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Research Article

CLAUDE DEBUSSY FIRST 12 PRELUDES FOR PIANO

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Iseyev Ruslan Alimjanovich
Assistant Teacher State Conservatoire Of Uzbekistan Nukus Branch, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the piano preludes of the greatest French Impressionist composer Claude Debussy. The first 12 preludes, their figurative content, structure and stylistic features are analysed in detail. Their figurative content, structure, stylistic peculiarities, the composer's innovative approach to the traditional genre of the prelude and the peculiarities of this famous genre caused by it are analysed in detail.

KEYWORDS

Impressionism, preludes, preludes for piano, french Impressionism, musical performance, french music, piano.

INTRODUCTION

A cycle of twenty-four preludes composed by Debussy at the end of his career (first notebook in 1910, second notebook in 1913), completed, in essence, the development of this genre in Western European music, whose most significant phenomena have hitherto been the preludes of Bach and Chopin (The development of the prelude in the 20th century is associated almost exclusively with the work of Russian and Soviet composers such as Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, Shostakovich, Kabalevsky and others. Their work has charted new paths for the evolution of the genre.).

For Debussy, this genre summarizes his creative path and is a kind of encyclopedia of all that is most characteristic and typical of the composer's musical content, range of poetic images and style. The prelude's ability to embody individual, shifting impressions, the absence of obligatory schemes in composition, and improvisational freedom of expression were all close to the aesthetic views and artistic method of the Impressionist composer.

Debussy's twenty-four Preludes are a cycle of miniature musical paintings, each containing a completely independent artistic image.

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Unlike the Chopin preludes, there is little sense of cyclicism here, that is, the interconnection of all or part of the preludes due to a common idea or a unified logic of musical development. In Debussy's Preludes we will not find such a wealth of figurative content and genre connections as in Chopin's (Chopin's cycle of preludes reveals to the listener the immense richness of man's inner world, wide range of his thoughts and feelings - from light serene lyrics to dramatic pathos, from uncontrollable passion to focused grief. This extraordinary richness of emotional states, shades of human experience Chopin embodied in a bright and varied genre. He attracted to this seemingly most "intimate" genre of music the features of the most common everyday musical genres - song, romance, dance, march, nocturne, etc. While each prelude is completely independent, Chopin's entire cycle has a definite dramaturgical intent.), but they are remarkable for the variety of pictorial and poetic themes in the vivid coloring of the language. This article will deal with the first 12 preludes.

MAIN PART

A major and very significant composition of 1910 was the first notebook of Preludes for piano. By giving each of the preludes a programmatic meaning, Debussy, as usual, went against the academic tradition that was accustomed to treating this genre as the domain of "pure" music. But by placing the titles of the Preludes at the end (rather than the beginning) of each of them, and in addition, by accompanying these titles with dots, Debussy seemed to emphasize his unwillingness to be intrusive, his intention to leave the listeners to "guess".

The forms of the preludes often gravitate towards three-part, but are free from any schematism and constantly reveal the ease of transitions, alternations and combinations, structure and development.

№ 1. "Delphic Dancers." The occasion - the prototype was the sculptural group of three dancers on a fragment of a Greek temple; Debussy saw a reproduction of this group in the Louvre. The music impresses with exceptional plasticity of slow, flowing movements. It is common for Debussy to play harmonic colors - then cloudy and tart (increased triads), then light and soft (natural turns). The role of the rhythm, based on changes of accents and calms and forming two pentatactos at the beginning, is also remarkable. In tacts 11-14, polyphony of converging and diverging lines is characteristic. In tacts 23-24, one can clearly see how much the coloration of the tertian chromatic juxtapositions is still beloved by Debussy. The last seven bars are striking in their coloristic subtlety and delicacy: Following the chromatic passages of the augmented triads, Debussy imposes a complex dominant in B-flat major (including the dominant in D minor) with light highlights. After these tart consonances, the tonic of B-flat major is especially clear. Curiously, in the first scene of the second act of Chabrier's "Gwendoline" we find music that foreshadows some of the turns of the "Delphic Dancers" :

