

ABSTRACT

Impressionism: A Comparison of the Stylistic Characteristics of the Movement in Music and the Visual Arts

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Impressionism is a well-known term when it comes to the visual arts, and a very important movement in the music world. Compositional techniques used during the Impressionist movement had revolutionary, lasting impacts on music styles and purposes, just as the Impressionist painting styles had lasting impacts on the subjects and compositions of future visual masterpieces. The Impressionist movement has always really drawn me to the arts- both visual and musical. Additionally, the main Impressionist composer, Claude Debussy, is a paramount composer for flutists. This paper compares and contrasts the stylistic choices characteristic of Impressionist paintings and Impressionist compositions. There are many similarities between the two artistic mediums, which is likely a result of Paris being the epicenter of the Impressionist movement. This study is important for future music educators, as explores music history it presents a way to meet the cross-curricular standards provided by the Texas Education Agency.

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IMPRESSIONISM: A COMPARISON OF THE STYLISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF
THE MOVEMENT IN MUSIC AND THE VISUAL ARTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	iii
Preface	iv
Chapter One: Impressionism: The Artistic Movement	1
Chapter Two: Crossover of Impressionism	3
Chapter Three: <i>Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune</i> by Claude Debussy	8
Chapter Four: <i>Syrinx</i> by Claude Debussy	17
Chapter Five: Concluding Remarks	20
Bibliography	22

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3
Figure 2	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	4
Figure 3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	4
Figure 4	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	5
Figure 5	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	5
Figure 6	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	6
Figure 7	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	7
Figure 8	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	9
Figure 9	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	10
Figure 10	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	11
Figure 11	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	12
Figure 12	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	13
Figure 13	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	13
Figure 14	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	14
Figure 15	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	15
Figure 16	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	16
Figure 17	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	18
Figure 18	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	19
Figure 19	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	19

PREFACE

Impressionism as an artistic movement is widely known across the world simply as a style of painting seen in the works of Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and other artists of the time. However, this aesthetic also carried over into western classical music with Claude Debussy often cited as the “father of Impressionism” in the field of western classical music. He is the composer who brought the ideas of the visual arts movement into the musical realm. There are quite a few crossovers and connections between the music of Debussy and the art of the Impressionist painters, especially because they often were involved in the same circles of friends and colleagues in Paris during the late nineteenth century.

CHAPTER ONE

Impressionism: The Artistic Movement

Impressionism is a 19th Century artistic movement characterized by works that ventured away from precise, defined lines in order to capture the light and essence of a fleeting moment.¹ It has become one of the most impactful eras of art history associated with Paris, France, as well as artists such as Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

On December 27, 1873, a group of artists-- including Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Pierre Prins, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Alfred Sisley-- signed the founding charter of *Le Société anonyme des artistes*.² This society was a way for these avant-garde artists to congregate together against the *le Salon officiel*- the official art society in Paris. At their first exhibit in 1874, art critic Louis Leroy coined the term “impressionism” after seeing Claude Monet’s *Impression: Sunrise* as a way to mock the artists of *Le Société*.³ The term was meant to criticize the paintings for their unfinished quality, which left only an impression of what the painting could and should be. Because of the connotation of the term’s origin, most of the artists of *Le Société* detested being referred to as Impressionist painters for quite some time. However, they adopted the

1 William Gaunt, *The Impressionists* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970): 7.

2 Ronald L. Byrnside, "Musical Impressionism: The Early History of the Term," *The Musical Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (1980): 522, Accessed July 27, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/741965.

3 *ibid.*

name in order to defy criticism. While the movement did not initially gain traction during these exhibitions, it eventually went on to pervade many types of artistic mediums from visual arts, to literature, to music starting in France and eventually spreading into other countries in Europe before spreading to other continents.

