EVOCATIONS FROM CHILDHOOD: STYLISTIC INFLUENCES AND MUSICAL QUOTATIONS IN CLAUDE DEBUSSY’S CHILDREN’S CORNER

AND LA BOÎTE À JOUJOUX

Hsing-Yin Ko, M.B., M.M.

Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2011

APPROVED:

Vladimir Viardo, Major Professor
Elvia Puccinelli, Minor Professor
Frank Heidlberger, Committee Member
Jesse Eschbach, Chair of the Division of Keyboard Studies
Lynn Eustis, Director of Graduate Studies in the College of Music
James Scott, Dean of College of Music
James D. Meernik, Acting Dean of the Toulouse Graduate School

Claude Debussy is considered one of the most influential figures of the late 19th century and early 20th centuries. Among the various works that he wrote for the piano, *Children’s Corner* and *La Boîte à joujoux* distinguish themselves as being evocative of childhood. However, compared to more substantial works like *Pelléas et Mélisande* or *La Mer*, his children’s piano music has been underrated and seldom performed.

*Children’s Corner* and *La Boîte à joujoux* were influenced by a series of eclectic sources, including jazz, novel “views” from Russian composers, and traditional musical elements such as folk songs and Eastern music. The study examines several stylistic parallels found in these two pieces and is followed by a discussion of Debussy’s use of musical quotations and allusions, important elements used by the composer to achieve what could be dubbed as a unique “children’s wonderland.”
Copyright 2011

by

Hsing-Yin Ko
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES ................................................................................................ iv

Chapters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE OF RESEARCH</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. COMPOSITIONAL BACKGROUND</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.1 Debussy as a Child</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.2 Debussy as a Father</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.3 Musical Background of <em>Children’s Corner</em></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.4 Musical Background of <em>La Boîte à joujoux</em></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. STYLISTIC INFLUENCES</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.1 American Minstrelsy</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2 Wagnerian Influence</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3 Influences from Russian Composers</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.1 Mussorgsky</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.2 Stravinsky</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. MUSICAL QUOTATIONS</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example 1: *Petite Cantate sur grand papier pour le jour de sa fête*, mm.19-22 ...........................................7

Example 2: *Children’s Corner*—“Golliwogg’s Cakewalk,” mm.10-13 ......................................................15

Example 3: *The Little Nigar*, mm.1-5 ..........................................................................................................16

Example 4: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.9 mm.15-22 ..............................................................16

Example 5: *La Boîte à joujoux*: Original illustration by André Hellé .......................................................17

Example 6: Wagner: *Tristan und Isolde*, (Piano reduction), mm.1-3 .........................................................20

Example 7: *Children’s Corner*—“Golliwogg’s Cakewalk,” mm.61-67 .....................................................21

Example 8: *La Boîte à joujoux*: Autograph Sketch of “Doll” (Durand edition) ........................................23

Example 9: *La Boîte à joujoux*: Autograph Sketch of “Punchinello” (Durand edition) .........................23

Example 10: *La Boîte à joujoux*: Autograph Sketch of “Toy Soldier” (Durand edition) .......................23

Example 11: *La Boîte à joujoux*: Autograph Sketch of “Flower” (Durand edition) ................................24

Example 12: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.14 mm.1-6 ...............................................................24

Example 13: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.10 mm.9-22 .............................................................25

Example 14: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.3 mm.1-10 ..............................................................25

Example 15: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.45 mm.14-18 .........................................................26

Example 16: Mussorgsky *Nursery*—“Doll’s Cradle Song,” mm.1-2 .........................................................28

Example 17: *Children’s Corner*—“Jimbo’s Lullaby,” mm.19-23 ..............................................................29

Example 18: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.7 mm.6-8 & p.8 m.1 ..............................................29

Example 19: Stravinsky *Le Sacre du printemps*—“The Adoration of the Earth, Introduction (four hand piano version), mm.1-8 .................................................................31
Example 20: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.1 .................................................................32
Example 21: Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (Piano reduction), p.6 mm. 1-10 ...........................................33
Example 22: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.47 mm.7-16 ................................................33
Example 23: *Children’s Corner* – “Jimbo’s Lullaby,” mm. 10-14 ....................................................35
Example 24: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.2 mm.15-16 ................................................35
Example 25: Clementi *Gradus ad Parnassum No.24*, mm.1-4 ........................................................36
Example 26: *Children’s Corner*—“Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum,” mm.1-5 .................................36
Example 27: Gounod’s *Faust*—“Soldier’s Chorus” (Piano reduction) ...........................................37
Example 28: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.28 mm.14-18 .............................................37
Example 29: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.29 mm.3-6 ..................................................37
Example 30: Mendelssohn—“Wedding March” (Piano reduction), mm.6-11 .................................38
Example 31: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.4 mm.6-10 ..................................................38
Example 32: Liszt *Mephisto Waltz No.1*, mm.67-82 .................................................................39
Example 33: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.5 mm.13-26 ................................................39
CHAPTER I
SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Among the various works that Claude Debussy (1862-1918) wrote for the piano, two pieces distinguish themselves as being evocative of childhood: *Children’s Corner* and *La Boîte à joujoux* (The Toy Box). These compositions portray a tender and simple side of the composer’s personality, combining his unique compositional voice, artistry, and distinct technical resources. Despite the singular place these works hold in Debussy’s output, scholarly research has been as scarce as their appearance in concert halls. Respected Debussy researcher Edward Lockspeiser states:

…I do not wish to overrate the importance of Debussy’s children’s music, but one can hardly doubt that the discipline of perception which its creation imposed upon the composer authorized the more richly introspective poetry of the twenty-four preludes with their quest of visions as yet unrecorded in music and their endless musing on so many imaginative and symbolical associations.¹

Other scholars, like musicologist Robert Schmitz, refer particularly to *Children’s Corner* by stating that Debussy makes no concessions in the use of complex harmonic textures. This factor appears to stem directly from the composer’s realization that children have an immense sensitivity for perceiving unusual colors in music.²

Since Debussy’s lifetime, a considerable amount of research has been devoted to his musical aesthetics, compositional techniques, influences, and symbolic associations. Daniel Chennevière published a book in 1913³ which classified Debussy’s music into three periods: the first, up to and including *Pelléas et Mélisande*, dominated by Symbolism with a tinge of

---

Impressionism; the second, marked by a “naturism” culminating in *Ibérie* (1908); [...] in the third period the composer’s art became “idealist” and “essentially melodic, tinged with an Attic simplicity and clarity” which reached its climax in *Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien* (1911).⁴

In addition, Ladislas Fabian looked upon the years 1904-1913 as the period of “simplified melodic style.”⁵ Based on the date of composition of the two works⁶ in question, it seems fit to utilize the term “simplicity” when describing these compositions. As art for art’s sake, music for music itself, Debussy’s children’s music⁷ can be described as simply being an expression of love for his daughter.

