Rivista di Analisi e Teoria Musicale

GATM

Rivista di Analisi e Teoria Musicale

Rivista di Analisi e Teoria Musicale

Indice

Recensioni

Andrea Stefano Malvano

Athematic Cyclicism "à la Debussy". Construction, function, and perception of some recurring intervals in the *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp*

French Cyclicism

The cyclic sonata in early twentieth-century France, as was clearly pointed out by Carlo Caballero, could be seen to be more than an aesthetic and formal one, but first and foremost a political question [Caballero 2001, 143].[1] An alignment with César Franck, that is to say a composer who deemed himself to be the direct heir of Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Schumann, might be interpreted as a clear alignment in favor of Germanist tendencies; whilst a stronger concurrence with the ideas of Vincent d'Indy, notwithstanding so many references to and quotations from Wagner's music, might evince a declaration of nationalism and loyalty to the traditions of French musical culture. Marianne Wheeldon investigated this issue in Debussy's music in great depth, highlighting the ambiguous reading of these relationships in works that show a certain adherence to the principles of the cyclic sonata: especially in those works located in the extreme phases of his output, such as the very early *Quatuor* (1893) and the chamber Sonatas (1915–1917) [Weeldon 2005]. Her contribution highlights an approach that was undergoing a great transformation, which starts out from a clear influence of Franck, and then shows a certain caution in taking a formal position within the debate. The last works, however, in accenting a clear affiliation with the French style of the eighteenth century, also implicitly imply a continuity with subsequent models, continuing to express a preference for Franck over d'Indy. Wheeldon carefully reflects upon this *corpus*, rejecting any form of generalization. However, the case of the *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp,* which undoubtedly offers multiple challenges to the analyst's attention, precisely because of its complex system of

---

1. «Within the French musical world of the first decade of the twentieth century, form had much more than a merely formal meaning: cyclical forms carried a political charge».

cyclical relationships, remains on the margins of her discourse, even in her 2009 monograph [Wheeldon 2009].

It is not easy to draw a clear distinction between Franck's and d'Indy's positions concerning the conception of the cyclic sonata. Undoubtedly direct artistic parentage (D'Indy had been Franck's student) favors the sharing of many ideas; but the comparison is not immediate, precisely because d'Indy left us traces of his poetics in his *Cours de Composition* (edited by Auguste Sérieyx starting from the notes taken during the lessons of the Schola Cantorum between 1899 and 1900) [D'Indy 1909], while Franck speaks solely through his compositions, without any form of explanatory paratext. For both of them, the fundamental principle undoubtedly consists in the search for formal unity, by means of a circular return to the starting point, which in alluding to a geometric system also refers to a symbol of Christian perfection [D'Indy 1909, 376].[2] This is represented by that which Mark Devoto defines as "the Rule of Three" [DeVoto 2004]: a predilection for compositions divided into three panels.

In order to ensure this unity, there must be a cyclical theme or a motif, which d'Indy calls the «thème personnage». A theme that is memorable from its very first appearance, owing to clear elements that make it easily recognizable in other rhythmic, melodic and harmonic contexts. D'Indy, in using the Franck's *Quintet* as a suitable example [*Ibid.* 380 et seq.], demonstrates a clear alignment with his teacher regarding this basic principle. What is likewise common is a predilection for variation over development, with an eclipsing of the Beethovenian model, in favor of a procedure that d'Indy indeed learned from Franck: the so-called «variation amplificatrice» [*Ibid.* 481 et seq.]. This kind of variation in progressively transforming a melody eventually creates a new character, that is linked to the system of intervals from which it comes, but completely renewed in its expressiveness. This process produces a cumulation of energy that is associated with the image of the spiral, the three-dimensional figure that through the same curve gradually leads upwards to a higher level. It is precisely this system of tensions that brings the cyclical conception of the two composers closer. Franck always sought out an apex in the architecture of his compositions, which consists of the so-called *péroraison* [*Ibid.* 382–387], understood as a meeting point between the *variation amplificatrice* mechanisms and a contrapuntal combination of previously heard themes [DeVoto 2004, 20]. D'Indy theorizes the same mechanism,

---

2.   «C'est en effet l'idée d'*unité*, de retour au point de départ, au principe commun ou au personnage permanent, après un parcours plus ou moins développé, qui fit très probablement recourir à cette expression imagée du *cyrcle*, empruntée tout à la fois à la géométrie et à la symbolique, où le *cercle* [...] figure la proportion *parfait*, la *trinité dans l'unité*; et c'est en ce sens qu'on a pu légitimement qualifier un *tryptique*, *cycle* de tableaux, ou une *trilogie*, *cycle* de tragédies».

defining the cyclic sonata as a «cathédrale sonore» formed by three naves (the formal tripartition, in fact) whose unity derives from a recurring motif observed in the entrance portal and replicated in all of the main decorations of the building; each one of these ornaments generates continuous vanishing lines, which all tend towards an apex where the clarity of divine glory shines forth.

The distance between these two composers lies in the details, far more than in the foundations of a thought brimming with common features. Wheeldon, in particular, accentuates a different interpretation of the cyclic recall: in Franck there are a few thematic reprises, albeit very clear ones, whilst in d'Indy there is a greater frequency of reminiscences, in all the composition's movements. Furthermore, d'Indy's rather clear prescription, that of avoiding the fusion between new material and cyclic theme in order to preserve its recognizability, unquestionably does not find a model in Franck, who often, precisely in the *péroraison* phase, sought out a harmonious polyphonic combination among themes that had already been heard. It is in these details that Debussy's possible adhesion to the two lines of thought is played out. The scarcity of explicit thematic recalls in the *Sonata for Violin and Piano* as well as in the *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp* seems indeed to have been influenced by Franck: «Debussy's more restrained use of cyclic procedures suggests that he may have been seeking to pry the Franckiste tradition from d'Indy's grip» [Wheeldon 2005, 670]. But Wheeldon's in-depth study of the *Sonata for Cello and Piano*, with the recurrence of the cyclical theme throughout the entire composition, seems instead to declare a closer affinity with Vincent d'Indy:[3] «Debussy's cello sonata, however, differs from the others in that cyclic theme is more thoroughly integrated into the work as a whole, and the result is a design that comes closer to d'Indy's prescriptions for the cyclic sonata». [Wheeldon 2005, 671]. The alignments are therefore uncertain, and perhaps require an individual treatment for each single composition. Debussy's writings do not come to our aid, because they limit themselves to celebrating a nationalistic, as much as generic, return to the French eighteenth century, which have then been highly exploited by subsequent generations [Gumplowicz 2013, 69–86]. We do not find any discernable adhesions to any theoretical school; and it is precisely for this reason we must ask ourselves whether it is really correct to interpret this late instrumental music by thought systems that Debussy never explicitly embraced, such as the formal theories proposed by D'Indy and Franck. An in-depth analysis of the cyclical processes contained in the *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp* can help us shed some light on this point.

---

3.   Even this principle is not entirely conclusive, because Wheeldon herself detects an ambiguous attitude by Franck in the *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, where, unlike other works, a greater recurrence of cyclical material is found throughout the entire composition.

The *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp*'s athematic cyclicism

Jean-Louis Leleu highlighted the function of the tritone in the construction of infra-thematic relationships within the *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp* in great detail. More specifically, his analysis insists on the recurrence of the interval of class 6 (C-G♭), reading a kind of "invariant" in it named *α*, that is capable of conferring a motivic unity to the three movements of the composition, while appearing in scalar configurations that are always different [Leleu 2017, 93–135]. This idea had already been advanced by Richard Parks, who, through an exclusive use of the tools offered by the set theory, had identified some "invariant PC sets" generated from the first bars of the *Pastorale*, and in particular from three fundamental motifs (x, y z) [Parks 1989, 130], Leleu nonetheless criticizes the lack of interest in the methods adopted by Debussy to hierarchize the musical material in the system identified by Parks, reasoning in purely set theoretical terms as concerns *pc sets* that produce completely different scalar motifs and equilibria. To this observation, which is perfectly acceptable, a high level of arbitrariness in the identification of the three fundamental motifs, which cannot be clearly distinguished, must be added: more specifically, x and y, in their indisputable continuity, struggle to withstand an analytical segmentation.

