

Abstract

Music of Colors: A Survey of French Music for Keyboard from Rameau through Dutilleux

Kai-Ching Chang, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2009

Dissertation directed by: Professor Santiago Rodriguez
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For my dissertation project, I chose to learn and perform selections from solo piano repertoire and piano/vocal chamber music by French composers. What attracted me to this project was the enormous variety of styles amongst composers from the late Baroque period to the mid-twentieth century.

The earliest of these composers was Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764), who composed *Le rappel des oiseaux*, *La poule* and *Gavotte avec six Doubles* during the first portion of his compositional life, from 1724-1730. In these compositions, he employed the suite form, as well as explored new compositional devices that imitated sound of animals commonly found in nature.

The next group of compositions: Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894): *Improvisation* (from *Pièces pittoresques*); Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924): *Nocturne No.6 in D-flat major*, *Op. 63* and *Thème et variations*, *Op.73*; Claude Debussy (1862-1918): *L'Isle joyeuse*, *Images II* and *Pour les accords* (from *Douze Études pour piano*); Erik Satie (1866-1925): *Sonatine bureaucratique*; Charles Kœchlin (1867-1950): *Nouvelles sonatines*, *Op.87, No.1*; Maurice Ravel (1875-1937): *Gaspard de la Nuit* and *Piano Concerto in G*; range stylistically between the early Impressionism of Chabrier, the late

Romanticism of Fauré and the full-blown Impressionism of Debussy and Ravel. Satie and Kœchlin exhibit a style that is not as easily classifiable. The former used wry irony, the latter, a mixture of Romanticism and Impressionism.

The last compositions that I included were Olivier Messiaen's (1908-1992) *Poèmes pour Mi (for voice and piano)* and Henri Dutilleux's (1916) *Piano Sonata*. These compositions were written during the mid-twentieth century. Their connections to the late French School are evidenced in their use of less rhythmic restriction, atonal and tonal melodies and harmonic modality. It is important to note that Debussy and Ravel also used pedal points and unresolved chord progressions: compositional features which are, most noticeably, in the works of Messiaen.

These three piano recitals were presented in Gildenhorn Recital Hall, at the University of Maryland, College Park. My first recital, assisted by pianist Grace Juang, was performed on April 25, 2007. With Professor Carmen Balthrop (Soprano), I presented my second recital on March 5, 2008. The third solo recital was performed on March 7, 2009.

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by

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Dissertation submitted by the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts
2009

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