There are several stylistic parallels and similarities found in *Children’s Corner* and *La Boîte à joujoux*. The composition of both works was influenced by a series of eclectic sources, including jazz, the music of Richard Wagner (1813-1883), novel “views” from Russian composers, and traditional musical elements such as folk songs and Eastern music. This study substantiates these commendations by means of 1) a thorough investigation of several stylistic parallels found in Debussy’s children’s music and 2) a discussion of Debussy’s innovative yet uncharacteristic use of musical quotations and allusions, important elements used by the composer to achieve what could be dubbed as a unique “children’s wonderland.”

The purpose of this treatise is to provide a comparative and comprehensive study of stylistic influences and compositional practice as related to these two pieces. Moreover, a clear

---


⁵ Ibid., 57-58.

⁶ Children’s Corner was composed between 1906-1908; *La Boîte à joujoux* was completed in 1913.

⁷ While Edward Lockspeiser and the author of this study refer to *Children’s Corner* and *La Boîte à joujoux* as “children’s music,” it is imperative not to confuse this label. The previous designation is specifically meant to illustrate that these two compositions are reminiscent of childhood. This music was not created with the primary purpose of entertaining youngsters. The considerable technical and interpretative demands posed by these works are also indicative that Debussy did not intend for children to perform these compositions.
understanding of Debussy’s creative process and inspirational sources will hopefully spark a renewed interest and appreciation of *Children’s Corner* and *La Boîte à joujoux*. 
CHAPTER II

COMPOSITIONAL BACKGROUND

This chapter presents an overall discussion of the compositional background of both *Children’s Corner* and *La Boîte à joujoux*. In addition to providing relevant biographical information, Debussy’s underlying principles and intent for writing these pieces is examined, as they relate to two fundamental family roles played in his life: Debussy as a child, and Debussy as a father. Debussy’s many letters, interviews and critiques (in addition to consequent academic research) provide significant insight to the composer’s true nature, becoming invaluable sources to study his music.

II.1 Debussy as a Child

Achille-Claude Debussy was born in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France, on August 22, 1862. According to family statements, there were no signs of musical or artistic talent exhibited by any of Debussy’s ancestors; in fact, his parents, Manuel-Achille Debussy and Victorine Manoury, seemed rather disinterested in their children’s education.\(^8\) Debussy only began taking piano lessons when he was eight years old, possibly encouraged and supported by his aunt. It was not until 1873, when Debussy entered the Paris Conservatoire, that he received not only an intense musical training, but also a more well-rounded education. The early neglect shown by his parents, nonetheless, would prove to be a lifelong handicap for the composer.\(^9\)

Debussy never spoke much about his childhood; in fact, it appears he purposely refused to reveal details about it. Written original sources from this time period are practically non-existent,


particularly when dealing with the first five years of the composer’s life. In a letter to Durand, his publisher, dated March 24, 1908, Debussy unintentionally revealed a memory dating from when he was six years old:

I remember the railway in front of the house and the sea on the distant horizon, which sometimes gave the impression that the railway came out of the sea, or else went into it. And then there was the road to Antibes with so many roses that I’ve never in my life seen so many at the same time—the perfume along that road certainly qualified as “intoxicating.”10

Many musicologists have delved into the mysteries surrounding Debussy’s childhood. The following information might provide clues as to why Debussy concealed details about it.

There were five children in the Debussy household, of which Achille-Claude was the eldest. The relationship between Debussy and his father appears to have been a negative one, clearly exemplified by Debussy’s use of the expression le vieux galvandeux11 when referring to him. His mother, according to Marcel Dietshy, showed a “lack of maternal instinct,” further exhibited by her early entrusting of two of her children—Adèle and Alfred—to Debussy’s aunt.12 Debussy had witnessed this and was home alone until the age of five—the birth of Emmanuel in 186713 Debussy appears to have been the favorite child in the family. His parents clearly perceived that Debussy was the most gifted among their children, having high hopes for their eldest son’s success. Debussy’s relationship with his siblings and parents was not a close one, and this could

10 Nichols, Debussy Letters, 189.


“Two related meanings are associated with this expression: “un galvaudeux” is a loose-liver; “se galvauder” is to sully one’s name in shady business or to go to the bad.”

12 Ibid., 306.

13 The fourth child, Emmanuel was born in 1867; the fifth son, Eugène-Octave, was born in 1873, but died of meningitis at the young age of four.
explain why he kept silent about his childhood. For Debussy, childhood was supposed to be the most innocent and pure time of one’s life. These shortcomings carried on and would eventually affect Debussy’s relationship with his daughter, as well as his children’s music.

II.2 Debussy as a Father

On November 4, 1905, Debussy wrote to a friend: “several days ago I became the father of a little girl. The joy of it has overwhelmed me a bit and still frightens me.”\textsuperscript{14} The birth of Chouchou obviously brought to Debussy immense joy, although this was likely paired with the burdens of reality and the demanding implications of having a child. Emma Bardac gave birth to Claude-Emma Debussy on October 30, 1905. Her composite name was a combination of both her parents’ first names, meant to symbolize the fruit of their love. Debussy and Emma Bardac had both divorced their previous spouses and remarried in 1908. As will be later documented, their love affair was scandalous, and Debussy lost many of his close friends, with the few exceptions of Erik Satie (1866-1925) and Louis Laloy (1874-1944). Laloy, a musicologist and critic who was also Debussy’s biographer, nonetheless stood in defense of the composer and spoke of the arrival of Claude-Emma as “the fulfillment of one of Debussy’s most cherished hopes.”\textsuperscript{15}

In 1907, Debussy composed a small cantata titled \textit{Petite Cantate sur grand papier pour le jour de sa fete}, to celebrate Emma Bardac’s birthday on June 4. The piece is twenty-two bars in length, and is scored for “récitant,” (bass-baritone, to be sung by Debussy himself) their daughter Chouchou, a SATB chorus, bells, and piano accompaniment.\textsuperscript{16} Chouchou at the time was only


\textsuperscript{15} Lockspeiser, \textit{Debussy}, 91.