Leleu's analysis sheds light on a system of deep relationships, evaluating not only the function of the α tritone within the modal writing of the composition, but also of its twin *β* belonging to the same interval class (E-B♭) and of some tetrachords capable of giving recurring sounds to the main ideas of the composition. His investigation emphasizes in particular the role of the tetrachord C♭-C-F-G♭ (C611,0) in accordance with Allan Forte's nomenclature, indicating its formation starting from the superimposition of two tritons: (C♭-F) + (C-G♭). All the relevant analytical results were employed by Leleu to investigate a thematic unity in the composition, observing a logic of musical discourse in Debussy's writing that is substantially freed from any form of pre-established syntax. The issue of cyclicism is only mentioned in passing. In the opening quotation, taken from the writings of André Schaeffner [Schaeffner 1963, 924],[4] alludes to a watermark forging process, that is capable of binding all three Sonatas together through latent compositional bonds. It is alluded to in a note, that there had been a «dépassement, à la fois, du mode de développement classique et du 'procédé cyclique'» [Leleu 2017, 106]. Then, in closing, Schaeffner's words are also used to draw the *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp* closer to some previous compositions (such as *La Mer* or the *Nocturnes*), in which intra-thematic relationships among the

---

4.   «Jamais Debussy n'usa du procédé cyclique avec plus de légèreté. […] Dans les Sonates il a la discrétion du filigrane dans le papier».

various movements were already explored, albeit in a less systematic way [*Ibid.* 133]. However, it seems that Leleu's interest drives the analysis towards the quest for an inner unity, which is more demonstrable in the writing than in the listener's perception and is capable of going beyond a category deemed to be obsolete or poorly adaptable to Debussy's thought. But can we really avoid an exhaustive reflection on this theme, which had so much engaged Parisian composers and commentators in the late nineteenth century, isolating a typically French gene in the evolution of large forms?

Incontestably, the entire cyclic process springs from the very first measures. The debut of the *Pastorale*, despite the scalar ambiguity that was clearly underscored by Leleu [*Ibid.* 122],[5] leaves deep impressions in the listener (Ex. 1).

Ex. 1a: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Pastorale*, mm. 1–3

The *pc set* of the first 3 measures is quite broad: { 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 0}.[6] The shift E♭-E, which we shall call γ, renders the interval relationships between the pitches of the theme uncertain, the melody has the features of an *arabesque,* that is full of not very memorable flourishes, the rhythm is in continuous transformation and in the flute part, it gives rise to a sensation of *trompe l'oreille*: the writing is in 9/8, but the ties of the first measure could lead the listener to a plausible reading in 4/4, given that Debussy does not underscore the unity of the ternary subdivision at any time. The elaboration of Example 1b demonstrates this, often accenting the strong beats

---

5. «[…] l'ambiguité demeure quant à la gamme, que l'on peut écrire {la♭ do mi♭ fa♭ sol♭} — avec fa♭ au lieu de mi —, mais aussi bien — et la prégnance de la structure de tierces majeures <la♭4 do5 mi5> au sommet y invite — comme une gamme par tons (défective, mais on a encore en mémoire le si♭ et le ré) que l'ajout du mi♭ (la 5te) permet d'asseoir sur la♭ : {sol♭ la♭ do (mi♭) mi}, voire, avec fa♯, {la♭ do (mi♭) mi fa♯} — les flottements, dans la notation, s'expliquant par le fait que l'échelle de référence n'est pas purement diatonique».

6. From here on we point out the choice to propose the pc sets in their normal form.

in the measure). The quintuplets that follow immediately afterwards help define the ambiguity of this initial accent, like the harp's upbeats. The same agogic rule in *rubato* alludes to the embryonic state of an improvised invention. The only stable element consists in the sonority of the C-G♭ tritone (we shall continue to use the name *α* given by Leleu in order to facilitate possible comparisons), which not only opens the composition in a completely isolated position, but offers 3 points of support for the indeterminacy of the melody. In just 3 measures, the interval manages to solidify in the listener's perception, both in melodic guise (measure 1) as well as in its harmonic guise (mm. 2–3), clearly standing out from all the surrounding material. In the hierarchy of stability there follows the sixth relation G♭-E♭ (hereinafter referred to as '*δ*'), which is delineated in the first two measures, then becoming the interval *ambitus* of measure 3 (confirmed 3 times in a row).
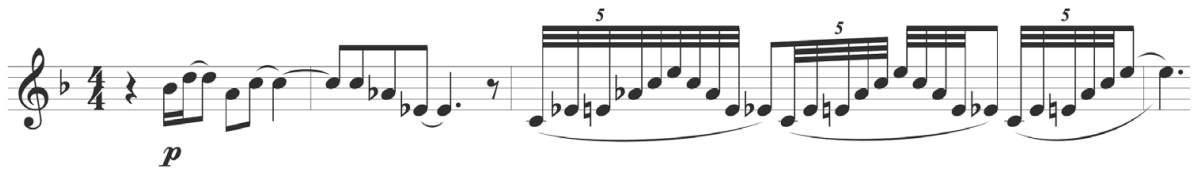
Ex. 1b: part of the flute changed into 4/4

Part of this material returns in the movement's finale, when section A', as we shall see, recalls what is stated in the opening pages. Before the theme is re-established in its complexity, Debussy anticipates its essential lineaments, in what we might define as a 'dematerialized' form (Ex. 2). This occurs in measure 61, when the *Affrettando* episode leads back in a rather stable manner to the tonality F major: among the measures 59–60 there is a memory of the perfect cadence on the dominant ninth found at the beginning of the *Pastorale* (mm. 8–9) which imparted a momentary stability to the harmonic process. After which, the diatonic flavor of the writing is hybridized by a low F♯ that shifts the listener's expectations for a brief, but significant moment.

The *α* tritone interval returns to be heard, in another enharmonic guise (F♯-C), both in melodic and harmonic form, just as in the beginning of the movement.[7] However this recall, which is undoubtedly perceptible upon listening, signals a more profound link with the material of the opening. Meanwhile, the pc set on which Debussy works {10, 0, 2, 3, 6} is totally included in the one that is

---

7. The comparison between the score published by Durand and the draft preserved at the Rychenberg-Stiftung in Winterthur, right from the start, highlights a certain ambiguity on Debussy's part in determining what enharmonic value to attribute to the pitch class [6]: the passage G♭ to F♯ does not always seem determined by precise harmonic or scalar reasons. For this reason, I think it useful to examine all the cases in which the intervals [0,6] or [6,0] appear, favoring the perceptual sensation over modal compatibility.

Ex. 2: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Pastorale*, mm. 60–61

commented upon in Example 1, confirming a scalar ambiguity that is difficult to decipher (it may be a harmonic G minor). The viola's *arabesque*s have the same circular physiognomy as the analogous flourishings proposed by the flute at the beginning of the *Pastorale*. Above all the viola's pitch E♭, repeated three times at the apex of the design — just as occurs in measure 3 — again generates the relationship δ with the low part, in its enharmonic reformulation of diminished seventh. The melodic design is completely different, yet the distinctive characters remain, and their evidence is underscored by the sharing of a tritone that acts as a cue [Deliège 2001] for the listener in a moment of temporary harmonic relaxation. The theme has unraveled, it no longer resonates in the instruments of the group of players, however the material of which it was composed remains clearly visible.

