

Debussy's Neglected *Fantaisie*

by Mark DeVoto

Claude Debussy's *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra, composed during 1889-1890, inexplicably remains an orphan among his works today. For no good reason, it is overshadowed in appreciation by Debussy's later orchestral works beginning with the *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune*, composed only four years after the *Fantaisie*. I have heard it said that the *Fantaisie* "isn't like the Debussy we know," an opinion that is surely debatable and in any case should not matter. I have also heard that the work smacks of a style that Rachmaninoff handled better, which also seems completely off the mark.

Debussy himself cancelled the planned first performance in 1890, after Vincent d'Indy, who was scheduled to conduct, claimed to have had insufficient rehearsal time for the whole work and proposed to perform only the first movement. Debussy understandably declined this suggestion and removed the orchestra parts from the musicians' stands. From time to time thereafter, even into his last years, Debussy told friends that he was planning to revise the score and put it up for performance. Nevertheless, the *Fantaisie* remained unseen and unheard until 1919, a year after Debussy's death, when it received its premiere performance with Alfred Cortot as soloist. The two-piano score was copyrighted by E. Fromont, one of Debussy's early publishers, in the same year.

Debussy may have had other reservations as well. The *Fantaisie* was his first large-scale essay in absolute music since his student days, and except for the String Quartet, it would remain the only one until the sonatas of his last years. It is also his only work with echoes, though they are slight, of the nineteenth-century *brillante* concerto style; but he did not call it a concerto, notwithstanding the three-movement form that is so unlike a typical romantic fantasia. By the time Debussy had risen to international fame in the first decade of the twentieth century with such works as *Faune* and *La mer*, as well as the successful opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, he may well have considered the *Fantaisie* a piece he had completely outgrown. This hypothesis would seem to fit well with a century of critical reflection, which holds both that the French Impressionist musical aesthetic is fundamentally at odds with the concerto principle, and that there were no Impressionist concertos of consequence. Debussy's two *Rapsodies* are brief solos with orchestra (the Saxophone Rhapsody was not even orchestrated by him), but their bravura aspects are few and far between; furthermore, Ravel's concertos were composed long after his Impressionist period and are

essentially neoclassical and Parisian in style. The closest approaches to an authentic Impressionist concerto are exceptional: Manuel de Falla's *Noches en los jardines de España* is a resplendent example. But one needs considerable imagination and a sense of irony to include Debussy's *Fantaisie* in this category.

The fact that Debussy continued to tinker with the *Fantaisie* from time to time suggests that he did not wish to disown it. Nevertheless, the lack of a proper launching, with Debussy himself behind it, has militated against the *Fantaisie* ever since. Today, eighty-two years after its premiere and 111 years after its composition, it is still seldom performed. This is unfortunate, because the *Fantaisie* is not only an attractive and expertly composed work but an essential link in the evolution of Debussy's maturing sense of musical form.

Versions

In 1890 the publisher Choudens went so far as to engrave a full orchestra score of the *Fantaisie* but did not release it for sale; it was on proof sheets for this score that Debussy made numerous revisions at various times. With one major exception (i.e., the solo piano part in mm. 145-160 of the third movement), these revisions were limited to details of orchestration. An article by Teresa Davidian describes many of the orchestral revisions and summarizes the work's complex publication history.¹ But it must be noted that what were probably Debussy's final revisions, including the measures just mentioned, were—for reasons unknown—left out of the revised Choudens score, which was taken over by Fromont in 1920; they do not appear even in the new Peters miniature score of 1972 and were seen for the first time in 1968 in a newly engraved full score edited by André Jouve and published by Jean Jobert, successors to Fromont. The new score also shows a rearrangement of the order of two connective passages in the third movement and the elimination of another, resulting in a work that is four measures shorter.

Form, Shape, Style

Outwardly the *Fantaisie* resembles a three-movement concerto, with the last two movements played without interruption and connected by an interlude. Only occasionally does the solo part break into a conventionally brilliant virtuoso style, and even when it does the brilliance mostly takes the form of accompanimental arpeggios; there is little of the sparkle that makes Liszt's or Saint-Saëns's concertos so exhilarating, and nothing

¹Teresa Davidian, "Debussy's *Fantaisie*: Issues, Proofs, and Revisions," *Cahiers Debussy* 17-18 (1994), 15-33.