nineteen months old, and musicologist Robert Orledge suggests that “Emma, a talented amateur singer, may have helped with Chouchou’s part for the child’s amusement.”\(^{17}\) This piece attests not only to Debussy’s love for Emma and his daughter, but also glorifies the most cherished gift that Emma gave him— little Chouchou. In Ex.1, the choir sings “Gloire à Chouchou mère,” (Glorify Chouchou’s mother). This is followed by an operatic declamation from the baby herself, stating “that she is tired after all the excitement of the performance and is going to bed, […] with a mixture of a yawn and a ‘bonjour!’”\(^{18}\)

Example 1: *Petite Cantate sur grand papier pour le jour de sa fete*, mm.19-22\(^{19}\)

![Example 1: Petite Cantate sur grand papier pour le jour de sa fete, mm.19-22](image)

Much of Debussy’s music was inspired by his little daughter, and *Children’s Corner* and *La Boîte à joujoux* are perfect examples to substantiate this claim. *Children’s Corner* was dedicated to

---

\(^{17}\) Orledge, “Debussy’s Musical Gifts to Emma Bardac,” 548.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 547.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
Emma-Claude with the title: “To my beloved little Chouchou, with the tender excuse of her father for that which follows.” The piece vividly portrays the innocent heart of childhood, revealing an infant world, the product of Chouchou’s imagination. The following quotation from Robert Schimtz is characteristically evocative of Debussy’s love for his daughter:

When Chouchou was still very young, her father would bring her some delightful little toys. But then he would ponder over their real significance to the child; it was not merely toys he wanted to give Chouchou, but an incentive to Joy! And so, he conceived that she could really derive joy from the toys when induced to make little elephant walk and go to sleep, when […] so came the inspiration to write the finest music to complete the make-believe universe of his beloved Chouchou; a music that would inspire her to play, to imbue her playthings with joy and life; it was a real labor of love, binding his consummate skill, his orchestral wizardry, to the miniature music for his adored child…

Debussy died of cancer in 1918. One year later, Chouchou tragically passed away of diphtheria on July 14, 1919, at the age of fourteen.

II.3 Musical Background of Children’s Corner

Debussy composed Children’s Corner between 1906-1908 and La Boîte à joujoux between July and October of 1913. Both of these scores were a product of Debussy’s middle-late period, written after the success of Pelléas et Mélisande: “It was Pelléas which propelled the composer to the forefront, and drew his earlier works in its wake.” After Pelléas was finally staged in 1902, Debussy rose quickly to fame, setting the basis for the future engraving of his name in musical posterity. However, the upcoming scandal of his first marriage would trouble Debussy just when

---

20 Schmitz, The piano Works of Claude Debussy, 118.
21 Ibid., 118.
his compositional success was bringing him widespread public awareness.

Debussy had married Rosalie (Lily) Texier in 1899; she was a naïve and simple woman who “did not have real musical or intellectual competence.” When Debussy first met Emma in 1903, he was immediately attracted to her not only as a woman, but also as an artist. After a vain struggle, he left Lily for Emma in 1904. Lily became increasingly desperate and tried committing suicide. After severely wounding herself, Lily filed a divorce lawsuit, the litigation of which continued for a number of years, even after Debussy had died. This scandal obviously caused enormous stress in Debussy’s life, both socially and financially. As a result, in 1905, Debussy entrusted the rights of his compositions to publisher Durand. The following letter, written on September 19, 1904, described Debussy’s bitter mood:

My life during the last few months has been strange and bizarre, much more so than I could have wished […] I have been working, but not as I should have liked. Perhaps I was over-anxious or perhaps I was aiming too high. Whatever the cause, I have had many a fall, and have hurt myself so much that I have felt utterly exhausted for hours afterwards.25

Despite his troubles, Debussy’s romantic life with Emma certainly motivated him to move forward and restored his artistic creativity to a certain extent. In fact, beginning in 1904, he composed such masterpieces as Masques, L’Isle joyeuse, Images I & II, and most important of all, La Mer. Regarding the premiere of La Mer in 1905, Laloy wrote:

The work was awaited in Paris with impatience that was not kindly disposed. Prudish indignation had not yet been appeased and on all sides people were ready to make the artist pay dearly for the wrongs that were imputed to the man.26

As such, the piece was initially not well received. As Laloy mentioned, some critics

---

24 Ibid., 23.
25 Lockspeiser, Debussy, 88.
26 Ibid., 91.
appeared perturbed with Debussy’s ongoing marital scandal, and were not bothered to intertwine the private aspects of Debussy’s love-life with negative assessments of a professional nature. An example of this was Pierre Lalo’s ironic review, which concluded with the following phrase, “I neither hear, nor see, nor feel the sea.” Notwithstanding these types of criticisms, La Mer soon became one of Debussy’s most frequently performed pieces, and “the term ‘debussysme’ came into vogue, used both as a compliment and as a term of abuse.”

In the midst of all this Debussy found himself in “a world beyond reality,” and he soon began the composition of Children’s Corner. Dietschy described Children’s Corner as the fruit of Debussy and Emma’s unrestrained love: the birth of Chouchou Debussy. In order to accomplish the make-believe universe imagined by his daughter, Debussy put himself into the supposed mindset and soul of Chouchou’s toys and puppets. It is also assumed that he wrote the piece as an outlet to amuse himself and escape reality.

Children’s Corner is composed of six pieces: “Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum,” “Jimbo’s Lullaby,” “Serenade of the Doll,” “The Snow is Dancing,” “The Little Shepherd,” and “Golliwogg’s Cakewalk.” This is the only set in Debussy’s piano music that bears a title in the English language. Ann McKinley claims this was possibly due to “Anglomania,” since Debussy had traveled to London, where he read English novels and hired an English nanny for his daughter. Despite his novel proposal with the title, Debussy made some spelling and grammatical mistakes: “Jimbo’s Lullaby” should have been “Jumbo’s Lullaby,” and “Serenade of the Doll” should have been “Serenade to the Doll.” Children’s Corner was published by Durand in

---

27 Ibid., 91.
28 Lesure and Howat, “Debussy, Claude.”
29 Dietschy, preface to A Portrait, xii.
1908, with the exception of “Serenade of the Doll,” which had been published separately two years earlier, in 1906. The première was given by Harold Bauer in Paris on December 18, 1908. In a letter dated August 6, 1908 to Durand, Debussy expressed his concerns regarding the layout and colors of the covers in the published version of *Children’s Corner*:

He considered it vital that the red used for the cover should be orange-red—to try to surround the Golliwogg’s head in a halo of gold. A clear grey paper on which it will be snowing will make up the [rest of the] cover.31

II.4 Musical Background of *La Boîte à joujoux*

Originally, *La Boîte à joujoux* was an illustrated story by André Hellé, converted into a children’s ballet scenario in February 1913. Debussy committed to write music for it and envisioned it as a piano solo piece from the onset. It is a simple work depicting a triangular love story:

A toy soldier falls in love with a doll, but the doll had already given her heart to a lazy, quarrelsome puppet, named Punch. So then the soldiers and the puppets went into a great battle, in the course of which the poor little wooden soldier was badly wounded. Forsaken by nasty Punch, the doll took the solider in, nursed him back to health and loved him: they married, were happy and had many children. Frivolous Punch became a sheriff. And life went on in the toy box.32

Debussy’s aim while writing *La Boîte à joujoux* was to “achieve effects of striking and natural simplicity, to endow the puppets with an appropriately burlesque character.”33 Similarly to *Children’s Corner*, the piece was also composed with Chouchou in mind and with the purpose of entertaining her. After completing the composition of the first two tableaux, Debussy told Durand

33 Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 159.
that he needed to extract confidences from Chouchou’s old dolls, and was learning to play the
drum in preparation.\textsuperscript{34} He exercised his mind with Chouchou’s toys, but did not always succeed.
While he faced trouble with the third tableaux, he told Durand that “the soul of the doll is more
mysterious than even Maeterlinck imagines, and does not easily put up with the humbug which so
many human souls tolerate.”\textsuperscript{35} Debussy finally announced the completion of \textit{La Boîte à joujoux}
on October 30, 1913, and said “nothing remained but to find a theater.”\textsuperscript{36} However, the beginning
of World War I prevented the work from being performed during Debussy’s lifetime. The premiere
took place on December 10, 1919—five months after Chouchou’s death. Robert Orledge
appropriately stated: “what began as Debussy’s effort to amuse his beloved daughter ended almost
as her obituary.”\textsuperscript{37}

The ballet is composed of four separate tableaux: “Le Magasin de jouets” (Toy Store), “Le
Champ de bataille” (Battle Field), “La Bergerie à vendre” (The Sheep for Sale), and “Après
fortune paît” (Once Fortune has been Made). \textit{La Boîte à joujoux}, is usually performed as a whole
due to its extra-musical programme, further substantiated by Debussy’s use of the \textit{leitmotif}.
Debussy intended to perform the ballet with marionettes. In an interview for \textit{Comoedia}, he told
Maurice Montabré:

\begin{quote}
You see it is simplicity itself—even childish! But how do you put it over in the
theater—its natural simplicity, I mean? The characters must retain their angular
movements, their burlesque appearance as cardboard cut-outs, without which the work
would become meaningless. I cannot see how this project could possibly be put on at the
Opéra-Comique. But nothing is impossible, after all!\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34} Robert Orledge, “Another Look inside Debussy’s ‘Toybox,’” \textit{The Musical Times} Vol. 117, No.1606

\textsuperscript{35} Robert Orledge, \textit{Debussy and the Theatre} (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 178..

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 178.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 182.

\textsuperscript{38} Orledge, \textit{Debussy and the Theater}, 177.
Children’s Corner and La Boîte à joujoux not only convey the same type of musical intimacy, but also share a series of additional resemblances. For instance, the orchestrations of both works were completed by André Caplet, whom Debussy had praised as having the gift to conjure up an atmosphere. Moreover, as such, Debussy’s ability to level his state of mind with that of an innocent child was bound with the mature state exhibited in his compositional craft. Although, in an interview, Debussy called La Boîte à joujoux a “pantomime,” “a work to amuse children, nothing more,” the work’s characteristics synthesize the use of a series of interesting compositional techniques. Furthermore, these are indicative of the composer’s efforts to direct his focus towards ‘simplicity.’ Critics praised La Boîte à joujoux during its 1919 premiere in Paris. The Monde Musical hailed the little play as a masterpiece of French music, and Auguste Mangeot wrote:

What charming music, it is of to-day with its novel rhythm and its melodic patterns new to our ears; yet belongs to all time, through its lively feeling, its harmonious sense of measure and proportion, the discreetness with which it suggests without ever insisting, and the harmonious quality which it blended both with its laughter and its tears...
CHAPTER III

STYLISTIC INFLUENCES

Debussy’s stylistic influences have been of interest to musicologists and theorists alike. This subject matter has been amply explored and researched during the last century. Referring to this topic, Schmitz wrote:

About the influences which temporarily colored Debussy’s life, some of them passing briefly, some leaving traces, and again some deeply affecting (by adoption or reaction) his musical aesthetics and technique, much has been written, during his lifetime and in the years since.43

This treatise presents three stylistic influences that, while completely unrelated to each other, are featured extensively in both Children’s Corner and La Boîte à joujoux: American minstrelsy, Wagnerian influence, and that of Russian composers.

III.1 American Minstrelsy

Debussy wrote the following critique for the journal Gil Blas:

The king of American music is in town. By that I mean that M. J. P. Sousa and his band have come for a whole week to reveal us the beauty of American music as it is performed in the best society. One really has to be exceedingly gifted to conduct this music. M. Sousa beats time in circles or tosses an imaginary salad or sweeps away some invisible dust. Or else he catches a butterfly that has flown out of a bass tuba.44

It was John Phillip Sousa who brought ragtime to Europe at the Paris Exposition in 1900 and his influences would soon reveal in Debussy’s music.45 Although Debussy had first heard music from the “New World” in the 1890’s, artistic representations and historic portrayals of

43 Schmitz, The piano Works of Claude Debussy, 40.
American culture and its Negro heritage began surfacing in Europe around 1900. The earliest documented manifestations of such exposés appeared in fairs and boardwalks in the French resort of Deauville. One of the main characteristics of minstrel groups was their use of the cakewalk. As a musical form, this 19th century dance of African-American origin incorporated syncopation and a habanera-like rhythm into the regular march rhythm:

The last piece in *Children’s Corner*—“Golliwogg’s Cakewalk”—constantly features this rhythmic element. As shown in Ex.2, Debussy does not use this pattern as an accompaniment, but rather as the main component of the right hand’s melodic motive. The left hand, in turn, is simply vamping straight staccato eighth notes.