It is precisely this episode, that is overlooked by Leleu, which prepares the textual and circular recall of measure 71 (Ex. 3). The conformation of the theme is the same as the one that opened the *Sonata*, the scalar ambitus reprises the same ambiguities, and the pc set is almost superimposable {2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 0}. The only variation, given by the pitch [7], is also the most significant: the low note alternates between F♯ and G twice, in an undulation that also returns in the following two measures (75–76), when the conclusion in delaying episode moves the harmony on the same supports as the harp (at the beginning and end of the measure). Debussy, as often happens in the reminiscences placed at the end of his compositions, makes the listener's mnemonic movement uncertain, returning an image of the original idea that is less clear.[8] However, the sonority of the

8. What is instructive in this regard is what happens in the finale of *Fêtes* when Debussy creates the sensation of a circular recall, working however on mostly secondary material, impossible to fix in the listener's memory

Ex. 3: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Pastorale*, mm. 71–76

α interval continues to stand out in its double harmonic-melodic physiognomy, just as it happens in the introduction of the *Pastorale*, extending into a series of increasingly subtle repetitions (in a diminuendo and progressive reduction of the parts), which lead to the conclusive *presque rien* [Jankélévitch 1981]. Moreover δ, which takes on the physiognomy of the diminished seventh confirming the enharmonic anticipation of the Ex 2, loses its obvious relationship between high and low notes, remaining concealed in the harp's texture: the textual recall of the design allows Debussy to soften some of the features of the original delineation reproducing those typical distorting memory procedures that were studied by Pierre Janet during those same years in Paris [Janet 1904, 417–453].

Ex. 3: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Pastorale,* mm. 71–76

The second movement, *Interlude,* does not propose thematically explicit references to the *Pastorale.* The piece revolves around an idea in *Tempo di Minuetto* that returns several times, without however ever abandoning the initial pitch-classes (it always opens on the C note, regardless of the instrument and modal context). Debussy apparently creates a new idea, but this novelty leaves a clear feeling of *déja entendu* in the listener, owing to some invariants (Ex. 4). The most obvious one is undoubtedly the α interval: Leleu notes its melodic presence in the succession of notes played by the flute, which extend from G♭4 to G♭5, pivoting precisely on C4 [Leleu 2017, 102] but the harmonic colour of the tritone at measure 3 is equally relevant, when the overlap between the viola's pedal and the sharp peak drawn by the flute produces α in its inversion (C-G♭).[9] As previously heard at the beginning of the *Pastorale* (Ex. 1, mm. 2–3) Debussy stresses this interval relationship three times, requiring a *crescendo* emphasis for the interpreter. Less perceptible, but equally decisive is the alteration that closes the phrase (E♮, measure 4), which in producing uncertainty about the modal reading of the episode,

---

9.   The symmetry that the tritone produces within the scale makes it possible to indifferently observe α in the two possible configurations: (C-G♭), (G♭-C). Both as a diminished fifth and as well as an augmented fourth to the listening always gives rise to the perception of a tritone.

reprises the same function performed by the γ slide (E♭-E) in the *Pastorale*'s generating theme. This *minuetto* gesture is decidedly not "dematerialized", like the episode commented upon in Example 2, but its identity reveals dominant characters — which are strongly accentuated by Debussy's choices — which express a discernible sharing with the first movement's material.

Ex. 4: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Interlude*, mm. 1–4.

A few bars later, the theme is repeated in the viola's part (mm. 8–11), with a chordal accompaniment of the harp: α continues to be well outlined (also from the doubling of the flute at measure 10 precisely on G♭5), however the E returns back to being flat, confirming the unpredictability of γ within the scalar system. The same ambiguity also continues in the subsequent reprise of the motif in the *Tempo di minuetto*. At mm. 46–51 (Ex. 5) the general color of the episode is again tainted by the presence of the E♮ in the flute part, creating a perfectly alternative version of that which was heard in mm. 8–11: the chord support of the harp is identical, the theme maintains its physiognomy unaltered until it reaches its climax, but the E♮ takes the melody elsewhere, taking up the ambiguity played on these two sounds from the beginning of the *Sonata*. In both cases the central importance of the tritone in the organisation of the overall design remains clear: C4 continues to act as a pivot between G♭4 and G♭5, entrusting dissonance with the task of defining the interval area of the theme (just as occurred in the generating idea of *L'après-midi d'un faune*), although the emphasis is even more marked thanks to the proliferation of the repetitions on G♭5, drawing the perceptive attention precisely to the pitch class which from the opening of the *Pastorale* signals the solidity of the α relationship. Also in this case the harmonic-melodic duplicity of the interval returns, which manifests itself horizontally (between viola and flute) and vertically (between harp and viola). Debussy also helps with expressive indications, suggesting the violist to "sospirare" precisely in correspondence with the G♭5 which is repeated with such insistence, in this passage as well as in the low notes of Ex. 1.

Ex. 5: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Interlude*, mm. 46–51

The same blending between γ and α identifies the last measures of the central section, in the *Interlude*, when the writing progressively leads to the recall of the initial *Minuetto* (Ex. 6). A nervous, quickening and detached design emerges in the flute's part, which acts as a connector between the impetuous episode in *sfogato* (mm. 61 et seq.) and the return to the initial dancing atmosphere. The connection, just before the first Tempo reestablishes itself, has a clear cross-fade function between the two formal articulations of the piece, revealing the «penchant for filmic technique» frequently remarked by Andrew Aziz in Debussy's music [Aziz 2021, 16]. On the one hand it helps to weld two distant harmonic areas: the B major/C flat major of the central episode (the ambiguity is accentuated by the choice of superimposing two different key signatures: five sharps for flute and viola, seven flats for the harp) slides chromatically towards the mixolydian D♭ of the *Minuetto*. On the other hand, it brings to mind the cyclical material of the composition: with the complicity of the *acciaccatura*, the now usual γ slide from E♭ to E♮ occurs; but above all the *ambitus* of the rapid arabesque reconstructs the system of the α relationships by delimiting the melody between C and G♭. In this way, according to a procedure that is dear to Debussy,[10] a few measures before the resumption of section A' being formalized, the distinctive elements of the theme are already perfectly anticipated, thus making the transition from one articulation to another quite fluid. The mixed sonority of γ and α refers back to the *Minuetto*, but also to the *Pastorale*, giving rise to an interesting overlaying of different memories, held together by a strong genetic familiarity.

10. Some examples are recalled in which a similar cross-fade occurs that overlaps themes belonging to juxtaposed articulations or movements: *Par les rues et par les chemins* (from *Ibéria*), mm. 232–269; *Matin d'un jour de fête* (from *Ibéria*), mm. 1–10; *Nuages* (from *Nocturnes*), mm. 80–102; *Jeux de vagues* (from *La mer*), mm. 155–162.
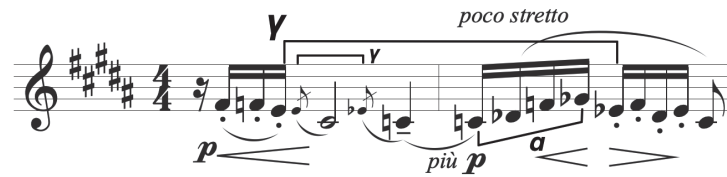
Ex. 6: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp*, Interlude, mm. 82–83

In this way the recall of Tempo I° takes shape with great naturalness (Ex. 7), emerging spontaneously from the compositional process. For 7 consecutive measures (mm. 85–91) the *Minuetto*'s theme acquires a clear mixolydian hue, refusing the modal duplicity generated by the γ relation; but at measure 92, thanks to the silence of the harp, the flute's and viola's E♮ stands out with great clarity, bringing the idea back to the scalar ambiguity of the beginning of the movement. The *cue* α still attracts the listener's attention, not only in the now well-known framework of the melody, but also in two striking underscores for the listener. At measures 87–88, the flute and viola come together to take up a phrase comprised within the tritone, which Debussy appropriately highlights in the high register. This choice produces a suggestive mirroring between the parts, which confirms the duplicity of α in its revolutions: the same descending idea traces first the passage C-G♭ then the opposite one G♭-C. Then, in the annotation of measures 93–94, in a total melodic isolation, the tritone resonates in the flute's part, imparting an interrogative tone to the phrase: the same doubling of the harp, foreseen in *marcato* on the G♭ note (with harmonics), attests to the desire to highlight precisely that pitch class that from the beginning of the *Sonate* marks an interval with a clear cyclic functionality. Both solutions are highly perceptible when listening by virtue of the highlighting sought out by Debussy on the compositional work: first, owing to the natural pre-eminence of the high register, then to the gradual rarefaction of a writing that unravels precisely in order to discover some essential elements. Also worth noting is the reappearance of δ, which reconstructs the sixth relationship between the low and treble notes, creating a further reminiscence of the *Pastorale*.

