1992

Pedal technique in La Cathedrale engloutie by Claude Debussy

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Debussy**

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PEDAL TECHNIQUE IN LA CATHEDRALE ENGLOUTIE BY CLAUDE DEBUSSY

A Paper

Presented to

**The Faculty of the Department of Music
San Jose State University**

In Partial Fulfillment

**of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts**

by

Ya-Hsuan Chiang

August 14, 1992

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

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APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

PEDAL TECHNIQUE IN LA CATHÉDRALE ENGLOUTIE BY CLAUDE DEBUSSY

by Ya-Hsuan Chiang

This paper addresses the topic of Claude Debussy's pedal technique using his "La Cathédrale Engloutie" as an example for analysis. It examines Debussy's biography, the pianos of his time and his pupils and associates for better understanding of the background. The impressionism of Debussy's time and its influence on him are also addressed.

Claude Debussy's piano works fully exploited the damper pedal and the una corda of the pianos in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This project has investigated systematically the piano work "La Cathédrale Engloutie" to highlight how sonority prolongation in pedal was achieved by the impressionist composer. The modern piano with its built-in sound prolonger is the ideal vehicle for expressing extended sonority. The modern music notation, however, proves to have shortcomings for indicating precisely the prolongation effects looked for by an impressionist composer.

To impose a fingering cannot logically adapt itself to the different formations of the hand. The absence of fingerings is an excellent exercise, it suppresses the spirit of contradiction which prompts us to prefer not to use the author's fingering, and verifies these everlasting words: 'One is never better served than by one's self'.

Claude Debussy

From the How to Play and Teach Debussy,
New York, 1932

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In most literature on Debussy, and in practically all writings focusing upon his piano style, the importance of pedalling has been stressed "ad infinitum." In book after book Debussy has been credited with "revolutionizing" the existing pedal technique, thus exploiting the instrument's theretofore undiscovered potential.

"Il était un maître dans l'emploi de la pédale
Il savait, au clavier, éveiller les sonorités de
l'orchestre."¹

Clearly, then, Debussy's "pedal revolution" was extremely refined and subtle. However, in the available literature concerning either Debussy or piano performance, no systematic discussion of the precise principles involved in a practical application of Impressionist pedal technique is to be found. The scattered references which do exist, moreover, abound in broad generalizations, statements which are equally as applicable to the pedalling problems encountered in other nineteenth and nearly twentieth century composers, as to Debussy.

In view of the need for such a detailed pedal study, this project will investigate the piano composition, "La Cathédrale Engloutie," by Claude Debussy. Naturally, it is impossible to formulate definitive answers to all questions posed in so subjective an area; nevertheless, the directions and suggestions contained in this paper will, it is hoped, bring the performer,

in his personal survey of a Debussy score, ever closer to an
"authentic" Impressionist sonority.

CHAPTER II

Claude Achille Debussy (1862-1918)

Biographical Sketch

Achille-Claude Debussy was born on August 22, 1862, at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. As a child he had little formal education but his musical tendencies were channelled into professional lessons. Those with the poet Verlaine's mother-in-law, Madame Maute de Flurville, led to his entry into the Paris Conservatory in 1872. Following his studies in composition with Ernest Guiraud, he obtained a "second grand prize" at Rome in 1883 and a "first grand" prize for his cantata "L'Enfant Prodigue" in 1884. He spent two years at the Villa Medici in Rome where he met Liszt, Verdi, and Boito, and heard Wagner's opera "Lohengrin." Two pilgrimages to Bayreuth in 1889 and 1890 took him from delirious enthusiasm to the most hopeless disappointment. Other influences of these years were his friendship with the painters of what became known as the "Impressionist" movement and, even more important, with writers and poets such as Mallarme and the "symbolists."

A memorable date in Debussy's evolution is the year 1892 when he finished his first symphonic work "Prelude a l'apres-midi d'un faune." In 1893 Debussy began work on an opera based on Maeterlinck's play "Pelleas et Melisande," a task that was to occupy him for nearly 10 years. After six years of marriage, he separated from Mademoiselle Texier in 1905 to marry Madame Emma Moyse; he also published the second book of "Fetes galantes." In 1910, the year of the first book of the

"Preludes," he conducted his compositions in Vienna and Budapest. By 1913 the second book of "Preludes" was completed.

A triumphal tour of Russia in 1914 preceded the advent World War I, by which Debussy was so affected as to be unable to write. But, despite the appearance of the first symptoms of an incurable illness, he reacted and composed the twelve monumental "Etudes" for the piano and planned to write "six sonatas for various instruments, by Claude Debussy, French musician." He completed three sonatas before his death on March 26, 1918.