Example 1: Thematic Events in the First Movement

Andante ma non troppo (Introduction)

The musical score is presented in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked "Andante ma non troppo" for the introduction and "Allegro giusto" for the main body. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 5, 15, 21, 49, 53, 74, 76, 86, and 92 indicated. The introduction (measures 1-5) is marked "f" and features a woodwind part (Ww.) with a dynamic marking of α_1 and a triplet of eighth notes. The main body (measures 6-92) includes various dynamics such as "dim.", "p", "f", and "Piano". It features several thematic events, including a woodwind part (Ww.) with a dynamic of "f" and a triplet, a section for Clarinet and Horns (Cl., Horn 8va) with a dynamic of "p" and a triplet, a section for Viola (Vla.) with a dynamic of "p", a section for Horns with a dynamic of "f", and a section for Piano with a dynamic of "f" and a triplet. The score also includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Ww. f α_1 Eng. horn, horn

5 *dim.* *p* Cl., Horn 8va 3

15 *f* Ww. 3

21 49 *p* Vla.

53 *p* Piano 74 *f* Horns

76 86 92 γ *f* Piano 3 3 3

93 116 **Fièrément**

118 128 **Modéré**

revenir peu à peu au Tempo I

131 158 **Bass Cl.**

Tempo I (Allegro non troppo) [sic]

161 176 **Piano** 180 **8va**

très animé jusqu'à la fin

182 202 **f 2 Ob.** 214 **Piano**

215 218 **3 Trp.** 224 **ff**

whatever of the booming, octave-filled, low-register "Steinway" sound characteristic of Brahms's, Grieg's, and Tchaikovsky's beloved monuments.

Indeed, the listener is aware that Debussy, perhaps taking a cue from d'Indy's *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français*, conceived of the piano's role as at least partly orchestral, as part of the overall blended sound, rather than as the leader in a continuing dialogue or contest between piano and orchestra. (There are some direct gestural resemblances as well to d'Indy's famous *Symphonie*, composed only three years earlier; one wonders whether Debussy was aware of these, or whether d'Indy felt flattered by Debussy's score.)

Nevertheless the *Fantaisie* can at least to a certain extent be considered a work in the nineteenth-century Austro-German symphonic tradition, most of all because of its continuous narration and development of thematic materials and their ongoing and comprehensive transformations. But this continuity is achieved by a means that is characteristic of Debussy and that becomes even more thoroughgoing in his later works: a thematic architecture that is pervasive and at the same time remains significantly hidden. This will be the principal focus of the present essay.

The First Movement: An Introduction and Allegro

The first movement is formally the most conventional, with a rough correspondence to the sectional and tonal framework of a sonata form, as the synopsis below describes; yet the sonata form is closest to that of a symphony, not a concerto, with no double exposition. The example shows the succession of themes, which are identified by Greek letters (α_1 , α_2 , β , etc.). See Example 1.

INTRODUCTION: 4/4, *Andante ma non troppo*; mm. 1-14, two contiguous themes, α_1 and α_2

EXPOSITION: 3/4, *Allegro giusto*; mm. 15-48, First subject: α_1 , G major; mm. 48-52, Bridge: β ; mm. 53-73, Second subject: β , B minor, then D, E major; mm. 74-85, Bridge: α_1 and β , whole-tone harmony; mm. 86-91, Third subject, short: D major, fragment of α_1 , β

DEVELOPMENT: chiefly orchestral, piano often absorbed into overall texture; mm. 92-115, γ with triplets, derived from β ; mm. 116-127, *Fièremment*, B-flat major,² α_1 ; mm. 128-157, *Modéré*, α_2 as apparently new subject, B major, A major; mm. 158-175, Bridge: *Revenez peu à peu au 1^{er} mouv^e*: α_2 and β fragments, whole-tone

RECAPITULATION: very short: *Tempo 1^o, All^o non troppo* [sic], principally G major; mm. 176-187, like mm. 15-26; piano countermelody to α_1 in

²Throughout the present article keys and chords are indicated as "B-flat major," "C-sharp triad," and so on; individual pitches are indicated as "B \flat ," "C \sharp ," and so on.

orchestra (cf., mm. 15-22, 176-183); mm. 188-201, *Animez peu à peu*, developed extension, towards Codetta, α_1 , α_2 , γ

CODETTA: *Très animé jusqu'à la fin*; mm. 202-224, varied and diminished α_1 , β

The wide range of keys beyond the principal tonality of G major is no more striking than with other composers of the time; the subsections of the Exposition represent stable tonality with familiar cadential patterns, while continuous modulation is mostly confined to the Development. Bridge passages are marked by whole-tone harmony with augmented triads and melodies in parallel major thirds.

