentiment in expression but offer to the listener a number of refined sensory elements which can be appreciated according to his imagination.[56]

The *Miroirs* consist of five pieces with titles related to natural subjects: *Noctuelles* (Night Moths)*, Oiseaux Tristes* (Sorrowful Birds)*, Une Barque sur l'Ocean* (A Boat on the Ocean)*, Alborada del Gracioso* (Aubade of the Jester)*,* and *La Vallée des Cloches* (The Valley of the Bells). Each piece is dedicated to one of his friends, members of *Apaches*. Vlado Perlemuter and Helene Jordan-Morhange explained as follows:

> The five pieces of *Miroirs:*, are dedicated to L-P Fargue, Vines, Sordes, Calvocoressi, and Maurice Delarge. These important pages mark a definite stage, the stage which could be called impressionist, a word which is attached too often and mistakenly to all his music. Here, each image is drawn with a lively, firm touch; straightforward painting which is far removed from the symbolism of Debussy.[57]

The first piece is called *Noctuelles* and is inspired by lines of Leon-Paul Fargue's poem, "'Les noctuelles des hangars partene, d'un vol gauche, Cravater d'autres poutres' (The nocturnal moths launch themselves clumsily from their barns, to settle on other perches)."[58] Roger Nichols adds that "Fargue was, like moths and indeed Ravel himself, a nocturnal animal and the two men were still going for long night rambles through Paris in the early 1920s."[59] According to editor Peter Kaminsky, "the opening two sixteenth notes exploit the natural division between the thumb and the rest of the

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[55] Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), 77.

[56] Marguerite Long, *At the piano with Ravel*, ed. Pierre Laumonier, trans. Olive Senior-Ellis (London: J. M. Dent & Sons LTD, 1973), 85.

[57] Vlado Perlemuter and Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel* , ed. Harold Taylor, trans. Frances Tanner (New York: Pro/Am Music Resources Inc., 1988), 19.

[58] Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), 72.

[59] Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), 72.

hand, with the thumb on a white note and the second and another finger on black notes; the resulting motion seems analogous to the fluttering of wings—be they of moths, owlets, or bats."[60]Ravel used many varieties of meters, rhythms, and rapid passages in this piece. Arbie Orenstein said, "With its many changes of meter and brief unmeasured runs, the rhythm is quite free in this impressionistic étude."[61]

The second piece is called *Oiseaux tristes*. According to Roger Nichols, Ravel mentions in his autobiographical sketch that "'The earliest of these pieces to be written, and the most typical of all to my way of thinking, is the second of the set, *Oiseaux tristes*. It evokes birds lost in the oppressiveness of a very dark forest during the hottest hours of summer'."[62] The main motif of the piece, two repeated notes, appears at the very beginning of the piece, is repeated in different ways, and also returns at the end of the piece. There are many improvisatory-like passages throughout the piece with various rhythms and tones. Nichols states that "Ravel emphasized the importance of distinguishing two levels in the texture of 'Oiseaux tristes': 'the bird calls on a high, rather strident level, with rapid arabesques, and by contrast, the somber, stifling atmosphere of the forest on a lower level, rather heavy and muted, with a lot of pedal but not much movement'."[63]

The third piece is called *Une Barque sur l'océan*. Arbie Orenstein describes it as follows: "This piece, the longest of the set, is technically even more difficult than *Jeux*

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[60] Peter Kaminsky, eds., *Unmasking Ravel: New Perspectives on the Music* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 117.

[61] Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975), 159.

[62] Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), 73.

[63] Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), 73.

d'eau, to which it is spiritually akin."[64] It is difficult to draw out different waves of the ocean at the piano, not only technically but also musically. Peter Kaminsky asserts that "The opening measures of *Une barque sur l'océan* from Miroirs present a repeating idea split between the hands, whose complex choreography helps evoke the title subject…."[65] Ravel later orchestrated this piece, and Roy Howat believes that "The rolling piano arpeggios of 'Une barque' lose much of their dynamism when orchestrated inevitably as tremolandos. Additionally, crescendos that take the dynamics from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* or *fff* in two or three bars generally leave the orchestra little time to show its dynamic range---."[66] In order to achieve effective dynamic, piano performers should aim for large pictures of waves.

The fourth piece is called *Alborada del gracioso*. According to Roger Nichols, it is the most popular piece in the set. Arbie Orenstein says that "The title of this composition focuses upon Hispanic lyricism coupled with humor, which will soon appear in *L'Heure espagnole*. In this brilliant panorama, the piano acts as a guitar, a languid voice, or a full orchestra."[67] However, in contrast to the other four *Miroirs*, this piece inspires me to create pictures of rhythmical dances. Helen Jourdan-Morhange argues that "They led Ravel to react, after first compositions, against an impressionism from which he wanted to free himself. Thus in the *Miroirs*, after *Noctuelles, Oiseaux Tristes* and *Une Barque sur l'Ocean*, which are all permeated with reflections of sky and sea, *Alborada*

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[64] Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975), 160.

[65] Peter Kaminsky, eds., *Unmasking Ravel: New Perspectives on the Music* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 117.

[66] Roy Howat, *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 79.

[67] Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975), 160.

arrives like a meteor from its colourful country of origin, with its lashing accents and 'earth' rhythms."[68]

The finale of the suite is called, *La vallée des cloches*. According to Arbie Orenstein, the sound of Parisian church bells inspired Ravel to compose this piece as well as other music that portrays the sound of bells. It is interesting to note that Debussy, Ravel, Mussorgsky and Rachmaninoff used bell sounds extensively as a motif for their compositions. *La vallée des cloches* is very somber and quiet in character; the loudest dynamic is *mezzo forte*, and the majority of dynamic markings are *pianissimo*.

When pianists perform any of these pieces, they need to place their images of the music in mind. Each individual draws out different interpretations of the music according to their own experiences. All of these selected pieces are difficult to perform both musically and technically. They demand much time for preparation and polishing. However, it is important to dig into the pieces and determine how to create the colors and sonorities the performer wants the audience to experience. For me, it has been a great experience to play the selected works in this dissertation project.

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[68]Vlado Perlemuter and Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel,* ed. Harold Taylor, trans. Frances Tanner (New York: Pro/Am Music Resources Inc., 1988), 24.

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