Impressionist paintings are very distinct from the paintings of those of *le Salon officiel* artists as they employ pronounced, thick brushstrokes and a vibrant, pastel color palette— both of which combine to create a sort of hazy picture of a scene. A common misconception regarding Impressionist paintings is that they are not detailed, and while some paintings offer very little precision, others are quite intricate while still creating this foggy character. Impressionist paintings also rely heavily on the fleeting quality of natural light, which is seen through landscape or *plein-air*⁴ (outdoor) scenes. Many of the well-known Impressionist paintings are landscape works, but the other large category in the genre was paintings that conveyed scenes in everyday life- often everyday activities in the lives of working class people. The paintings of *le Salon officiel* almost exclusively depicted the wealthy and elite classes, as they were the only ones who could afford to splurge on portraits. In another attempt to rebel and separate from *le Salon officiel*, Impressionist painters focused on working-class citizens, creating portraits conveying a moment of movement in their work. Edgar Degas is one artist who was particularly fond of the working class, as he almost exclusively painted ballerinas, musicians, and proletariats in their ordinary work environments.⁵

4 Dr. Charles Cramer and Dr. Kim Grant, “What Does ‘Impressionism’ Mean? (Article),” Khan Academy (Khan Academy), accessed September 27, 2019, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/avant-garde-france/impressionism/a/what-does-impressionism-mean>.

5 “A Woman Ironing,” metmuseum.org, accessed March 25, 2020, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436174>.

CHAPTER TWO

Crossover of Impressionisms

The Impressionist movement in both the music and the visual art realms focused on a few key characterizing attributes- *en plein air* subjects, vibrant yet pastel color palettes and suspended moments in time. These attributes come together to create mystical scenery for audiences, and became defining factors of the movement.



Fig. 1, Monet, Claude, *Water Lilies*, Oil on Canvas, 1916, <https://www.claude-monet.com/waterlilies.jsp#prettyPhoto>.

Monet's *Water Lilies* series include some of the most well-known Impressionist paintings of all time. This series features Monet's own water lilies plants in the pond of his Giverny property. Each painting focuses on the surface of the water, as well as how the light from the sky or nature around the pond is reflected upon its surface. Each painting employs the protruding brushstrokes characteristic of Impressionist masterpieces, as well as this focus on how a fleeting moment of light affects a landscape. These paintings feature the water lily pond in all of the different seasons of the year, in

addition to a multitude of different times of the day. Each painting is unique, even with the same central focus being the surface of the pond and the water lilies on it.

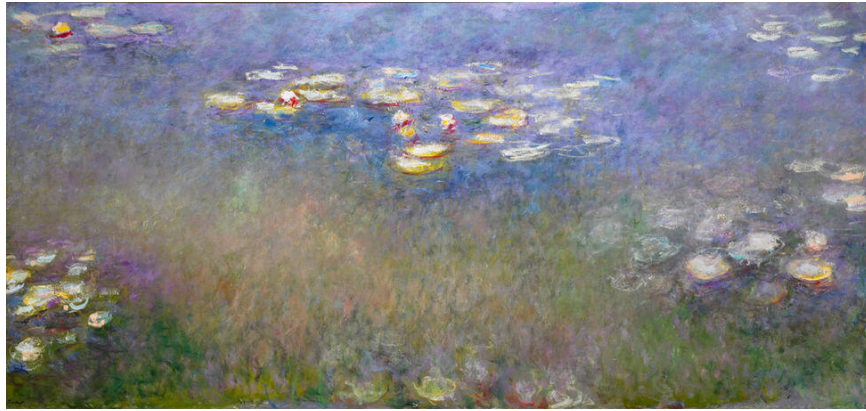


Fig. 2, Monet, Claude, *Water Lilies Agapanthus*, Oil on Canvas, 1914-1917, <https://www.claudemonet.com/waterlilies.jsp#prettyPhoto>.



Fig. 3, Monet, Claude, *Water Lilies, Green Harmony*, Oil on Canvas, 1914-1917, <https://www.claudemonet.com/waterlilies.jsp#prettyPhoto>.

Degas' paintings focused on a switch to proletariat lifestyle, often depicting dancers, musicians, and women working in their everyday lives. His paintings, while slightly more intricate, are still very blurred, as is characteristic of the Impressionist movement. They focus on the overall picture created by the bold, yet pastel color palette, and less on the minute details of his subjects' faces. The emotion of the subject is expressed through the color palette rather than seen through their features.



Fig. 4, Degas, Edgar, La Classe de danse (The Dance Class), Oil on Canvas, 1871, <https://www.edgar-degas.net/dancing-class.jsp>.



Fig. 5, Degas, Edgar, A Woman Ironing (La Repasseuse), Oil on Canvas, 1873, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436174>.