The Introduction is particularly short, but it presents the kernels of the most important structural material of the movement, indeed of the whole work. The α_1 theme is the nuclear theme of the entire *Fantaisie*. It forms the main theme of the first movement and the finale; from the beginning of the finale, it is subjected to repeated transformations. At the beginning of the first movement α_1 is organized around the pitch E as an added major sixth to the G tonic triad; at the end of the movement, and again at the beginning of the finale, it starts on G, and at the end of the finale, on D; in all three cases it is absorbed into tonic harmony. α_2 is chiefly used in the first movement, reappearing once, climactically, in the coda of the finale. The succession of α_1 and α_2 in the Introduction, however, is marked by a harmonic motive, the simple juxtaposition of I and $+II_7$, a standard chromatic neighbor chord that is elevated in the *Fantaisie* to a structural cyclic status, as we shall see.

Hearing the beginning of the *Fantaisie* for the first time, the listener is less likely to remark the themes themselves, whose structural significance is not yet apparent, than the abrupt and remote harmonic shifts that occur almost immediately. The sudden appearance of E-flat major (measure 7) is brief but striking, and its structural value is revealed in the coda of the movement at measure 218, where it appears abruptly again.

Debussy's harmonic language in three of the large-scale works that followed his Roman exile—the Baudelaire songs, *La Damoiselle Édue*, and the *Fantaisie*—represents a great leap forward in originality and mastery, far beyond the works of even a few years earlier, such as *Printemps*. Debussy's instincts in experimental chromatic coloration of an essentially diatonic harmonic language are as unerring as they are well controlled in this music. The flexibility shown by Debussy in moving directly between distantly-related harmonies without the benefit of conjunct voice-leading or conventional chromatic relationships is one aspect of his style that becomes even more strongly developed in his later works, most noticeably in his increasing fondness for parallel harmony of triads, seventh chords, major ninth chords, added-sixth chords, and triads with various kinds of added seconds. Early harbingers of such harmony in the *Fantaisie* appear

prominently in the fauxbourdon-like chords of the first part of the finale. In the first movement the listener is likely to be aware especially of the nonparallel successions of sequential dominants, and even more of conventional dominant-tonic relationships with strong root motions but made richer by chromatic alterations and the addition of appoggiature. Even the initial tonic sonority is striking, a root-position major triad with added major sixth that is unmistakably harmonic and frequently recurrent. The dominant major-ninth sonority that becomes an entirely independent entity in Debussy's later works is still a dependent and not especially prominent part of the classical tonal discourse in this first movement, functioning as a normal dominant (e.g., mm. 54-58, 64-65, 86-91). But there are places where its functional value becomes strained, as for instance at mm. 97-108, where as many as seven different dominant sonorities are tossed together with only loose functionality among themselves. In the second movement, dominant ninths appear in distantly-related sequences; at the beginning of the finale, they become sufficiently independent to serve paradoxically as tonic substitutes, with Mixolydian minor seventh.

Debussy's harmonic invention in the first movement of the *Fantaisie* is remarkable enough; but the handling of melodic material is no less unusual, particularly in the relative non-assertiveness of themes. First and second subjects are well defined by key area, but less so by their melodic substance. The different themes are all related, with certain melodic motives and interval patterns in common, but they are not particularly striking in themselves, even when they are distinct; it is not an exaggeration to say that the most noticeable thing about the themes in the *Fantaisie* is that, except when they appear at the formally expected boundary markers, they seldom stand out as actual themes. Melodies defining the architecture are stated over a single harmony at their first appearance; they are stated first by the orchestra rather than the piano; and they mostly appear without much harmonic or cadential preparation. Phrases are relentlessly in four-measure units divided into matched or balanced two-measure pairs, often with Debussy's beloved successive repetition of single measures or pairs of measures. Most of the themes also show Debussy's restrained melodic ambitus, with a preference for small intervals and a tendency to depart from and return to a particular tone. This latter tendency is not as stark as Golaud's famously immobilized *Leitmotiv* beginning in measure 5 of *Pelléas*, but it is a feature of much of the thematic material in the *Fantaisie*.

The first section of the *Allegro giusto* illustrates the neat symmetry of phrases that so often characterizes Debussy's music, a symmetry that nevertheless includes so much rich variation that the repeated material itself never becomes obtrusive.

FIRST PERIOD: α_1 in orchestra: antecedent phrase; mm. 15-18, cadence on IV; consequent, mm. 19-22 (19 = 20)

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SECOND PERIOD: α_1 in piano: antecedent, 23-26, cadence on IV_{7b} ; 2 mm. extended: mm. 25-26 = mm. 27-28

THIRD PERIOD: α_1 in orchestra, on G (V_{11}), ant. 33-36; α_1 in piano, V_{11} (=IV/V), cons. mm. 37-40 (39 = 40), heading for IV

CADENTIAL PHRASE: mm. 41-44, IV alternates with V of IV, then ii_7 ; mm. 45-48, $I(vi)_{6/5}$ with $+II_7/V$ neighbor chord (compare Introduction, mm. 1-4).

