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"Debussy's *Pour les Sonorités Opposées*," a Lecture-

Document prepared by DEBUSSY'S POUR LES SONORITÉS OPPOSÉES: ITS ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Document prepared by [Name] for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in the School of Music. This Lecture-Document is

approved and accepted by:

Victor Steinhardt *March 8, 2004*
Victor Steinhardt, Chair of the Examining Committee Date

by

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Accepted by:

A LECTURE-DOCUMENT

Presented to the School of Music
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts in Performance

March 2004

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March 2004

An Abstract of the Lecture-Dissertation of

Rika Uchida, M.A. in the degree of
in the School of Music, University of Toronto, March 2004

THE DUBOIS'S *POUR LE SOUVENIR D'OPINION*: ITS ANALYSIS AND
COMPARATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

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Rika Uchida
Professor of Music, York University

Opinion by Rika Uchida presents the
composer's own language and his... This lecture-
dissertation presents the analysis of *Pour le Souvenir*...
interpreted by Rika Uchida, Walter Orendling, Howard Pollack and Muriel Uchida,
and by other interpretations. The dissertation requires four weeks' condition by a lecture
interpretation.

An Abstract of the Lecture-Document of

Rika Uchida for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts
in the School of Music to be taken March 2004

Title: DEBUSSY'S POUR LES SONORITÉS OPPOSÉES: ITS ANALYSIS AND
COMPARATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Approved: 
Professor emeritus Victor Steinhardt

Claude Debussy's *Pour les Sonorités opposées* from *Douze Études* presents the composer's new language and experimentations for the keyboard. This lecture-document presents the analysis of *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, a comparison of interpretations by three pianists, Walter Gieseking, Maurizio Pollini and Mitsuko Uchida, and my own interpretation. The document explores how analysis contributes to a better interpretation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Claude Debussy's last work for piano, *Douze Études pour le Piano*, poses various new challenges for performers. Compared to most of the piano works by Debussy, this work is much less known and is seldom performed in concerts. One of the reasons for this lack of attention may be that, while most of his earlier works have titles that give pianists visual or emotional imagery, the *Études* do not. For example, performing *Poissons d'or* (Gold Fish) from *Images Book II* gives pianists a clear visual image for interpreting the work. In contrast, the titles in *Douze Études* suggest a technical emphasis in each *Étude*, but they do not give performers ideas of how to interpret the works musically. As Debussy dedicated *Douze Études* to Chopin and the inspiration of the work came from editing Chopin's piano works, some of the *Études* are clearly influenced by Chopin's *Études*, such as the ones for 3rds, 6ths, and octaves. Chopin wrote most of his *Études* as technical endurance studies, but Debussy wrote *Douze Études* for different purposes, some of them technical, some compositional. I find that interpreting *Douze Études* requires a different approach from his earlier works or from the Chopin *Études*. This document will explore the approaches that I and other pianists have taken in achieving a coherent performance of one of the *Études* from *Douze Études*.

In this lecture-document, I chose to examine *Pour les Sonorités opposées*¹ (X) from *Douze Études*. This *Étude* exhibits Debussy's new compositional language and experiments for the piano. I will discuss Debussy's own philosophy of piano performance, present an analysis of the *Étude*, a comparison of three different representative recordings, and my own interpretation of the *Étude*. The goal of this document is to show how analysis helps lead to a better interpretation of the work.

I have studied a half dozen *Études* from *Douze Études* and performed four of them in recital. In preparing for performance, I did a thorough analysis of the four *Études*. My analytical methods included both Roman numeral and pitch-class set analysis, since the harmonic language in the *Études* ranged from tonal to ambiguous tonality. Performers memorize their repertoire in various ways; I memorize my repertoire through analysis, in combination with aural and visual memory.

In *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, Debussy explored sounds beyond what a piano usually can produce. Debussy said his ideal is a "piano without hammers." The *Étude* requires performers' mastery of various technique and touches. It has harmonies more advanced than those of his earlier music, and requires a performer's own interpretation and creativity.

In this document, I have chosen Schenkerian and pitch-class set analysis to examine *Pour les Sonorités opposées*. In recent years, there has been extensive analytical study of Debussy's works for piano in which set theory is most often employed

¹ *Sonorités opposées* translates into "for opposite sonorities."

to examine pitch organization.² Another commonly used analytical approach to Debussy's works is Schenkerian analysis.³ Roy Howat has done significant study on Debussy's piano works both as a theorist and a pianist. He presented a careful study of Debussy's manuscript of *Douze Études*, an analysis based on form and proportion, and discusses the golden section in selected works of Debussy.⁴

Schenkerian analysis shows the structure of the entire work. It also reveals the hidden motivic unity in different levels of music: background, middle ground and foreground. Pitch-class set analysis is appropriate for works in which tonality is ambiguous and traditional Roman numeral chord analysis is not applicable. In this *Étude*, there are some instances of pitch-class sets used horizontally and vertically as a motive in the different structural levels.

At the same time, I believe the actual performance should sound spontaneous and unique, and these are the values I seek for each performance. After understanding the structure of the work by analysis, I look for the right characterization of each section, phrase and measure. The ideal characterization sometimes comes from experimenting with different touches, tone colors, dynamics, *rubato*, or sometimes applying visual or emotional imagery. Although technically difficult, I believe the performance of *Douze Études* should avoid any technical "show-off" quality.

² Examples which use set theory to analyze Debussy's piano works are follows: Richard Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Ethan Haimo, "Comments on Haimo, Generated Collections and Interval Control in Debussy's Prélude," in *In Theory Only*, vol. V/2 (May-June 1979) 19-22; Joel Suben, *Debussy and Octatonic Pitch Structure* (Ph. D. Thesis, Brandeis University, 1979).

³ The following analytical study employs Schenkerian analysis: Felix Salzer, *Structural Hearing: Tonal Coherence in Music*, with a foreword by Leopold Mannes (New York: Dover Publications, 1962).

⁴ Roy Howat, *Debussy in Proportion: a Musical Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

The following criteria served as a basis in choosing three representative recordings in this document.

1) The three recordings must be contrasting in order to compare their interpretations.

2) The pianists should have recorded most or all of *Douze Études*, so that they have their own concept of interpretation of the entire work.

3) The quality of the recording should be good enough for comparing small details such as articulation and dynamic nuance. Most older recordings did not have the sound quality needed for this project.

4) The recordings should exhibit Debussy's ideal of piano playing: a piano without hammers. This criterion eliminated many recordings, since many pianists tend to exaggerate dynamics above *f*, thus resulting in a hammer-like sound quality.

5) The recordings should exhibit pianists' technical mastery of the *Études*. Tempo is one of the aspects I chose to examine in the recordings. If pianists' technical problems become a factor in tempo choices, it would not serve for this project.

6) The recordings should exhibit various tone colors and sounds.

Following the above criteria, I chose the recordings of Walter Gieseking, Maurizio Pollini and Mitsuko Uchida for comparing their interpretation. All three pianists have recorded the complete *Douze Études*. Gieseking is widely known as a great interpreter of Debussy, and I considered his recording as an authentic interpretation of Debussy. Pollini has a reputation as an intellectual performer who follows every indication on the score, and I considered his recording as an objective interpretation. Uchida is the first pianist to make a video recording of *Douze Études*. The video

combines her lecture-demonstration and a performance of the complete *Douze Études*.

In her lecture, she talks about her own concept of performing *Douze Études*. I considered her recording to be a subjective interpretation, where she does not hesitate to offer her own ideas for interpreting the composition. I will compare these pianists' recordings of *Pour les Sonorités opposées* with Debussy's indications on the score and what I found from my analysis. Their interpretive decisions, such as changes in tempo, articulation, dynamics, phrasing, and climax in the *Étude* will be discussed in detail.

Although analysis is a crucial path in preparing for my performance, it might not be the one used by the three pianists chosen for this document. However, by applying analytical and interpretive concepts, I will uncover the factors that affect their interpretation, and discuss which approaches best serve the interpretation of the *Pour les Sonorités opposées*.

Earlier in the year, he edited the piano works of Chopin, and it is well known that this editing work provided Debussy the stimulus for writing his own *Études*.¹ The *Études* are divided into two books. The first volume of Book 1, which contains the first six *Études*, was issued by Durand in April 1910; Book 2 was issued in June 1916. After he completed the first six of the *Études*, Debussy asked Durand whether the *Études* should be dedicated to Chopin or Liszt.² Debussy wrote in his diary:

¹ Roy Harvey, introduction to "Études pour Liszt," *Études pour Liszt*, ed. Roy Harvey, trans. Roy Harvey, (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 1.

² Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, translated and edited by Francis L. Lipp and Roger Nichols, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), 90.

³ *Clara Schumann, pianist*, program note for the *Debussy Études*, conducted by Maurice Strakosky (CD 11 011 Philips), 1.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND OF DOUZE ÉTUDES

Claude Debussy's last work for piano, *Douze Études pour le Piano*, was written during his three-month stay in Pourville in the summer of 1915. That year, Debussy also wrote *En Blanc et noir*, the Sonata for cello and piano and the Sonata for flute, viola and harp. That summer turned out to be one of the most prolific periods of his life.⁵

Debussy wrote to his publisher, Jacques Durand:

I am sure you'll agree with me that there is no need to make technical exercises over-sombre just to appear more serious; a little charm never spoilt anything, Chopin proved it and makes this desire of mine seem somewhat overweening, I know. Neither am I so dead to write to the world as not to be aware of the comparisons that my contemporaries, colleagues and others will studiously make to my disadvantage.⁶

Earlier in the year, he edited the piano works of Chopin for Durand, and it is said that this editing work provided Debussy the stimulus for writing his own *Études*.⁷ The *Études* are divided into two books. The first edition of Book 1, which contains the first six *Études*, was issued by Durand in April 1916; Book 2 was issued in June 1916. After he completed the first six of the *Études*, Debussy asked Durand whether the *Études* should be dedicated to Chopin or Couperin.⁸ Debussy wrote in his diary:

⁵ Roy Howat, introduction to "*Études pour le piano*": Facsimile des esquisses autographes by Claude Debussy (Geneve: Editions Minkoff, 1989), 7.

⁶ Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*. Selected and edited by François Lesure and Roger Nichols, translated by Roger Nichols. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), 300.

⁷ Misha Donat, program note for the *Debussy Études*, performed by Mitsuko Uchida (D115551 Philips), 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

I owe as much respectful gratitude to one as to the other of these masters, such admirable foreseers.⁹

In *Douze Études*, Debussy explored not only the traditional areas of study such as 3rds, 6ths, octaves, and the finger-strengthening exercises, but also sonority and the treatment of tonality.¹⁰ Misha Donat writes that Book 2 concerns itself largely with principles of texture, sonority and tone color.¹¹ The *Études* provide pianists with a formidable challenge in both technical and interpretive aspects. Debussy wrote to Durand:

These *Études* will be useful in teaching pianists that to embark on a musical career they must first have a formidable technique.¹²

Debussy was unusually pleased with his *Études*, a sentiment he rarely expressed about any of his compositions. In his letter to Durand in August 1915, he wrote:

I've invested a lot of passions and faith in the future of *Études*. I hope you will like them, as much for the music they contain and for what they denote.¹³

Some of the *Études* were premiered in November 1916 by George Copeland, and in December 1916 by Walter Rummel. The *Études* present pianists with many technical difficulties. Even Debussy confessed that some of the *Études* were technically beyond him.¹⁴ In his letter to Durand, Debussy wrote:

I'll see you again and be able to play you these *Études*, which are giving your fingers such a fight... I may say there are certain passages that sometimes bring mine into a halt, too. Then I have to get my breath back as though I'd been climbing a flight of stairs... It'll be fertile ground for establishing records.¹⁵

⁹ Debussy, *ibid.*, 301.

¹⁰ Roger Nichols, "Debussy, Claude" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Edited by Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980), vol. 5, 308.

¹¹ Donat, *ibid.*, 1.

¹² Nichols, *ibid.*, 306.

¹³ Debussy, *ibid.*, 300.

¹⁴ Nichols, *ibid.*, 308.

¹⁵ Debussy, *ibid.*, 301.

When Gabriel Fauré, the director of the Paris Conservatoire, asked Debussy to perform *Douze Études* at a concert, Debussy responded:

My hesitation in answering your kind letter, dear maitre and friend, stems from the humble reason that I do not know how to play the piano well enough anymore to risk a performance of my *Études*.¹⁶

The *Études* do not have the picturesque titles we find in *Estampes*, *Images*, and *Préludes*. The *Études* reflect Debussy's increasing espousal of classical clarity in his late years. Some of Debussy's private view of the *Études*' character and imagery emerge from letters to his publisher Jacques Durand during and after their time of composition, and some of the *Études* seem to reflect Debussy's tragic last few years of illness and despair.¹⁷

Debussy allowed *Douze Études* into print more quickly than usual for him.¹⁸

Roy Howat says that Debussy was an unreliable proofreader, and he was more concerned with musical retouches than with spotting notational or engraver's errors. When Debussy corrected proofs of the *Études*, he was ill and depressed. Howat says that some of Debussy's letters suggest that much of the fair copy was written at moonlit hours, and the printed scores of the *Études* have an unusually high number of dubious readings.¹⁹ Howat also writes that Debussy became less dependent on working at the piano in later years.²⁰ Furthermore, Debussy did not live long enough after their publication to correct later reprints. Thus the manuscript of *Études* needs to be viewed with caution.

¹⁶ Ibid., 302.

¹⁷ Howat, *ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 8.

Debussy rarely gave specific instruction for fingerings in *Études*. On the first page of Book 1 of *Études*, he wrote:

Our old Masters - I mean 'our' admirable clavecinistes - never indicated any fingerings, trusting without a doubt the ingenuity of their contemporaries, Doubting that of our modern virtuosos would be out of place... Let us find our own fingerings.²¹

However, Debussy was usually very specific about which hand is supposed to handle which note or group of notes. In some of the sketches of the *Études*, Debussy did indicate occasional fingerings, specifically in *Pour les tierces* and *Pour les notes répétées*.