Debussy's *Syrinx* depicts mental images similar to the scenery seen in Monet's *Water Lilies* series. Both are set in an outdoor landscape that is full of luscious greenery complimented by a body of water, also full of a plethora of water plants. *Syrinx*, through the Greek mythology narrative of Pan and the water nymph Syrinx. *Water Lilies*, through the depiction of the same pond full of lilies throughout a variety of different seasons of Monet's life. The tonal ambiguity that Debussy employs in *Syrinx* provides the same essence of the blurred lines within Monet's *Water Lilies* series. The storyline of Pan and Syrinx is still distinguishable, but mostly by listener interpretation, just as the outlines of the lilies, the pond, and sometimes the bridge are distinguishable, but mostly through viewer interpretation. The lines— story and outline— are still present, they are just blurred to create more room for audience interpretation, as is custom of the Impressionist movement. Similarly, the seemingly ambiguous rhythms in *Syrinx* create the same essence of the seemingly careless and unfinished brushstrokes within the *Water Lilies* paintings. Even though to audiences, there is not much detail in the rhythms and the

brushstrokes, this is far from true. Both Debussy and Monet put extreme care into each marking and each brush stroke. It is because of this detailed work put in by the creators that the audiences get the sense of a more improvisatory, carefree artistic masterpiece.

Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* depicts similar mental images to the scenery found in the work of Degas, specifically his *Landscape* piece and his dancers series. Even though *Faune* and *Syrinx* are both musical interpretations of the same subject material, their different orchestration leads to different mental depictions. The use of the solo flute in *Syrinx* creates a calmer, more serene depiction of the gruesome tale. Thus listeners can imagine a small, peaceful body of water filled with reeds, similar to the small, serene pond filled with lilies depicted in Monet's paintings. The use of one instrument leads to a slightly clearer mental image than the use of the many tone colors in a full orchestra. Therefore, *Syrinx* is more like Monet's *Water Lilies*; whereas, *Faune* is more like Degas' *Landscape*. Degas takes a very blurred approach to his outdoor masterpiece, with the



Fig. 6, Degas, Edgar, Landscape, Oil on Canvas, 1892,
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/359362>.

whole mountainside looking as though it is covered in a thick haze. Similarly, Debussy uses the plethora of tone colors found in the full orchestra to create this diverse, vibrant

color that gives a slightly more hazy view of the story of Syrinx and Pan that seems even further removed from the horrific reality of the tale. Additionally, like *Syrinx*, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* seems to be very improvisatory, especially in the moments featuring the flute solo motive. However, each rhythm is very meticulously notated to create this feeling for the audience. This is more characteristic of Degas' series of works that depict professional dancers. This series features dancers from the studio, to the warm-up room, to center stage. Within each painting, though each is very different, viewers can see the graceful movement that precedes and follows the moment caught in time by the painting. These paintings are more detailed than Degas' *Landscape*, while still having the overall blurred quality that is characteristic of the Impressionist movement. *Faune* also related more to Degas' works because it is music intended for a ballet performance. When this is factored in, audiences can imagine the dancers in Degas' works performing to the music that Debussy wrote. The graceful, smooth, and elongated movements of the dancers, especially the one seen in *L'Etoile*, are similar to the elongated lines employed by Debussy in *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*.

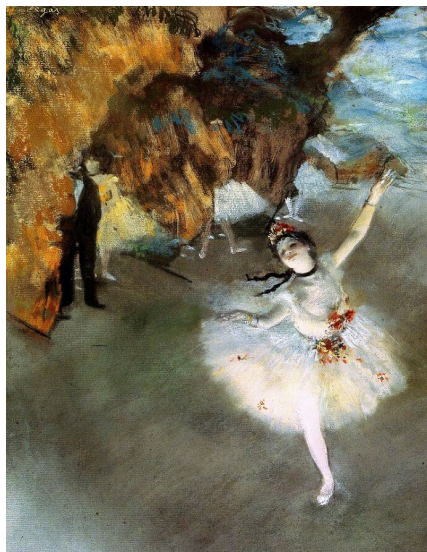


Fig. 7, Degas, Edgar, L'Etoile (The Star), Oil on Canvas, 1878,
<https://www.edgar-degas.net/the-star.jsp>.