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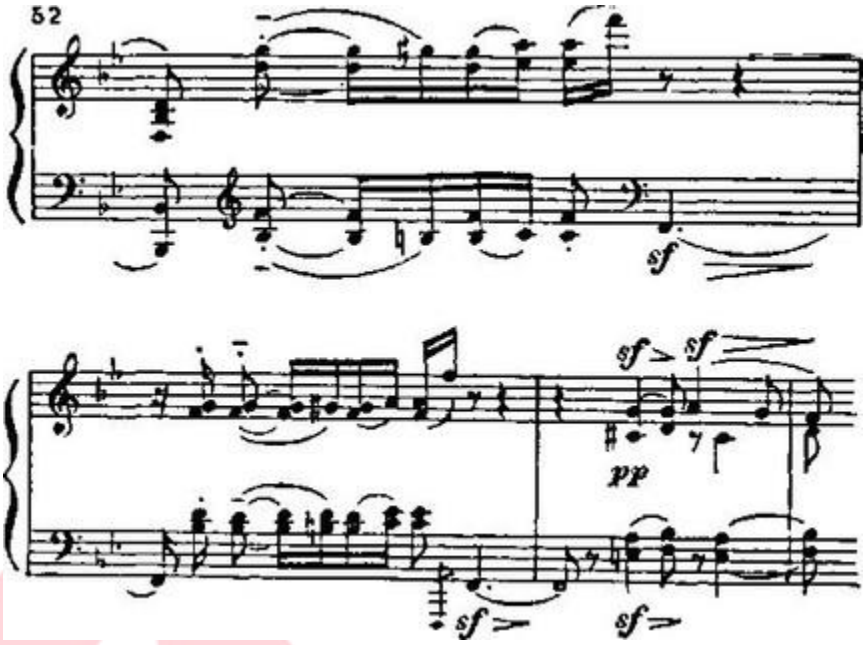

This is one example of Debussy's development and complication of the intonations found in his predecessors.

№ 2. "Sails." According to Marguerite Long, Debussy criticized an overly "colorful" performance of this Prelude, exclaiming: "this is not a photograph of a beach." Indeed, all the music is intended to be "intangible," like a ghostly vision over the sea. Of course, sails are a thankless object to depict with sounds. But Debussy instinctively went against the convention of metaphor, sensitively rendering quiet splashes and rustles. The dominance of whole-tone is shaded before the reprise by a pentatonic fragment. What is striking is the purely impressionistic in figurative meaning of the richness of the rhythmics, cultivating a multitude of details and nuances within a quiet contemplation. Polyphony of softly contrasting lines is developed - as in the first prelude. "Sails" is one of Debussy's most "weightless" pieces, it is like Monet's most airy and delicate landscapes.

№ 3. "Wind on the Plain." Perhaps the occasion for the composition of this prelude was Verlaine's poem (from "Forgotten Ariettes") with an epigraph from Favart: "The wind on the plain..." (See Paul Verlaine. Collected Poems translated by Valery Bryusov, p. 39.). Either way, the prelude "Wind on the Plain" contains a soundscape of light and persistent blowing alternating with violent gusts. The expressive factors are effectively alternated. The entire first section (bars 1-8) and its subsequent analogies are built on a play of semitones that create the image of a light, sad whistle. In bars 9-12, there is a whole new coloration of fast descending septactic chords. In tacts 22 and beyond, the whole-tone enters, in tacts 28, 30, etc. - swift blows-bursts of triads. A little further on (bars 38 and following), the whistling of the semitones is intensified by the proceeding movement. And in the coda there is a new coloristic detail: through the quiet whistling of the wind one can hear a polytonally ascending chromatic chain of three major triads. The whole structure of the piece seems entirely subordinated to

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the sonorous task; and yet it does not break with the three-part structure, containing, in addition, elements of development before the reprise.

№ 4. "Sounds and scents roar in the evening air." The title of this prelude uses the third line from the first stanza of Baudelaire's poem "Evening, Harmonie" (Chandra and Ideal series), Debussy certainly made use of some figurative elements of Baudelaire's poem and, above all, the image of the "melancholy waltz", the sounds of the "fluttering violin". The lyrical plein air landscape is masterfully constructed. There are rumbling echoes, then sweet and languid tunes. The music swells in and out. The pentatonic rhythm gives it an unsteady and shaky feel at first. As usual with Debussy, the genre receives vague, semi-fantastic outlines. As soon as the simple, elementary intonations of the dance are glimpsed, they are immediately erased by bizarre turns of harmonies. The final four bars are marvelous in their picturesqueness - it is as if the distant and deafening echoes of horns; the sound perspective immediately seems to expand immensely, the ear is drowned in space. Judging by M. Long's recollections, Debussy also invested this piece with thoughts about the ephemeral nature of human life and the fleeting nature of joy devoid of a future. However, this is more of an abstract, additional commentary than a program.