Who had opportunities to work with Debussy gave us a picture of the composer's philosophy of piano playing.

George Copeland²² said that Debussy referred to his music as almost complete elimination of personal equations, regarding himself as a species of recording board held up to nature.²³ Debussy emphatically said, "You must forget that the piano has hammer." He was interested not so much in the single tone that was ordinarily heard when a note was struck, as in the patterns of resonance which that tone set up around itself. Many of his pieces are built entirely on this resonant tone of the piano. He inquired upon the proper way to strike a note on the piano. He said:

It must be struck in a precise way, otherwise the sympathetic vibrations of the strings will not be heard quivering distinctly in the air.

²² George Copeland (1902-1972) was one of the best pianists to have known Debussy, a member of the American Academy of Music.

²³ James Dubielz, *Debussy: The Musical Mind* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 183.

²¹ Debussy, preface to the *Douze Études* (München: G. Henle Verlag, 1994), xviii.

CHAPTER III

DEBUSSY'S PIANISM:
HIS PHILOSOPHY OF PIANO PLAYING

In order to achieve a better performance interpretation, it would be helpful to understand how Debussy expected pianists to perform his music. The writings by pianists who had opportunities to work with Debussy give us a picture of the composer's philosophy of piano playing.

George Copeland²² said that Debussy achieved in his music an almost complete elimination of personal equations, regarding himself as a species of sounding board held up to nature.²³ Debussy frequently said, "one must forget that the piano has hammers."²⁴ He was interested not so much in the single tone that was obviously heard when a note was struck, as in the patterns of resonance which that tone set up around itself. Many of his pieces are built entirely on this acoustical sense of the piano. He insisted upon the proper way to strike a note on the piano. He said:

It must be struck in a peculiar way, otherwise the sympathetic vibrations of the notes will not be heard quivering distantly in the air.²⁵

²² *Ibid.*, 175.

²³ Cecilia Chopin, *Marguerite Long, A Life in French Music, 1869-1949* (Ann Arbor: University Press, 1991), 21.

²⁴ Cecilia Chopin, *Debussy: A Portrait and Selection of his Operas* in the early 20th century French piano music.

²² George Copeland (1882 -1971) was one of the first pianists to introduce Debussy's music to American audience.

²³ Roger Nichols, *Debussy Remembered* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1992), 163.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

Debussy played his music striking each note as though it were a bell, listening always for the hovering clusters of vibrating overtones. He regarded the piano as the Balinese musicians regard their gamelan orchestras.²⁶

Debussy said, "pianists' fifth fingers are such an 'ear-sore.'" What he meant was that he disliked melodies emphasized at the expense of harmony. Harmony was for him the essence, and melody should be part of it, blending in but never dominating. Harmony should never be sacrificed to the melodic idea. Harmony is intimately allied with melody, which in general is a kind of shaded relief.²⁷

Cecilia Dunoyer²⁸ says that Debussy has left us all the indications possible for the execution of his work.²⁹ He regarded this aspect with the utmost care, and at times was almost fierce about it. He said, "a faithful interpreter is sufficient."³⁰ The numerous expression marks which he introduced into his text had to be observed with complete punctiliousness. Debussy was like Schoenberg in this regard. Nuances, accents, pauses, changes of tempo, *subito p*, all of the things which are so characteristic of Debussy's writing, none of them could be glossed over.³¹ Debussy liked slight *crescendos*, a *ppp* increasing into a mere *pp*. Such tiny changes were meaningful and important to his art. Debussy said to the soprano Ninon Vallin:³²

Before putting in an accent or a nuance, I sometimes brood over it for several days, thinking about the precious words which form the text of my songs.³³

²⁶ Ibid., 173.

²⁷ Cecilia Dunoyer, *Marguerite Long: A Life in French Music, 1874-1966* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 71.

²⁸ Cecilia Dunoyer is a pianist and scholar who specializes in the early 20th century French piano music.

²⁹ Ibid., 74.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 75.

³² Ninon Vallin (1886-1961) was the one of the most famous sopranos of the first half of 20th century in France. Debussy accompanied her in the first performance of his *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*.

³³ Nichols, *ibid.*, 182.

Debussy loved miniatures for that reason. For over the miniature, small in its framework, he could spend infinite time and patience. Robert Schmitz³⁴ wrote that *crescendos* were one of Debussy's obsessions in piano playing. Schmitz says that many pianists who play Debussy overlook his *crescendo* markings. He writes:

Seeing the sign, *ppp* then *crescendo*, they seldom bother to look for the volume mark at the other end of that *crescendo*. Immediately they spurt out into an *fff*. It is such caresses which makes so much of Debussy's music for piano sound jerky, heavy, rather than delicately flowing and wistful, sustained, the way it was originally intended by him to be.³⁵

Debussy admired Bach, Liszt and Chopin. He frequently said, "Chopin is the greatest of all. For with the piano alone, he discovered everything."³⁶ Mme Maute de Fleuville, who studied with Chopin, was Debussy's first teacher. It is said that she taught him the mellowness which he in turn demanded of his interpreters.³⁷ Roger Nichols³⁸ writes that Debussy did not favor composers in the classical period, particularly Mozart and Beethoven. Debussy said, "I detest the concertos of Mozart, but less than those of Beethoven."³⁹

Dunoyer writes that there are three subjects about which Debussy relied on performers' common sense and musical intelligence: fingering, pedaling and tempo.⁴⁰ In his letter to Durand in October 1915, Debussy said:

You know what I think about metronome marks: they're right for a single bar... only there are 'those' who do not hear music and who take these marks as an authority to hear it still less! But do what you please.⁴¹

³⁴ Robert Schmitz (1889-1949) worked with Debussy over a period of two years.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Roger Nichols a scholar who specializes in early 20th century French music.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴⁰ Dunoyer, *ibid.*, 99.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 189

As for pedaling, Debussy explained: "Pedaling cannot be written down, it varies from one instrument to another, from room to room, or one hall to another."⁴² He also writes to Durand:

The plain truth perhaps is that abusing the pedal is only a means of covering up a lack of technique, and that making a lot of noise is a way to drown the music you're slaughtering! In theory we should be able to find a graphic means of representing this "breathing" pedal... it wouldn't be impossible.⁴³

Dunoyer says that the long sustained bass notes in Debussy's scores are to be interpreted as a sort of pedal indication.⁴⁴ The great Debussy interpreter Alfred Cortot wrote that Debussy made use of the pedal and especially of a blend of both pedals (damper pedal and *una corda*, since the middle pedal did not exist on European pianos of this time) with infinite artistry.⁴⁵ Debussy himself owned a Blüthner grand and a Bechstein upright piano. He was fond of his Blüthner because it had an extra set of strings set on top of the others, which, although not touched by the hammers, would vibrate sympathetically and enrich the sonority.⁴⁶ Dunoyer says that long pedals may obliterate the clarity and harmonic subtleties of his music on the modern Steinway.⁴⁷ The bass on a Steinway in particular is overpowering compared to the turn of the century Pleyel, Erard, Bechstein and Blüthner pianos, so that long pedals must be understood as half and quarter pedals and all shades in between.⁴⁸ Debussy expected the foot to be intimately attuned to the ear and a rich sound palette, and he advised performers to

⁴² Ibid., 300.

⁴³ Ibid., 301-2.

⁴⁴ Dunoyer, "Debussy and Early Debussystes at the Piano," in *Debussy in Performance*. Edited by James Briscoe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 100.

⁴⁵ Alfred Cortot, *The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*. Translated by Violet Edgell (London: J. & W. Chester, 1922), 56.

⁴⁶ Dunoyer, *ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 104.

depress the pedal before starting to play, so that the overtones would vibrate immediately upon contact.⁴⁹

Debussy seldom played in public. But when he did so, it was an excellent demonstration of his principles. Once at the Salle Erard, he played several of his *Préludes*. As usual, an attendant raised the lid of the concert grand. But when Debussy came on, the first thing he did was to lower the lid. Emile Vuillermoz⁵⁰ wrote on Debussy's playing as follows:

All those who have had the privilege of seeing one of Debussy's works well up from under his fingers know what a miraculously gifted pianist he was. Personally, I have never heard more supple, elegant or velvety playing. He obtained sonorities from the piano which softened the angles and asperities generated by his forward-looking inspiration. He had discovered the exact finger technique to suit his harmonic system.⁵¹

Dunoyer notes that the only two pianists whom we can document as having merited Debussy's genuine satisfaction are Walter Rummel and Marguerite Long.⁵² Debussy's extremely high artistic standards and cynical temperament did not allow him objectively to assess, much less praise, others' attempts to perform his works. Harold Bauer, the contemporary of Long, Ravel and Cortot wrote: "Debussy was the most violent of all the critics I ever met."⁵³ The following comment which Debussy wrote in a letter to Bauer in July 1910, shows how critical he was to his contemporary pianists:

We are so often betrayed by those "so-called pianists"! Believe me, you cannot imagine to what extent my piano music has been deformed, to such a degree that I often hesitate to recognize it.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵⁰ Emile Vuillermoz (1878-1960) studied at the Paris Conservatoire under Fauré and went on to become a music critic.

⁵¹ Nichols, *ibid.*, 156.

⁵² Dunoyer, *ibid.*, 102.

⁵³ Nichols, *ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁴ Debussy, *Letters.*, 275.

This comment proves how critical and demanding Debussy was for pianists who attempt to perform his music.

CHAPTER IV

In the following chapters, I will present the analysis of *Pour les Sonorités opposées* (X) from *Douze Études* and compare three different interpretations of the *Étude*. Debussy's philosophy of performing his own piano works discussed here will serve as a reference in comparing three interpretations.

The tenth *Étude* in the set, *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, is one of the most difficult *Études* to interpret. Searching for the ideal sonority for each phrase, melody, chord or even note is a subjective matter, and pianists must be willing to experiment with tone color, timbre, and touch. The lack of a clear tonal center and complex, ambiguous harmony, juxtapositions of various textures make interpretation even more difficult.

The title "*Pour les Sonorités opposées*" translates into "contrasting sonorities." This is one of the *Études* which Debussy did not write for a technical purpose, rather, he used to experiment with different sonorities of the instrument and various musical ideas. Émile Vuillermoz writes as follows:

Debussy studies the orchestral textures of piano performance, where it is a means of creating, successively or simultaneously, highly contrasted mixtures of sonorities.³⁷

In other words, he asks pianists to create and maintain a wide variety of textures, close to a complete orchestral palette. Debussy experiments with timbre, harmony, texture, dynamics, articulation, register distribution, and sustained or interrupted sound.

³⁷ Émile Vuillermoz, *opéra sur 4 Études, Opusculi Debussiani*, Walter Gieseking (New York: Angel, 1955), 333250 Angel.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS:

POUR LES SONORITÉS OPPOSÉES

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Emile Vuillermoz writes as follows:

Debussy studies the orchestral nuances of piano performance, where it is a matter of creating, successively or simultaneously, highly contrasted ambiances of sonorities.⁵⁵

In other words, he asks pianists to create and combine a wide variety of timbres, close to a complete orchestral palette. Debussy experiments with tonality, harmony, texture, dynamics, articulation, register distribution, and sustained or unsustained sound.

⁵⁵ Emile Vuillermoz, program note of *Études; D'un cahier d'esquisses*. Walter Gieseking (New York: Angel, 1955), 335250 Angel.

Susan Bradshaw also writes:

Debussy's imaginative disregard of the essentially percussive qualities of the instrument enabled him to develop a new pianism, dependent on sonority rather than attack, on subtle dynamic shading rather than sustained cantabile. His exploration of the resonances obtainable from overlapping harmonies coloured by the sustaining pedal, which later proved equally important in the light of instrumental techniques developed after World War II.⁵⁶

The tonality in this *Étude* is ambiguous. In some sections, it is hard to hear a tonal center because of the extreme chromaticism and the lack of functional harmony. There are two possible primary tonalities in this *Étude*: C# minor and E major. It is possible to consider that the *Étude* oscillates between sections with tonal stability and instability, and that there is no primary tonal center. In this analysis, I would like to examine the structural unifying elements in the *Étude*, such as form, dynamics, musical climax, tonality, contrapuntal structure, motive, pitch-class collection and pitch-class set. Although not directly related to these structural aspects, I will also discuss the contrasting sonorities in the *Étude*. Since the focal point of the piece is contrasting sonorities, I will examine the relationships between the musical elements (e.g. harmonies or dynamics) and the different types of sonorities that Debussy experimented in this *Étude*.

⁵⁶ Susan Bradshaw, "Keyboard Music," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Edited by Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980), vol. 11, 511.

1. Form

The *Étude* can be divided into eight sections. Among them, the B section (mm. 15-30) and the D section (mm. 38-58) are substantially longer than the other sections, which are all less than eight measures long.

Ex. 1 Form in *Pour les Sonorités opposées*

Section:	Intro	A	B	C	D	C'	B'	Coda
Measure:	1	7	15	31	38	59	63	68-75

The form shown above presents an arch form without the return of the A' section before the Coda.

2. Form, Dynamics and Climax

Example 2 shows the relationship between form and dynamics in *Pour les Sonorités opposées*.