CHAPTER THREE

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune by Claude Debussy

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune, or 'Prelude to the Afternoon of the Faun,' is a tone poem for orchestra composed by Claude Debussy from 1892-1894⁶. A tone poem, or symphonic poem, is "a musical composition for orchestra inspired by an extra-musical idea, story, or 'program,' to which the title typically refers or alludes."⁷ These single movement works evolved from the concert-overture, a musical introduction to an opera or play.⁸ Tone poems are often the musical evocation of visual or literary ideas, as *faune* is the musical evocation of the poem "Afternoon of a Faun" by the French symbolist-expressing the intangible through visual representations⁹- poet, Stéphane Mallarmé.

The original version of the poem was completed by Mallarmé in 1865. It went through various revisions before the fourth and final edition was published in 1877 under the title, "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune."¹⁰ It is a dream-like poem about a faun, or a half human, half goat god, who has awoken from his afternoon nap and recounts his sensual

6 Claude Debussy, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, Paris, France: E. Fromont, 1895.

7 The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Symphonic Poem," Encyclopædia Britannica, (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., February 18, 2011), <https://www.britannica.com/art/symphonic-poem>.

8 *ibid.*

9 "Symbolism," Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/symbolism>.

10 Stephané Méllarme, "The Afternoon of a Faun," translated by Hope H. Glidden and Elisabeth Yaung-Bruehl, Accessed October 17, 2019, https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/60564/dalrev_vol64_iss1_pp46_49.pdf?sequence=3.

encounters with several nymphs in his dream. The poem is meant to be encapsulated in a haze that disorients the audience and distorts their sense of reality. Unlike the original story of Pan and Syrinx, this poem is not a linear or chronological tale. Rather, it is an “interior conversation” that moves back and forth between dramatic silences and spoken words, “memories and fantasies, dream and reality, story and flute song, [and] disenchantment and intoxication.”¹¹ This hazy composition technique is synonymous with the ideals of the Impressionist movement. Mellarmé aligned himself with this movement and some of its most prominent visual artists and composers, Eduard Manet and Claude Debussy, respectively. Mellarmé first collaborated with Manet on the deluxe edition of his poem that was published with illustrations by Manet in 1876. He then later



Fig. 8, Manet, Édouard, Engraving in Wood, 1876,
https://www.princeton.edu/~graphicarts/2011/02/stephane_mallarme_1842-1898_la.html.

collaborated with Debussy to turn this already musical poem into an orchestral work that would become transformational in its influence upon musical composition to follow.

Debussy’s use of the new Boehm flute as his primary solo instrument, as well as his use

¹¹ Stephané Méllarme, “The Afternoon of a Faun,” translated by Hope H. Glidden and Elisabeth Yaung-Bruehl, Accessed October 17, 2019, https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/60564/dalrev_vol64_iss1_pp46_49.pdf?sequence=3.

of this blurred tonality brought new life into the realm of compositional techniques. The impact and influence of this piece can be seen in a variety of compositions for years to come, such as Olivier Messiaen and Pierre Boulez.¹² From its origin, *Faune* was an Impressionist work that went on to become one of the definitive pieces of musical Impressionism.

In his typical fashion, Debussy gives vague tempo indications juxtaposed with very particular musical markings throughout the work, leading to a piece that sounds very free and improvised despite its particular construction. The work begins with a flute solo- the theme- that evokes the feeling of those moments between sleep and wake. In measure

The image shows the first four measures of the orchestral score for Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. The tempo is marked "Très modéré". The flute part begins with a first solo, marked "p doux et expressif". The harp part includes specific fingering instructions: "1^{re} accordez LA2-S1b, D02-R0b, M12-FAb, SOL2-LAb" and a "1^{re} glissando" marking. The woodwind and string parts are mostly silent in these initial measures.

Fig. 9, Debussy, Claude, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of the Faun), m.1-4, 1892-1894, [https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_\(orch._score\).pdf](https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_(orch._score).pdf).