The last appearance of the *Minuetto* theme takes place at the end, with a fading off episode that closes the movement *perdendosi*, as often happens in Debussy's endings (Ex. 8). The melody is unchanged in the viola's part, but the doubling of the flute, which is inserted with a phase shift of 2 quarters, emphasizes the phrase elaborated as a mirror in Ex. 7. The tritone α returns to being the protagonist, finding a further stressing of the timbre. The choice requires reflection, because in the *Interlude* all five recalls of the main idea are always proposed at the same pitch, rigorously avoiding any form of transposition. The procedure is not irrelevant in such iridescent scoring as Debussy's, and undoubtedly arises from the

Ex. 7: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Interlude,* **mm. 85–94**

Ex. 8a: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Interlude,* **mm. 107–116.**

desire to assign a uniform color to the motif generating the movement. In light of what has been analyzed, there are grounds to believe that the color desired by the composer is that of the tritone α, which inevitably remains etched in the listener's memory thanks to the salience and recurrence of its pitch-classes [0, 6]. The persistence of the element is also confirmed by the harmony in two cases: at measure 110 when the sonority returns between the two extreme parts, and at measure 112 on the last chord charged with resolving tension of the movement (the dominant seventh function with diminished fifth is undoubtedly discernable).

Therefore, the cyclical genes of the composition also return in the finale: the tritonal α relation and the γ slide (E♭-E♮), underscored by the triple repetition of the descending fragment F-E♮-C in the flute's part. It is precisely this E♮, thanks to the overlap with its enharmonic F♭ in measure 110, that could provide an additional key to the scalar interpretation. Leleu analyzes this passage by hypothesizing the colors of an acoustic mode (G♭, (A♭), B♭, C, D♭, (E♭), F♭): an interpretation that could be shared, which leverages the inclusion of the recurrent tetrachord C60,4 [Leleu 2017, 110]. But one could also interpretate the last integral reprising of the minuet theme, between measures 107 and 110, as a A♭ major altered by the α tritonisation (in a mixolydian mode) as well by the γ duplicity (E♭-E♮/F♭). The pc set of the episode {0, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10 } is perfectly compatible.
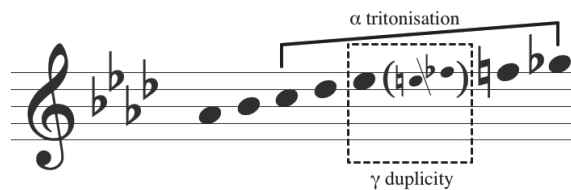
{0, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10}

Ex. 8b: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Interlude*, scalar interpretation of measures 107–110.

The *Final* opens with resolution on a rapid oscillation of fifths of the harp, highlighting two *arabesques*, that are well distinguished by their timbre: first a flute theme built on a lowering of descending triads in triplets (motif x for Leleu) and then a well-marked *controtema* of the viola, to be performed *sur le chevalet*, which in its anapestic phrase (∪ ∪ —) might reveal a possible derivation from the *Minuetto* of the *Interlude* (motif *y* for Leleu).[11] In this initial phase the two instruments enter into dialogue by sounding these brief melodic ideas, without

---

11. In this case as well, in order to facilitate possible comparisons, the same names devised by Leleu shall be adopted: x and y.

however manifesting any cognizable linkage with the cyclic material of the composition (Ex. 9a).

Ex. 9a: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Final,* **main theme and** *controtema*

In the first part of the movement the form is built through a system of rotations, taking up the terminology coined by Hepokoski and Darcy [Hepokoski-Darcy 2006] and appropriately applied to Debussy by Andrew Aziz [Aziz 2021], in which section A' (mm. 22–32) is organized on the same succession of x and y motifs heard in section A (at mm. 1–21), as well as with the repetition of the same timbral combinations (x-flute, y-viola). However, in the recall A' both themes are subjected to an interesting process of tritonisation, which reconstructs precisely the α relationship, so much exploited in the previous pages of the *Sonata*. First x ends on a *sforzato* grace note that vertically reconstructs the interval between the bass note (the harp's C♮) and the melody (the flute's F sharp), creating a decisive jolt to the perception of the modal tensions of the episode (Ex 9b). Then y is interposed with a third descendant, which transforms the perfect fifth between the second and third pitch (E♭-B♭) into a diminished fifth (C-G♭), thus generating a ripple in the melody that is destined to reverberate in the following measures, when α returns to resonate between harp and viola thanks to a trill of triplets that prolongs the sound of the B♭ (Ex. 9c). Both of the solutions [Leleu 2017, 118–119] make it possible to link the themes of the *Final* to the genetic heritage of the composition, leading the listener to immediately feel a familiarity with the interval sounds explored in the previous movements. But it is necessary to add a further reason for reminiscence that stimulates the listener's memory: the E♮ that is consolidated in the x motif, replacing the E flat of the first appearance (the only scalar variant written by Debussy), proposes the now consolidated duplicity of a pitch that often discriminates very similar pc sets (Ex 9b) in the *Pastorale* and in the *Interlude*. Leleu overlooks this permutation, which not only leads back the now well-known γ ambiguity in the compositional texture, but also allows us to read both appearances of the theme in the light of the same scalar system: a simple F minor, which in reproposing the shift E♭-E♮ leads back to the dialectic between the melodic and harmonic system of the minor scales.

Ex. 9b: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Final,* **mm.** 22–24.

Ex. 9c: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Final,* **mm. 27–30**

From this moment, especially the *a*-generating sonority, apparently unrelated to the opening measures of the movement, returns to once again dominate in the writing of the *Final*. The subsequent recall of the y motif (mm. 39–40 on flute) continues to present the tritonisation pointed out above, leaving the pc [6] spotlighting the melody as well as the accompaniment. The sound that from the beginning of the *Pastorale* signals the return of the cyclical interval is accentuated in the harp and viola parts, nervously punctuating short chromatic phrasings that fix the G♭ note in the listener's perception (the linked markings of the harp and the ripples on the weak tempos of the sixteenth note quatrains in the viola). A few measures earlier (mm. 35–36) the same accompaniment is used for another recall of y, a tone below and without a tritone in the ascending score of the opening. This transposition, which takes place only in the flute part (the support

of the other instruments remains constant also as regards the pitch), offers two different faces of the same theme within a few measures: the first one, stripped of α, refers to the present, that is to say to a movement that is generated from totally new material (perfect fifth); the second, contaminated by α, reconstructs a memory of the past, making further connections with the listener's experience of the *Sonata* (Example 10). The variation produced by Debussy in the continuation of the phrase engages the class 6 tritone again at the peak of the melody, reproducing the same mirroring [0, 6] – [6, 0] commented upon in the *Interlude* (see Ex. 7). This accentuation characterizes precisely one of the highest pitched points of the entire composition (the flute will rise higher only at measure 88, when it reaches E♭5), leaving an incisive mark in the listener's perception. Debussy helps with the dynamics in order to highlight this passage, using the most intense indication of the whole *Sonata* (*più f*), which at no other time goes beyond the boundary of '*forte*'.