Ex. 2 Form and Dynamics in *Pour les Sonorités opposées*

Intro	A	B	C	D	(49 50 51 53)	C'	B'	Coda	(74 75)
<i>pp-p</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>pp</i>	<i>pp</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>cresc</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>ff</i>	<i>pp</i>	<i>pp</i>
								<i>pp. p. pp</i>	<i>f pp</i>

(Note: the numbers in parentheses indicate measure numbers)

The climax in terms of dynamics occurs in the D section. Up until the D section, there is no dynamic markings above *p*. The D section starts with the marking of *p*, and there is an indication of crescendo going to *f* in m. 49, and *ff* in m. 50. The texture

supports the dynamics in a build-up during the section. At the beginning of the D section, the texture consists of widely spaced chords with pedal points in the bass and the tenor, without melody. The melodic material enters as a single line first in the tenor, then it is doubled in the tenor and alto, and tripled in the soprano, alto and tenor to make a continually increasing density of texture to support the dynamic build-up to *ff*. Measure 50 is the only occasion where *ff* is used in this *Étude*. The dynamics go down to *pp* in the next measure (m. 51), and the overall dynamics are kept around *pp* till m. 74, where another marking of *f* is found. The dynamics go down to *pp* suddenly at m. 75.

Measure 50 is clearly the climax of this *Étude* in terms of dynamics, and this measure divides the entire work (75 measures total) into a proportion of 2:1. Measure 50 can be considered as the "golden section" in this *Étude*.⁵⁶

Ex. 3 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 48-53.

⁵⁶ Roy Howat talks about the golden section in Debussy's compositions in *Debussy in Proportion: a Musical Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

After the dynamic peak of *ff* at m. 50, Debussy suddenly drops it down to *pp* at m. 51, and a contrasting musical idea appears at m. 53, with the softest dynamic marking of *ppp*. Measure 53 could be considered as a negative climax, with its contrasting texture, harmony and sonority.

3. Tonality and Contrapuntal Structure

The tonality is ambiguous in this *Étude*. The first three measures consist of only two pitch classes, G# and A. With the doubling and the bass notes, G# is the focal pitch in these 3 measures (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 1-3.



The pitch class G# is sustained in multiple voices in a substantial portion of the *Étude*. In the bass, G# enters in m. 2 and is prolonged till m. 68 at the highest structural level with a few interruptions. G# in the alto is prolonged in mm. 1-15 (it changes enharmonically to Ab in m. 7). Richard Parks says that pitch class 8 (G#) saturates this *Étude*, and G# is the unifying element in this work.⁵⁷ Although the pitch class G# appears most often in the *Étude*, there is no section that suggests G# as a tonal center. The tonalities and the principal bass notes of each section are shown in Ex. 5.

⁵⁷ Richard Parks, in *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 107.

Ex. 5 Tonalities and Bass Notes in *Pour les Sonorités opposées*

Section:	Intro	A	B	C	D	C'	B'	Coda
Tonality:	N/A	f	c#	E	C#	E	c#	(E or c#)
Bass note:	G#	F		G#	G#	F#		C#

(Note: there is no bass note in the B and B' section)

When the tonal center is missing, sustaining bass notes take on a more important role. Hearing the structural function of the bass G# in the introduction (mm. 1-6) for example, leads to a different interpretation. The bass G# could be V or III depending on the tonality (E major or C# minor). I would give more prominence to the bass G# if I consider this *Étude* to be in C# minor (See pp. 22-28 in this chapter for further discussion of key designation).

The sections B, B', C, C' and Coda share the same key signature of four sharps. The thematic materials in the C, C' and the Coda sections consist of the E pentatonic collection. The bass notes are different in each section: G#, F#, C#. In the beginning of the C and C' sections (m. 31 and m. 59), the implied tonality is E major or E pentatonic. In the Coda, the tonality is more ambiguous with the bass note C# in m. 68; it could be either C# minor or E major (See Ex. 6-c).

Ex. 6-a *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 31-32 (section C).

L'istesso tempo

pp lointain, mais clair
et joyeux

G#

Ex. 6-b *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 56-59 (section C' begins at m. 59).

59

1^o Tempo

pp

F#

Ex. 6-c *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 65-69 (the Coda begins at m. m. 68).

68

(de loin)

calendo - - - - - *pp* - - - - - *p* *marqué*

C#

There is no bass note in the B and the B' sections. From the melodic material in the top voice, C# minor or C# Aeolian mode is implied. The tonality of F minor in the A section (mm. 7-14) is not sustained for a long time nor does it return later in the *Étude*, thus it is not a principal tonality.

From the discussion above, there are two possible primary tonalities in this *Étude*: C# minor or E Major. Choosing one or the other can affect how the piece sounds in performance. In the following section, I discuss both possibilities.

a) C# minor

There are three primary bass notes at the highest structural level: G#, F# and C#. The bass C# enters in m. 68 (Coda) for the first time in this *Étude*, preceded by G#. The second entry of the bass C# in m. 70 is also preceded by G#, and the repeated descent of a perfect fifth (G#-C#) implies the tonality of C# minor (Ex. 7).

Ex. 7 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 65-75.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system, starting at measure 68, features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a bass line. The bass line has notes G# and C# marked below it. The second system, starting at measure 70, continues the bass line with notes C# and C#m 7 marked below it. The score includes various performance instructions such as 'calendo', 'pp', 'de loin', 'p marque', 'de plus loin...', 'smorzando', and 'pp'.

The last entry of the bass C# in m. 74 is preceded by the bass B. The prolongation of the bass G# in from m. 2 to m. 68 can be interpreted as V in C# minor. The bass F# in mm. 53-59 can be considered as IV in C# minor.

In the top voice, an *Umlinie* descent from G# to C# can be traced.

Ex. 9 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, C# Minor graph.

1 7 28 31 38 53 60 61 68 75
 ^5 ^4 ^3 ^2 ^1

c#: V IV V I
 ()
 Intro A B C D C' B' Coda

Although the tonality in the A section (F minor) does not fit well in the key of C# minor, it occurs through neighbor motion to E in the bass. The C# major tonality in the D section, which is the longest section of the *Étude* and contains its climax, is the parallel major of C# minor.

There are several problems with my attribution of C# minor to this *Étude*. The bass C#s are never harmonized with a complete C# minor chord. The two bass C#s in m. 68 and m. 70 appear with the E pentatonic material in the upper voice; the last bass C# in m. 74 is harmonized with a C# minor seventh chord (See Ex. 8).

In these three occasions, the chord could be interpreted as an E major added sixth chord with C# as a bass, especially when the E pentatonic material is present in the upper voice. This contradicts the assumption of C# minor tonality in this *Étude*.

In order to emphasize the C# minor tonality, the performer needs to hear the bass G# sustained till it goes down to F# at m. 59, which is the first measure of the C' section. Therefore, in this interpretation, the introduction and the sections A through D (mm. 1- 58) should be articulated as one long gesture.

b) E major

In the upper voice, a harmonically supported descent of G#-F#-E can be traced at the highest level. Among the thematic materials used in the *Étude*, the E pentatonic material in the C and C' sections and Coda is the one that implies the clearest tonal center. The melodic materials in the A and the D sections are extremely chromatic, and they do not imply a clear tonal center. The tonality of C# minor in the B and B' section is the relative minor of E major.

Ex. 10 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, E Major graph.

1	7	28	31	38	53	60 61	68	75
^3					^2			^1

E:	I			[V]	V	I	I add 6
	Intro	A	B	C	D	C'	B' Coda

In the C section, the E pentatonic theme appears with the bass G#; it can be interpreted as the first inversion of the E added sixth chord, and there is a strong sense of E as a tonal center (See Ex. 6-a). In the C' section, the theme appears with the bass F# at m. 59; this time, the tonal center of E becomes ambiguous; however, the bass moves down to E in m. 61, preceded by B. The bass progression (F#-G#-B-E) at mm. 59-61 supports the E major tonality, as [V]-I6-V-I (Ex. 10).

Ex. 11 b - *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 72-75.

Ex. 10 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, m. 56-64.

C' (m. 59)

The last entry of the E pentatonic theme is problematic: it is accompanied by the bass C#, which could be interpreted as a C# minor seventh chord. In the upper clefs, two voice lines can be traced: D-D#-E and A-A#-B in mm. 72-75, which emphasize ^1(E) and ^5 (B) of E major by preceding them with leading tones (D# and A#). The combined two voices support the E major tonality. In the same measures, the descent of a perfect fifth (E-B), which is the beginning portion of the E pentatonic theme, is repeated three times. This also emphasizes the E major tonality (Ex. 11-a, b).

Ex. 11-a *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 70-75.

Ex. 11-a shows a musical score for measures 70-75. The score is in treble and bass clefs. Above the staff, notes D, D#, and E are marked. Below the staff, notes A, A#, and B are marked. The music includes dynamics like *ppp* and markings such as "de plus loin..." and "rallentando".

Ex. 11-b *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 72-74.

Ex. 11-b shows a musical score for measures 72-74. The score is in treble and bass clefs. Above the staff, notes D, D#, and E are marked. Below the staff, notes A, A#, and B are marked. The music includes dynamics like *ppp* and markings such as "rallentando".

The tonality of F major in the A section can be considered as a neighboring phenomenon, and the tonality of C# Major in the D section can be interpreted as VI in the key of E Major.

There are also several problems with the E Major reading of this piece. The lack of a bass E at the beginning and the end of the piece poses problems for an E major tonality. The bass note E occurs only twice in the entire *Étude*: in m. 14 and m. 61, neither of which are sustained or prolonged. The initial occurrence of the bass E is found at m.14, following the bass Bb at m. 13. The implied harmony at m. 14 is E ninth, however, the tonality is ambiguous because of the tritone interval (Bb-E) in the basses. The bass E in m. 61 occurs in a substantially structural place in the *Étude*: the E thirteenth

chord in m. 61 appears with *fermata* sign and is followed by a phrase with *Lento* marking. This is the only *fermata* in the entire *Étude*. In order to assume E major as a primary tonality in this *Étude*, the missing bass E must be mentally supplied at the beginning, and the final C# minor seventh chord in mm. 74-75 must be interpreted as the third inversion of an E major added sixth chord.

In order to emphasize an E major interpretation, one should bring out the clearest melodic theme, which is in E pentatonic (mm. 31, 36, 59, 68).

c) Summary and Interpretation

The tonality of C# minor seems logical from the point of view of the bass notes. The last entry of the bass C# is preceded by the long prolongation of the bass G#, and G# can be interpreted as V in the key of C# minor. However, the melodic materials support the tonality of E Major. Except for the A and the D sections, the tonality oscillates between E Major in the C and the C' sections and Coda, and C# minor in the B and the B' sections. The presence of the E pentatonic material and the voice leading in the upper voices in the Coda support the case of E Major as a primary tonality in the *Étude*.

While either interpretation of the tonality is supportable, my own preference is the C# minor interpretation. Even though the E pentatonic theme is repeated several times in the *Étude*, it is hard to hear the ending C# minor 7th chord as the last inversion of an E major added 6th chord. Hearing the first bass note G# as V, sustained through the climax, and going down to C# as I at the end to me gives a better interpretation.

4. Motivic Unity

Connections between motives at various levels can help the pianist make a more coherent interpretation. Debussy's most prominent motives in this piece are two notes which are either a consecutive or simultaneous minor 2nd or major 7th apart. These motives are heard at the beginning; for example in m. 1, which consists of G#s in three registers and As in two registers.

Ex. 12 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, m. 1.



The two-note motives that use these dissonant intervals are employed both horizontally and vertically in various places in the *Étude*.

The minor 2nd is found extensively in mm. 1-14. The two-note motive *a* (E-F) in m. 5 consists of the ascending minor 2nd. The motive is also found in m. 6 and m. 14.

Ex. 13 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 1-14.

The image shows the first 14 measures of the piece 'Pour les Sonorités opposées'. The tempo is marked 'Modéré, sans lenteur' and the dynamic is *pp*. The notation is for piano in G major, 3/4 time. The first four measures show a series of chords. In measure 5, a two-note motive *a* (E-F) is highlighted. The dynamic changes to *p dolente* in measure 5. The piece ends in measure 14 with a final chord. Below the bass staff, there are some markings: a vertical line, a horizontal line, and the numbers 7 2 7 2 7.

6

14 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, III, 31-33.

motive $\underline{a'}$ (E-F-E-D)

11

The two-note motive \underline{a} (E-F) is extended as a four-note motive $\underline{a'}$ (E-F-E-D) in m. 9 with an additional pitch D. The motive $\underline{a'}$ appears in m. 13; this time the motive is transposed up a minor 3rd: (G-Ab-G-F).

Measure 53 contains the dissonant interval of major 7th between F# and E#.

While this interval appears frequently, the dissonant effect is stronger in m. 53, where C# is present between the two F#s in the lower register, and an E# major chord appears above the F# chord. The effect is polychordal, and this measure, which contains this special sonority, can be considered as the musical and emotional climax of the piece. The E# major chord is echoed in the higher register, and is spelled enharmonically as F major (Ex. 14).

4 Contrasting Sonorities

Debussy experiments with contrasting sonorities in various ways in this *Étude*, as the title indicates. The following discusses examples of contrasting sonority in terms of register, texture, harmony and dynamics.

Ex. 14 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 51-53.

The two-note motive \underline{a} (E-F) appears later in mm. 68-69 (F is spelled enharmonically as E#). In the lower register, the pitches A and G# are present in m. 69, which links to the initial presentation of the two pitches in m. 1 (Ex. 15).

Ex. 15 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 65-69.

I interpret the use of the two-note motive at mm. 68 and 69 as a structural unifying element in the *Étude*. Understanding where the motive is employed in the piece will help performers make a coherent interpretation.

5. Contrasting Sonorities

Debussy experiments with contrasting sonorities in various ways in this *Étude*, as the title indicates. The following discusses examples of contrasting sonority in terms of register, texture, harmony and dynamics.

a) Register

Debussy uses a wide range of registers of the keyboard in this *Étude*. For example, high, medium and low registers in mm. 1-3 offer an opportunity for contrast. I try to imagine different orchestral sonorities in the different registers. Pianists could combine different sounds in the first three measures of this *Étude*, which use high, medium, and low registers.

Ex. 16 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 1-3.