The dominant-eleventh harmony is worth noting here; Debussy uses this chord strategically at several important points later in the work. In fixing on and savoring its special sound, he followed some notable precedents, including Grieg's Piano Concerto (in the first movement, before the C-major theme), Borodin's Second Symphony (beginning of the finale), and of course the thunderclap at the beginning of Verdi's *Otello*.

The following shows how the α_1 is transformed in the Codetta. Characteristically, the first statement of this transformation is in the interior of the texture, oboes with English horn and horn an octave below, with the much more powerful piano and upper strings effectively shouting down the structurally more important melody. The harmony works against the transformed α_1 also at this point, with tonic resolution only at measure 210, when the piano triumphantly seizes the melody.

Example 2: Fantaisie, First Movement, mm. 202-205:

The example is an elementary illustration of Debussy's capacity for thematic understatement, an essential part of his technique and aesthetic that can be seen already in *La Damoiselle Éluë* and that became even more pronounced in later works. The theme as a subsurface phenomenon reflects Debussy's personal reaction to what he perceived as the overweening assertiveness of Beethoven's symphonic power and might, and especially to the blatancy of the Wagnerian *Leitmotiv*—the "calling card," as he

Example 3: Thematic Events in the Slow Movement, Interlude, and Finale

Lento e molto espressivo

Fl. Vn. I

p δ ϵ ζ η_1 η_2 θ_1 θ_2

6 9 14 15 27 28 35 37 40 42 46 47 54

p *pp* *mf* *p* *p cresc. poco a poco* **Tempo I**

Animez un peu

ob. *p* très doux

più mosso poco a poco

Ob., Eng. horn

En retenant **Tempo I**

55

70

77

81

85

90

2

17 (8)

23 Ww. I

ez un peu

res doux

55 61 69 **Tempo I**

3 3 3

θ_1 δ θ_1 θ_1 δ θ_1

Piano p pp ppp

Vn. I div. Cb. Harp ppp α_1

81 **Même mouvt. (Interlude)**

3 3 3

3 Trb. sord. 2 Fl. $K P$

pp

85

pp pp

2 Cl. 2 Bu. Bass Cl. ϵ

90 **Allegro molto**

3 3 3

sf pp

Piano coll'8va 2 Fl. δ α_1 variant

dim. Vc., Cb. pizz.

2

p p

17 (8) **ostinato bass continues**

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

Piano pp

23 37 **3 Horns**

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

pp

38

Vn. div.
p

145

51 Ww.
Piano

f

155

Très rythmé

77

f
K variant
3

185

81 Piano

f

218

82 (cf. mm. 37-38)

82 (cf. mm. 37-38)
8va
ff

256

90

3

p

99

105 Vn., Vla.
p
Piano

259

116

116
8va
Piano mf
ff
Horns

278

121

13

296

Le double moins vite

Vn. I sord. (Piano solo in revised version, 8va)

145 *pp* doux et espr. α_1 new variant

153 Vn., Vla. *pp* €

155 *pp*

171 **Tempo I** *Piano* *p* Trp. sord. (cf. m. 116)

185 Vn. I, II *Piano* *ff* α_1 variant, augmentation sim. etc.

218 246 254 *pp* Bass Cl., 3 Bn.

256 *Piano* *pp*

très animé jusqu'à la fin

259 α_1 274 *ff* α_2 *fff*

(bars 260-263 omitted in revised version)

278 288 *ff* Horns

296 20 *ff* *ff* 298

derisively referred to it.³ The *Fantaisie*, no less than Debussy's later works, validates the principle of thematic construction in the narrative continuity of nearly every measure; but paradoxically the succession of thematic statements is quite typically a less prominent element in the texture, subsidiary to an independent melodic line that never recurs, or even to a figurational pattern tied idiomatically to a particular instrument. From a psychological standpoint, such de-emphasis makes sense; the listener does not have to cling to the structural melody as the most prominent element, at every instant and at the expense of other elements, in order to be reassured that it is actually there. Thus Debussy's habit of maintaining the thematic process as a rearguard action represents a comprehensive challenge to classical symphonism—a challenge that was successful from the *Fantaisie* to the last orchestral works.