Ex. 10: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Final*, mm. 35–36, mm. 39–40 superimposed

The preparatory work at this point is sufficient for achieving an athematic climax, in which the sonority of the tritone is totally isolated by the composer, generating an effect of extreme expressive amplification (Ex. 11). It is the episode that takes shape at measure 43, to then extend into the next section, the articulation of the movement that we could define B in which a new dancing theme appears (this time more than a minuet it seems to be a bolero) written in a clear Doric manner

(mm. 48 et seq.). Debussy allows the phrase segment *a* in the viola's part to predominate, again using the maximum dynamic intensity (*più forte*) and a *du talon* marking that favors the creation of a cutting gesture, repeated 6 times, which is no more contained within a melodic line or a complex polyphonic texture, but definitively sifted into a sort of emphatic culmination of the entire movement, and at the same time of the whole composition. This presence is so evident and so perceptible, that it reverberates in the surrounding areas, reflecting itself in another tritone played by the harp [11, 5]: an atmospheric duplication, which transposes the same rhythmic gesture onto other pitch classes, giving the impression of a sonorous spatialisation. This is not an unprecedented sound for the listener's ears, because in the preceding pages there are many passages in which the same interval relationship is manifested: in the *Pastorale*, just before the resumption of the main theme, the same phrase segment (in its enharmonic version) chimes twice in the harp's part (measure 69); in the *Interlude* the central section presents the same figuration with inverted parts (measure 74); the accompaniments of the *Final* are frequently characterized by the color of the interval, transformed into a sort of frantic tremolo of the harp (mm. 6, 13, 33). Undoubtedly the hue of this element might sound familiar to the listener, but in this context the impression is that Debussy wants to multiply the presence of *a* by creating a connective tissue totally generated by the sonority of a tritone that 'bounces' between the parts in its elementary form. Even the figuration in repeated triplets, which intersperses the episode twice in the viola part, elaborates a tritone (A♭-D), completing a pc set that derives from the sum of three tritons: $\{5, 6, 8, 11, 0, 2\}$.[12]

What happens in the flute part may be read in the light of a fade in that introduces section B, anticipating its Doric and bi-modal physiognomy: the theme begins to appear, marked by the *lointain* indication as well as by a diminishing rhythm, producing a progressive overlap between distant materials, which must not find integration precisely because they stratify sound flows coming from different directions. Something similar happens in *Par les rues et par les chemins*, first panel of *Ibéria*, when the recall of the *sevillana* overlaps the martial motifs of the central episode like a sheet of tissue paper (mm. 232 et seq.). This is the texture that Debussy looks for in the initial phase of the B section of the *Final* (*Un poco più mosso, poco a poco*), when *a* becomes a sort of pendulum that is parallel to the new melody: the two parts (flute and viola) do not blend precisely because the writing becomes multi-track, stacking sequences of events that intersect only for a few moments. Leleu speaks of an *objet trouvé* for the Doric theme, hinting at an

---

12.   From this pc set we exclude the pc of the flute, because they belong to a Doric scalar system, which gradually overlaps, refusing to integrate with the material played by the viola and harp.

element that gives the impression of being «importé du dehors» [Leleu 2017, 105]. The interpretation alludes to something extraneous to writing, which is grafted without merging with the surrounding material. The appearance of the melody from *lointain* confirms this reading, but there is also the desire, at this point not negligible, to amplify the cyclical function of the interval which guarantees synthetic unity to the whole *Sonata*. If α were to blend perfectly with the theme of the flute, it would lose all its revealing recognizability. For this reason, the episode, with this proliferation of tritons, can recall the culminating effect sought by Franck in the endings of his cyclical works: that moment of convergence between all the themes and tensions of the composition that Vincent d'Indy defined as «*péroraison*», alluding to the vanishing point of the «*cathédrale sonore*» [*Ibid.*, 37–38], constructed by the cyclic sonata. Debussy does not resort to a theme to achieve the same effect, but to an interval that acted as a big bang for the entire *Sonata* and which now makes itself heard in all its ancestral simplicity.

Ex. 11: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Final*, mm. 43–53

After this multiplication of the tritone sound, α returns several times in the last pages of the movement. At measure 68 a sudden stop of the viola on two long G♭ notes introduces the return of the interval in combination with the harp, performing a complementary function to that commented on in Example 11: the

stratification of sounds that are extraneous to the predominantly diatonic physiognomy of the central section produces a new multi-track editing between materials that refuse perfect integration, triggering an effective fade-out between B and A' (Ex. 12a). The return of the materials exposed in section A (in particular the x and y motifs) is enriched by a frequent presence of α in the flute and viola *arabesques* (mm. 77, 80–81), which in fact is anticipated by the last measures of the intermediate episode. The procedure also involves the recurring accompaniment formula in B which is tritonised by virtue of the harmonic modulation elaborated in A', further contributing to gradually making the transition from one articulation (B) to another (A') of the form (Ex. 12b).

Ex. 12a: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Final,* **mm. 68–71**

Ex. 12b: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Final, fade-out* **B-A'. Section B (mm. 64–69) – Section A' (m 80)**

The last evident appearance of the cyclical interval precedes the coda at the peak of a climax that leads to the progressive shattering of the main motifs, in a dynamic crescendo with a strong expressive intensity (Example 13). A figuration in triplets between flute and viola charges the tension (mm. 93–94), subsequently accentuated by a quadrupling of the same design in the next measure, until the apex arrives precisely in correspondence with an evident underscoring of α in the harp's part, repeated twice in decisive (*mf – f*) dynamic progression. The flute and viola stop on a trill interspersed with octave rests, which frames the most

striking material of this apex. Once again Debussy leaves a clearly visible cue to the listener's attention, repeating the same descending figuration of the *péroraison*, with reversed parts: [6–0] – [0–6].

Ex. 13: C. Debussy, *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Final*, mm. 96–97

In the last part of the *Final*, the impression is that the composer refuses to hide the tritone in the harmonic-melodic texture, in order to continue to highlight its retrospective function. Its isolation offers a key to deciphering the fruitful experience of the previous movements, definitively standing out from the surrounding material. This continuous emergence favors the perception of a familiarity between a motto that is exclusively tritone and the main ideas of the *Sonata*, generating a reminiscence that goes beyond the boundaries, perhaps limited one, of the thematic experience. A comparison between the pc sets of the examples commented above can help to demonstrate the signaling function of *a* within the composition, as an element capable of outlining scalar affinities between apparently divergent passages of the *Sonata*.

The reading in succession of these pc sets (called α Series) denotes a significant level of sharing between the scalar systems adopted by Debussy. The duplication of the table in normal form and in ascending order has the sole purpose of simplifying the comparisons. Between Ex. 11 and Ex. 12, only those pc sets marked with α were selected, to avoid mixing scalar systems deliberately without integration: the fade in and out commented upon in the two junctures A-B and B-A'. Data processing makes it possible to evaluate the percentage of inclusion between the pc sets, operating with superposition between two examples at a time that strictly respect the order of appearance in the Sonata: Ex1 + Ex2, Ex2 + Ex3, Ex3

α Series (normal form)

| | | | | | | | | | | | Pc sets marked with α | | |
Ex1	Ex2	Ex3	Ex4	Ex5	Ex6	Ex7	Ex8	Ex9b	Ex9c	Ex10	Ex11	Ex 12	Ex 13
2	10	2	0	0	0	0	3	4	9	10	5	0	0
3	0	3	1	1	1	1	4	5	10	0	6	2	1
4	2	4	3	3	3	3	5	6	0	1	8	6	6
6	3	6	5	4	4	4	6	7	1	5	11		
8	6	7	6	5	5	5	8	8	2	6	0		
9		9	8	6	6	9	10		3		2		
10		10	10		8	10	0		5				
0		0			10	0	1		6				
						1							

α Series (ascending order)

| | | | | | | | | | | | Pc sets marked with α | | |
Ex 1	Ex2	Ex3	Ex4	Ex5	Ex6	Ex7	Ex8	Ex9b	Ex9c	Ex10	Ex11	Ex 12	Ex 13
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	2	5	5	6	6
4	6	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	3	6	6		
6	10	6	6	5	5	6	5	6	5	10	8		
8		7	8	6	6	8	6	7	6		11		
9		9	10		8	10	7	8	10				
10		10			10	11	8	9	10	10			
							10						

Perc. Inclus													
100	80	57,14	87,5	100	83,33	87,5	87,5	62,5		100	60	100	66,67

Tab. 1: Comparison between pc sets of episodes containing α arranged in normal form and in ascending order

+ Ex4 and so on. The results of the operations show that the compatibility levels are always greater than 57.14% (minimum value found between Ex3 and Ex4). The themes are transformed but the material they are made of is always very similar; and what signals this familiarity is precisely the α tritone, which acquires a hierarchical position, as we have seen, in progressive evidence during the course of the composition. Its origin is located precisely in the opening of the *Pastorale* with those two initial notes, which generate a dense network of successive ties. For this reason, it would be natural to expect a return of the same interval in the epilogue of the *Final* (mm. 109 et seq.), when Debussy offers the most striking concession to the cyclic sonata mechanisms theorized by Vincent d'Indy (Ex. 14).