Debussy's Piano

Before discussing precise pedal techniques one must consider the actual instrument for which Debussy conceived his piano repertory. The late nineteenth century grand piano was, for our present purposes, the same piano familiar to us today, although slight timbre and sonority variations existed between different makes. According to Charles Cooke, the concert grand piano in Western Europe attained maturity around 1885, just before the first piano compositions of Debussy were published.² Jane Bathori reveals that Debussy actually preferred the tone and timbre of an Erard piano, particularly when performing with the voice or in chamber ensembles.³ George Copeland, however, reminds us that Debussy actually composed the bulk of his piano repertory while sitting at a Pleyel upright!⁴

The middle (sostenuto) pedal was first introduced in France in the middle of the nineteenth century. It was a novelty and was obscure until Steinway and Sons resurrected it half a

century later. Leonid Kreutzer, writing well after the principal Debussy compositions were published, notes the following:

"Es gibt noch das von Steinway und Sohns erfundene sogenannte Prolongement-PedalLeider ist aber die Konstruktion dieses edals noch zu wenig entwickelt, als dass es von wesentlichem Nutzen sein Könnte....Belassen wir es bei der Erwhnung."5

It was believed that Debussy composed the majority of his piano works with pianos having only the regular damper and una corda pedals of his time. Apparently, then, Debussy's works were created upon and for any number of makes, sizes, and shapes of pianos available in France during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the sostenuto pedal is, according to several respected pianists, desirable and necessary in realizing the Debussian harmonic and textural plan.

In analyzing any musical keyboard sound one may distinguish (1) the struck tone and (2) its continuing reverberation. Seldom in the history of music has concentration upon a sound's reverberation been stressed as in the Impressionist keyboard literature. Accounts by his contemporaries of Debussy's "subtle and refined ear" may, in part, explain his preoccupation with prolonged sound.⁶ The modern piano with its built-in "sound prolonger," the damper pedal, is understandably the ideal vehicle for expressing extended sonorities.

Reproducing Piano Rolls

In the second decade of the twentieth century the Welte-Mignon reproducing piano firm contracted several reknowned composers and performers to make commercial rolls of the standard piano literature. Debussy cut several such rolls, many of which have recently been transferred to long-play records.⁷ Although the rolls do, to be sure, accurately reflect certain aspects of the composer's interpretation, they are of somewhat limited value for the modern researcher. Debussy's pianistic talent was not particularly well developed; numerous disparities between recorded versions and the scores indicate that Debussy possessed insufficient skill to execute cleanly many precise effects carefully noted in the score. Despite their limitations, though, the performances contribute substantially to our investigation of pedalling. They record, for instance, precisely when Debussy did and did not employ the damper pedal. Unfortunately, though, the mechanical process was unable to record the half-pedalling effects which contributed so much to the Impressionist piano sonority.

Although the disc recording process was relatively crude during Debussy's lifetime, the composer cut several records accompanying well-known singers in performances of his own works. Unfortunately, these discs are "collector's items" today and are virtually inaccessible in the United States.

Pupils and Associates

Certain performers who benefitted from firsthand acquaintance with Debussy's pianistic style have, unfortunately, left no trace of their association with the composer. Such a figure was Ricardo Vines (1874-1943), a Spanish pianist, was considered the foremost interpreter of the Impressionist piano literature. Vines premiered the bulk of Debussy's mature piano repertory between 1901 and 1913. His exquisite performing style was often ascribed to his complex and subtle use of "the two pedals" (damper and una corda). Although Vines cut several recordings early in the century, most of the discs have disappeared from circulation; only a single recording is occasionally encountered today.⁸

In Maurice Dumesnil (1886- 1974), one at last locates a pianist whose close association with Debussy is adequately documented in prose and recording. Dumesnil was a student of the composer at the Paris Conservatoire at the turn of the century and has authored a brief but extremely informative booklet entitled How to Play and Teach Debussy.⁹ Among Dumesnil's recorded legacy a popular reproducing-piano roll of La plus que lente is still widely found today.

E. Robert Schmitz (1889-1949), the foremost interpreter of Debussy's keyboard repertory, published in 1950 the widely read and respected The Piano Works of Claude Debussy.¹⁰ As a pianist, Schmitz made numerous reproducing-piano rolls and recorded the bulk of the Debussy literature on disc. Despite the pianist's

immense popularity as a Debussy interpreter, an unbiased evaluation of Schmitz' writings and performances discloses numerous discrepancies with the fundamental Debussy style. Schmitz maintains that the middle (sostenuto) pedal is desirable and often necessary.¹¹ Although Schmitz occasionally employs "half-pedal," most of his pedal-point realizations are accomplished through the use of the sostenuto pedal; his book, in fact, preaches that Debussy's piano repertory cannot be conceived without recourse to all three pedals. In analysis and programmatic explication, Schmitz contributed substantially to an understanding of Debussy's piano literature; many of his theories, though, are subject to disputation and must be reevaluated in light of further historical investigation.

George Copeland (1882-1971), an American pianist, was one of Debussy's close associates in Paris during the early twentieth century. Copeland introduced the bulk of Debussy's piano literature to the United States public and even arranged an extremely popular transcription of the orchestral work Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun for piano solo. Copeland made numerous reproducing piano rolls between 1910 and 1930 and later recorded substantially on disc, most recently on a subscription recording released in 1963.