№ 5. "The Hills of Anacapri." Unlike the preceding evening landscape, this whole one seems to be permeated with light and joy. According to S. Köcklen, here Debussy makes one think of Chabrier. Indeed, the music of "The Hills of Anacapri" contains something of the expansive gaiety of the author of "Spain." However, the brilliance of impressionist color belongs here entirely to Debussy, as well as the characteristic refined and sonorous interpretation of the genre. The genre is represented by bells (tinkling and quiet at the beginning, loud and resounding before the end), the image of an impetuous tarantella, and the intonations of a Neapolitan love song (Debussy himself saw here a "handsome fellow"). But all this does not crystallize to "tangibility", but whizzes and shimmers in a poetic "mirage". The role of the high register (from the beginning of the piece) is notable, as is the carefree murmuring pentatonic. In the middle section (beginning with the introduction of the song theme), calm and full basses appear for the first time. It's a very expressive light and shade - it's as if we've come from the scorching rays of the sun into an enchanting cool grove. The slow love theme is very peculiarly stated (remarque Modere et expressif). It is heard now and then in one middle voice - under the upper ostinato F-sharp, accompanied by passages of subvocalizations, interrupted by a different rhythm of the accompaniment. All of this gives her a special, flirty charm. And the more dazzling is the reprise of the fantastic tarantella, at the end of which Debussy reaches the extreme, highest limits of piercing sonority. Like "Iberia", the prelude "The Hills of Anacapri" reflects new tendencies in Debussy's work, striving for clear contours and sharp "graphic" sonorities. This "engraving" of "The Hills of Anacapri" is symptomatic, and will find its continuation in a number of other preludes.

№ 6. "Footsteps in the Snow." In this prelude Debussy's intention was purely metaphorical and therefore he was unable to create distinct images (how can steps in the snow be conveyed by musical sounds?!). Debussy unwillingly had to write a remark at the beginning of the piece: “this rhythm must have the sonic significance of the background of a sad and icy landscape”. But such an image could not be

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substantiated by the music, which, however, expressed something else; something very sad, compulsive and languid in its monotony. In this respect the task is perfectly solved - through a multitude of melodic and harmonic shades, through many variants of texture, Debussy conducts an ostinato rhythmic figure with a characteristic "push" rhythm (sixteenths and fourths in excess), over which, at times, intonations of indefinite and restrained complaint ("tender and sad regret" - according to Debussy's remark) appear (Let us recall the analogy in the piece "Snow Dancing" from The Children's Corner). The very end of the prelude is very expressive and simple, with the widest separation of bass and discant in the final chord of D minor.

№ 7. "What the West Wind Saw." This is one of the strongest plays in the entire series. Unlike the finale of "The Sea," the picture of the raging elements here is bleak. Almost the only thing left of the purely human are the "choral" fragments (bars 7-9 and the corresponding episode before the end), but even here too big chord leaps disturb the sense of chorality. Otherwise, the music of the prelude expresses the undivided and ferocious domination of elemental and destructive forces.

The formal tonal basis of the piece is F-sharp minor, but the tonality, as usual for late Debussy, is interpreted in a very expansive way (for example, already in the first six bars, stormy rolls of passages layer two altered subdominant septaccords on the organ point of the tonic). In the choral fragment (bars 7-9) we again see the role of tertian chromatic juxtapositions preserved by Debussy (D-sharp major and A major are drawn to F-sharp major). In bars 10-14, the characteristic "noise" soundwriting of large seconds (in addition, on the basis of a whole-tone fret) comes out. From tact 15, a period of gradual and violent buildup begins. First, there are the persistent accents and chromatic waves of ascending parallel broken triads (And Debussy could not do without chromaticisms - longtime companions of wind imagery in music!). Then the beats intensify menacingly, and enlarged triads enter. The effect of gusts and trills (remark strident - i.e. "shrill") following this is magnificent - just the way a powerful wind is able to tear and rumble. A little farther on, against a background of humming whistles, pitiful short phrases appear in the right hand (bars 26 and on).

Could these be human groans? I think not; after all, the wind can also "moan", "howl", "cry". Soon he becomes fierce with redoubled force (again three signs in the key, in the bass - beats of seconds), roaring and rumbling. Then, after a violent upsurge (bars 43-46, non legato marking), there is a climax. Here, with the sounding of rapidly changing septaccords (bars 47-50), the colouring seems to become clearer, and heroic and fanfare-like intonations are heard (when they were first performed (in bars 21-22), enlarged triads prevailed!). But this glimmer of human will is immediately extinguished in the deafening roar and whistles of the merciless elements. There are barely any echoes of the chorale (bars 59-62). At the end, the music is once again overpowered by the pressure of soulless elemental forces.