¹² Jann Pasler, "DEBUSSY THE MAN, HIS MUSIC, AND HIS LEGACY: AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT RESEARCH," *Notes* 69, no. 2 (2012): 197-216, Accessed July 15, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/23358736.

four, the oboes, clarinets, horns, and harp join in playing an e half-diminished seventh chord that is reminiscent of a cinematic dream-like sequence. In the middle of this introductory section, there is a dramatic silence in measure six before the section carries on and transitions into the first section of the piece in measure seven. The transition makes very particular use of sound and silence variations of instrument grouping to create different colors from a minimal amount of instrumental timbres. This section

Fig. 10, Debussy, Claude, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of the Faun), m.5-10, 1892-1894, [https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_\(orch_score\).pdf](https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_(orch_score).pdf).

begins with a repetition of the thematic flute solo that is seamlessly handed off to the oboe. It then builds to a homophonic climax in measure 19 with most of the instruments harmonizing on similar rhythmic ideas. Another repetition of the flute solo begins in

measure 21 with variation with more rhythmic movement and smaller rhythmic values. The flute is accompanied by very light orchestration that acts as a silence or pause after the previous repetition's larger orchestration. The flute solo repeats again in measure 26, for the last time until the return of the A section, with another increase in rhythmic movement. The section seems to build in tempo and orchestration before coming back down to its original suspended feel, ultimately ending the A section of the piece. Debussy relies heavily on the solo flute line to create this repetitive nature of the faun's recount. Every time the flute solo reappears, it is like the faun is circling back to the fantasy of his

The image shows a page of a musical score for the flute and orchestra. The top staff is for the Flute (FL.), with a first ending bracketed and marked '1. 2.'. Below it are staves for Maultrompete (MAUTR.), English Horn (COR ANGL.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (BASS.), Horns (CORS. 1. 2. and 3. 4.), Trumpets (Dis.), Percussion (position nat.), and Cymbals (position nat.). The bottom staff is for the Cello/Double Bass (Cello/B.). The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (p, f, cresc., decresc., dim.), articulation (accen., do), and performance instructions (position nat.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

Fig. 11, Debussy, Claude, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of the Faun), m.17-20, 1892-1894, [https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_\(orch._score\).pdf](https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_(orch._score).pdf).

Fig. 12 shows a page of the orchestral score for Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, measures 21-22. The score is written for a full orchestra. The top staff is for Flute (Fl.), followed by Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Fg.), Horn (C), Trumpet (T), Trombone (Tb.), and Cymbal (Cym.). The music is in 3/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamics such as *ppp* and *pp*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Fig. 12, Debussy, Claude, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of the Faun), m. 21-22, 1892-1894, [https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_\(orch._score\).pdf](https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_(orch._score).pdf).

Fig. 13 shows a page of the orchestral score for Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, measures 26-27. The score is written for a full orchestra. The top staff is for Flute (Fl.), followed by Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Fg.), Horn (C), Trumpet (T), Trombone (Tb.), and Cymbal (Cym.). The music is in 3/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamics such as *ppp* and *pp*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Fig. 13, Debussy, Claude, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of the Faun), m.26-27, 1892-1894, [https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_\(orch._score\).pdf](https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_(orch._score).pdf).

dream rather than the reality of his awakened state. Debussy also relies heavily on the glissando and runs in the harp to create the feeling of entering and exiting a dream. The B section of the work begins in measure 31 with a clarinet solo and much more

Fig. 14, Debussy, Claude, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of the Faun), m. 28-31, 1892-1894, [https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_\(orch._score\).pdf](https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_(orch._score).pdf).

rhythmically active orchestration. Throughout the B section, there are many dichotomies explored- larger orchestration and solo playing with accompaniment, playful interjections and lyrical lines, wind choirs and string choirs. These dichotomies represent that of the faun, who is ever-oscillating between fantasy and reality. The transition back to the A

Fig. 15, Debussy, Claude, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of the Faun), m.86-88, 1892-1894, [https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_\(orch._score\).pdf](https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_(orch._score).pdf).

section begins in measure 86 with the return of the A section beginning with a reprise of the opening flute solo in measure 94. In the first iteration of the A section, the orchestration was continually building, from one instrument to the full orchestra. This time the orchestration slowly fades out, going from a full orchestra to a small chamber ensemble that fades into complete silence. The revolutionary, Impressionist style of this piece has made it the quintessential piece of the musical Impressionist movement.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the flute part of Claude Debussy's 'Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune'. The score is written in G major and 3/4 time. It features a variety of musical notations including slurs, accents, and dynamic markings such as 'pp' (pianissimo) and 'p' (piano). Performance instructions like 'retenu' (retained) and 'P. expressif et doux' (Piano, expressive and soft) are present. The score is divided into measures, with a double bar line and a '40' indicating the measure number. The flute part is the top staff, and it is accompanied by other instruments including English Horn, Oboe, Clarinet in A, Bassoon, Horns, Trumpets, Trombones, and Tuba.