Example 2: *Children’s Corner*—“Golliwogg’s Cakewalk,” mm.10-13

In *La Boîte à joujoux*, Debussy borrowed his original tune “The Little Nigar” to picture the entrance of an English soldier. As Ann McKinley states, the imagery Debussy might have intended to portray was possibly revealed in a letter he wrote to Laloy during a trip to England in August 1905:

48 McKinley, *Debussy and American Minstrels*, 251.
I’ve just spent several days in London—rather dreary, except for the music of the grenadiers who went past everyday morning with their lively ‘bag-pipes’ and raucous little fifes. Their marches sound to me like a drunken cross between Scottish popular song, and the Kake-Walch.49

Example 3: *The Little Nigar*, mm.1-5

```
Allegro giusto

f très rythmé

f marcato

mf e dimin.
```

Example 4: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.9 mm.15-22

```
LE SOLDAT ANGLAIS
Mouvement de Marche modéré

pp lointain et raide

8ème bassi

sempre pp très exactement rythmé
```

“The Little Nigar” was originally commissioned in 1909 for a method book called *Methode de piano*, immediately following the successful premiere of “Golliwogg’s Cakewalk.”

---

Curiously, musicologists seldom mention this well-known, playful piece when discussing Debussy’s piano music. In “Le Soldat Anglais” (from “Le Magasin de jouets,” the first tableau), Debussy used the first fifteen measures of “The Little Nigar,” (Ex.3) but transposed them up a perfect fourth (Ex.4). Although in André Hellé’s original illustration there is a character introduced as “le Nègre” (Ex.5), this music is not related to him. Instead, “the music accompanying the entrance of a toy English soldier is reminiscent of ‘Golliwogg’s Cakewalk’ and appropriately, is a satire on the band music, heard by the composer in London, of the Grenadier Guards.”

The resulting images, however, differ completely from the original, primarily because of dynamic and expression marking changes in the first eight bars of the accompaniment. Before the cakewalk tune begins, Debussy added four measures of a pp accompanimental figure as an introduction, building up gradually to p, mf and finally f. The music seems to picture an English soldier approaching from a distance. Tension increases by way of the dynamics resulting in a

Example 5: *La Boîte à joujoux*: Original illustration by André Hellé

---

50 Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 159.
climax which represents the first appearance of Punchinello (also known as *Punch*\(^{51}\)), one of the main characters in the ballet.

### III.2 Wagnerian Influence

In 1903, Debussy replied to an inquiry on Germanic influences in music, initiated by the *Mercure de France*, and stated: “Wagner was—if one may express oneself with some of the grandiloquence that becomes him—a beautiful sunset that was mistaken for a dawn.”\(^{52}\) Debussy’s viewpoints on Wagner were complex, for they involved feelings of both adulation and rejection towards the great composer. Debussy studied Wagner’s music and recognized the incomparable skills of this German master: “There is no question of discussing Wagner’s genius here. It is a dynamic force whose effects have been all the more certain because they were prepared by the hand of a magician whom nothing daunted.”\(^{53}\) However, Wagner’s ideas on how to systematically create drama, as well as his compositional procedures, differed highly from what Debussy considered to be the true value of music: “I was Wagnerian to the point of forgetting the simplest principles of civility...”\(^{54}\)

Wagner’s influence fell upon the Paris of the 1880’s, creating a phenomenal uproar that dominated the entire world of literature and art. Wagner’s music became a matter of cult. A number of musicians, including Debussy, were deeply affected by Wagnerism.\(^{55}\) It is likely that Debussy’s first contact with Wagner’s music was during his student years at the Paris Conservatoire through

\(^{51}\) Punch is a character derived from the famous “Punch and Judy show” from British; it could be traced back to the 16\(^{th}\) century Italian character—Pulcinella.


\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) Vallas, *The Theories of Claude Debussy*, 113. “Debussy wrote for Gil Blas on April 6th, 1903”

\(^{55}\) Lockspeiser, Debussy, 37-38.
his headmaster, Albert Lavignac. The following article by Mlle. Marguerite Vasnier describes Debussy’s admiration for Wagner from an early age:

He [Debussy] was very unsociable and never hid his displeasure when my parents invited friends, for he did not often allow himself to be with strangers. If people dropped in and were fortunate enough to please him, he could be amiable and would play and sing Wagner or he would imitate or caricature some modern composer.56

In 1880, Mme. Von Meck introduced Debussy to Wagner in Venice. In a later journey to Vienna, Debussy heard Tristan and Isolde for the first time, subsequently devoting to it hours of passionate study. However, his enthusiasm did not last very long:

I do not feel tempted to imitate what I admire in Wagner. My conception of dramatic art is different, according to mine, music begins where speech fails. Music is intended to convey the inexpressible...57

Debussy argued that Wagner was less of an innovator than he was generally considered to be. His chief grievance against Wagner was a lack of passion—a disinterested love of music.58 As Vallas concluded in his book, “Debussy was above all a musician, whilst Wagner was above all a dramatist.”59

Debussy’s ambivalent attitude towards Wagner is revealed in his children’s music. In Children’s Corner, Wagner’s shadow appears in the last piece of the set, “Golliwogg’s Cakewalk.” Debussy presents a hilarious caricature which impertinently suggests the Prelude from Wagner’s Tristan (Ex. 7).60 Example 6 is a piano reduction of Tristan und Isolde’s opening phrase. The first chord, as part of the leitmotif related to Tristan, has become well-known as “Tristan’s chord.”

56 Lockspeiser, Debussy, 21.
57 Vallas, Claude Debussy, His life and Works, 84.
58 Vallas, The Theories of Claude Debussy, 129.
59 Ibid., 129.
60 Lockspeiser, Debussy, 154.
Wagner had the ability to create musical tension through the use of harmonic suspensions. From the beginning of the opera, dissonant chords are resolved into other dissonances. Chord-shifts fail to resolve all dissonances present, always preserving, or creating a new one.\(^{61}\)

From a more conservative perspective, Wagner’s new concepts did not follow standard traditional harmonic practices, and this interested Debussy. Years later, Schoenberg wrote:

One no longer expected preparation of Wagner’s dissonances or resolutions of Strauss’ discord; one was not disturbed by Debussy’s non-functional harmonies, or by harsh counterpoints of later composers.\(^{62}\)

On the other hand, intermixing drama with music was against Debussy’s artistic aesthetics. Instead, he was more keen on emphasizing clarity and conciseness, which he deemed essential to French music.\(^{63}\) Debussy wrote:

After some years of passionate pilgrimages to Bayreuth, I began to have doubts about the Wagnerian formula, or, rather, it seems to me that it was of use only in the particular case of Wagner’s genius. He was a great collector of formulae, and these he assembled within a framework that appears uniquely his own only because one is not well enough acquainted with music.\(^{64}\)

Example 6: Wagner: *Tristan und Isolde*, (Piano reduction), mm.1-3\(^{65}\)

---


63 François Lesure, *Debussy on music*, 74-75.

64 Ibid., 74.

Example 7: *Children’s Corner*—“Golliwogg’s Cakewalk,” mm.61-67

In this last instance, Debussy kept the original melodic line of the theme but accompanied it with a very simple harmony. Example 7-a is a satire on Wagner’s *Tristan* in which Debussy naively disrupted this famous theme with a humorous gesture. In Ex.7-b—two groups of three eighth-notes appear attached with grace notes and staccato markings over them. The “a tempo” marking abruptly interrupts *Tristan’s* theme; this is achieved by Debussy’s mocking indication to play slower and with great emotion—“Cédez, avec une grande emotion.” Debussy apparently intends to create an imagery in which even the most innocent minds of children cannot tolerate the German master’s unnatural, over-dramatic expression, and they make fun of it.