Modéré, sans lenteur

The widely-spaced notes in mm. 1-3 in *Étude* resemble the beginning of *La Vallée des Cloches* in *Miroirs* by Ravel, written between 1904 and 1905, with Debussy's exception of the dissonance-creating *As* and the lowest G# (Ex. 17). Both pieces begin with G#s which are an octave apart; Debussy could have known this piece and borrowed the musical idea from Ravel.

Ex. 17 *La Vallée des Cloches* in *Miroirs*, mm 1-2.

Très lent (♩ = 50)

b) Texture

In this *Étude*, each section consists of different textures, such as the dense polyphony in the A and D sections, the doubling of parallel chords with the moving bass and feeling in the listener. For example, Debussy indicates *simile* with clear of chromatic lines in the B section, and the homophonic texture in the C section.

Ex. 18 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 16-20 (in the B section).



The musical and dynamic climax in the D section requires a full orchestral sound from the piano. It would be helpful for performers to experiment with different orchestral sonorities for each texture.

Ex. 19 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 48-53 (in the D section).

The image shows a musical score for piano, measures 48-53. It features two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The music is in a key with two sharps. The texture is dense and homophonic. A *Calmo* marking is present above the second staff. The dynamics range from *pp subito* to *ppp* and *m.f.*

c) Harmony

Various types of harmonies are employed in this *Étude*: diatonic, pentatonic, chromatic, whole-tone, octatonic, and polychords. Each harmony may bring a different mood and feeling to the listener. For example, Debussy indicates *lointain, mais clair et joyeux* (from a distance, but clear and joyful) for the pentatonic theme at mm. 32-33. This clearly indicates what type of sonority Debussy is expecting for this theme.

Ex. 20 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 31-32.

// *Allegretto*
pp *lointain, mais clair et joyeux*

In mm. 1-14, the mixture of different types of harmonies creates an unstable mood for the listener. After the chromatic and octatonic harmonic materials, the use of pentatonic harmony in mm. 11-12 gives an effect of a tension-relaxation to the listeners (Ex. 21).

Ex. 21 Harmonic Materials in *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 1-14.

(Note: OCT: octatonic, WT: whole-tone, Chrom: chromatic, PENT: pentatonic)

OCT

Modéré, sans lenteur

pp

p dolente

WT (Bb at m. 6)

6 OCT CHROM OCT D \flat PENT

p expressif et profond

11 WT WT WT

p poco cres.

D \flat PENT B \flat PENT (except for A \flat) OCT

In the B section, the moving line under the parallel chords is mostly chromatic.

Whole-tone harmony is occasionally employed in both horizontal and vertical dimensions.

Ex. 22 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 16-25.

d) Dynamics

The big shift of dynamics from *ff* to *pp* appears in mm. 50-51. The two measures share the same musical material; however, Debussy drops the tripled melodic line to a single line in the tenor in m. 51. This is followed by polychordal harmony in m. 53, which presents a sudden change of musical ideas. The dynamic climax (*ff*) happens at m. 50. The dynamic indication of *ppp* occurs at m. 53 could be interpreted as a negative climax, as discussed in Form and Dynamics. However, in bringing out different type of sonorities, the polychordal material in mm. 53 could also be interpreted as the climax in this *Étude* (See Ex. 23).

Ex. 23 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 51-53.

53
Calmato
pp subito
ppp

Measure 53 contains by far the most dissonant harmony in the piece. The tonality of Db major is clear at the dynamic climax at m. 50, which is reinforced by the repeated dominant pedal tones (Ab). The absence of the pedal tones, the sudden entrance of the polychords in the widely spaced registers marked as *ppp* at m. 53 requires a subtle touch. The interpretation of this measure will be discussed in Chapters V and VI.

The C# minor seventh chord in the penultimate measure appears with the indication of *f*, which is followed by the pitch B in four octaves in the higher registers with the marking of *p*, which creates the echo effect. The dynamics go down to *pp* in the last measure.

Ex. 24 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 69-75.

(de plus loin...)
pp
smorzando
f
p
pp
pp
C#m7

6. Summary

Debussy said that he experimented with orchestral sonorities from the keyboard in this *Étude*. The ambiguous tonality and a lack of clear melodic ideas make this *Étude* difficult for performers to make a convincing interpretation. There is no clear answer for tonality in this *Étude*, however, the arch form discussed above and the dynamic shape support C# minor as a structural background in this *Étude*.

The dissonant intervals of the major 7th and the minor 2nd introduced at m. 1 reappear throughout the *Étude*. Towards the end of the *Étude*, Debussy restates the prominent motive \underline{a} (E-F) at m. 68 and the initial two pitches in the piece (G# and A) at m. 69. The pentatonic theme is employed four times in the piece; although accompanied by different bass notes, the theme consistently appears in the same register. Debussy's marking seems to indicate a specific sonority for this pentatonic theme.

The wide range of dynamics also suggests different sonorities. The dynamic climax (*ff*) requires an orchestral sonority; however, the softest dynamic (*ppp*) at mm. 53-56 calls for the performer's special imagination, with its dissonant harmony of polychords and widely spaced registers.

CHAPTER V

COMPARATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Pour les Sonorités opposées by three Pianists:

Walter Gieseking, Maurizio Pollini and Mitsuko Uchida

In this chapter, I will discuss the interpretations of *Pour les Sonorités opposées* by three pianists. A summary of pianists' performance style and their perceptions of performance, particularly in Debussy's piano music, precede the comparison of their interpretations. I will discuss and compare their interpretations in terms of tempo, *rubato*, climax, phrasing, articulation, dynamics, voicing, sonority, and other unique features that each pianist creates in the recording.

I. Gieseking, Pollini and Uchida

Among the pianists who recorded the complete *Douze Études*, I have chosen to discuss the interpretations of Gieseking, Pollini and Uchida of *Pour les Sonorités opposées*. The criteria that served as a basis in choosing their recordings for this document are discussed in Chapter I. The published quotations and critiques of each pianist are summarized here. The summaries are unequal in length because of the amount of literature found for each.

a) Walter Gieseeking's efforts. He had the usual control to play the pop of Debussy, and

Gieseeking said that Debussy should be played in a classic manner, more like Mozart than Chopin, and rather strictly in time, always with magical tone.⁵⁸ He wrote:

I am so proud and happy that my name is so often associated with Debussy's music, this marvelous music that seems to me so natural and perfect, so sincere and beautiful.⁵⁹

Gieseeking taught in master classes that Debussy and Ravel should be played with technical perfection and even fingers, in a classic and rather strict impressionistic frame, voicing, and singing the melodies spontaneously and uninhibitedly within.⁶⁰ He said:

I have to hear beautiful resonance from the piano, which is the key to a fine interpretation. If you approach these works primarily from the structural or technical standpoint, or with a too romantic or percussive style, something will be out of balance.⁶¹

Emma Bardac said that Gieseeking's interpretation surpassed her husband's ideal of how his works should sound.⁶² Gieseeking learned his first Debussy work, *Reflects dans l'eau* at age 17, and by age 24 he had already played all the piano works by Debussy and Ravel. He gave the first performances of some of the Debussy's *Douze Études* on one of those programs.

⁵⁸ This statement seems contradictory to what was discussed in Chapter II: Nichols Rogers writes that Debussy did not favor composers in the classical period, particularly Mozart and Beethoven (Nichols, *ibid.*, 176).

⁵⁹ Dean Elder, "The Enduring Legend of Walter Gieseeking," in *Clavier*, Nov. 1995, 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶² Nichols, *ibid.*, 178.

Giesecking's knowledge of pedal technique was supreme, and in particular he was a master of half-pedal effects. He had the tonal control to play the *ppp* in Debussy, and he achieved complete identification with the music of Debussy.⁶³

An important principle of Giesecking was to bring out the melody so even the least informed listener could follow. He said:

You must catch and hold the attention of the listener from the first note. You must exteriorize in order to be sure of communication.⁶⁴

Dean Elder writes on Giesecking's playing as follows:

Giesecking may have had the most readily recognizable tone of all and he could sustain it the longest. His pure, transparent, non-percussive tone of great dynamic range resulted from his phenomenal ear and masterful pedaling. Music flowed from him effortlessly and enthusiastically, always colored by his innate sense of the exquisite.⁶⁵

b) Maurizio Pollini

Pollini is said to be one of the most convincing interpreters of 20th century keyboard repertoire. He has note-perfect accuracy and meticulous respect for the composer's intentions, while asserting his own highly personal ideas and feelings about music.⁶⁷ Everything he does arises from a deep, individualized conception. John Gillespie writes that Pollini's playing is intellectual but not natural, and everything seems calculated.⁶⁸ Since Pollini is not primarily regarded as a Debussy player, credible published critiques for his performance of Debussy's works were not available for this document. Paul Griffiths writes as follows:

⁶³ Harold Schonberg, *The Great Pianists* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1987), 450.

⁶⁴ Elder, *ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁵ Elder, *ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁷ Gillespie, "Pollini, Maurizio," *ibid.*, 695.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 697.

Pollini's reputation as an 'intellectual' player probably comes from this: that he seems to want to know every chord, every note, every color, every rhythm he produces. The mind refuses to let the fingers get away with what comes naturally to them.⁶⁹

c) Mitsuko Uchida

Dean Elder writes on Uchida's playing as follows:

She has an intense understanding of how the music is made, such as the point of climax, the precise function of just one note in a theme. She is able to find proportions in phrases, dynamics and tempo. She is called an individualist at the keyboard.⁷⁰

Uchida talks about Debussy's *Études* as follows:

Debussy demands flexibility in the fingers and in the arm, which extend and contract laterally. The pianist has to be mentally quick as the composer changes his tempos and ideas. If an entire piece requires the same manner of playing, a player gets used to it and does it with ease, as in Czerny's first *Velocity Etude*, for instance. With Debussy *Études*, however, nothing is automatic. Chopin wrote a great number of endurance studies dealing with pianistic problems such as thirds. In contrast, Debussy, he had no desire to write an endurance study. He wrote first as a composer. His idea was to take so-called pianistic problems like thirds, fourths, and sixths and translate them into compositional terms. He wanted to use the full potential of the piano: its great flexibility, lightness, and variety of timbre and pedal possibilities. Above all, his goal was to achieve tremendous freedom at the keyboard. He was obsessed with the thought that out of banal ideas like thirds, he could create beautiful music. Schubert's music cannot be separated from his personality; in contrast, intellectual ideas drove Debussy on. I have spent a hell of a lot of time with Debussy's music, and certain of the explanations I found are quite interesting. The important thing is to find out if there is a way for you to have some satisfactory explanation.⁷¹

Uchida made a video recording of the *Douze Études*. In the first half of the video, she discusses technical problems in selected *Études* with demonstrations. The last half consists of her performance of the complete *Douze Études*.

⁶⁹ Paul Griffiths, "Key to a Mastermind's Skill," in *London Times*, June 2, 1990, 40.

⁷⁰ Dean Elder, "Mitsuko Uchida plays Debussy" in *Clavier*, Vol. 32, no. 10. December 1993, 44.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

II. Comparative Interpretation: *Pour les Sonorités opposées*

The recordings that I used in this project are as follows:

Claude Debussy: *Douze Études*, as recorded by:

- Walter Gieseking, 1957, four CDs by EMI Classics ZDHD 65855, released on January 21, 1997 as The Complete Works for Piano [ADD]
- Mitsuko Uchida, April 1989, released on CD (January 1, 1990) as Philips 2PH 422412 [DDD]
- Maurizio Pollini, October 1992, released on CD as Deutsche Grammophon 471 359-2 [DDD]

Performance Duration:

Gieseking: 4'38"; Pollini: 4'21"; Uchida: 4'48"

In the discussion below, tempo in each section, phrase and measure is examined in detail as well as sonority, harmony, texture, thematic material and dynamics.

Throughout this comparison, however, it is tempo that has the most influence. In examining pianists' phrasing, *rubato*, or how they unify the *Étude*, tempo becomes a major factor in their interpretation. For example, where in the piece and how often each pianist takes *rubato* or *ritardando* makes the phrasing and structure of the piece different. There are sections in two different meters ($3/4$ and $9/8$) in this *Étude*. Since Debussy does not indicate the tempo relationship between \downarrow and \downarrow , pianists could make different decisions about when the meter change occurs. The decision to choose one core tempo ($\downarrow = \downarrow$) or two core tempi can make the interpretation of the *Étude* quite different from performer to performer.

1. Tempo in Each Section

As discussed in the analysis, this *Étude* could be divided into eight sections, and the form could be considered as an arch form without the return of the A' section before the Coda:

Ex. 25 Form in *Pour les Sonorités opposées*

Section	Intro	A	B	C	D	C'	B'	Coda
Measure #	1	7	15	31	38	59	63	68–75
Meter	9/8	9/8	3/4	3/4	9/8	3/4	3/4	3/4

The following shows the metronome tempo for each section in the recordings by the three pianists. The tempo indication at the beginning of each section follows the section and meter. The first number indicates the metronome tempo at the beginning of the section. The middle number shows the fastest metronome tempo within the section. The last number indicates the metronome tempo at the end of the section. The slowest tempo occurs either at the beginning or the ending of each section in this *Étude*. If the middle number is missing, either the beginning or the ending tempo indicates the fastest metronome tempo within the section:

Ex. 26 Metronome Tempo in Each Section for the Recordings of the Three Pianists

(Note: the metronome numbers of the sections in 9/8 are per ♩ and the sections in 3/4 are per ♩; the fastest metronome tempo in the entire piece of each performer appears in bold font and the slowest metronome tempo is underlined.)