The Second Movement, Lento molto e espressivo

The cyclic unity of the *Fantaisie*, first assured by the transformation of α_1 into a marchlike ostinato pattern in the finale, emblemizes the kinship of the *Fantaisie* with the cyclic tradition of Franck, Saint-Saëns, and others of the post-Liszt generation in French music. Between the first and second movements of the *Fantaisie* there is no cyclic connection of themes until the very end of the second movement, connecting with the Interlude. But a psychological continuity between the first and second movements is brought about by the unusual use of $G\sharp$ as an appoggiatura $F\sharp$ to $G\sharp$ at the beginning of the second movement in F-sharp major. The appoggiatura is meant to momentarily deflect the sense of dominant-tonic cadence and to color it in an idiosyncratic way, as Debussy did so often. (Debussy liked this particular device well enough to use it again to connect the first and second movements of *Ibéria* some twenty years later—and in the same key.)

The principle of the theme-behind-the-scene is even more strongly applied in this subdued, dreamlike second movement. There are six recurrent themes appearing at different points in the narrative—more than that as one identifies melodic segments that recur as broken-off motives. Where a piano-orchestra dialogue actually exists—with the theme of the moment stated in first one and then the other—the orchestra is usually the first to act, and the piano follows. At other times, a theme is introduced in the orchestra while the piano plays a different, diversionary theme, or even nonthematic, textural material.

Example 3 outlines the thematic progress of the slow movement of the *Fantaisie* and the finale, with the interlude between.

³"*Pelléas et Mélisande: A Reply to the Critics*": an interview with Robert de Flers, published originally in *Le Figaro* (16 May 1902); and in translation in *Debussy on Music: The Critical Writings of the Great French Composer*, ed. François Lesure and Richard Langham Smith (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 80

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OPENING SECTION: mm. 1-26, in two subsections of 13 mm. each; F-sharp major with some stress on ♭III (A major): cf. mm. 6-8 and 19-21; cf. augmented triads, mm. 16, 18, and 19-21. (Note the downbeat cadential V_{11} at mm. 5 and 12, and the unexpected variant at measure 24 to a different dominant, a tritone away—a favorite jazz substitute in a later generation.) δ , ϵ themes in dialogue; ζ (measure 15) is the *second* measure of melody, motivically broken off later. (Measure 17 is very close to an absolute-pitch aural image of the first measure of Debussy's song *l'Ombre des arbres*, but with an added $D\sharp$.)

SECOND SECTION: *Animez (très peu)*, mm. 27-40, modulating. η_1 and η_2 : B major — G-sharp minor — D-sharp minor — B-flat major (measure 35, η_1). Continuation: θ_2 , piano, mm. 39-40, which continues in:

DEVELOPMENT OF SECOND SECTION: *Più mosso poco a poco*, chiefly of θ_2 , mm. 41-45, then η , mm. 46-52, plus fragment of θ_1 , cadence *En retenant* leading to:

SHORTENED, FALSE REPRISÉ OF THE FIRST SECTION: F major, *Tempo I^o*, mm. 54-58, cf. mm. 10-14.

SECOND DEVELOPMENT: of ζ , cf. mm. 15 and 59-62; and of θ_2 , cf. mm. 39-45 and 63-68, *animez peu à peu*, modulating by thirds through several keys, considerable chromatic-scale motion. Note thematic combination at mm. 59-60, ζ , θ_1 , and melody of mm. 19-20. Cadence, *Retenu*, to:

FINAL SECTION: F-sharp major restored, measure 69, but with θ_1 stated by piano over dominant harmony; δ and θ_1 combined, suggesting B major (mm. 73-76), returning to F-sharp major (mm. 77-78); final cadence (mm. 80-83) introduces α_1 in bass.

All of this adds up, perversely, to a simple rondo form, varied in ways that are quite unconventional but easily recognized, such as the reprise of the opening melody in the "wrong" key of F major, or the final return of F-sharp major at measure 69 without its distinctive theme.

As in the first movement, Debussy's themes here are for the most part first stated over a single harmony. They are not themes that imply harmonic progression; varied harmony is associated with later statements. Thus they are susceptible to combination with each other, especially as contrapuntal ingredients of complex dominant harmony; they are just as susceptible to transposed restatement, even in the same key.

What becomes the main theme ϵ of the second movement begins as an imitative motive in the background (measure 5), eventually emerging in the piano with a naive but dramatic simplicity (see Example 4). This short self-retrograding melody is the only theme that survives from the second movement to share center stage with α_1 and α_2 in the finale. At measure 9 it begins on $D\sharp$, with dominant harmony; at measure 13, on $C\sharp$, with tonic harmony, but in the orchestra, while the piano completes its varied echo of measure 10.