Fig. 16, Debussy, Claude, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of the Faun), m.95-97, 1892-1894, [https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_\(orch._score\).pdf](https://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/4/40/IMSLP14736-Debussy_-_Pr%C3%A9lude_%C3%A0_l'apr%C3%A8s-midi_d'un_faune_(orch._score).pdf).

Shortly before Debussy began composing this piece, the flute was undergoing many changes. It was transitioning to the key system that is still in use today- the Boehm system, created by Theobald Boehm. Debussy was one of the first to write prominent solos in orchestral works and solo pieces for this modern flute, which has made his repertoire essential for the modern flutist. The prominent feature of the flute throughout the tone poem has made Faun a required piece of study for all those pursuing a higher education or career in flute performance. The solo from the beginning of the work is an excerpt that has established itself as one of the most frequently asked pieces on orchestral auditions for flutists.

CHAPTER FOUR

Syrinx by Claude Debussy

La Flûte de Pan, “The Flute of Pan,” was composed by Claude Debussy in 1913¹³, and originally premiered as *incidental music*— music in between scenes or acts of a play to create or evoke a certain atmosphere or mood¹⁴— in Gabriel Mourey’s play *Psyché*¹⁵. The title of the unaccompanied flute solo was later changed to *Syrinx* after Debussy’s death. It was the most influential solo flute composition since Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach’s *Sonata in A minor Wp 132* for solo flute composed in 1747¹⁶, and the first solo piece written for the completed and finalized Boëhm flute.

Like *faune*, this work Debussy’s that follows the Greek myth of Syrinx and Pan. In which, Pan’s obsession with Syrinx caused her to flee from him, and turn herself into a bed of reeds to disguise herself from him. Pan then cut the reeds and fashioned an instrument— the pan flute— in order to play a lament to his lost beloved. In Debussy’s musical interpretation of the story, listeners can hear the journey from original infatuation, to the chase, and finally to Syrinx’s demise.

13 Claude Debussy, *Syrinx*, Munich, Germany: G. Henry Verlag, 1986.

14 Roger Savage, “Incidental Music,” Grove Music Online (Oxford Music, January 20, 2001), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.baylor.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.43289>.

15 Georg Predota, “Claude Debussy: La Flûte De Pan/ Syrinx Melodrama and Flute Solo,” Interlude.hk, July 14, 2019, <https://interlude.hk/claude-debussy-la-flute-de-pan-syrinx-melodrama-flute-solo/>.

16 Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach, *Sonata in A Minor Wq 132*, Vienna, Austria: 1983.

Debussy's original markings do not convey his intent with complete clarity, which has led to performer and musicologist debates over the work throughout the years. While his rhythmic notation is very precise, his use of actual dynamic values is sparse. There are moments (m. 14-19) in which there are many crescendos and decrescendos, and yet the only dynamic marking Debussy gives is *piano*. Therefore, it is unclear what

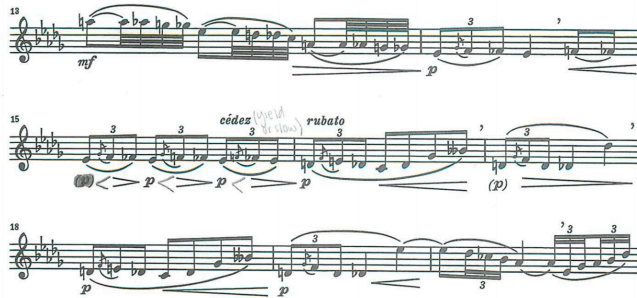


Fig. 17, Debussy, Claude, *Syrinx*, m. 13-20, 1913.