Section (meter)	Gieseking	Pollini	Uchida
Intro (9/8) ♩ <i>Modéré, sans lenteur</i>	56-60-52	54-56-50	44-46-40
A (9/8) ♩ <i>Animando poco a poco</i>	50-54-48	52-69-60	42-54-48
B (3/4) ♩ <i>1^o Tempo; Rit (m. 30)</i>	50- 66 -60	54-63-54	63- 76 -58
C (3/4) ♩ <i>L'istesso tempo</i>	44-56- <u>42</u>	52-56	66- 76
D (9/8) ♩ <i>Animando e appassionato poco a poco; calmato (m. 53)</i>	63- 66 -52	63- 80 -52	42-60-37
C' (3/4) ♩ <i>1^o Tempo; Lento (m. 61)</i>	50-52- <u>28</u>	50- <u>33</u>	66-72- <u>22</u>
B' (3/4) ♩ <i>1^o Tempo</i>	46-48-44	54-56-50	63-66-48
Coda (3/4) ♩ (no indication)	56-44	50-48	56- 76 -48

2. Range of Tempo

Tempo excluding mm. 60-62

(Note: the slowest metronome tempo (at mm. 60-62) for all three pianists is excluded. Measures 61-62 are indicated as *Lento*, and Uchida's slowest tempo occurs at the 3rd beat of m. 60).

Giesecking: ♩/♩. = 42-66

Pollini: ♩/♩. = 48-80

Uchida: ♩/♩. = 37-76

Uchida's recording shows the widest range of tempo, and Giesecking, the smallest range of tempo.

Tempo at mm. 60-62

Giesecking: ♩ = 28-44

Pollini: ♩ = 33-40

Uchida: ♩ = 22-33

Ex. 27 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 60-62.

Both Giesecking and Pollini play at their slowest tempo at mm. 61-62 (*Lento*). Uchida's slowest tempo at m. 60 will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

3. Meter and Tempo

In comparing the metronome tempi by the three pianists, Giesecking's and Pollini's tempi show similarity, except for the slower tempo in the C and the B' sections in Giesecking's recording

a) Giesecking

Giesecking's recording shows one core tempo ($\downarrow / \downarrow = 50-56$). He plays in a faster tempo ($\downarrow = 63-66$) in the D section; and a slower tempo ($\downarrow = 44-46$) in the C and B' section.

b) Pollini

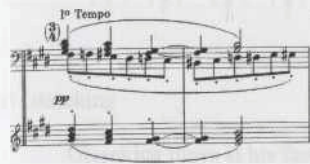
Pollini's core tempo is $\downarrow / \downarrow = 52-56$, except for the D section ($\downarrow = 63-66$). From this, both Giesecking and Pollini interpret that \downarrow becomes \downarrow when meter changes occur. Pollini also sets a slightly slower tempo in the C and B' section, but the difference in tempo between these two sections and his core tempo is not as big as that of Giesecking.

c) Uchida

Uchida's tempo interpretation is different from Giesecking's and Pollini's. There are two prevailing tempi in her recording. Her tempo in the Coda sits in between her fast and slow tempi. Her basic metronome tempo in the sections in 9/8 meter (Intro, A, D) is $\downarrow = 42-44$. In the sections in 3/4 meter (B, C, C', B'), her tempo is $\downarrow = 63-66$. It is clear

that Uchida sets a faster tempo in the sections in 3/4 meter; in fact, her metronome tempo increases 33% in the sections in 3/4 meter. There is no indication by Debussy regarding tempo when meter changes happen. The first meter change from 9/8 to 3/4 occurs at m. 15. Debussy indicates 3/4, *1^o Tempo* at this measure; however, he does not indicate the tempo relationship between ♩ and ♩ (Ex. 27).

Ex. 28 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 15-16.



Uchida's two core tempi in this piece makes her performance more sectional than that of the other two pianists.

4. Climax, Dynamics and Tempo

Measure 50 (the D section) is marked with the highest dynamic level (*ff*) in the piece, and the indication of *sempre animando* (at m. 44) precedes the measure. The dynamic and tempo increases in Giesecking's and Pollini's recordings happen over a longer period of time (mm. 44-50) than Uchida's (mm. 47-50).

Ex. 29 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 47-50.

a) Giesecking

Giesecking plays at his fastest tempo at m. 50. His tempo increase happens gradually in mm. 44-50. His metronome tempo is $J = 58$ at m. 44, and moves faster till it reaches at $J = 66$ at m. 50. Giesecking also plays at this tempo ($J = 66$) at m. 24. His tempo increase in this section takes place within a relatively small range ($J = 58-66$) compared to Pollini's. Giesecking keeps the dynamic level at *p* until *crescendo molto* appears at m. 47, and reaches *ff* at m. 50 as indicated in the score.

b) Pollini

Pollini's recording shows the biggest climax at m. 50 as shown by tempo and dynamic increases. His use of *rubato* in this piece is more restricted than Giesecking's and Uchida's, thus saving the big climactic point for m. 50. His playing shows a concept of the *Étude* as one large unit.

Pollini approaches the climax at m. 50 by applying *molto crescendo* from m. 44, where Debussy indicates *sempre animando*. All three pianists reach the *ff* level at m. 50; however, only Pollini applies a big *crescendo* to the bass pedals, thus creating an orchestral effect. His metronome tempo is $\text{♩} = 60$ at m. 44. The metronome tempo increases one click per measure from m. 44 until he reaches $\text{♩} = 80$ at m. 50, which is his fastest tempo in this *Étude* (his next fastest tempo is $\text{♩} = 69$ at m. 12).

Pollini slows down his tempo to $\text{♩} = 40$ at the end of m. 60, then to $\text{♩} = 36$ at m. 61, where Debussy indicates *Lento*. His interpretation in m. 60-63 sounds like a relief of tension after the big climax at m. 50.

Ex. 30 Pollini: *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 60-62.

c) Uchida

Although Uchida approaches the climax at m. 50 by increasing the dynamic level, she does not make this section as climactic as do Gieseking or Pollini. At m. 42, her dynamic level is already at *mf*. She applies *subito p* at m. 47 to prepare *crescendo molto*, then reaches *ff* at m. 50. This makes her dynamic build-up happen in a shorter period of time compared to Gieseking and Pollini. Her metronome tempo is $\text{♩} = 52$ at m. 44, and

reaches $J = 60$ at m. 50. This tempo increase is not as big as in other sections. For example, Uchida uses bigger tempo increases in the B section ($J = 63-76$).

5. Emphasis on Different Musical Elements

a) Gieseking

Gieseking plays each melodic and motivic idea with a variety of touches. He also brings out contrasting moods and feelings for each section. He plays the melodic lines in the A section expressively in a slower tempo. The motive \underline{a} (E-F), which is discussed in the analysis, is brought out consistently in his recording.

Ex. 31 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 1-5.

The musical score for Ex. 31, 'Pour les Sonorités opposées', mm. 1-5, is presented in a two-staff format. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo marking is 'Modéré, sans lenteur' and the dynamics are 'pp' and 'p dolente'. The score shows the first five measures of the piece. A specific motive 'a' is highlighted in the upper right section of the score.

b) Pollini

The sustained pedal tones are usually emphasized and played at a higher dynamic level in Pollini's recording. The pitch $G\#$ serves as a pedal tone in many sections in this piece. The first pitches in the *Étude* ($G\#$) sound accented in his recording. As discussed in the section on climax, Pollini brings out the bass pedal tones ($G\#$) at the highest dynamic level in the D section among the three pianists. When the bass pedal tone moves to a different pitch, there is less emphasis on the pedal tone.

c) Uchida

The most dramatic gesture in Uchida's recording occurs at mm. 60-61. Uchida slows down her tempo considerably whenever the motive ζ (shown in the examples below) appears in the *Étude*. This gesture shows her emphasis on that motive. This motive appears three times in the *Étude*: at m. 33, 37 and 60.

Ex. 32-a Uchida: *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 33-35.

$\text{♩} = 46$ $\text{♩} = 54$
pp *mf* *pp*

calando

motive ζ (C-F-Bb-G)

Ex. 32-b Uchida: *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 37-38.

$\text{♩} = 76$ $\text{♩} = 30$ $\text{♩} = 42$
f

motive ζ (A#-D#-G#-E#)

pp *p* *pp*

Animando e appassionato
poco a poco
p *doux* *p* *man*

Ex. 32-c. Uchida: *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 60-62.

♩=58 ♩=22 ♩=30 ♩=33 ♩=30

cresc. *f*

motive \underline{c}

At the first appearance of the motive \underline{c} (m. 33), she expands the timing by slowing the motive, and the dynamic shape seems much more exaggerated than Debussy's indication suggests. Debussy does not indicate the utmost dynamic level for the *crescendo* and *decrescendo* at m. 33. Uchida's dynamic range is between *pp* and *mf* at this measure. At the second presentation of the motive at m. 37, her gesture in timing and dynamics increases to a higher level. Right before the motive enters at m. 37, her metronome tempo is $\text{♩} = 76$. She slows down her tempo to $\text{♩} = 33$ when the motive enters. The three *crescendo* markings in m. 37 do not indicate the utmost dynamic level. Uchida takes the level up to *f*.

The third entry of the motive at m. 60 seems the most climactic point for Uchida in this *Étude*. On the first beat at m. 60, her metronome tempo is $\text{♩} = 58$. When the motive enters, she slows down the tempo to $\text{♩} = 22$. Debussy indicates *p* after the *crescendo*, then indicates *decrescendo*. Instead of following the indication of *decrescendo*, Uchida reaches *f* level at the end of the motive by applying *molto*

crescendo. By slowing down the tempo and changing the dynamic indication, Uchida emphasizes the motive.

As discussed in the analysis, the downbeat of m. 61 is one of the structural focal points in the *Étude*, if we regard the *Étude* to be written in E major. The E thirteenth chord at m. 61 is preceded by the bass note B, and the descent of pitch B-E emphasizes the E major tonality.⁷²

Ex. 33 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 60-62.

The E pentatonic theme always precedes the motive *c*. Uchida applies a big *accelerando* to the pentatonic theme. From the above observations, Uchida seems to emphasize the E major tonality in this *Étude*. Her emphases in this motive make the *Étude* sound like a rondo sonata form.

Ex. 34 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 15-20.



⁷² The bass E at m. 61 is missing in Pollini's recording.

6. *Rubato*

a) Gieseking

Gieseking's use of *rubato* stands in between Pollini's and Uchida's. He applies *rubatos* throughout the *Étude* as Uchida does; however, his *rubato* is much more subtle than hers. Gieseking applies a different timbre for each voice in a texture, rather than making his nuances with *rubato*.

b) Pollini

Pollini's recording shows little use of *rubato*. His use of a big *rubato* is limited to the climactic point around m. 50 and the *Lento* at m. 60. Pollini moves to the next section without *ritardando* most of the time. This gives the effect of having no bar-lines in the piece. Even in places where the *ritardando* is indicated, Pollini takes the least amount of tempo fluctuation or sometimes does not slow down his tempo at all. This makes his playing continuous, and avoids making the *Étude* sectional. He creates one large structure by eliminating *rubato*. Once each section begins, he usually stays at the same tempo.

At the beginning of the B section (m. 15), Debussy indicates *f* *Tempo*.

Ex. 34 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 15-20.

The musical score shows two staves. The upper staff is the treble clef with a melodic line starting on G4, moving through A4, B4, and C5. The lower staff is the bass clef with a bass line consisting of chords. The tempo is marked 'f Tempo' and the dynamics are 'pp'. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

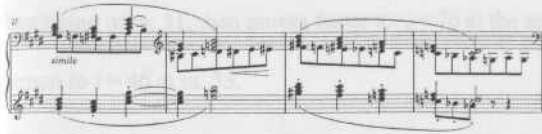


Fig. 35 Uchida's *André* for *Étude pour la main gauche*, mm. 29-33.

In Pollini's recording, the 8th notes in the middle voice sound articulated and emphasized. Since he plays *tempo giusto* in this section, the 8th notes sound like a metronome and become a beat unit. The dynamic nuance is also very limited. Pollini does not follow Debussy's indication of a two-bar-phrase in this section, thus the phrasing seems missing. Overall, his playing sounds monotonous and continuous, and it lacks nuances in some places.

c) Uchida

Uchida takes the biggest liberties of *rubato* in this *Étude*, and her recording seems almost opposite from Pollini's. Among a total of 75 measures, she plays *tempo giusto* only in the first three measures. In the B section, her two-bar-phrase is clearly defined by the *ritardando* at the end of each phrase. Her tempo range in the B section is $\text{♩} = 63\text{-}76$. She takes time at the phrase-ends, and holds the first triad in each phrase longer, as if it has a *fermata*. Her playing sounds fragmented and the phrases do not flow smoothly because of her frequent use of *rubato*.

Another example of her exaggerated *rubato* occurs at mm. 31-33. Debussy indicates *L'istesso tempo* at m. 31, after the *ritardando* in the previous measure. He also indicates *lointain, mais clair et joyeux* at the measure. Uchida's tempo is $\text{♩} = 66$ at the

beginning of m. 31, then moves faster to $\text{♩} = 76$ at the end of m. 32. She slows down her tempo to $\text{♩} = 46$ at m. 33.

Ex. 35 Uchida: *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 29-33.

♩=63 ♩=66 ♩=69 ♩=76

Rit. . . . # L'istesso tempo

pp lointain, mais clair et joyeux

♩=46

motive g

Uchida's *rubato* makes her playing sound spontaneous and interesting, however, when the exaggerated *rubato* appears without any indication, her interpretation seems overly subjective.

7. Rhythm and *Rubato*

The rhythmic pattern shown in the example below ($\text{♩} \text{ ♩} \text{ ♩}$) appears in the A and the D section. Each pianist plays the rhythm differently.

Ex. 36 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 47-48 (in the D section).

a) Giesecking

The 16th notes in the example move slowly in Giesecking's recording until m. 49. He starts moving 16th notes with forward motion at m. 49 until the dynamic climax at m. 50.

b) Pollini

Because of the restricted use of *rubato*, Pollini's rhythm is exactly as notated. He does not use forward or backward motion in the example above.

c) Uchida

Uchida plays this rhythmic figure with exaggerated forward motion, thus shortening the 16th notes. In mm. 47-50, she shortens the 16th notes so much that they become 32nd notes. She also changes the timing for the bass pedal tones (G#). The bass notes are played one eighth note value late. The following example shows her rhythm.