Example 4: *Fantaisie*, Second Movement, mm. 9-10:

At measure 27, V_9 of IV in F-sharp major, or V_9 of B major, is not quite a signal of what the dominant major ninth will become at the beginning of the Interlude and then the finale: a genuine, functioning *tonic* substitute, whose de-dominanted strength represents the first liberation of this sonority. Here the tonal ambiguity leads first to G-sharp minor, then D-sharp minor. The new theme η in orchestra-piano dialogue in paired phrases moves directly, at the end of the second phrase in D-sharp minor, to a sudden key change to B-flat major (A-sharp major enharmonically). The progression via an augmented-sixth chord is conventional enough, but the very irregular voice-leading to a dominant-eleventh chord (measure 35, 12/8) enhances the surprise. See Example 5.

The piano at this point is textural, and Debussy's heterophony of later years is foreshadowed in the gently undulating texture in which the piano is nonthematic and the solo cello, introducing the new theme θ_1 , is chiefly in the background. Once again, a theme appears that becomes prominent only later; the piano features it only at the end of the movement, at measure 69.

The entire movement is remarkably efficient in the compressed action of its multiple themes, which follow each other with complete naturalness. No less remarkable is the chromatic richness, which is expressed in the speed and variety of modulations through remote keys. As much as in any other early work of Debussy's, dominant harmony is let loose in this movement, less to confirm stable tonality for longer stretches than to move to some other dominant that may be more or less distantly related. Where Bach and Mozart might pursue a dominant sequence of medium length, or Chopin a sequence of extreme length, via a circle of ascending fourths, Debussy makes use of a circle-of-thirds succession (mm. 59-64), with the successive dominants only distantly related despite two common tones ($B^b-C\#-E^b$). See Example 5.

The slow movement's final section begins at measure 69 with an uncertain return of F-sharp major; θ_1 , the theme that first appeared at measure 35 in the solo cello (see Example 5), now appears for the first time in the piano. The repeated cadence at measure 73 suggests B major, but F-

Example 5: *Fantaisie*, Second Movement., mm. 34-35:

sharp major is more strongly favored by the end of the phrase. The combined melodies at mm. 73-74 with θ_1 beginning on $F\sharp$ but harmonized by $I-I_6-IV-V_{13}$ of B major is contrapuntally ingenious; the kiss of $A\sharp$ on B looks much more harsh than it actually sounds. The piano texture in difficult double notes says something about the pianistic function of these measures in the overall form; but they lead not to B major but back to the main key, F-sharp, for the final cadence of the movement: θ_1 (piano) combined with δ_1 (orchestra). The stable F-sharp major that follows at measure 77 forms the structural climax of the movement with great subtlety: two themes are again combined, δ in the orchestra and θ in the piano, then drift upwards to the highest registers yet reached in the movement.

The ethereal, vanishing cadence on measure 80, high in the strings and even higher in the piano, is a glimpse into Debussy's orchestra of later years. At this moment, the opposite register of the orchestra, at the very bottom of the strings, makes an appearance full of mystery—a subtle but unmistakable variant of the α_1 theme of the first movement. Two measures later, this bass melody is all that remains, leading directly into the Interlude.⁴

The function of the Interlude (mm. 84-95) is twofold: to signal a distinctive departure from standard concerto form, and to adumbrate the thematic beginning of the finale. At *Même mouvt.*, measure 84, trombones are heard for the first time in the *Fantaisie*, and at the same moment the new theme, which will become a main theme κ , appears in the clarinets in parallel thirds—once again over a tonic bass suggesting a single harmony, tonic with minor seventh. There is a brief holdover from the second movement, a single statement of ϵ by Debussy's least favorite instrument, the bass clarinet. The piano's shimmering entrance at measure 88 descends from the highest register, where it was last heard a few measures before. The harmony here is an alternation of tonic and raised II_7 ; this will soon become

⁴On an old LP recording of the *Fantaisie*, some well-meaning engineer, in full certainty that a concerto should have three movements, inserted a space between mm. 82 and 83.

the half-turn quintuplet motive that initiates the second phrase of κ at measure 7 (the measure numbering of the third movement beginning with the *Allegro molto*), thereafter to be a separate motive in its own right. But the alternating $+II_7$ harmony ($A\flat=G*$) connects back to the first movement, even to measure 4 of the introduction. Thus Debussy's respect for the cyclic principle is vindicated even more strongly, never as overtly as in Franck or d'Indy, but endowing this brief interlude with a special formal significance.