№ 8. "The Girl with Hair the Colour of Flax." The contrast of this prelude in relation to the previous one is most striking. Here Debussy captivates with purity and tenderness, pastoral calm and goodness (It is hardly accidental that the same tonality was chosen, but with a different inclination. "What the West Wind Saw" was in F-sharp minor, and here it's in G-flat major. In general, the group of preludes Nos. 6-8 has as if a dramaturgically unified meaning. In "Footsteps in the

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Snow" there is hopeless sadness, in "What the West Wind Saw" - the horror of death and destruction, in "The Girl with Hair the Colour of Flax" - the alluringly beautiful image of Melisande. For an apt reflection on these contrasts, see Debussy et E. Roe, p. 21. "E. Lokshpeiser sees in the prelude "What the West Wind Saw" a possible echo of the images of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind").

This prelude is a very striking example of free improvisation in Debussy's work. Her music flows strikingly at ease, rhythmically, melodically and harmonically, as if playing with the plasticity of emerging forms. She is at times dreamy, at times enthusiastic, at times reserved to a whisper. The tetratonics at the beginning, the role of tertian chromatic juxtapositions (G-flat major - E-flat major, E-flat major - C-flat major), nonaccords as expressors of poetic-sweetness (tacts 17-18), subplots, reprise of the theme on plagal harmony are highlighted. Is it not significant that, seeking the light and ideal, Debussy reached for the simplicity and clarity of folk tunes and melodies?

№ 9. "Interrupted Serenade." Here Debussy returns to images of Spain (not without reason, the D major theme repeats the march-dance theme from the finale of Iberia). According to Marguerite Long's recollections, Debussy depicted in this prelude the vicissitudes of a Spanish guitarist who is prevented by street accidents from finishing his serenade. There is apparently nothing tragic or dramatic in the idea of the play, but shades of sadness are heard more than once (the last lyrical episode with Rubato's remark is particularly expressive in this respect). The sound of the guitar is excellently imitated in the prelude - not only the texture of the writing, but also the character of the timbre combinations are reproduced.

№ 10. "The Sunken Cathedral." Along with the prelude "What the West Wind Saw," this one is most remarkable in the first notebook. The perfection and slenderness of its content and form are partly due to the fact that, as we have seen, the range of these images had gradually crystallised in Debussy's work long before 1910. Debussy was long and persistently drawn to the poetry of ringing and choral singing "from the depths" - he eventually created a masterpiece.

As in many of Debussy's other works, the influence of Mussorgsky (mainly Pictures at an Exhibition and the romance Above the River from the cycle Without the Sun) is clearly felt here. Debussy follows his own intonational paths, on the one hand revitalising the techniques of medieval organum (parallel sequences of empty quintets) and, on the other, making brilliant use of the techniques of impressionist sound painting. The soundscape of the play is based on the legend of the old Breton town of Is, which in the 4th or 5th century was swallowed up by a watery abyss; bells, organ and choral singing come at times from the depths of the ocean. In just five pages, Debussy managed to create an entire poem written with rare skill. Already in the first section (bars 1-15) the shades of colour are wonderfully calculated. At first, the parallel quinta-quarta quarta on the basis of the bass descending lower and lower (bars 1-5) (Incidentally, the piece, which has C major as its tonal centre, begins as if in G major, which makes it possible to gradually approach the main tonality). Then the sonority "hangs" in the upper register, it rings slightly dimly but persistently. On repeated notes of the E pedal, a stark, prayerful theme in C-sharp minor (Doric) creeps in. And with the return of the undulating, slow swell of the quint-quartet (tacts 14-15) - it is complicated by harmonic layering (This is where the overriding

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harmony of the first-step C major septaccord is formed.). Throughout the first section of the piece, Debussy freely combines C major and C-sharp minor (Doric) as simple variants of a single tonic.

The next fragment (bars 16-27) reveals the image of the sunken cathedral with splendid imagery. The shifts to B major and then to E-flat major (with richly filled textures of figuration and highlights of swelling ringing) are very logical, as both of these tonalities are tertian variants of the C major dominant. The C major returns (bars 28 and onwards). The sonority of this fragment (bars 28-39) is superb in its imagery. Above the deep and rumbling tonic bass move massive parallel triads of organ-choral fold. They are full-bodied, but due to the chosen register and texture they sound soft, dull, as if from afar. This "deception of hearing" is unmistakably found. The C major now takes on a Mixolydian character (thanks to the B flat). And here the bells are heard in a new way. They are at first fanfare-like (bars 40-41), but quickly subside into vague and tremulous harmonies (bars 42-45), where the sound-painting of the bells is done in the obvious traditions of Mussorgsky and Borodin.