Wagner’s influence in *La Boîte à joujoux* can be mainly perceived by the featured use of the *leitmotif*—a recurring theme related with a particular character or idea. Debussy spoke ironically of the *leitmotif* in Wagner’s *Ring*, as being suggestive of “…a harmless lunatic who, on presenting his visiting-card, would declaim his name in song….Its too sumptuous greatness renders futile the legitimate desire to grasp its proportions.”

---

strove intensely to avoid Wagner’s influences, he was still affected by the Wagnerian cult. In *Pelléas et Mélisande*, he not only adapted the use of *leitmotifs* but also replicated “*Tristan*’s chord” on *Mélisande*’s words, “*je suis triste*.” Debussy complained to Ernest Chausson (1855-1899) as he scrapped his draft for *Pelléas*, “and worst of all, the ghost of old Klingsor, alias R. Wagner, kept appearing.”

Referring to *La Boîte à joujoux*, Lockspeiser stated, “*The Leitmotiv* technique, the Wagnerian associations of which were considered by Debussy to be so needlessly naive, is used with delicacy and humour to underline the parody of the three principal characters.” Three themes appear in this piece, each associated with one of the main roles in the ballet. These can be seen in the following examples, which are autograph sketches of each character: Ex. 8—Doll, Ex.9—Punchinello, and Ex.10—Toy Soldier. In addition, Debussy specifically gave the “flower”—the symbol of love—a character theme, surprisingly exemplified by a *fermata* over a rest with a *pp* in *diminuendo* (Ex.11). For this important image, Debussy even wrote to Hellé on July 19, 1913 and pleaded for him “to put the rose on the cover of the album in the centre. This rose has as much importance as any of the characters, and I even beg to include it amongst the characters.”

Musicologist José Eduardo Martins claims the significance of the rose is suggestive of Debussy reminiscing his secretive childhood, a revelation inferred from a specific quote in the 1908 letter which Debussy wrote to Durand (described previously in p.5 of this treatise).

---


68 Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 159.


70 Orledge, *Debussy and the theatre*, 126.

Example 8: *La Boîte à joujoux*: Autograph Sketch of “Doll” (Durand edition)

Example 9: *La Boîte à joujoux*: Autograph Sketch of “Punchinello” (Durand edition)

Example 10: *La Boîte à joujoux*: Autograph Sketch of “Toy Soldier” (Durand edition)
Unlike Wagner, Debussy’s use of the *leitmotif* relates more to musical allusions rather than labels. The appearances of his *leitmotifs* are closely attached to the character or a description of the character’s emotions. Debussy’s technical application of this compositional device results in a mediating fashion, where mere evocations of the characters are combined with the emergence of elements in connection with those characters, such as ideas, psychological experiences and dramatic emotions. As a result, the beautiful doll’s presence can be felt in the music with the appearance of the charming waltz she is always dancing (Ex.12). Punchinello—the doll’s initial lover—begins his theme as the harmony progresses to ear-splitting dissonant harmonic seconds, which in turn serve to characterize him as a wicked and unfriendly villain (Ex.13). In Ex.14, the Toy Soldier is associated with a trumpet-like theme, suggestive of a march.

Example 12: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.14 mm.1-6

---

As is customary in children’s stories, this ballet concludes with a happy ending—the doll settles with her soldier husband and has four children. However, Debussy lively painted the “doll’s ironic pathos”73 in the final tableau: twenty years later, the doll got considerably fatter and she no longer could dance, so she tried to sing. In Ex.15, Debussy added grace notes on the first and

73 Lockspeiser, Debussy, 159.
third beats, together with *tenuto* markings on the second and fourth beats. This appears to be sarcastically depicting the fat figure of the doll which can no longer dance and walks with heavy steps. The melody of the doll is transformed from legato eighth notes to staccato triplets, a musical jest to portray her cracked singing voice.

Example 15: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.45 mm.14-18

---

### III.3 Influences from Russian Composers

#### III.3.1 Mussorgsky

After a meeting with Debussy in 1891, Erik Satie remarked: “When I first met Debussy he was full of Mussorgsky and was very deliberately seeking a way that wasn’t very easy to find.”74 Debussy had been introduced to the score of Modest Mussorgsky’s (1839-1881) *Boris Godunov* by his friend Jules de Brayer as early as 1889; however, a full appreciation of *Boris* did not come until he heard a concert of Mussorgsky’s music performed by Pierre d’Alheim in 1896.75 According to Laloy, Debussy was “undeceived” after that: “He then endeavored to

---

74 Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 47.
75 Ibid., 49-50.
explain to Brayer that one could not admire at the same time two opposed forms of art. Being an ardent Wagnerian, this friend would hear nothing of it, and they parted.\textsuperscript{76}

In 1901, Debussy heard Mussorgsky’s \textit{Nursery}, a children’s song cycle for solo voice and piano accompaniment comprised of the following seven pieces: “Child and Nurse,” “In the corner,” “The Beetle,” “Doll’s Cradle Song,” “Going to Sleep,” “Murr the Cat,” and “A Ride on the Hobby-Horse.” He was deeply impressed by the work and hailed Mussorgsky as a genius. His admiration of this Russian master went so far as to claim that:

No one has ever appealed to the best that is in us in deeper or more tender accents. He is unique and will remain so, for his art is free from artifice or arid formula. Never was refined sensibility interpreted by such simple means. It is like the art of an inquisitive savage who discovers music at every step made by his emotions [...] Mussorgsky produced the effect of shuddering, restless shadows which close around us and fill the heart with anguish.\textsuperscript{77}

Debussy thought music should be spontaneous and natural. He also felt composers should not be necessarily bound to follow traditions in terms of compositional standards and rules. As such, Debussy concluded that he preferred music the way Mussorgsky felt it,\textsuperscript{78} an impression stemming from the fact that the Russian composer freed himself from “established forms” in his artistic creations.\textsuperscript{79} It is apparent that Mussorgsky’ \textit{Nursery} greatly influenced the creation of \textit{Children’s Corner}. Debussy discussed the dramatic occurrences in \textit{Nursery} by stating:

In \textit{Nursery} we have the prayer of a little girl before she goes to sleep. In it, (Mussorgsky) describes the gestures, the delicate scruples of a child’s soul, and even the delightful way little girls have of posing as grown-ups, all expressed in accents of ardent sincerity which are found nowhere else...\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{77} Vallas, \textit{The Theories of Claude Debussy}, 152.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 152-153.
Debussy warmly praised the “imagining fairy landscapes” created by this masterpiece, further emphasizing the fact that “little dramas are all written with the greatest simplicity...”