I have referred elsewhere to the significance of the next part of the Interlude as an aural image, especially in its absolute-pitch sense.⁵ Debussy had composed his *Printemps* only a few years before as one of his *envois* from Rome; that the home committee disapproved of his use of F-sharp major then did not prevent him from using it this time.⁶ The Interlude connects directly with *Printemps* at this point in its direct shift to E-flat major in an accented cadential gesture, exactly as in Part II of *Printemps*, in the same key.

The connection to the beginning of the finale is direct enough: the dominant E-flat chord becomes an augmented-sixth chord resolving directly to G major, another tonic with minor seventh.

The Finale

Having made his token gesture towards sonata form in the first movement, Debussy arrived at an idiosyncratic sectional form for his finale, one that nevertheless is well unified. It is possible to regard the finale as a three-in-one form of the kind much beloved by French composers from Franck onward; the A-flat major section would thus be the middle, like a slow movement, a scheme that Debussy had already tried successfully in his early Symphony in B minor for piano four hands. Yet this does insufficient credit to the details of the overall shape that look like this:

THEME AND 7 VARIATIONS: mm. 1-76, *Allegro molto*; α_1 ostinato bass + new theme κ together; mostly G major with some shifts, but modulating eventually to:

DEVELOPING SECTION: mm. 77-133; the same themes, and a few new fragments, mostly A major with some shifts; brief connecting passage, mm. 135-144, whole-tone ascent.

⁵See Chapter 2 of my own *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality: Essays on his Music* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press; forthcoming).

⁶The significance of F-sharp major in Debussy's works is considerable but has yet to be fully explored. Before *Printemps* it is certainly a rare key in any orchestral music; perhaps the most recent examples that would have occurred to Debussy are Franck's *Variations symphoniques* and Fauré's *Ballade* for piano and orchestra (originally for piano solo). In piano music and chamber music one thinks of Chopin's Nocturne, Op. 15, No. 2, and Impromptu, Op. 36; Schumann's Romance No. 1; Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 78; and Franck's *Trio concertant*, Op. 1, No. 1.

"SLOW MOVEMENT": *Le double moins vite*, A-flat major, mm. 145-170; new variant of α_1 ; reappearance of second-movement themes; piano entirely in background (first version); orchestra entirely in background (second version, in which most second-movement themes are left out as well); A-flat major

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT: *Tempo I^o*, mm. 171-213, α_1 and κ , G-sharp major/minor, modulating; connecting passages in whole-tone harmony; heading to:

TRIUMPHAL RETURN: G major, α_1 in augmentation, κ motive; some modulation and development; extensive whole-tone connective passage (mm. 254-273, shortened in second version), and

PERORATION AND CODETTA: *Très animé jusqu'à la fin*: α_1 with α_2 , *fff*, mm. 276-277.

This is really a movement of five sections rather than three. What Davidian refers to as the "old-fashioned variation set" applies only to the first of these five sections. During his years as a critic Debussy affected to scorn the theme-and-variation form as a splendid way to make something out of nothing; but he succeeded brilliantly with nonperiodic variations in *La mer*, in which the variation paradigm is not immediately obvious, and he certainly showed a fondness for ostinato patterns in many works. At the beginning of the *Fantaisie* finale, the use of a cyclic theme as the ostinato bass supporting an entirely new structural melody seems like a fairly original idea.

Is Debussy's *Allegro molto* an appropriate marking for this music? In the sense that Beethoven or Chopin might have used the term, it probably is too fast. The entire "variations" section seems as though it should proceed at an *alla marcia* pace. When Debussy used a melody that is very similar to this one in his *Tarantelle styrienne* (later he called it simply *Danse*), composed at about the same time, it was in 6/8 meter, which is doubtless faster in its lively eighth-note pace, but there are no sixteenths in that piece. With no metronome markings and no performances from Debussy's lifetime, we can only estimate Debussy's imagined tempo for this finale indirectly, but it is not unthinkable to look ahead nearly a decade to *Fêtes*, the second of the orchestral *Nocturnes*, for an aural image: compare triplet rhythm of the A-flat major-minor resumed *Tempo I^o* at measure 171 with the beginning of *Fêtes*, and balance it against the A-flat major-minor of the middle section of *Fêtes*, *Modéré mais toujours très rythmé*.

The "slow movement" in A-flat major, mm. 145-170, includes the only place in the entire *Fantaisie* where Debussy revised the piano part at all. In the original version, the piano part in mm. 145-152 is completely subdued even though not suppressed; in accepting the role of the harp that began at mm. 135-136, the piano submerges itself in the orchestra, and the listener is aware only of high-register doubling notes while the thematic function, with

a new variant of α_1 , is given entirely to the orchestra. The piano has almost entirely dropped out for several measures before this point, but the junction at measure 145 is important, with the rich V_{11} sound initiating the new key as a surprise, much like measure 35 of the slow movement on the same harmony.