A French pianist, Daniel Ericourt (1903-n.d.), was a child prodigy at the Paris Conservatoire early in the twentieth century; he knew the Debussy family well and often performed with the composer in private and in public. His recordings disclose

an intimate familiarity with Debussy's style and employ countless subtle pedal effects in achieving exquisite sonorities. His execution of half-pedal effects is admirably controlled and convincingly presented. Throughout his presentation of the literature, Ericourt employs most of the pedal effects; he executes them with sensitivity and precision, making his recordings veritable "models" of the Impressionist keyboard sound.

All musicians mentioned so far have, without exception, been personally associated with Claude Debussy. On the basis of such contact, the primary external research for this project has been purposely restricted to the writings and recordings of these persons.

CHAPTER III

Impression and Debussy

Definition

The term, "Impressionism," was originally introduced in the visual arts to characterize the work of a group of French painters (Manet, Monet, Renoir and Cezanne) of the late 19th century. They aimed at painting what could be seen at a glance, without recording every detail in the way that earlier painters had done. Some wonderful experiments in color and atmosphere resulted. Although the movement started as early as 1859, it really became established with an Impressionist exhibition in Paris in 1874. The movement spread to French poets such as Mallarme and Verlaine, who called themselves Symbolists. The Symbolists, like the Impressionist painters, turned away from the pathos of the Romantic movement. They discarded the story element in poetry; they scorned the moral, whether expressed or implied. They tried to evoke and suggest rather than to make direct statements.

The new aesthetic doctrines could not but make a deep impression on such musicians as were sensitive to painting and poetry. In consequence, the quest for subtilization of means and refinement of vocabulary soon passed over from painting and poetry to music.

Debussy's Concept of Impressionism

In each of the artistic areas affected by late nineteenth and early twentieth century Impressionism the individual means of

expression focuses upon nuance, a suggestion rather than a definite statement of purpose. A certain vagueness, a "blurring of edges," though not of the form itself, is evident throughout all genres of Impressionism. Claude Debussy, the principal and, perhaps, only "pure" musical Impressionist, clearly affected such objectives throughout his piano repertory.

Debussy met Mallarme in 1887, and from then onwards, began to be associated with the Impressionists and to imbibe their ideas. In a letter of March, 1908, to his publishers, Debussy mentions this term ruefully: "I am trying to do 'something different' - in a way, realities - what the imbeciles call 'impressionism,' a term which is as poorly used as possible, particularly by art critics."¹²

The subject matter Debussy chose for his piano literature is, indeed, wide and varied. Its range extends from court dances of the Baroque and Classic periods ("Menuet" and "Passepied" from Suite Bergamasque) through folk dance (Mazurka, Danse: Tarentelle Styrienne) to early American jazz ("Minstrels" from Preludes I). A varied spectrum of exotic, atmospheric and pictorial effects are also exploited: oriental traits ("Pagodes" from Estampes), spanish rhythms ("La Puerta del Vino" from Preludes II), reflective moods (Nocturne) and the play of water ("Poissins d'or" from Images II, "Ondine" from Preludes II) are all encountered in his literature. Despite the variety of Debussy's subject matter, though, certain compositional techniques were consistently employed when presenting a particular subject from

the Impressionist point-of-view. Such techniques included: (1) the exploitation of non-functional scale systems including the long-dormant ecclesiastical modes, the pentatonic scale and the whole-tone scale; (2) the expansion of the standard nineteenth century harmonic vocabulary beyond the use of triads and seventh chords; (3) the deliberate exploitation of parallel chord movement; (4) a predilection for non-pulsatile rhythms; and, (5) an avoidance of many common eighteenth and nineteenth century musical forms such as the sonata-allegro form.¹³ Each of these compositional devices contributed, in its own way, toward achieving the musical objectives of Impressionism: nuance and suggestion, a "floating" in space. In Debussy's own words, "It (music) is colors and time, in rhythm."¹⁴

CHAPTER IV

La Cathédrale Engloutie

"La Cathédrale Engloutie" (1910) is number 10 in the first of Debussy's two books of Preludes. It takes its name from the old Breton legend of the Cathédrale of Ys, which was engulfed by waves in the 4th century as punishment for an impious population. In the story, the cathedral was allowed to surface out of the water at sunrise to remind the people of their sins, then slowly return to the depths and enchanted sleep.

This prelude has the imposing power of a large-scale tone painting. The unmistakably programmatic narration makes "The Sunken Cathedral" one of Debussy's most celebrated compositions. Its popularity is further enhanced by the quasi-total absence of apparent technical problems. Significant difficulties, however, are located along the line of absolute tonal control, balance, and refined gradation. Furthermore there is a need for a strongly musical mind-- one that is capable of drafting a solid architectural plan that welds the elements of the interpretation (tempo, dynamics, and touch) --into a cohesive picture.¹⁵

There are three principal musical ideas in this work: one is suggestive of plain chant and the organ, as if played by phantom fingers; another is representative of the quiet sea; and, the third is like the slow swelling of the waves. A bell-like figure and a ponderous pedal point are heard at the climax. As the cathedral recedes beneath rocking waves there is an echo of the plain chant and the conclusion is like the opening, but with seconds added to the harmonies. Moving blocks of hollow chords

that Debussy employed to express somber mystery are utilized to suggest the sunken bells. In its chord sessions, the composition represents what was then a new concept of dissonance, a conception in which dissonance was to be regarded as an end in itself and not a mere episode on the road to a redemptive consonance.¹⁶