A comparison of Nursery and Children’s Corner shows that there are some resemblances between both works. Ex.16 is the opening of “Doll’s Cradle Song” from Nursery. In this piece, Mussorgsky establishes the pulse in the accompaniment by repeatedly using harmonic seconds, creating the feeling of a cradle rocking peacefully in the air. The nanny then starts to sing the lullaby and tell the child a bedtime story. Ex. 17 is derived from “Jimbo’s Lullaby” (Children’s Corner); the feeling evoked here is almost identical to the one perceived in the opening measure of “Doll’s Cradle Song.”

In La Boîte à joujoux, a similar setting is used to accompany an old Hindu chant which, according to Debussy, was still used every day to tame elephants (Ex.18). The elephant is brought under control and calmed down using a technique which subtly resembles the cradle movement from the lullaby.

Example 16: Mussorgsky Nursery—“Doll’s Cradle Song,” mm.1-2

---

81 Ibid.
82 A footnote by Debussy for La boîte à Joujoux, 7.
Example 17: *Children’s Corner*—“Jimbo’s Lullaby,” mm.19-23

![Example 17: Children’s Corner—“Jimbo’s Lullaby,” mm.19-23](image)

Example 18: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.7 mm.6-8 & p.8 m.1

![Example 18: La Boîte à joujoux (Durand edition), p.7 mm.6-8 & p.8 m.1](image)

In addition to *Nursery*, José Eduardo Martins assumes that Debussy may have either consciously or unconsciously thought of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* when composing *La Boîte à joujoux*. A number of similarities between both works are present,\(^{83}\) of which Martins offers the following two as evidence to substantiate his claims: 1) Both works were inspired when their authors were visually impacted by artwork, which could indicate they were composed mainly

---

for descriptive purposes. In *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Mussorgsky sketched an imaginary tour of an art collection alluding to the paintings of Viktor Hartmann, while *La Boîte à joujoux* was composed to depict André Hellé’s story and illustrations. 2) The use of *leitmotifs* was clearly employed by Debussy in *La Boîte à joujoux*, as has been amply documented. While not exactly in the same fashion, Mussorgsky’s treatment of the recurring theme in “Promenade” (*Pictures at an Exhibition*) can be regarded as a modified type of *leitmotif*.

### III.3.2 Stravinsky

Debussy greatly admired the work of Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), and was a friend of the talented Russian composer. Both Debussy and Stravinsky were commissioned at one point to write ballet music for Sergei Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes*. Stravinsky’s harmonic and rhythmic bravado would often shock audiences, and this adventurous composing style resulted in one of the most famous musical riots ever, during the première of *Le Sacre du printemps (The Rite of Spring)*, on May 29, 1913. That same year Debussy completed work on *La Boîte à joujoux*, and the influence of Stravinsky’s masterful ballet is evident in Debussy’s piano piece.

Before Stravinsky completed the full orchestral score of *Le Sacre du printemps*, he played the four-hand piano version with Debussy. Reflecting on this musical encounter, Debussy later wrote to Stravinsky:

> Our reading of *Le Sacre du printemps*, at Laloy’s house, is always present in my mind. It haunts me like a beautiful nightmare and I try, in vain, to reinvoke the terrific impression. That is why I wait for the stage version like a greedy child impatient for promised sweet. ⁸⁴

The “Prelude” of *La Boîte à joujoux* (Ex.20) is reminiscent of the opening from *Le Sacre

---

*du printemps* (Ex.19). The unaccompanied leading melodic motives in both works (marked as “a”) seem to portray a monologist telling a story. Both motives recur in cyclic motion, repeated with varying degrees of change. A second element of interest (marked as “b”), written in a higher range than the “a” motives, is introduced shortly afterwards in both pieces. In *Le Sacre du printemps*, Stravinsky employs a descending chromatic scale using perfect fourths. In the case of *La Boîte à joujoux*, Debussy maintains the downward motion but instead uses a full texture of chords in triads in both hands. Furthermore, the tempo markings of both examples are very similar. Instead of the “*poco accelerando*” indication found in *Le Sacre du printemps*, Debussy opts for the comparable instruction to play “*Un peu plus mouvementé.*”

Example 19: Stravinsky, *Le Sacre du printemps*—“The Adoration of the Earth,
On a letter to Diaghilev dated May 26, 1917, Debussy wrote: “Petrushka is definitely a masterpiece. They haven’t anything of the sort in Germany and never will have.”\(^8\) Hellé’s *La Boîte à joujoux* is often described as a children’s version of *Petrushka*—a story also featuring puppets that come to life. Thus, Orledge suggests this resemblance between both works might have prompted Debussy to readily accept the commission to compose the music to Hellé’s ballet.\(^8\)

Debussy wrote to Stravinsky on April 13, 1912:

> Thanks to you I’ve spent a lovely Easter holiday in the company of *Petrushka*, the terrible Moor and the delightful Ballerina. I imagine you too must have spent some incomparable moments with these three puppets…

The spirit bestowed by Stravinsky upon the puppets inspired not only Debussy, but also Chouchou. Debussy told the Russian composer in a letter written on Nov. 5, 1912, that “Chouchou has composed a fantasy on *Petrushka* which is enough to make a tiger roar.”\(^8\) A closer examination of both the final joyful polka dance from *La Boîte à joujoux* and the dance

\(^{85}\) Debussy, *Letters*, 327.

\(^{86}\) Orledge, *Debussy and the Theater*, 184.

\(^{87}\) Debussy, *Letters*, 256.

\(^{88}\) Ibid.
from *Petrushka*’s first tableau are indicative of the influence that Stravinsky exerted over Debussy (Ex.21 & Ex.22).  