The thematic density of the "slow movement" emphasizes the cyclic structural function of the passage: at measure 149 Debussy adds η_2 from mm. 28-29 of the second movement; at 151, ζ_1 and ϵ combined, and the same pair, inverted, at 156-160. It is hard to tell which is the more expressive, the harmony enriched by the different and simultaneous melodic lines, or the variants in the lines themselves; at all events, Debussy reveals, especially in this passage, a remarkable technical mastery of expressive elements that is well worthy of comparison with any of his French contemporaries.

Yet Debussy was clearly less satisfied with this section than he was with any other part of the *Fantaisie*, as the wholesale revision reveals, especially in mm. 145-156. In the revision, the solo piano, unaccompanied, initiates the thematic role with the variant at 145-146, but immediately hands it over to a solo violin, an instrumental color not previously heard in the *Fantaisie*. The piano then continues in a style seldom seen in Debussy's solo piano works, in R.H. trills and L.H. arpeggios with a new and independent bass line. (Where else did Debussy ever write a trill in thirds?) What in the original version was a resonant orchestral accompaniment is limited here to only three solo instruments, until the string ensemble finally returns at measure 157. The original version's panoply of motives from the second movement has almost entirely disappeared in the revision; all that remains of the second-movement themes is ϵ . It is as though Debussy's later second thoughts, remembering Wagner's calling card, decided that the assortment of cyclic connections was a thematic overload, and that the strongly-featured ϵ , which will appear later, was all that would be necessary.

Debussy's final coda, *Très animé jusqu'à la fin*, beginning at measure 274, gives further emphasis to the top register of the piano, as if to say once again, in this peroration, that the bottom register is conspicuously avoided in this non-concerto. At measure 276 there is a notable cyclic gesture: the α_2 motive, with the $+II_7$ harmonization with which it first appeared in succession in measure 4 of the first movement. This motive does not appear anywhere else in the finale, but here Debussy marks it *fff*, the only time in the entire work that this dynamic occurs, reinforced by *très marqué*.

Envoi

We have already made educated guesses about why Debussy did not push his own *Fantaisie*, and could stretch for another: at the time that Debussy probably last worked on revisions for it, he was regularly involved in touring as a composer and conductor, and might not have wished to appear as a

featured piano soloist with orchestra if the *Fantaisie* had been available. From his teen years Debussy had been an outstandingly capable pianist, but even at the height of his fame he appeared in this role only occasionally in public, sometimes as accompanist for singers or in chamber music, somewhat less often as a soloist in his own works. A number of his piano pieces were given their premieres not by Debussy but by others, such as Ricardo Viñes and Harold Bauer or even Maurice Ravel, Debussy's boundless admirer who was only a moderately accomplished pianist at best (he played the premiere of *D'un cahier d'esquisses*). All of this is consistent with the known facts of Debussy's generally retiring and even shy personality. He appeared as a conductor of his orchestral music because he had to; he was in demand and he needed money. He would not have conducted by preference and the testimony of his contemporaries is that his conducting technique was limited, although orchestras supported him with enthusiasm. In the last years before the Great War, Debussy's touring activities were increasingly hampered by illness. One can imagine the pressures a reluctant Debussy would have faced as a touring artist on center stage, if the *Fantaisie* had already been published, available, and publicized by others.

But certainly there is no plausible reason why Debussy's *Fantaisie* should not become a standard concert item today. Pianists have discovered and readily adopted lesser-known works from the byways off the well-beaten romantic concerto path: Beethoven's Choral Fantasy, Chopin's *Krakowiak*, Schumann's *Introduction and Allegro appassionato*, Mendelssohn's *Capriccio brillante* and Second Concerto, Liszt's *Malédiction* and *Totentanz*, Franck's *Les djinns*, Tchaikovsky's Second Concerto, Saint-Saëns's *Rapsodie d'Auvergne* and *Africa*, Rachmaninoff's First Concerto. Debussy's *Fantaisie* can stand up to any of these admirable and effective concert works. And there is no doubt that the *Fantaisie* is an essential ingredient for a fuller understanding of the accomplishment of the composer who, as much as anyone else, permanently transformed the history of music of the last hundred years.

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Abstract

The *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra is an important but rarely heard work of Claude Debussy's early maturity. The thematic and tonal design reveals an exceptional mastery highlighting the importance of the work in the composer's evolution, with significant adumbrations of his later technique, most importantly the relegation of symphonic development to the textural background.