The correspondence between the story and the music is evident in the dynamic shape of the Prelude $< >$ and the manner in which the thematic elements gradually emerge from the initial idea, and are "fused by the pedal into a single mass of hazy, shimmering sonority."¹⁷ A tripartite design is suggested largely by the tonal plan, in which bass movement from G toward c at the beginning (measures 1-41) and from G-sharp toward C at the end (measure 68) surrounds the central G-sharp section. The three sections successively decrease in length (measures 18, 25, and 46).

CHAPTER V

Pedal Techniques in La Cathédrale Engloutie

Pedalling Signs in Figures

Throughout this chapter, the following indications will be employed in the supplementary figures drawn from "La Cathédrale Engloutie":

(a) full pedal	
	(depress) (change) (release)
(b) u.c.	una corda
(c) o.s.	"over-short damping"
(d) t.c.	tre corda

Una Corda

The observant reader will already have noticed that the una corda in the first measure at this piece is an important technical resource for Debussy. A number of the specific pedal indications in the scores attest to its application; contemporary accounts of Ricardo Vines' "exquisite" performances continually cite his mastery of the "two pedals" (e.g. damper and una corda). A comprehensive survey of pedalling techniques in Debussy's keyboard literature would hardly be complete, then, without discussion of the "soft pedal," as it is frequently called.

In his already oft-quoted treatise on Debussy piano music, E. Robert Schmitz recommends the una corda for general dynamic levels.¹⁸ Although the all-encompassing pervasiveness of this recommendation is a typical Schmitz generalization, a more substantial application of the una corda in Debussy than in

earlier piano literature does seem proper. The Impressionists' predilection for "understatement" in all art forms appears to have its natural musical counterpart in a general dynamic level of subdued proportion; consequently, the una corda may contribute substantially to the attainment of this effect.

Maurice Dumesnil, moreover, contends that the una corda need not be restricted to piano or pianissimo passages.¹⁹ In modifying a loud attack by use of the una corda the pianist, according to Dumesnil, avoids the thin, superficial sound so aggravating to the mellifluous Debussy "sound ideal."

The history of the una corda in piano literature has often indicated its use in passages marked softer than piano. In Debussy, such dynamic signposts represent a minimal application of the soft pedal. For instance, I suggest the joint use of the una corda and damper pedals to attain a "soft and shimmering" sonority in measures 1-6 and 14-15. In measures 16-21 use the una corda and damper pedals to represent pictorially the indistinct rising of the cathedral out of the mist (tre corde at measure 19). In measures 44 and 70 to the end use una corda for the pianissimo pp designated by Debussy (see Figure 1.)

Naturally, the individual instrument and place of performance affect the degree to which the una corda will be exploited. It is not unreasonable, in fact, to consider a mastery of the una corda in Debussy performance more difficult and less definable, in some respects, than that of the damper pedal. Its complete application, for some, may only be totally realized through

Profondément calme (Dans une brume doucement sonore)

measures 1-6

Peu à peu sortant de la brume

sempre pp

p marqué pp

p

marqué

Augmentez progressivement (Sans presser)

measures 16-21

Figure 1

Example of Una Corda Usage in "La Cathédrale Engloutie"

artistic instinct, an aspect of piano performance beyond the scope of this or any other critical study.

Prolongation

In his discussion of Debussy pedalling E. Robert Schmitz states that the forte (e.g. damper) pedal must precisely recognize a score's harmonic and melodic changes. Such a statement, in keeping with Schmitz' common predilection for generalization, fails to appreciate the innumerable "blurred outlines" which contribute, at least partially, to the unique effect of Impressionist art, poetry and music. Schmitz' statement, moreover, is simply a rephrasing of a standard pedalling guide used throughout the nineteenth century, a rule-of-thumb which Debussy, as we see, rendered somewhat obsolete in his pianistic writings.

Elsewhere, Schmitz attempts to describe and limit different "levels" employed in the use of the damper pedal. Although a partial depression of the pedal, the so-called "half-pedal" or "overshort-damper pedal" (to be fully discussed later), contributes substantially to Debussy's overall pedal technique, it seems unrealistic to specify multiple fractional levels and their corresponding effects. Individual differences between pianos render the transfer of such precisely defined gradations virtually impossible. A general recognition of some degree of "fractional pedalling," whether obtained near one-quarter, one-half, or three-quarters the depth of the damper pedal, seems more appropriate when discussing this aspect of the technique.

Measures 9-13, 50-52, and 60, one needs pedal changes according to suggested harmonic changes. In measures 22, 40 and 84, repedal at textural changes (see Figure 2.)