The indication *Mouvt de la "Pastorale"* clearly underscores the circular reprise of the theme set at the *Sonata's* opening. The textual return of the material exposed in the first measures of the composition places the listener in a position of hypermnesia, using a term borrowed from Janet's psychiatric studies: that is

Ex. 14: C. Debussy, Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp, Final, mm. 109–111

to say an extremely clear manifestation of memory, which recomposes memories with a quantity and quality of details bordering on the edges of abnormality [Janet 420–426]. The same listener, who is now familiar with a mostly athematic system of relationships, based on simple interval cues, will be led to grasp the anomaly of this choice. Debussy seems torn between the desire to offer predictable reassurance to the listener's comfort zone, offering him a clear retrospective on the generating idea of the work, and the commitment to stimulate unconscious mnemonic processes based on the doubt of an elusive past. Confirmation comes from the choice to carefully avoid the resumption of α in this episode, all built on a rigorous transposition of three semitones that refuses precisely the distinctive elements of the cyclical process perceived up to that moment: no trace of the diminished seventh δ nor of the duplicity γ, a suggestive emphasis on a tritone never heard before in the topical moments of the composition (A-E♭), and a relevant metrical variation with a shift of the flute's melody across the measures 109–110. The result is a contradictory sensation, which offers something new precisely when material already heard and assimilated in the course of the *Pastorale* returns with greater conspicuousness (also by virtue of the recall placed at the end of the movement). The distance between the pc sets contributes to demonstrate this ambiguity by reaching the lowest level of inclusion of the series (50%), precisely when the comparison occurs on the same theme.[13] It might seem like a transcription of that which D'indy said about the failure to integrate the cyclical

13. Ex. 1 = {2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 0} Ex. 14 = {5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 0, 1, 3}

theme into the surrounding material. However, Debussy gives the impression that he is seeking out a new form of deliberately dissociated complexity. On the one hand there is, however, only one case, the inclination to respect a rule of the cyclic sonata (precisely the resumption of a theme-character in its clearly recognizable features), on the other hand an abrupt scalar transposition, which does not respect that quest for "parenté plus ou moins directe" [D'Indy 1905, 387], that is precisely what d'Indy holds to be indispensable for the unity of the composition. The whole episode, from the tonal point of view, exhibits the physiognomy of an anomalous cell, which inserts a modal fracture, just when the writing gives the impression of returning to the *Sonata's* implant tonality (the F major reached in the following measures). The scalar area has the same level of indecipherability as the *Pastorale*, but the perception of a gap is evident just when the harmonic tensions seem to find a definitive convergence towards the perfect final agreement.

Conclusions

This analysis serves to consolidate Leleu's insights, confirming the internal unity of the composition. All the additions we have made to his reading of the *Sonate*[14] have the purpose of enhancing and reinterpreting the function of some recurring intervals in the construction of the three movements. What emerges is a path of progressive revelation of a few supporting elements, in particular the α interval, which gradually shed their themes to reveal a distinctive identity. So far the cyclical nature of the work has been evaluated only with regard to the resumption of the theme of the *Pastorale* in the epilogue. Undoubtedly, the choice is the result of a circular thought that owes much to the research of Franck and d'Indy. But the analysis commented above highlights a much denser network of links, which tends to go beyond the thematic dimension, to favor a substantially athematic connection. DeVoto and Wheeldon try to find a kinship with French research at the end of the century, identifying contradictory influences from the theoretical and compositional scenario of the time. Debussy, instead gives the impression of eclipsing every model in the *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp*, experimenting with various solutions. It would seen that there is undoubtedly a transformational process, which leads the composer to rework some procedures that were historicized by tradition: one need only think in particular of the rewriting of the *péroraison*, which loses its melodic traceability while remaining the climax of the entire work; but it is the same concluding resumption of the *Pastorale* that

14. In addition to the integrations and different analytical interpretations of some examples, the passages not considered in detail by Leleu include Ex. 2, Ex. 6, Ex. 7, Ex. 9b, Ex. 9c, Ex. 10, Ex.12a, Ex. 12b, Ex.13, Ex.14.

invests the circular return to the origin with new meaning, loading it with contradictions that stimulate memory in divergent directions. Above all, there is a strong drive towards a form of subconscious cyclicism, which offers the listener continuous points of contact with that *déjà entendu* by working on sufficiently connoted and perceptible cues. The term is borrowed from Irène Deliège's well-known theory of perception, which emphasizes the role played by those elements of writing that gain prominence on the musical surface [Deliège 2001, 233–243]. The cues, however, do not necessarily coincide with the themes, but simply manage to reveal a «salient property» [*Ibid.*, 239] that is capable of helping the memory to reconstruct the complete physiognomy of the recurring ideas in the mind of the listener.

The α interval, together with its derivatives γ and δ, is just a possible example of a cue that strikes the listener's attention from the very first measures of the *Pastorale*; each time it reaches the listener it reconstructs an imaginary line that favors the mental return to the genetic nucleus of the composition, but progressively loses its function as a means to transform itself into the end of cyclical thought. From a cue it turns into evidence, isolating itself more and more from the thematic material to appear in all its tritonal relevance. The recurrence is unquestionably perceptible, but at the same time elusive precisely because of an athematic nature, which appears but at the same time slips into the user's memory. This leds us towards Pierre Janet's clinical studies on the distortions of memories following emotionally traumatic episodes: that dialectic between phases of amnesia and hypermnesia that makes memory an elastic tool, never really the same. But our thoughts also turn to many literary references that were well known to Debussy, such as Verlaine and Mallarmé, who devoted a great deal of poetic research to the suggestions of the subconscious. One has only to think of *Colloque Sentimental* and the famous dialogue between the «deux formes» in a lonely and frozen park: on the one hand a figure who tries to recover the souvenir of an «extase ancienne» with difficulty, on the other a laconic interlocutor who answers «no» or «c'est possible». Or at the opening of *the Après-midi d'un faune* («Aimai-je un rêve?»), which immediately insinuates the reader with the sensation of witnessing an uncertain flow of the subconscious, on the border between reality and dream. Debussy felt the need to reflect on these tortuous mechanisms of memory, which in some cases even reach the extreme of amnesia, as happens to Mélisande, who from the first scene seems to be the victim of a total cancellation of the past.