Ex. 37 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 47-50.

The musical score for Ex. 37, measures 47-50, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the right-hand part (treble clef) with a melodic line of eighth notes and a piano part (bass clef) with a bass line of eighth notes. The second system shows the piano part (bass clef) with a bass line of eighth notes and a right-hand part (treble clef) with a melodic line of eighth notes. The piano part has a 'p' dynamic marking. The right-hand part has a 'crescendo molto' marking.

8. Contrasting Sonorities

Debussy experimented with a variety of sonorities in this *Étude*. The following discusses how each pianist emphasizes or de-emphasizes contrasting elements, and brings out contrasting sonorities in the *Étude*.

Register

1) mm. 1-3

Measures 1-3 include a wide range of registers at the keyboard. Debussy gives only one dynamic indication (*pp*) in these three measures.

Ex. 38 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 1-3.

The musical score for Ex. 38, measures 1-3, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the right-hand part (treble clef) with a melodic line of eighth notes and a piano part (bass clef) with a bass line of eighth notes. The second system shows the piano part (bass clef) with a bass line of eighth notes and a right-hand part (treble clef) with a melodic line of eighth notes. The piano part has a 'pp' dynamic marking. The right-hand part has a 'Modéré, sans lenteur' marking.

There are three different elements in mm. 1-3:

- a) The pitches G# on the downbeat of m. 1, which are tripled in three octaves, and sustained through mm. 1-2. The pitches are repeated at m. 3.
- b) The dotted quarter-notes A, doubled in an octave at the middle register. The pitches are indicated with a marking of the roll and a *tenuto* sign. The pitches are repeated three times on the third beat in mm. 1-3.
- c) The bass G# in the low register at m. 2, which has a *staccato* marking.

Tempo at mm. 1-3:

Gieseking: J. = 56-60

Pollini: J. = 54-56

Uchida: J. = 44-46

All three pianists play the initial pitches G# at the highest dynamic level (*mp*) in these three measures. Gieseking plays all the G#s without voicing, thus the pitches blend together. Pollini and Uchida bring out the highest G#.

The dynamic levels for the quarter-notes A are around *p* in all three recordings. The sound quality of the roll is warmer in the recordings of Gieseking and Uchida, because of less articulation and the slower speed to the roll. The timing of the roll is quick in Pollini's recording, which makes these three measures seem to move faster. The bass G# is played softest (at *ppp*) in all the recordings. All three pianists play this bass as *portato*, rather than *staccato*.

Because of the *tenuto* on the pitches A, the pitches could be emphasized and played at the higher dynamic level; however, because of the duration of the initial G#s, which are sustained for two full measures, the G#s might require a higher dynamic level. Although Gieseeking plays mm. 1-3 at the fastest tempo among the three pianists ($J. = 56-60$), he still maintains the spacious feeling. His articulation of each of the pitch is the least so that all the pitches blend together. Pollini's playing sounds fastest, because of his quick arpeggiation of the pitches A. Uchida's tempo is slowest in these three measures ($J. = 44-46$), which also makes her playing sound spacious.

2) mm. 53-56

Debussy uses contrasting registers simultaneously to create special sonorities at mm. 53-56. The block chords in the lower register and the rolled chords in the higher register create unique sonorities with dissonant harmony at mm. 53-56.

Ex. 39 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 52-56.

The musical score for 'Pour les Sonorités opposées' (measures 52-56) is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 52 and 53, and the second system covers measures 54 and 55. The piece is in 4/4 time and marked 'Calmato'. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the left hand (bass clef) plays block chords. Dynamics include 'ppp' and 'f'.

a) Giesecking

Giesecking plays the chords in the low register at *p* and the rolled chords in the higher register at *ppp*. The pitches at the higher register sound distant, thus creating an echo-like effect.

b) Pollini

Pollini plays these four measures *dolce*, *tempo giusto*, and there is no difference in his dynamic level (*pp*) and sound quality between the two opposite registers.

c) Uchida

Uchida sets a slightly slower tempo ($J = 37$) at m. 53. She plays the rolled chords in the upper register with a big *rubato*. She plays the phrases in the upper register melodically at *p*, and plays the chords at the lower register like an accompaniment at *ppp*.

Texture

a) Giesecking

Giesecking uses a different kind of timbre for each voice in the B section. There are parallel triads in two different registers (the upper triads with slur, the lower ones with *staccatos* and slur), and the moving 8th notes in the inner voice with *staccatos* and slurs.

Ex. 40 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 15-20 (in the B section).

The musical score shows two staves. The upper staff is marked with a first tempo of quarter note = 37. It contains a series of parallel triads, with the upper ones slurred and the lower ones marked with staccatos and slurs. The lower staff is marked *ppp* and contains a series of parallel triads, also with slurs and staccatos. The overall texture is characterized by the contrast between the two registers and the use of different articulations.



Giesecking plays the 8th notes in the inner voice with a string *pizzicato* sound. He also applies a slight dynamic shape to the 8th note figure. His tempo range is $\text{♩} = 50-66$ in the B section and he plays it with slightly forward motion, which helps the phrases to flow.

b) Pollini

Pollini's interpretation of this section is discussed earlier in this chapter. In summary, he articulates and emphasizes the 8th note figure in the middle voice so much that the sustained sound in the parallel triads becomes a background.

c) Uchida

Uchida plays this section similarly to Giesecking. She uses different touches for the parallel triads in the upper and lower clefs. The triads in the upper clef are sustained, and the ones in the lower clef are slightly detached. The 8th note figure is played very softly, and this helps the phrases to flow smoothly.

Harmony

As discussed in the analysis, various types of harmonies are employed in this *Étude*: diatonic, modal, octatonic, chromatic, pentatonic, and whole-tone.

1) mm. 7-14 (the A section)

All three pianists set a dark and somber mood at the beginning of the piece (introduction and the A section: mm. 1-14). The tonality is ambiguous and various types of harmonies are employed in the A section: octatonic, chromatic, pentatonic, and whole-tone. The tripled chromatic melodic line in the example below (starts on pitch C at m. 7) is played differently in the three recordings.

Ex. 41 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 6-14.

7 (Section A)

whole-tone motive \underline{b}
(Ab-C-D)

a) Giesecking

Giesecking plays the chromatic melodic line with sustained sound, and the 16th notes in the melody move slowly. He plays the whole-tone motive \underline{b} at *pp*, as indicated in the score. The motive sounds distant and creates an echo-like effect in the high register. Giesecking also slows down the tempo in the motive. Since there is a big distance between the chromatic melodic line and the whole-tone motive, the slowing of

the tempo in this motive brings out the transparent, spacious feeling which suits the character of the whole-tone harmony.

b) Pollini

Pollini does not bring out the chromatic melodic line; instead, he brings out the whole-tone motive in the higher register. Pollini plays this motive at *mf* with forward motion. The motive sounds compressed and aggressive.

c) Uchida

Uchida brings out this chromatic melodic line to the point that each melodic note sounds accented. Her sound quality is sharp, and the melodic line sounds aggressive. Uchida also plays the whole-tone motive softly as Gieseking does; however, she plays this motive with forward motion.

2) Pentatonic Theme

The pentatonic theme in this piece (at mm. 31-32, mm. 36-37, mm. 59-60, and mm. 68-69) is discussed in the Chapter IV. The preceding section (B) in mm. 15-30 consists mostly of modal and chromatic harmonies, with occasional use of whole-tone harmony. Pianists could create contrasting sonorities when the pentatonic theme enters at m. 31.

Ex. 42 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, Pentatonic Theme in mm. 31-32 (section C).

tempo by these two measures brings out an opposite mood, and does not proceed as if

pp *lointain, mais clair et joyeux*

The ending of the piece includes different levels of dynamics. From the *pp* at the

a) Gieseking

Gieseking uses much less pedal to create a dry sound at mm. 31-32. He holds the first two notes (E-B) which have a *tenuto* sign longer, then moves his tempo forward with *staccato* notes (F#-C#-G#). His tempo range is $\text{♩} = 44-56$ in these two measures. He brings out the innocent and child-like character of this pentatonic theme with his dry sound. Gieseking's sonority for the pentatonic theme seems to be the closest to Debussy's indication: *lointain, mais clair et joyeux*.

b) Pollini

Among the three pianists, Pollini's recording shows the least difference in sound quality from the preceding sections. He plays exactly as written in the score: *tenuto*, *staccato* and the slur markings are carefully observed. His tempo range in these two measures is $\text{♩} = 52-56$, and the tempo moves slightly slower than the previous section ($\text{♩} = 54-58$).

c) Uchida

Uchida's range of tempo is $\text{♩} = 66-76$ at mm. 31-32, and $\text{♩} = 76$ is her fastest tempo in this piece. Her tempo moves faster with the repeated four-note figure (F#-B-E-

C#) at m. 32. She uses less pedal to create a dry sound, as Giesecking does. Her fast tempo in these two measures brings out an aggressive mood, and does not sound as if from a distance (*lointain*).

Dynamics

The ending of the piece includes different levels of dynamics. From the *pp* at m. 70, the indication of the *diminuendo* and *smorzando* could bring the dynamic level down to even softer than *ppp*. The subito *f* on the rolled C# minor chord at m. 74 is followed by the *p* over the pitches B in the higher registers, followed by *pp* at m. 75.

The following examples compare the recordings of the three pianists with regard to their tempi and dynamic levels.

Ex. 43-a Giesecking: *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 70-75.

♩=52 rit. ♩=46 ♩=44 ♩=44 ♩=40

ppp *pppp* *f* voice B

Ex. 43-b Pollini: *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 70-75.

♩=50 ♩=50-52 tempo giusto ♩=46-48
 (pp -equal dynamic level) f mp (pitches B accented)

slow roll

Ex. 43-c Uchida: *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 70-75.

♩=44 ♩=48 ♩=50-48 ♩=50 rit. // ♩=44
 forward motion p cresc mp f mp

quick roll, sharp sound

The indication of *de plus loin* (from further) at m. 70 could be emphasized by a softer dynamic level or slower tempo. Giesecking slows down his tempo at this measure. Pollini keeps the same tempo. Surprisingly, Uchida applies forward motion at the end of m. 70. The *decrecendo* from *pp* in mm. 70-73 is observed only by Giesecking. Pollini remains at *pp* level. Uchida applies *crescendo* at m. 72. It seems that she prepares the *f* at the C# minor 7th chord at m. 74 by increasing dynamic level beforehand. This interpretation seems contradictory to Debussy's indication.

All three pianists play the C# minor 7th chord at m. 74 at a forte level. Gieseking and Pollini play this chord with sustained sound. Uchida plays it with an aggressive sound. The climax is clearly established by means of carefully calculated means.

Gieseking and Pollini take time before playing the pitches B at the penultimate measure, thus the 8th rest at the downbeat of the measure seems to become a quarter rest. Uchida does not lengthen this 8th rest. Because of the contrasting registers, dynamics and the musical elements (7th chord vs. quadrupled pitch class B) at this measure, taking time at the 8th rest seems musically appropriate.

9. Summary and Critique

a) Gieseking

Gieseking's interpretations in this *Étude* are subtle. Every phrase is nuanced by a variety of timbre, dynamic shape and the subtle use of *rubato*. Even in places where he chooses to play more slowly, the tempo never seems static because of his use of different touches and phrase shapings. Also, the avoidance of accents in the middle of the phrase or on the downbeat of the measure helps the music to flow. When the texture is complex, Gieseking applies a different timbre to each voice. The dry sound he creates for the pentatonic theme is imaginative, and the sound fits Debussy's indication of *lointain, mais clair et joyeux*. Except for the climax at m. 50, there is no feeling of aggressiveness in his playing. Sensitivity and delicacy in his recording makes me feel that he is speaking each phrase instead of playing.

²⁰ Roger Nichols writes that Debussy used right ornaments, a good listening lesson from *Collected Recordings* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1992), 143.

b) Pollini

Pollini creates one big architecture in this *Étude* by avoiding small gestures and nuances. The climax is clearly established by means of carefully calculated tempo increases and dynamic shapes. His rhythm matches perfectly what is written in the score. Although the architecture he creates through the *Étude* seems to fit into its arch form, significant expression and feelings are missing most of the time. By eliminating *rubato* in between phrases, the overall impression in his recording is that it is without bar-lines. However, the lack of *rubato* makes his playing sound metronomic, and the beat unit seems to fall into small note values. I found his recording to be uninteresting because of the lack of character and expression in each section.

c) Uchida

Uchida's playing is imaginative, full of gestures and nuances and very spontaneous. She plays every phrase with dynamic shapes and tempo nuances. After listening to her recording many times with the score, however, her playing started to sound fragmented. Her nuances in phrase shapes are usually created by tempo fluctuation, especially *ritardando* at the end of phrases. From a microscopic viewpoint, her playing is spontaneous and full of surprises. However, I feel she does exaggerate her gestures too much in some places, thus creating many climactic points in the *Étude*. Uchida's *crescendos* happen usually in a bigger range of dynamic, which seems contradictory to what Debussy expected for performers.⁷³ Her control over texture is superb, and she does aim for many different colors. I find her playing much more

⁷³ Roger Nicholas writes that Debussy liked slight *crescendos*, a *ppp* increasing into a mere *pp* (Debussy Remembered (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1992), 163).

imaginative and interesting than Pollini's, however I am not sure that Debussy would have agreed. She put her own ideas in every phrase in the *Étude*, but some of her interpretation seems to be far from what the composer indicated on the score.

MY INTERPRETATION

POUR LES SONNÉTÉS OPPOSEES

Three different interpretations are presented in chapter IV. I will now discuss my own interpretation of *Pour les Sonnetés opposées* with some preliminary comments on the purpose and advantages of analysis.