Sustaining of Long Notes

A simple direction made by Charles Cooke provides a convenient starting point for discussing specific pedalling in Debussy.²⁰ Cooke observes that long notes that cannot be sustained by the fingers must, of necessity, be retained by pedal. The resultant sounds often create the "blurs" of "clouds" Cooke considers essential to the Impressionist sonority. Measures 1-6 produces such an effect with Debussy's own pedal indication. In measures 22-23 use full-measure pedals to sustain dotted whole-notes. In measures 24-27 pedal analogous to measures 22-23 in accordance with the ostinato figure (see figure 3.)

Pedal Points

Several authors, E. Robert Schmitz included, cite the importance of the damper pedal in sustaining the pedal points so frequently encountered in Debussy. Often a pedal must be sustained beyond its indicated value in the score. Having determined the occasional need for pedal point prolongation, one must now consider its precise length. A general solution lies in extending the pedal point to the end of the phrase or rhythmic unit; such as measures 53-54, 55-56, and 57-58 (see Figure 4.)

Measures 21 - 22

measures 83 - 84

measures 59 - 60,

Figure 2

Example of Prolongation Usage in "La Cathédrale Engloutie"

measures 22 -27

Figure 3
Example of Sustaining of Long Notes Usage in
"La Cathédrale Engloutie"

Technical necessity often requires the average pianist to pedal tones which must be quitted by the pianist's fingers. In Measures 85 to the end maintain a C pedal-point. At the same time, whole-note chords in measures 86-87 must be stressed slightly to cancel effects of the dissonant "D"'s in preceding chords (see Figure 4.)

Legato Parallel Chords

In his excellent treatise Pedalling the Modern Pianoforte, the English pianist York Bowen notes that the damper pedal often represents the only means of attaining a legato in a chain of parallel chords. Since a primary feature of the Impressionist harmonic vocabulary concerns parallel chord movement, this use of the pedal is particularly relevant to Debussy. A simple parallel chord passage is shown in measures 62-66; here, a pedal change on each chord produces the desired effect (see Figure 5.)

"Over-Short Damping"

The reknowned British pedagogue, Tobias Matthay, in his book The Principles of Fingering and the Laws of Pedalling, describes two pedal effects which are of great value in solving certain Debussian sonority problems: "over-short damping" and "half-pedalling." Over-short damping may be employed whenever a low bass note must be prolonged against higher-pitched moving harmonies. The effect is only successful when the sustained tone is low enough to activate strongly vibrating bass strings and the upper harmonies are light and well-removed in pitch. In

This musical score shows measures 53-58. It is written for piano in G major (one sharp). The score is in 3/4 time. Measures 53 and 54 are marked *pp* (pianissimo). Measures 55 and 56 are marked *p* (piano). The score features complex arpeggiated figures in both hands, with many notes beamed together. There are several slurs and ties. A measure rest is present in measure 56. The piece ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign in measure 58.

measures 53-58

This musical score shows measures 86-87. It is written for piano in G major. Both measures are marked *8va...* (octave up). The score features complex arpeggiated figures in both hands, with many notes beamed together. There are several slurs and ties. The piece ends with a double bar line in measure 87.

measures 86-87

Figure 4

Example of Pedal Points Usage in "La Cathédrale Engloutie"

The image displays a musical score for measures 62-66 of the piece "La Cathédrale Engloutie". The score is written for piano and features two systems of staves. The first system, measures 62-63, shows a treble and bass staff with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The music consists of parallel chords moving in a stepwise fashion. A fermata is placed over the final chord of measure 63, and the word "molto" is written below the staff. The second system, measures 64-66, begins with a measure number box containing the number 63. The music continues with parallel chords, marked with a "dim." (diminuendo) in measure 64 and a "p" (piano) dynamic in measures 65 and 66. A fermata is placed over the final chord of measure 66. The score is labeled "measures 62-66" at the bottom.

measures 62-66

Figure 5
Example of Legato Parallel Chords in "La Cathédrale Engloutie"

execution, the effect consists of striking the bass tone firmly, fully depressing the damper pedal and raising the damper pedal a fraction of its depth. When raised, the pedal will lower the dampers to a critical height wherein they will substantially mute the lightly vibrating upper strings but effect inconsequentially the strongly vibrating lower strings. Obviously, the precise level of the critical "fractional" raising of the pedal varies greatly among instruments and requires careful experimentation for proper identification. Certain well-known "problem passages" in this piece attain a satisfactory solution only through over-short damping. In measures 28-39, one must exploit "over-short damping" in order to retain a pedal point while clearing excessive blurring of upper register chords (see Figure 6.) Maurice Dumesnil recommends a "late" over-short damping to suggest the organ overlap in a large cathedral.²¹

Phrase Separations

A clear delineation of phrase structure is, in part, the responsibility of the damper pedal. In many Debussy passages a clean pedal change is needed to separate the individual members of a phrase group. At times, conflicts arise between two distinct phrase groupings performed simultaneously in contrasting textural levels. In measures 22 and 84 repedal at the texture change. In measures 64-65 the pedal breaks between phrases (see Figure 7.)