Debussy's vision of the dynamic spectrum in this section is is. One can assume that the crescendos are not too drastic, as the loudest dynamic in the work is *mezzo forte*, and it is only used twice. However, there is no way to know for sure what Debussy's intent was. Scholars also debate over how to treat the rhythmic values juxtaposed with the complete freedom of a solo flute work. Debussy wrote very particular rhythms, which leads many to believe they should be played strictly as written. However, with the absence of any accompaniment, there is the ability to stretch and compress the music as one sees fit. One such place is from m. 6 to m. 8. Debussy was notoriously particular in his rhythmic markings in order to make pieces seem improvised. Debussy does not give any tempo fluctuation instructions until the *retenu* in m. 8; however, it is incredibly challenging for a flutist to make it through eight beats at an already slower tempo with a *retenu* in one breath. Therefore, many performers will slightly compress the note values in m. 6-7 in

order to be able to lengthen the note values in m. 8. There is much debate over the ambiguity of this work, yet it is this ambiguity that leads to an improvisatory and Impressionist sound.



Fig. 18, Debussy, Claude, *Syrinx*, m. 5-8, 1913.

The piece is written in the key signature of B-flat minor. However, Debussy employs a plethora of accidentals in order to give the work tonal ambiguity. It opens with a two-bar motive, beginning on B-flat, that can be heard throughout the rest of the piece in various registers and dynamic levels. The middle section of the work, beginning at m. 9 with the reappearance of the original motive in a lower register, ushers in a slightly faster section of the work that explores new motives and begins to center on D-flat, rather than B-flat. The closing section begins with the anacrusis to m. 26, as the main motive returns in the original octave and builds to a dynamic-driven climax. From there, the piece hearkens back to both motives, and eventually fades out in regards to both rhythmic activity and dynamic volume eventually reaching a *perdendosi* in the penultimate measure, which is representative of *Syrinx*'s demise.

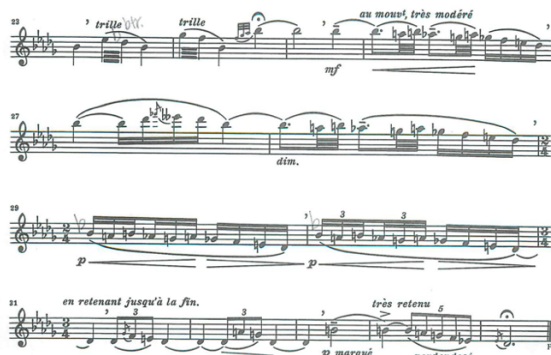


Fig. 19, Debussy, Claude, *Syrinx*, m. 23-35, 1913.

CHAPTER FIVE

Concluding Remarks

Impressionism refers to the aesthetic style of *plein-air* subjects, noticeable brushstrokes, less intricacy, and pastel color palettes in the visual arts medium; as well as their counterparts in musical compositions— new tone color palette combinations, nature-based scenery depictions, and improvisatory sounds. The Impressionist Movement has carried on and pervaded many art forms through current times. It is important to study the movement and its characteristics in both music and the visual arts in order to be able to recognize its influence in composers and artists of later styles, such as composers Olivier Messiaen and Pierre Boulez.

Additionally, the Texas Education Agency provides requirements and standards, known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, that teacher must meet every school year. One such standard is for students to have an understanding of how compositions fit into the cultural and historical context of other compositions, as well as the timelines they learn in history classes.¹⁷ This allows for a cross-curricular approach with both history and art teachers. Cross-curricular lessons, while not required, are highly encouraged by school boards and faculty leadership. Impressionism presents a good opportunity to discuss the crossover of the music and visual mediums, as found in this research, as well as the way these characteristics reflect the major historical events of the time. This

¹⁷ "TMEA Home," Texas Music Educators Association, accessed June 27, 2020, <https://www.tmea.org/resources/teaching-resources/music-teks>.

historical view can also be employed in a larger unit discussing how Impressionism fits into the timeline of other aesthetic movements, such as Expressionism, Modernism, Cubism, and the Classical schools of thought. This unit could also focus on the historical events of the time, as well as the shifts in power and class systems and how that affected or influenced the aesthetic movements.

Studying the paintings of Monet or Degas while listening to the music of Debussy gives students the opportunity to study the similarities in the characteristics of the two, as well as create a mental picture in their minds of the scenic setting of the compositions. This also allows students to make abstract connections between their auditory and visual senses, which helps them to create mental images or stories when they study and perform musical compositions. These images or stories help musicians to evoke specific emotions from their audiences thus enhancing their performance.

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