The athematic cyclical nature of the *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp* seems to have been designed to stimulate the listener's mnemonic faculties in a complex way, generating a subtle dialectic between recognition and doubt. One could

speak, coining an oxymoron, of reminiscences of the non-memorable, which writing makes perceptible and at the same time uncertain. It is not a work that ends in the watermark of musical writing, as Leleu seems to argue, referring to the reading of André Schaeffner, revealing itself only to the analyst's attention [Schaeffner 1963, 924]. There is the will, at least in this *Sonata*, to leave evident, albeit ambiguous, traces in the listener's fruitive faculties. For Deliège the cue is used to recover the physiognomy of a theme, but in this case the path seems the opposite: themes help us recover the α cue, forcing the listener to overcome those automatisms that lead to the identification of large melodic groupings. The process is not simple, as it forces us to review fruitive habits that are well rooted in Western culture, and therefore can only succeed in a subconscious form. Debussy had already explored this path in many previous works: for example, the finale of *Fêtes* (mm. 252–266) or of *La Mer* (*Dialogue du vent e de la mer*, mm. 133 et seq.), when the combination of themes builds an open memory that places the user in front of many possible retrospective paths; to the indication *lointain* often used to materialize an indecipherable temporal distance even more than spatial [Jankélévitch 1968, 78 et seq.] resorting to anomalous cells that seem to be grafted into the present through unconscious contacts with the past (for example in the finale of *La puerta del vino*, mm. 83–84); or to the cyclical nature of the *Sevillana* in Ibéria, which especially in the central panel (*Les parfums de la nuit*, mm. 92–95) turns into an evanescent reminiscence of a recent past. But in the *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp* the step is even more daring, because it overcomes the constraints of the thematic system, to assign to the cyclical interval an elementary force, perceptible and at the same time elusive as a physiognomic feature that progressively separates from the face to which it belongs. This process is not as evident in the other two works of the same *corpus* and testifies to an innovative conception of the cyclic sonata, which perhaps is not that of Frank, nor even of D'Indy, but one that can be certainly identified as that of Debussy.

Bibliography

Forte A. (1991), *Debussy and the Octatonic*, «Music Analysis» 10/1–2, pp. 125–169.

Antokoletz E., Wheeldon M. (ed. 2011), *Rethinking Debussy*, New York, Oxford University Press.

Aziz A. (2021), *Temporal Disruptions in Debussy's and Ravel's Programmatic Sonatas.* «Music Analysis», 39/3, pp. 314–358.

Caballero C. (2001), *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Code D.J. (2001), *Hearing Debussy, Reading Mallarmé: Music après Wagner in the Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune'*, «Journal of the American Musicological Society», 54/3, pp. 493–554.

D'Indy V. (1909), *Cours de composition musicale*, Deuxième Livre – Première Partie . Paris, Durand.

Debussy C. (2005), *Correspondance 1872–1918*, edited by François Lesure and Denis Herlin, Paris, Gallimard.

Debussy C. (1987), *Monsieur Croche et Autres Écrits*, edited by François Lesure, Paris, Gallimard.

Deliège I. (2001), *Similarity Perception ↔ Categorization ↔ Cue Abstraction*, «Music Perception», 18/3, pp. 233–243.

Devoto M. (2004), *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality*: *Essays on his Music*, Hillsdale, Pendragon Press.

Gumplowicz P. (2013), *Un nationalisme au miroir du cake-walk*, in Chimenes-Laederich 2013, *Regards sur Debussy*, Paris, Fayard, pp. 69–86.

Hepokoski J.A., Darcy W. (2006), *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata*, New York, Oxford University Press.

Hepokoski J.A. (2010), *Clouds and Circles: Rotational Form in Debussy's 'Nuages'*, «Dutch Journal of Music Theory», February, pp. 1–17.

Koechlin C. (1927), *Traité de l'Harmonie*, Paris, Max Eschig.

Janet P. (1904), *L'amnésie et la dissociation des souvenirs par l'émotion*, «Journal de psychologie», 5, pp. 417–453.

Jankélévitch V. (1968), *La vie et la mort dans la musique de Debussy*, Neuchâtel, La Baconnière.

Jankélévitch V. (1981), *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi et le presque rien*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil.

Joos M. (ed. 2004), *Claude Debussy, Jeux de Formes*, Paris, Éditions Rue d'Ulm.

Leleu J.-L. (2017), *Spécificités de l'agencement formel et de l'invention thématique dans la* Sonate pour flûte, alto et harpe *de Claude Debussy*, «Revue de musicologie», 103/1, pp. 93–135.

Malvano A. (2020), *Diabolus in memoria: Observations Regarding the use of the Tritone in Debussy's Endings*, «De Musica Disserenda», 16/1, pp. 53–69.

Parks R. (1989), *The Music of Claude Debussy*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press.

Rings S. (2008): *Mystéres limpides: Time and Transformation in Debussy's "Des pas sur la neige"*, «19th-Century Music», 32/2, pp. 178–208.

Schaeffner,A. (1963), *Claude Debussy*, in Roland-Manuel 1963, *Histoire de la Musique II, du xviiie siècle à nos jours*, Paris, Gallimard.

Tadié J.-Y. (2013), *Proust et Debussy* in Chimenes-Laederich (eds), *Regards sur Debussy*, Fayard, Paris 2013, pp. 111–118.

Wheeldon M. (2005), *Debussy and La sonate cyclique,* «The Journal of Musicology», 22/4 pp. 644–679.

Wheeldon M. (2009), *Debussy's Late Style*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

Abstract

This paper intends to demonstrate how the tritone in the Debussy's *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp* becomes a tool of the memory, capable of revealing an underlying cyclical unity. The analysis consolidates Jean-Louis Leleu's insights (Leleu 2017), reinterpreting the function of some recurring intervals in the construction of the *Sonata*. What emerges is a path of progressive revelation of a few supporting elements, in particular the α interval [6–0], which gradually shed their themes to reveal a distinctive identity. So far, the cyclical nature of the work has been evaluated only with regard to the resumption of the theme of the *Pastorale* in the epilogue. But the analysis of this paper highlights a much denser network of links, which tends to go beyond the thematic dimension, to favor a substantially athematic connection. Musicological studies tried to find a kinship with French research on cyclicity at the end of the XIXth century (DeVoto 2004; Wheeldon 2009). But Debussy eclipses every model, experimenting with various solutions. There is a transformation process, which leads the composer to rework some cyclical procedures that were historicized by tradition: specially the rewriting of the *péroraison*, which loses its melodic traceability while remaining the athematic climax of the entire work. Above all, there is a strong drive towards a form of subconscious cyclicism, which offers the listener continuous points of contact with that *déjà entendu* by working on connoted and perceptible cues.

Keywords
Debussy, Tritone, Cyclical unity, Sonate, Analysis

L'articolo si propone di dimostrare come il tritono nella *Sonate pour flûte, alto et harpe* di Debussy diventi uno strumento della memoria, capace di rivelare una

ciclicità soggiacente. L'analisi consolida le intuizioni di Jean-Louis Leleu (Leleu 2017), reinterpetando tuttava la funzione di alcuni intervalli ricorrenti nella costruzione della *Sonate*. A emergere è un percorso di progressiva rivelazione di pochi elementi portanti, in particolare l'intervallo *a* [6–0], che gradualmente si spogliano dei loro temi per svelare un'identità distintiva. Finora la ciclicità dell'opera è stata valutata solo in merito alla ripresa del tema della *Pastorale* nell'epilogo. Ma l'analisi dell'articolo evidenzia una rete di legami molto più fitta, che tende a superare la dimensione tematica, per privilegiare un collante sostanzialmente atematico. DeVoto e Wheeldon cercano di trovare un legame con le ricerche francesi di fine secolo sulla ciclicità (DeVoto 2004; Wheeldon 2009). Ma Debussy supera ogni modello, sperimentando varie soluzioni. Si verifica un processo di trasformazione, che porta il compositore a rielaborare alcuni procedimenti ciclici storicizzati dalla tradizione: in particolare la riscrittura della *péroraison*, che perde la sua tracciabilità melodica pur rimanendo il punto di fuga atematico dell'intera opera. C'è soprattutto una decisa spinta verso una forma di ciclicità subcosciente, che offre all'ascoltatore continui punti di contatto con il *déjà entendu* lavorando su *cues* sufficientemente connotati e percepibili.