1. Purpose of Analysis

I do a thorough analysis in preparing for my performances. Analyzing elements such as form, tonality, harmony, phrase and motive helps me to understand the deeper level of structural unity. In performing from memory in particular, I find that knowing the form of the music is essential. The form serves as a map for my performance. I start from a detailed analysis which includes rhythm patterns, chord names or pitch-class sets, and then reduce it to a simplified version that fits onto one page. The reduced analysis serves as a simplified map when performing without the performance. I believe that the actual performance must be free from conscious thought about the analysis of the music in order to achieve spontaneity and expression; however, understanding the structure of the music serves as a safety net at the subconscious level when performing from memory.

Analyzing *Pour les Sonnetés opposées* was a difficult task. Although the tonality is ambiguous and harmonic materials are mostly chromatic or atonal, the

CHAPTER VI

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Analyzing *Pour les Sonorités opposées* was a difficult task. Although the tonality is ambiguous and harmonic materials are mostly chromatic or octatonic, the

Étude is still tonal. As discussed in my analysis, it is possible to consider that the tonality oscillates between E Major and C# minor in this *Étude*. After preparing two versions of Schenkerian graphs in both keys, I found both versions to make sense in different ways, but they also presented some problems. I decided to choose C# minor as a primary tonal center in this *Étude* because of the structural bass movements. It helps me to interpret this *Étude* structurally if I regard the suspended G# pedal at mm. 1-67 as going down to C# at m. 68, thus making a V-I progression in C# minor. This assumption provides me a big picture of the *Étude*.

2. Tempo

Core Tempo

Among the three pianists discussed in chapter IV, Uchida chooses two different tempi for sections in 9/8 ($J = 42-44$) and 3/4 ($J = 63-66$). Since Debussy did not indicate the tempo relationship between J and J , performers must decide which would be appropriate. I choose to set one core tempo as do Gieseking and Pollini ($J = J$), since it helps to unify the *Étude* as one large structure. Another factor in determining the tempo, when the first meter change occurs at m. 15 (from 9/8 to 3/4), is the relationship between the musical materials at mm. 14-15.

Ex. 44 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 11-16.

The harmonic materials at m. 15 are mostly chromatic and modal. Texture is relatively dense with the doubling of triads and the chromatic moving line in the middle voice. The dark and somber mood in the A section continues at m. 15. I feel that setting a faster tempo at m. 15 would make this section (B at mm. 15-29) sound less serious, and destroy the mood.

Gieseking's and Pollini's core tempo are similar (Gieseking: $\text{♩} / \text{♩} = 50-56$; Pollini: $\text{♩} / \text{♩} = 52-56$). I like Uchida's slow tempo ($\text{♩} = 42-44$) at the beginning of the *Étude*, since it gives the feeling of spaciousness to the wide texture. However, I found this tempo does not allow the following phrases to flow. My core tempo would be $\text{♩} / \text{♩} = 50-56$, which still keeps a spacious feeling while allowing a fluent motion.

Sempre animando

Gieseking and Pollini play at their fastest tempo at m. 50, which is also a dynamic climax in the piece. In the D section, Debussy indicates *sempre animando* at m. 44. Both pianists starts m. 44 at $\text{♩} = 63$. Gieseking plays $\text{♩} = 66$ and Pollini plays $\text{♩} = 80$

at m. 50. Pollini's tempo increase sounds exciting; however, I feel the climax happens and ends very quickly in his performance. Gieseking achieved this climax not by speed; although his tempo is slightly faster at m. 50 than m. 44, the timing in the climax at m. 53 sounds expanded. I would apply *poco accelerando* starting at m. 44 and achieve about $J. = 70$ at m. 50. I like the excitement of *accelerando* in Pollini's recording, but I feel the dense texture requires a tempo not as fast as his tempo ($J. = 80$). I also prefer to expand the timing at the big leap from the third beat of m. 49 to the downbeat of m. 50.

Ex. 45 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 48-50.

Rubato

Among the three pianists, Uchida takes the biggest liberties of *rubato* in the *Étude*. She also uses *rubato* for emphasizing specific motivic ideas in the *Étude*. Subtle use of *rubato* helps phrases to flow and breathe; however, too much use of *rubato* makes the music fragmented. For example, I would play the B section with a slight forward motion. I would also breathe at phrase-ends occasionally, but not as often as Uchida.

Ex. 46 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 16-20 (in the B section).



Pollini limited *rubato* to only a few places in the *Étude*, including m. 61. I also regard the E 13th chord at m. 61 as the biggest breathing point in this *Étude*.

Ex. 47 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 60-62.



Lento at m. 61

Both Gieseking and Pollini play the *Lento* at mm. 61-62 at the slowest in the *Étude* (Gieseking: $\text{♩} = 42$; Pollini: $\text{♩} = 36$). Uchida's slowest tempo ($\text{♩} = 22$) occurs right before the *Lento*, as discussed in the previous chapter. I would play this *Lento* section at about $\text{♩} = 40-42$. Playing this section in a slower tempo stagnates the motion.

Motive c

Uchida's emphasis on motive *c* is discussed in detail in Chapter V. Among the three presentations of the motive (at mm. 33, 37, and 60), I would take a *ritardando* at the motive at m. 60 and achieve about $\text{♩} = 46$, which is slightly faster than the tempo at m.

61. Debussy indicates *p* after the *crescendo* and *decrescendo* at m. 60. Uchida reaches *mf* at the end of the motive by applying *molto crescendo*. I disagree with her interpretation. I would follow Debussy's indication of *decrescendo* and reach at *pp* on the downbeat of m. 61.

Ex. 48 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 60-62.

cresc. *mf* decresc. *p* (Uchida)
 decresc. *pp* (my interpretation)

motive c

3. Form and Section

As discussed in the analysis, this *Étude* can be divided into eight sections.

Among them, the B and the D sections are substantially longer than others. For the interpreter, the question is how to connect these sections to make larger units.

Ex. 49 Form in *Pour les Sonorités opposées*

Section:	Intro	A	B	C	D	C'	B'	Coda
Measure:	1	7	15	31	38	59	63	68-75

The following shows how I make connections in the small sections above. The larger scale form below consists of three sections: Section I (mm. 1-14), II (m. 15-

downbeat of m. 61), and III (second beat of m. 61-m. 75). The middle section is proportionally much longer than the first and the last sections. Measures 61-62 can be considered as an overlapping point between the middle and the last sections.

Ex. 50 Larger Scale Form in *Pour les Sonorités opposées*.

Larger Scale Form:	I	II	III
Smaller Section:	[Intro A]	[B C D C']	[B' Coda]
Measure:	1 7	15 31 38	59 61-62 63 68-75

I interpret the introduction (mm. 1-6) as connecting to the A section (mm. 7-14) with a slight pause at the end of m. 6. The motivic connections (E-F) appear at the ends of both sections. Texture becomes dense at m. 7. I would keep the same dynamic level (*p*) from m. 6 to m. 7, so that the dense texture at m. 7 would not destroy the continuity from the previous section.

Ex. 51 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 1-14 (intro, A).

Intro
Moderato, sans hauteur

motive (E-F)

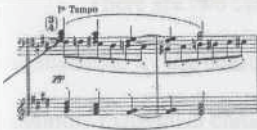
6 E-F 7 (Section A)
p expressif et profond



There is a common tone (*Ab* becomes *G#*) at mm. 14-15; however, texture, harmony, tonal center, meter and rhythm change in the B section. Although there is no break in timing indicated in between the A and B sections, I consider m. 15 to be the beginning of the second large unit in the *Étude*, and take a brief pause at the end of m. 14.

Ex. 52 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 15-16.

G# (common tone of *Ab* at m. 14)



The B and the C sections could be connected by the moving 8th note line and the bass pedal (*G#*). I try to keep the continuity by phrasing the moving 8th note line at m. 30 leading to the bass pedal (*G#*) at m. 31.

Ex. 53 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 29-33.

End of the B section C (m. 31)



Ex. 53 From the C to the D section, the bass pedal (G#) and the phrase on the 3rd beat at m. 37 connect to the next section (D) at m. 38. Voicing this phrase clearly in the texture will make a better connection.

Ex. 54 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 37-40.

End of C section D section

[A# D# G# E#]

Allegretto e appassionato
pp *molto a poco*
p *doux* *p* *marcato* *p* *espressif et*
ritardando

G# G#

There are two contrasting musical ideas in the D section: the tonality of C# major is sustained by the dominant pedal in the bass (G#) at mm. 38-52, even though the melodic material is chromatic and tonally ambiguous. The polychord at m. 53 presents a big contrast as discussed in the analysis and the interpretation. The bass note moves down from G# to F# at m. 53. This bass note (F#) leads to the next section (C') at m. 59, after the chromatic upper neighbor motions to G at mm. 57-58. It would help the sections to connect if the bass notes and overall texture maintain the same dynamic level.

considered as an overlapping point between the C' and the B' sections in the smaller-scale form, and the middle and the last sections in the larger-scale form.

The B' section leads to the Coda by the bass movement (G#-C#) at mm. 67-68. V. 1 is C# minor. The melody in the upper staff consists of the augmented C# minor triad (C#-G#-E), which also supports the quality of C# minor. The cadence at mm. 68-69 would lead smoothly to m. 68 (the Coda). I would slow down slightly at mm. 66-67 and

Ex. 55 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 56-64.

End of D section 57 58 59 (C') 60

E 13th Fm6 G#m7

I consider the E 13th chord at m. 61 to be the end of the second large unit in this *Étude*. This is the only fermata in this *Étude*. The bass progression (F#-G#-B-E) at mm. 59-61 presents the most functional progression in this *Étude* (in E major): [V]-I6-V-I. As discussed in the analysis, this progression supports the E major tonality. The melodic material at m. 61 is closely related to the one in the D section. The following measure (m. 62) consists of the arpeggiated F minor 6th chord, which relates to the broken 7th chord figures in the next section (B'). The melodic material at m. 61-62 could be considered as an overlapping point between the C' and the B' sections in the smaller scale form, and the middle and the last sections in the larger scale form.

The B' section leads to the Coda by the bass movement (G#-C#) at mm. 67-68: V-I in C# minor. The melody in the upper clef consists of the arpeggiated C# minor triad (C#-G#-E), which also supports the tonality of C# minor. The *calando* at mm. 66-67 should lead smoothly to m. 68 (the Coda). I would slow down slightly at mm. 66-67 and

make a *diminuendo* down to *pp* at m. 68. Since Debussy indicated *de loin* (further), I would not set a faster tempo at m. 68.

The Coda could be interpreted as the C" section, since it consists mostly of the thematic materials from the C section. However, with the return of the two note motive E-F at mm. 68-69 and motive G#-A at m. 69, I consider it appropriate to call this ending section the Coda.

Ex. 56 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 65-69.

End of the B' Section

Coda

C# G# E E# (F)

G# C# A - G#

4. Motivic Unity

As discussed in the analysis, two notes which are either consecutive or simultaneous a minor 2nd or a major 7th apart are found throughout the *Étude*. Among them, I regard the combination of two notes (G#-A) and (E-F) to be the structurally unifying elements in this *Étude*. I interpret the combination of G# and A at mm. 1-3 as placid, still and sad, and seek for sonority of bells coming far away. Debussy indicated *dolente* for the middle voice at m. 4, and I consider this indication to apply for the motive (E-F) in the middle voice at mm. 5, 6, and 13.

Ex. 57 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 1-5.

Modéré, sans lenteur

pp

p dolente

motive (E-F)

motive (G#-A)

I consider mm. 68-69 to be one of the structurally most important points in this *Étude*, because of the reappearance of the two note motives (E-F and G#-A) which links to the initial presentation of them at m. 1 and m. 5. In order to emphasize the motive (E-F) at mm. 68-69, I would hold E at m. 68 slightly longer than notated, so that listeners can hear the connection to E# at m. 69. Debussy indicates *marqué* at m. 69, where I would play A and G# in the lower clef with tenuto and emphasis.

Ex. 58 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 65-69.

68

E (hold longer) E# (F)

allegro

pp

p marqué

A G#

5. Climax in the *Étude*

There are three places which could serve as a climax in this *Étude*: m. 50, 53, or 68-69. Measure 50 is clearly the highest point in the *Étude* in its dynamic level. With its dense texture and the dynamic marking (*ff*), pianists could achieve the orchestral

sonority to make this climax dramatic. I imagine the sound of a full string section in the tripled melodic lines, of the brass in the sustained chords, and of double bass for the lowest notes.

Ex. 59 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 48-50.

50

Measure 53 could be considered as a climax in terms of the meaning of the title: opposing sonorities. The dynamic climax at m. 50 happens in a relatively tonal context (C# major). At m. 51, the dynamic level suddenly drops down to *subito pp*, but the tonality of C# major is still sustained. The polychord at m. 53 is the most dissonant harmony in the *Étude*, and it presents the biggest contrast. The polychord is marked with a *tenuto* marking. I would play this chord as softly as possible with sustained sound, and seek an unexpected, still and mysterious quality. Although m. 50 would sound as a climax to the listeners because of its orchestral sonority, I regard m. 53 as an emotional climax in this *Étude*.

Ex. 60 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 51-53.

53

Calmato

Measures 68-69 are a structurally important point in this *Étude* as discussed above. These measures may not serve as a climax; however, I feel it is important for performers to be aware of the structurally unifying elements in these two measures. Emphasizing the unifying elements by slight dynamic increase or tenuto would be effective.