Soudre sans dureté

measures 28-39

Figure 6

Example of "Over-Short Damping" Usage in "La Cathédrale Engloutie"

measures 64-65

Figure 7
Example of Phrase Separations in "La Cathédrale Engloutie"

Pivot-Notes

In connecting two separate sections Debussy frequently employs a single note which is approached as a function of one harmony and quitted as a different function of the next. The note's placement between the two harmonies, then, forms an integral tie between the sections and comprises, in this respect, a harmonic "pivot-note." Since the "pivot-note" should, at some juncture, be heard alone (i.e. capable of being interpreted in either of its harmonic roles), one must ensure its solo, unpedalled sounding in performance. In measures 6-8, repedal the "pivot-note" to articulate a new phrase (see Figure 8.)

"Hazy" Blurring

In addition to prolonging individual notes and chords the damper pedal may, in keeping subtle shadings, alter the tone and timbre of certain passages in the Debussy keyboard literature. Whenever the pedal is depressed, all the dampers are raised, allowing strings other than those struck to vibrate sympathetically; in such a way a pedalled sound will differ substantially from that of an unpedalled "dry" sound. Although the application of a pedal for tone and sonority change is often intuitive, certain identifiable musical features prompt specific pedalling procedures, such as "hazy" blurring.

York Bowen describes many of Debussy's overlapping pedal effects as "hazy," the result of a necessary unclear blurring analogous to the indistinct lines inherent in Impressionist painting. In measure 16-21 use a single "hazy" pedal to

measures 6-8

Figure 8

Example of Pivot-Notes Usage in "La Cathédrale Engloutie"

represent pictorially the indistinct rising of the cathedral out of the mist ("peu a peu sortant de la brume"), and use una corda at the same time (tre corde at measure 19). In many instances such blurring has extramusical connotations. For instance, in measures 25-27, occasional "flutter" clears excessive blurring as lower registers are gradually exploited. Measures 66-83 use a single pedal to effect the muffled ("sours") sonority of an "echo" atmosphere; also, an occasional (optional) "flick" of the pedal to clear excessive blur in measures 72-83 must be achieved (see Figure 9.)

Comprehensive Analysis and Annotation of the Score

In the Appendix A, a score of "La Cathedrale Engloutie" has been annotated to include the pedalling used by this author. As well, a commentary is presented in Appendix B, provides a measure-by-measure rationale for such pedal indications. Page references to textual discussions of the pedal techniques being employed are also noted in the commentary. For the purpose of comparison on with other editions, Appendix C displays the pedal markings of Maurice Hinson for Alfred Publishing Company.²²

72

73

74

75

76

77

78

79

80

81

82

83

au Mouvt

pp

Comme un écho de la phrase entendue précédemment

Flottant et sourd

B♭ basse

measures 66-83

Figure 9

Example of "Hazy" Blurring Usage in "La Cathédrale Engloutie"

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

The piano works of Claude Debussy exploit to the fullest a pianist's mastery of the two pedals commonly found on French pianos in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, namely the damper pedal and the una corda. The damper pedal is used substantially in each of its three traditional roles: that of prolonging a sound, altering its quality, and effecting a dynamic emphasis. In addition, various effects achieved through the application of "fractional" pedalling are essential in realizing an authentic Impressionist sonority. The una corda, moreover, may be employed at any dynamic level to ensure the "understatement" sought by Debussy and his contemporaries in allied fields.

The modern piano with its built-in "sound prolonger," the damper pedal, is, understandably, the ideal vehicle for expressing extended sonorities. Modern musical notation, though, often proves inadequate for indicating precisely the prolongation effects desired by an Impressionist composer. In musical styles as seemingly disparate as those of Beethoven and the Expressionists, musical notation may accurately describe the essential features of music emphasizing, principally, the struck tone. In Debussy, though, conventional graphic notation often belies desired sonority effects. This notational shortcoming is particularly evident in the piano literature with its potential for sonority prolongation in pedal.

In view of the need for such a detailed pedal study, this project has investigated systematically the piano work "La Cathédrale Engloutie" by Claude Debussy. The "La Cathédrale Engloutie" has not exhausted all the pedal technique of Claude Debussy. As suggested earlier, each pianist's assimilation of a "proper" Debussy pedal technique will draw the pianist ever farther from the all-too-common "abus de la pedale" and ever closer to a valid Impressionist sonority.

Although specific pedalling suggestions have been formulated in the paper, a general "rule-of-thumb" will prove beneficial when approaching a Debussy keyboard work for the first time. When a choice is demanded, extend the pedal to the limit of clarity, remembering that the Impressionist aesthetic comprises a "blurring of edges," not a blur of the entire form itself. In this manner the general Impressionist expressive objectives will be approached in an even preliminary reading of a composition.

Since the conclusions in a paper of this nature are based largely upon speculation and a calculated exercise of choice, such conclusions serve not as immutable laws but as hypotheses, working procedures to be considered in each individual case. In addition, one must not isolate a particular pedal technique from other pianistic considerations; the relationship of pedalling to touch and dynamic shading, for instance, is an important one.