Parole chiave
Debussy, Tritono, Unità ciclica, Sonata, Analisi

Notizie sugli autori / Notes on contributors

Paolo Teodori ha pubblicato diversi studi, in particolare sulla musica romana del XVI-XVII secolo. Tra questi: *Corelli e lo stile rigoroso: la lezione di Matteo Simonelli* (Firenze, 1997), *L'evoluzione dello stile palestriniano nella musica di Ruggero Giovannelli* (Fondazione G.P. da Palestrina, 1999), *Felice Anerio, il primo libro dei Madrigali spirituali a 5 voci* (Fondazione G.P. da Palestrina, 2007). Si è anche occupato di musica da film; ha pubblicato: *La forma di una musica narrativa: Hans Zimmer, The Patricide, dalla colonna sonora del film Gladiator*, RATM, 2012.
Insegna Teoria dell'Armonia e Analisi (Roma, Santa Cecilia). Dirige il Coro "Sant'Agnese in Piazza Navona". Compone musica.

Paolo Teodori has published several studies, in particular on 16th-17th century Roman music. Among them: *Corelli e lo stile rigoroso: la lezione di Matteo Simonelli* (Firenze, 1997), *L'evoluzione dello stile palestriniano nella musica di Ruggero Giovannelli* (Fondazione G.P. da Palestrina, 1999), *Felice Anerio, il primo libro dei Madrigali spirituali a 5 voci* (Fondazione G.P. da Palestrina, 2007).
He has also dealt with film music by publishing *La forma di una musica narrativa: Hans Zimmer, The Patricide, from the soundtrack of the film Gladiator*, RATM, 2012
He teaches Theory of Harmony and Analysis (Rome, Santa Cecilia). Conducts the Choir "Sant'Agnese in Piazza Navona". Composes music.

Alessandro Bertinetto (PhD 2000, Università di Padova) è professore di Filosofia Teoretica presso l'Università di Torino. È stato Ricercatore in Estetica presso l'Università di Udine, e Alexander von Humboldt Fellow presso la FU di Berlino. È stato visiting scholar presso le Università di Madrid (Complutense e Autónoma), Murcia, Tolosa, Kanazawa Luxembourg, Berlino, Valencia e Belo Horizonte. È stato membro dell'*Executive Committee* della *European Society for Aesthetics* (2012–2018).
I suoi interessi di ricerca includono l'idealismo tedesco, l'estetica, l'ermeneutica, la filosofia della musica, la creatività e l'improvvisazione. I suoi libri più recenti sono: *Il pensiero dei suoni*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori 2012; *Eseguire l'inatteso. Ontologia musicale e improvvisazione*, Roma, il Glifo 2016; *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Improvisation in the Arts* (a cura di; con M. Ruta) Abingdon, Routledge 2021; *Estetica dell'improvvisazione*, Bologna, il Mulino 2021 (eng. trans. *Aesthetics of Improvisation*, München, Fink 2022).
È coordinatore di ART – Aesthetics Research Torino: www.art.unito.it

Alessandro Bertinetto (PhD 2000, University of Padova) is professor of Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Turin. He has been Researcher in Aesthetics at the University of Udine, and Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the FU Berlin. He has been visiting scholar at the Universities of Madrid (Complutense and Autónoma), Murcia, Toulouse, Kanazawa Luxembourg, Berlin, Valencia and Belo Horizonte. He has been member of the Executive Committee of the European Society for Aesthetics (2012–2018).

His research interests include German idealism, aesthetics, hermeneutics, philosophy of music, creativity and improvisation. His most recent books are: *Il pensiero dei suoni*, Milano 2012; *Eseguire l'inatteso. Ontologia musicale e improvvisazione*, Roma, il Glifo 2016; *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Improvisation in the Arts* (ed., with M. Ruta), Abingdon, Routledge 2021; *Estetica dell'improvvisazione,* Bologna, il Mulino 2021 (eng. trans. *Aesthetics of Improvisation*, Munich-Leiden, Fink-Brill 2022).

He is Coordinator of ART – Aesthetics Research Torino: www.art.unito.it

Massimiliano Locanto è professore associato di Storia della Musica presso l'Università degli Studi di Salerno. I suoi interessi di ricerca e pubblicazioni riguardano due aree principali: la storia del canto liturgico medievale e la musica del Novecento, con un focus particolare sulla musica di Igor Stravinskij (alla quale ha dedicato la monografia *Stravinsky and the Musical Body. Creative Process and Meaning*, 2021) e sul rapporto tra teorie musicali, tecniche compositive e pensiero scientifico. I suoi articoli sono apparsi su importanti riviste e volumi miscellanei internazionali. Ha curato, tra gli altri, i volumi *Tracce di una tradizione sommersa. I primi testi lirici italiani tra poesia e musica* (2005, con M.S. Lannutti), *Igor Stravinsky: Sounds and Gestures of Modernism* (2014); *Composition and Improvisation in Fifteenth-Century Music / Composizione e improvvisazione nella musica del Quattrocento* (2017, con J.E. Cumming e J. Rodin), *Music Criticims: 1950–2000* (2019, con Roberto Illiano).

Massimiliano Locanto is associate professor in History of Music at the University of Salerno, Italy. His research interests and publications are in two main areas: the history of medieval chant and twentieth-century music, with a strong focus on the music of Igor Stravinsky (to which he devoted his book *Stravinsky and the Musical Body. Creative Process and Meaning*, 2021) and on the relationship between music theories, compositional techniques, and scientific thought. His articles appeared in important international journals and miscellaneous books. He edited, among others, the volumes *Tracce di una tradizione sommersa. I primi testi lirici italiani tra poesia e musica* (2005, with M.S. Lannutti), *Igor Stravinsky: Sounds and Gestures of Modernism* (2014); *Composition and Improvisation in Fifteenth-Century Music / Composizione e improvvisazione nella musica del Quattrocento* (2017, with J.E. Cumming e J. Rodin), *Music Criticims: 1950–2000* (2019, with Roberto Illiano).

Andrea Malvano è professore associato in musicologia presso il Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici dell'Università di Torino, dove è presidente del Corso di laurea in Cinema, Arti della scena, Musica e Media (CAM). Diplomato in Pianoforte e laureato in Lettere Moderne, ha conseguito un Diplôme d'études approfondies (DEA) in musicologia all'Université «Lumière» di Lione e un Dottorato di ricerca presso le Università di Torino e Milano. Autore di monografie su Debussy (Edt, Albisani), Schumann (Edt) e sull'archivio storico dell'Orchestra Rai (Rai Eri), ha pubblicato saggi per editori e riviste internazionali («Cahiers Debussy», «Revue Musicale OICRM», «Studi Verdiani», Routledge, Brepols). È stato coordinatore nazionale di un progetto di ricerca FIRB sull'Archivio Storico dell'Orchestra Rai, ed è coordinatore locale di un PRIN sulla formazione del pubblico musicale nel Novecento. La sua monografia su recezione e analisi nella musica di Debussy è stata recentemente tradotta in francese (*Debussy, un nouvel art de l'écoute*, Paris, Van Dieren 2022).

Andrea Malvano is associate professor in musicology at the University of Turin, where he is also Coordinator of the master degree in Cinema, Performing Arts, Music and Media. He graduated in Letters at the University of Turin and in Piano at the Conservatory of Genoa. He holds a Diplôme d'études approfondies (DEA) in musicology at the University «Lumière» in Lyon and a PhD at the Universities of Turin and Milan. He has published monographs about Debussy (Edt, Albisani), Schumann (Edt) and the Rai Music Archive (Rai Eri). He is author of articles on international journals and publishers («Cahiers Debussy», «Revue musicale OICRM», «Studi Verdiani», Routledge, Brepols). He was national coordinator of research projects about Rai Orchestras and about the audience education in XXth Century. His monograph about reception and analysis in Debussy's music was recently translated in Franch (*Debussy, un nouvel art de l'écoute*, Paris, Van Dieren 2022).