Example 21: Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (Piano reduction), p.6 mm. 1-10

![Example 21](image)

Example 22: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.47 mm.7-16

![Example 22](image)

---

89 Orledge, Debussy and the Theater, 184.
CHAPTER IV
MUSICAL QUOTATIONS

This chapter focuses on the use of musical quotations, which Debussy cleverly reconstructed from material borrowed from other composers. This in turn allowed him to further develop his creative process and express himself in a charming and engaging manner. These quotations are generally good-humored, and their adaptations persuasively reflect the charm and sensitivity behind Debussy’s intellect. In 1914, Debussy stated in an interview for Comoedia that La Boîte à joujoux was based on “music that I have written for Christmas and New Year albums for children! […] These album pieces will be brought together and made into three tableaux.” Regardless of this assertion, Orledge claims that in fact no such albums existed; instead, he described La Boîte à joujoux as “a veritable Aladdin’s cave of snippets from popular songs, classical themes and references to Debussy’s own compositions.” Besides the previously mentioned allusions to Tristan’s theme, the quotation from Hindu chant, and Debussy’s self-borrowed tune from “The Little Nigar,” there are other musical quotations which the composer transformed and incorporated to form part of his “children’s wonderland.” A discussion and comparison of these with their original sources will enhance our understanding on how Debussy achieved the “endless musing with many imaginative and symbolical associations,” that Lockspeiser so aptly describes.

In “Jimbo’s Lullaby,” Debussy pictures Chouchou’s bedtime story with “Jimbo,” a small stuffed velvet elephant which was one of her favorite dolls. Debussy quoted the well-known French folksong “Dodo, fait dodo…” (Sleep, go to sleep), which, as its name suggests, is

90 Lockspeiser, Debussy, 159.
91 Orledge, Debussy and the theatre, 182.
92 Ibid.
commonly used as a children’s lullaby (Ex. 23). In order to create a dreamy atmosphere, the melody (Eb-Db-Eb-Eb-Db) is hidden within the hesitating whole step figures appearing on the second beat of each measure. In *La Boîte à joujoux*, Debussy again used this folksong melody to portray the sleeping time of the different dolls and puppets, this time using the pitches D-C-D-D-C (Ex. 24).

Example 23: *Children’s Corner* – “Jimbo’s Lullaby,” mm. 10-14

![Example 23: Children’s Corner – “Jimbo’s Lullaby,” mm. 10-14](image)

Example 24: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p. 2 mm. 15-16

![Example 24: La Boîte à joujoux (Durand edition), p. 2 mm. 15-16](image)

“*Gradus ad Parnassum*” was a title used by Muzio Clementi and Carl Czerny to name collections of instructional piano studies. Debussy borrowed the title for the opening piece of *Children’s Corner*, which he titled “Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum.” Debussy’s ironic allusion to these studies shows his irreverent attitude toward these types of purely ‘technical’ exercises. The

---

piece begins with a cascade of running sixteenth notes in a way similar to many of Clementi and Czerny’s etudes (Ex.25). However, Debussy soon turns this uninspired finger training into a lyrical melody (Ex.26). On August 15, 1908, Debussy wrote to his editor, Durand:

“Doctor Gradus as Parnassum” is a sort of hygienic and progressive gymnastic; it should therefore be played every morning, before breakfast, beginning at “modéré,” and winding up to “animé.” I hope that the clarity of this explanation will delight you.94

Example 25: Clementi Gradus ad Parnassum No.24, mm.1-4

Example 26: Children’s Corner—“Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum,” mm.1-5

Another instance of borrowing occurred with Charles Gounod’s (1818-1893) *Faust*, where Debussy quoted the “Soldier’s Chorus” (Ex.27) and used it in the second tableau of *La Boîte à joujoux*. This parody lively depicts the marching troop’s arrival for the upcoming battle (Ex.28 & 29). Although Debussy used a 4/4 meter instead of the 12/8 found in Gounod’s original setting, the feeling of “march” remains unchanged. The texture found in Debussy’s example is much lighter and more subtle, in addition to the fact that the dynamics are kept within a very soft range (pp with crescendo). This probably relates to the idea that louder sounds would be too aggressive for the innocent minds of children.

Example 27: Gounod’s *Faust*—“Soldier’s Chorus” (Piano reduction)

Example 28: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.28 mm.14-18

Example 29: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.29 mm.3-6
The melody of Felix Mendelssohn’s (1809-1847) famous “Wedding March” from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* appears in the end of the third tableaux in *La Boîte à joujoux* to announce the marriage of the Toy Soldier and the beautiful doll (Ex.30). Instead of the majestic and celebratory feeling found in Mendelssohn’s original score, Debussy transformed it into a somehow humorous presentation, which seems more appropriate for this instance. In *La Boîte à joujoux*, this wedding tune lacks the original strength and support of a harmonic progression; the accompaniment of the left hand is simply alternating the pitches G and A in straight staccato eighth notes (Ex.31). With a single stroke, Debussy immediately provides the image of a couple marching during the wedding in a childish way.

Example 30: Mendelssohn—“Wedding March” (Piano reduction), mm.6-11

Example 31: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.4 mm.6-10

After hearing Franz Liszt (1811-1886) and Giovanni Sgambati (1841-1914) play Camille Saint-Saens’ (1835-1921) *Variations for Two Pianos on a Theme of Beethoven*, Debussy praised the performance as the greatest musical treat of his life.\(^{95}\) He undoubtedly respected Liszt as a pianist and composer, and the Hungarian virtuoso’s presence is felt in the first tableau

\(^{95}\) Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 29
of *La Boîte à joujoux*: a parody of his *Mephisto Waltz No. 1* lively transforms into an image suggestive of the busy life inside the toy-box. The leaping staccato gestures combined with rests provide feelings of unease and instability. In Liszt’s example, the leaping occurs when intervals of fourths move in a chromatically ascending motion (Ex.32). In *La Boîte à joujoux* however, the intervals are fifths (Ex.33). As shown in both examples, the repetition (marked as “b”) of the original phrase (marked as “a”) is doubled and written an octave higher.

Example 32: Liszt *Mephisto Waltz No.1*, mm.67-82

Example 33: *La Boîte à joujoux* (Durand edition), p.5 mm.13-26
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Debussy’s music for children provides performers and scholars with an excellent opportunity to delve deeper into the composer’s “fantasy world.” Debussy achieves a simple approach in these works through the satirical use of certain compositional techniques, as well as the naive portrayal of musical quotations. The latter itself represents an opportune homage to the achievements of several great composers. Furthermore, Debussy’s colorful writing possesses a thin texture and an innocent, spontaneous quality which stylistically embraces the genre to perfection. It is the author’s hope that this discussion of stylistic influences and compositional practices will validate the fundamental place that *Children’s Corner* and *La Boîte a joujoux* hold in Debussy’s oeuvre.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books and Dissertations


Articles in Periodicals and Dictionary


Scores


Discography