6. Contrasting Elements in the *Étude*

Finding contrasting elements in the *Étude* and emphasizing them would help to achieve a better interpretation. The following list shows the contrasting elements in the *Étude*:

Ex. 61 Contrasting Elements in *Pour les Sonorités opposées*

Musical indication	<i>joyeux</i>	<i>dolente</i>
	<i>calmato</i>	<i>profond</i>
Harmony	consonant	dissonant
Texture (a)	dense	simple
	polyphonic	homophonic
Dynamic marking	<i>doux</i>	<i>marqué</i>
	<i>de plus près</i>	<i>lointain</i>
	soft (<i>ppp</i>)	loud (<i>ff</i>)
Articulation	<i>legato</i>	<i>staccato</i> or <i>portato</i>
	<i>pénétrant</i>	<i>clair</i>
Tempo indication	<i>animando</i>	<i>1^o Tempo; L'istesso tempo</i>

7. Musical Indications

The feeling of the *Étude* is mostly somber and dark except for the sections where the pentatonic theme is present. The pentatonic theme, which is indicated as *joyeux* (joyous), should be played with a contrasting character and sound. The theme appears four times in this piece. Except for the 2nd presentation of the theme which lacks a dynamic indication, this theme is indicated as *pp*. The indication of *lointain mais clair* (distant but clear) should be observed carefully. Uchida plays this theme with *molto accelerando* and *crescendo*, and I disagree with her interpretation. It seems she emphasizes the indication of *joyeux* but disregards *lointain*. Her *crescendo* makes the theme sound as "*de plus près*." To achieve the indication of *lointain*, the dynamic level should be maintained at *pp* level. As discussed regarding Giesecking's recording, a drier touch helps to achieve a *clair* (clear) sound in this theme; it also gives a feeling of *joyeux*.

8. Articulation and Dynamics

The articulation markings in this *Étude* are mostly *legato* and *portato*. The *staccatos* appear in some of the bass pedals and in the pentatonic theme discussed above. The musical ideas which are indicated as *legato* should be played as smoothly as possible, even at the higher dynamic level.

The chromatic melodic lines in the A and D sections are indicated with *legato* markings. The A section is indicated as *expressif et profound*, and the D section as *expressif et pénétrant*. In Uchida's recording, the melodic line sounds accented in both sections. The indications of *profound* and *pénétrant* may require voicing the melodic lines, and the dynamic level for the them could be higher than the actual indication (*p*) in

the score. Although tenuto signs appear towards the climax at m. 50 (the D section), Debussy did not indicate any accents in this *Étude*. I interpret the tenuto signs as holding the pitches long enough or slightly longer than notated with some emphasis, but not as articulated pitches. Accents or articulated sounds destroy the smoothness of the phrases and melodic lines. I feel the sharp and articulated sounds in Uchida's recording do not suit these two sections.

The middle voice in the B section is marked *portato*. My interpretation of this chromatic line is placid and mysterious, as if something unexpected is going to happen. The use of whole-tone harmony in between the chromatic materials adds color and is refreshing to the ear. The texture feels dense when the harmonic context is chromatic; although the texture is similar, the transparent sonority of the whole-tone harmony gives a spacious feeling.

Ex. 62 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 16-25.

(Note: WT indicates whole-tone harmony)

The chromatic line in the middle voice should be played as softly as possible to make the phrases flow. I imagine different woodwind sonorities in the sustained chords and string *pizzicati* in the moving chromatic lines. I disagree with Pollini's interpretation of articulating this chromatic line since it stops the flow of the phrase. I interpret the top notes in the triads in the bass clef as the primary voice and play the voice line as smoothly as possible. The triads in the treble clef are indicated with *portato*, and I play them softer than the triads in the upper clef, as if they are overtones.

Three different markings are indicated at mm. 38-40: *doux*, *marqué*, and *expressif et pénétrant*. The dynamic marking of *p* is sustained throughout these three measures. The *crescendo* at the end of m. 37 should be played in a smaller dynamic range, since Debussy did not indicate *p subito* at m. 38. From the discussion of Debussy's philosophy of piano playing in Chapter II, I consider that *crescendos* should not be exaggerated unless the next dynamic marking indicates to do so.⁷⁴

Ex. 63 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 37-40.

I would play the sustained chord at m. 38 softer than *p* with the least articulation, to achieve the indication of *doux* (gentle, sweet), then play the chord at m. 39 with more

⁷⁴ Robert Schmitz says that many pianists who play Debussy overlook his crescendo markings (Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1950., 175).

emphasis. Since it is indicated as *marqué*, this chord could be played at a higher dynamic level (*mp*); however, I avoid articulating the chord to keep the music flowing. The same chord is repeated at m. 40. This time, there is no tenuto marking over the chord. I interpret the absence of the tenuto sign to mean that the emphasis moves from the chord to the melodic line in the middle. At m. 40, I play only the melodic line (marked with a slur) as *expressif et pénétrant*, but keep the other voices (chords and the bass pedal) in the background.

The following examples could be played as if they are overtones.

Ex. 64 Whole-tone Motive in *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 11-14.

Whole-tone motive (Ab-C-D)



Ex. 65 The Rolled Chord in *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, m. 53.

53



These materials are played at the softest dynamic level in Giesecking's recording. He also plays them slightly slower, which gives a spacious feeling. I imagine the sound

of the harp for the arpeggiated F minor 6th chord at m. 62, and continue to apply the sound to the grace notes at mm. 63-64.

Ex. 66 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 61-64.

Ex. 66 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 61-64.

9. Coda

The entry of the bass C# at m. 68 is a structurally important point in the C# minor interpretation; it is the first entry of the tonic note in the bass.

Ex. 67 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, mm. 65-75.

There are elements that can emphasize the E major tonality: the pentatonic theme at 69 and 71 and the repetition of the two notes (E-B) at mm. 72-73. Two voice lines can

be traced at mm. 72-75: D-D#-E and A-A#-B, which also emphasize the E major tonality, as discussed in the analysis.

Ex. 68 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, Reduction, mm. 72-74.

Emphasizing both elements of C# minor and E major would make the tonality in the Coda ambiguous; however, this could be an interesting interpretation if the performer is aware of the presence of both tonalities.

10. Other Contrasting Elements

As discussed in the previous chapter, emphasizing contrasting elements in the *Étude* such as register, texture, dynamics and harmony would help to achieve a better interpretation. I try to imagine a different instrumentation for each musical idea. I also search for visual, emotional or aural images. The polychord at m. 53, for example, could sound more convincing if the performer has an emotional or visual identification for the dissonant harmony. My interpretation of this dissonant harmony is sad, lost, coming from deep in the lake. I hear overtones in the higher register as an angelic voice coming from heaven.

Ex. 69 *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, m. 51-53. In the case of *Pour les Sonorités*

53

11. Summary

Analyzing *Pour les Sonorités opposées* has led me to a different perspective on this *Étude*. As the title suggests, searching for a variety of contrasting sounds leads pianists to a better interpretation. This approach alone may lead to a spontaneous and expressive performance, however, I feel the interpretation without a deeper understanding of the structure of music could make the performance become fragmented. As discussed in Uchida's interpretation, her recording sounds interesting and spontaneous from a microscopic viewpoint. However, it seems fragmented because I do not sense the structural unity in her interpretation. The lack of one core tempo also makes her recording sound sectional. I regard setting one core tempo as one of the unifying elements in music.

My conclusion is that analysis serves as a basis for a better performance. I think of musical analysis as a basis for understanding the architecture. I would decide how to divide the space when building a house. This process is similar to deciding how a musical composition is organized. The decision one makes about the location of climax determines the overall shape of the piece.

I seek a variety of sound and expression. In the case of *Pour les Sonorités opposées*, searching for contrasting sonorities would be important for achieving a better interpretation. Pollini's interpretation is based on a solid architecture but lacks spontaneity, expression and a variety of sound. Uchida's interpretation, on the other hand, seems successful in its variety of sound and expression, but lacks architecture.

I agree with Giesecking's interpretation the most, since he achieved one large structure and also a variety of expression and sound. My own interpretation would also emphasize the motivic unity in this *Étude*: the two note motives (E-F) and (G#-A). I would emphasize the return of these two motives at mm. 68-69 and strive for structural unity. My ideal performance of this *Étude* would show the large structure and a variety of sounds, and would also convey the emotional depth of each passage.

Complete Chopin Études	Nikolaj Kravitsky	1929
No. 1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11*	Jacques Février	1930
No. 1	Isidor Kravitz	1932
No. 7, 9	Jakob Gimpel	1935, 1936
No. 11	Vladimir Kravitsky	1936, 1938
No. 11	María-Theresa Prokopenko	1938

1930 - Present

The pianists who have recorded the complete *opus* include: Ignace Jan Paderewski, Walter Giesecking, Leonora Fergus-Thompson, Alicia de Larrocha, Benno Moiseiwitsch, Robert Schenitz and Sviatoslav Stravinsky.

* Margaret K. Smith, *Encyclopedia of Chopin*, ed. Charles Liberman, Praeger, New York, 1982, p. 212, 213.

APPENDIX

PIANISTS AND RECORDINGS

1. Recordings of Debussy's Piano Works

a) 1902 - 1950

Margaret G. Cobb's *Discographie de l'Œuvre de Claude Debussy* covers recordings of the works of Debussy during the period of 1902 to 1950. This source is based on the work by Henri Borgeaud, who had compiled more than a hundred pages of notes for a discography which he was unable to complete before his death in 1967. Cobb notes that this discography should not be regarded as final.⁷⁵ The recordings of Debussy's *Études* made during this period are follows:

Complete <i>Douze Études</i> :	Adolph Hallis	(1938)
Nos 1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11:	Jaqueline Blancard	(1934)
No.1:	Janine Weill	(1935)
No.1, 7:	Jakob Gimpel	(1942, 1948)
No. 11:	Vladimir Horowitz	(1934, 1936)
No.11:	Marie-Therese Fourneau	(1946)

b) 1950 – Present

The pianists who have recorded the complete piano works by Debussy include:

Walter Gieseking, Gordon Fergus-Thompson, Martin Jones, Roy Howat, Robert Schmitz and Soulima Stravinsky.

⁷⁵ Margaret G. Comb, *Discographie de l'Œuvre de Claude Debussy* (Genève: Éditions Minkoff, 1975), 9.

Those who have recorded the complete *Douze Études* are follows:

Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Martino Tirimo, Louis-Philippe Pelletier, Maurizio Pollini, Mitsuko Uchida, Garrick Ohlsson, Sally Pinkas, Fou Ts'ong and Francois-Joel Thiollier.

The following have also recorded significant portions of the *Douze Études*:

Paul Jacobs, Michel Beroff, Sviatoslav Richter, Peter Frankel, and Werner Haas.

2. Pianists: Contemporaries with Debussy

Walter Rummel, Marguerite Long, Ricardo Viñes, Alfred Cortot, George Copeland, and Robert Schmitz were the first pianists to introduce Debussy's piano music to more or less receptive audiences. All these pianists had personal contacts with Debussy, and their recordings in the early days of the phonograph established a historical foundation for the performance of his music.⁷⁶

Walter Rummel (1887-1953), a pianist and a composer, did not make any recordings of Debussy, but performed the premieres of at least ten of Debussy piano works, including five *Préludes*. Rummel gave the first public performance of two of the *Douze Études*, one of which was *Pour les octaves* in December 1916. He premiered *En Blanc et Noir* with Therese Chaigneau in January 1916. He also gave the American premiere of four *Préludes* in July 1910, and gave the only known public performance in Debussy's lifetime of the entire set of *Préludes* Book II in London in June 1913.

Marguerite Long (1874-1966) worked with Debussy during the last years of his life. Although Long had established herself as an artist and a professor at the Paris

⁷⁶ François Lesure, in the preface to *Douze Études* (München: G. Henle Verlag, 1994), v. Lesure also writes that it was Olivier Messiaen who drew attention to the *Études*' modernity after the Second World War.

Conservatoire since 1906, she felt that Debussy's music was beyond her reach.

However, Emma Bardac wrote to Long in her letter as follows:

He (Debussy) has no performers with whom he is happy; male pianists do not understand a thing about his music. We went to hear you recently. You are the only one who could play it well.⁷⁷

Subsequently, Long specialized in the works of French composers, particularly of Debussy, Ravel and Fauré. Ravel dedicated his G major Concerto to her, and she performed it under the direction of the composer.

Ricardo Viñes (1875-1943) had a close friendship with Debussy and Ravel. He played thirteen first performances of Debussy's piano works, including *Pour le piano*, *Estampes*, *Images* Book I and II, and selected *Préludes* from Book I and II. Debussy dedicated *Poissons d'or* and the *Hommage à Rameau* from *Images* Book II to Viñes, which is a significant gesture since this was the only dedication Debussy ever made to a musician, except for Chopin (*Douze Études*).⁷⁸

Alfred Cortot (1877-1963) was a leading French pianist at the turn of the century. He showed genuine interest in the piano music of his French contemporaries, and discussed them in his book, *La Musique Française de Piano*. Among Debussy's piano works, Cortot made recordings of *Préludes* Book 1, *Children's Corner* and *Pour le piano*.

George Copeland (1882-1971) was one of the first pianists to introduce Debussy's music to American audiences. He gave the American premiere of *Passepied*, *Claire de lune*, and *Prélude* from *Pour le piano* in 1906 in Boston, and continued to study all the piano works of Debussy available at that time. Notably, Copeland gave the world

⁷⁷ Cecilia Dunoyer, "Debussy and Early Debussystes at the Piano," in *Debussy in Performance*. Edited by James Briscoe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 102.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

premiere of two *Études, Pour les Arpèges composés* and *Pour les Sonorités opposées* in November 1916 in New York. Copeland claimed that the answer to why so few people were able to play Debussy's music is as follows:

I think it is because they try to impose themselves upon the music. It is necessary to abandon yourself completely, and let the music do as it will with you to be a vessel through which it passes.⁷⁹

Robert Schmitz (1889-1949) worked with Debussy over a period of two years, and wrote a book, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*, published in 1950.

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⁷⁹ Roger Nichols, *Debussy Remembered* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1992), 153.

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