APPENDIX A

Score of "La Cathédrale Engloutie"

Annotated by the Author

.X

Profondément calme (Dans une brame doucement sonore)

First system of musical notation. It features a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. The music is marked with a piano (pp) dynamic. There are various musical notations including notes, rests, and slurs. A small 'K.C.' is written below the bass staff.

Doux et fluide

Second system of musical notation, continuing the piece. It maintains the same key signature and time signature. The music is characterized by flowing lines and slurs, consistent with the 'Doux et fluide' instruction.

Third system of musical notation. It continues the musical development with various note values and rests. The dynamics remain consistent with the previous systems.

Fourth system of musical notation. It includes the instruction '(sans nuances)' above the staff. The music concludes with a final cadence. The dynamic marking 'pp' is present at the beginning of the system.

Peu à peu sortant de la brume

16

sempre pp

p marqué pp

18

p marqué pp

p

marqué

t.c.

Augmentez progressivement (Sans presser)

20

22

piu f

Sonore sans dureté

24

ff

ff

8^e basse (o.s.)

(o.s.)

(o.s.)

31

(o.s.) 8^a bassa (o.s.) 8^a bassa (o.s.)

32

(o.s.) 8^a bassa (o.s.) 8^a bassa (o.s.) 8^a bassa

41

p più p pp più pp

8va bassa (o.s.) 8va bassa (o.s.) 8va bassa (o.s.) 8va bassa

u.c.

42

Un peu moins lent (Dans une expression allant grandissant)

pp expressif et concentré

51

pp pp

66

p *f*

69

p *ff* *molto dim.*

72

p *p* *p*

75

pp *pp* *pp*

au Mouvt

*Comme un écho de la phrase
entendue précédemment*

*Flottant
et sourd*

8^e basse

73

p *p* *p*

8^e basse

76

8^e basse

77

8^e basse

78

Dans la sonorité du début

più pp *pp*

8^e basse

79

8^e basse

(... La Cathédrale engloutie)

APPENDIX B

Commentary with a Measure-by-Measure

Rationale for Pedal Indications

"La Cathédrale Engloutie"

"La Cathédrale Engloutie"

<u>measure</u>	<u>commentary</u>	<u>page ref.</u> (text)	<u>page ref.</u> (score)
1 -- 2	single pedal to sustain dotted whole-notes and observe markings at the of m.1 -- <u>una corda</u> for for pp level	18 15	35
3 -- 4	analogous to m.1-2		
5 -- 6	analogous to m.1-2		
6, beat 4	repedal "pivot-note" to articulate new phrase	28	
9 -- 13	pedal changes according to harmonic changes	18	
14 -- 15	analogous to m.1-2		
16 -- 21	single "hazy" pedal to represent pictorially the indistinct rising of the cathedral out of the mist ("peu a peu sortant de la brume <u>tre corde</u> at m.19	28 15	36
22	repedal at texture change	25	
22 -- 23	full-measure pedals to sustain dotted whole-notes	18	
24 -- 27	pedal analogous to m.22-23 in accordance with ostinato figure		
25 -- 27	occasional "flutter" to clear excessive blurring as lower registers are gradually exploited	28	

<u>measure</u>	<u>commentary</u>	<u>page ref.</u> (text)	<u>page ref.</u> (score)
28 -- 39	exploitation of "over -short damping" to retain pedal point while clearing excessive blurring of upper register chords (Maurice Dumesnil recommends a "late" over-short damping to suggest the organ overlap in a large cathedral)	22	36 37
40	repedal at texture change	18	37
42 -- 48	single pedal -- no change required as harmonics disappear independently in slow tempo	18	37
44	<u>una corda</u> for pp level	15	37
50 -- 52	pedal change according to suggested harmonic changes	18	37
53 -- 54	single pedal to sustain pedal point	19	37
55 -- 56	analogous to m.53-54		37 38
57 -- 58	analogous to m.53-54		
58 -- 59	catch pedal point in pedal	19	38
60	repedal according to harmonic change	18	38
60 -- 61	analogous to m.58-59		38
62	analogous to m.60		38
62 -- 66	pedal changes to effect legato parallel chords	22	38
64 -- 65	pedal breaks between phrases	25	38

<u>measure</u>	<u>commentary</u>	<u>page ref.</u> (text)	<u>page ref.</u> (score)
66 -- 83	single pedal to effect muffled ("sours") sonority of "echo" atmosphere begin at m.70 use <u>una corda</u> for pp level	28 15	38 39
72 -- 83	occasional (optional) "flick" of pedal to clear excessive blur		39
84	repedal at texture change	25	39
85	single pedal to end, maintaining C pedal point. (whole-note chords in m.86 and 87 must be stressed slightly to cancel effects of the dissonant "D"'s in preceding chords).	19	39

APPENDIX C

Score of "La Cathédrale Engloutie"

Annotated by Maurice Hinson

La Cathédrale engloutie

(The Sunken Cathedral)

45

X. Profondément calme (Dans une brume doucement sonore) (♩ = 69) ②

8va...

pp

(una corda)

4

8va...

Doux et fluide

8

13

pp

pp (sans nuances)

② MM marks by the editor.