The fading bass bell (A-flat has become G-sharp) vibrates slightly, and the Doric theme in C-sharp minor (from bars 7-12) reappears. It is now in a low register, muffled and vague, but soon begins to grow and blossom with new turns and ascending sequences. Here, however, there remains some veil on the sonority, and the chain of descending parallel septaccords further muffles the colouring.

The bass bells (bars 68-69) sound barely audible. The last fragment of the piece begins, with the Mixolydian C major theme (now like an echo of its first appearance) floating in the bass on the moderately rippling figures of the bass (like the mysterious hum of the depths). And in the coda the image closes - again the ascents of the beginning can be heard, but now in a persistent C major and with slightly restless second sounds. The illusion of the mysterious city fades away, dissolving into the calm, placid waters.

The remarkable merits of the play "The Sunken Cathedral" become particularly clear when one reviews its simple and slender structure, where alternations and returns of the three themes are combined with miniature developments. But the third theme (in Mixolydian C major) is not developed, but only varies in texture. This emphasises its solemnly hieratic character.

№ 11. "Peck's Dance." This prelude is dedicated to impressions of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. It contains many very subtle colouristic effects. The single-voice exposition at the beginning shades the "airiness" of the music (plagal turns are characteristic). But especially good, perhaps, is the whole fragment of bars 30-52, where a surprisingly fragile landscape is achieved - through the delicate forest rustles and rustles sound the restrained fanfares of the horns (and the tonalities are again tertian: E-flat major and C-flat major). Curiously further, the reprises of the first theme are given with (varying) accompaniment, and the whole piece ends with the elf's light and swift escape, in which the tonalities of A-flat major, E major and C minor are fused. C minor is the main tonality of the piece, and in its final cadence we again notice features of tertian connections-unions.

№ 12. "Minstrels." Here Debussy, as in some of his other works ("Puppet Kek-uok" from "Children's Corner", the prelude "General Lyavin the Eccentric", "The Little Negro".), paid tribute to the tendencies of

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urban, pre-jazz music, from the influence of which he seemed to be guarded by his entire natural philosophy. With his usual initiative and attentiveness of ear, Debussy captured elements of Negro instrumental music-making (a troupe of Negro "minstrels" toured Paris). Of course, even here he used his usual expressive means (in particular, enlarged triads, parallelisms), but he sensitively reproduced the intonation-rhythmic and timbre attributes of the emerging jazz, imitating the sound of banjo, drum beats, syncopated rhythms, pentatonic turns, the so-called "barbershop harmonies" (See V. Konen. Ways of American Music, M., 1961, pp. 150 and 198.).

In doing so, Debussy's music all the more easily acquired sharp and pungent outlines, getting rid of all impressionist "fogs". However, this was not at all a path of progressive development. In the measure of its "urbanisation", Debussy's work was deprived of its best poetic virtues. It became emotionally impoverished rather than enriched, beginning to serve the emerging "fashion". Intonationally apt, but, in fact, a sad monument to such a tendency was "Minstrels". Concluding the first notebook of preludes with their defiantly swaggering sounds, they seemed to cross out the most poetic, exciting and inspired of the pieces in this series. Was it the composer's painful irony? Perhaps, and even more likely.

CONCLUSION

Debussy's piano music, more than any other area of his work, underwent a significant evolution from the early to the late period of his composing career. The peculiarity of Debussy's piano work lies first and foremost in its imagistic structure. None of the composers of the past embodied in piano music such a variety and richness of subjects connected with pictures of nature. Debussy did not strive, in his choice of themes close to him, connected with pictures of nature, to a purely pictorial solution (that is, to a precise concrete musical depiction of phenomena in the surrounding world). For him, the problem of colorfulness and flavor has always been associated with the transmission of a certain mood, feeling and his own attitude to a particular poetic image. Each of his landscape sketches has a certain emotional coloring - now a quiet, dreamy contemplation, now a majestic meditation; a stern and sometimes gloomy mood can instantly change to intoxicating joy. Having abandoned traditional forms (sonata, variations and concerto), Debussy nevertheless retained a coherent and integral composition in the majority of his works.

When we compare Debussy's piano works with the legacy of his great predecessors who revolutionized world piano music and performance (Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin and Liszt), we see that Debussy's works are certainly inferior to them in depth of content, in emotional range, in the scale of ideas and forms. But such an aspect of Debussy's artistic method as colorful and coloristic contributed to the maximum expansion of the timbre and sound possibilities of the piano and enriched the piano literature of the 20th century with many remarkable works.

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