Peu à peu sortant de la brume

16

sempre pp

p marqué pp

18

p marqué pp

p

marqué

20 Augmentez progressivement (Sans presser)

20

(tre corde)

22

8va

più f

26

ff

Sonore sans dureté

ff

8va

31

8va ...

35

8va ...

39

8va ...

43

8va ...

più p

pp

più pp

47

Un peu moins lent (Dans une expression allant grandissant) (♩ = 63)

pp expressif et concentré

52

pp

pp

This system contains measures 52 through 55. The music is written for piano in a key with two sharps (F# and C#). Measures 52 and 53 feature a complex texture with multiple voices and a prominent bass line. Measures 54 and 55 continue this texture, with dynamic markings of *pp* (pianissimo) in measures 53 and 55.

56

p

This system contains measures 56 through 58. The music continues in the same key and style. Measure 57 has a dynamic marking of *p* (piano). The texture remains dense with multiple voices.

59

8va.

f

ff

molto

This system contains measures 59 through 62. Measure 59 has a dynamic marking of *f* (forte). Measure 60 has a dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo). Measure 62 has a dynamic marking of *molto* (molto). The music is marked with an 8va. (octave up) in measure 59.

63

dim.

p

p

This system contains measures 63 through 67. Measure 63 has a dynamic marking of *dim.* (diminuendo). Measures 64 and 65 have dynamic markings of *p* (piano). The music features complex textures with multiple voices and a prominent bass line.

68

pp

This system contains measures 68 through 71. Measure 68 has a dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo). The music continues in the same key and style, featuring complex textures with multiple voices.

72 au Mouvement

72 au Mouvement

pp Comme un écho de la phrase entendue précédemment

Flottant et sourd

8va.

Flottant et sourd

75

75

Andante

8va

78

78

8va

A

This image shows a musical score for the song 'The Rose Tree'. It features two staves. The upper staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It contains a melody with a long, sweeping line that spans across the staff. The lower staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef, featuring a continuous eighth-note pattern. Below the piano staff, there is a dotted line labeled '8va' and a series of small, sharp, upward-pointing marks, likely indicating a specific performance technique or a simplified version of the melody.

81

Dans la sonorité du début (♩ = 66)

84

Dans la sonorité du début (♩ = 66)

84

pp

85

86

87

88

⑥ Debussy gradually ritards beginning here to the end in his recording of this piece.

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER I

- 1 "He was a master in employing the pedal.....he knew, at the piano, how to evoke the sonorities of the orchestra".
Heinrich Strobel. Claude Debussy, traduction a Andre Coeuroy.
(Paris: Editions le bon plaisir, 1940), p. 205.

CHAPTER II

- 2 Charles Cooke, Playing the Piano for Pleasure (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960).
- 3 Jane Bathori, "Les Musiciens que j'ai connus - II, Debussy", translated by Felix Aprahamian, Recorded Sound, 6, Spring, 1962.
- 4 George Copeland, "Debussy, the Man I Knew", Atlantic Monthly, January, 1955, p. 34-38.
- 5 "There is yet a so-called sustaining pedal originated by Steinway and sons.....Unfortunately, it is still too little developed to be of practical use.....Therefore, let us only mention it."
- 6 Leon Vallas., The theories of Claude Debussy, Musicien Francais, translated by Marie Obrien (London: Oxford University Press, 1929).
- 7 Telefunken 18
Telefunken 34
American Columbia ML 4291
Classics Record Library WV 6633
- 8 "Soriree dans Grenade" from Estampes, Columbia D 15245.
Of passing interest is the fact that Vines was an early teacher of a, now, more well-known French musician, Francis Poulenc.
- 9 Maurice Dumesnil, How to Play and Teach Debussy (New York: Schroeder and Gunther, 1932).
- 10 Robert E. Schmitz, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950).
- 11 Schmitz, op cit., p. 38.

The common confusion concerning the nomenclature of piano pedals prompts one to employ the following terms in this paper:
right pedal = damper pedal; middle pedal = sostenuto pedal; left

pedal = una corda.

CHAPTER III

12 Robert E. Schmitz, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950), p. 13.

13 Claude Debussy. Letter to Jacques Durand. Pourville, September 3, 1907.

"I am more and more convinced that music, by its very nature, is something that cannot be poured into a rigid and traditional form."

14 Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

15 Bela Siki, Piano Repertoire: A Guide to Interpretation and Performance (New York: Schirmer Books, 1981), p. 301.

16 Oscar Thompson, Debussy, Man and Artist. (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1940), p. 267.

17 Nadia Boulanger, "Lectures on Modern Music", Rice Institute Pamphlet, XIII, No.2, (1926), p. 172-173.

CHAPTER V

18 Robert E. Schmitz, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950), p. 38.

19 Maurice Dumesnil, How to Play and Teach Debussy (New York: Schroeder and Gunther, 1932), p. 14.

20 Charles Cooke, Playing the Piano for Pleasure (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 62.

21 Dumesnil, op cit., p. 19.

22 Maurice Hinson, Preludes, Book I (California: Alfred Publishing

Co., Inc. 1986), p. 45-49.

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