

## Cathedrale engloutie de Claude Debussy

The work La Cathedrale Engloutie (1910) is the tenth prelude composed by Claude Debussy for piano, out of a total compendium of 23 preludes published for this instrument. Each one of these preludes is dedicated to a different object, so that on a metaphorical level this work emulates the sound of church bells, the reason for the title. It was published in 1910, which places the work in its late period, characterised by the abandonment of the tone scale in the search. Since Debussy has a wide repertoire of compositions dedicated to the piano, his knowledge and experience result in scores that are pianistically virtuoso, yet technically feasible. The work reflects his style, based on the use of modal and pentatonic scales, and whose development is based not so much on thematic units but on the motivic development of intervalllic or rhythmic sequences. So his style has been commonly called Impressionist, a term often associated with the painting of Manet and Cez anne, art in which it refers to the play of light, shadow, and blurred colours to suggest forms.

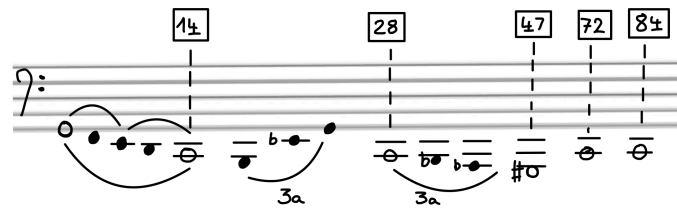
Beginning with the tonal center of the work, it seems to be located in C. Observing the diagram below, we can see that most of the piece is centred on modal scales of C (mixolydian or ionian), adding to it the fact that the climax of the piece (bar 28) and the ending are centred on that note.

You may find the following scales:

SCALE	BAR
G pentatonic	Bar 1
F lydian	Bar 3
E pentatonic	Bar 5
E lydian	Bar 7
<b>C ionian</b>	<b>Bar 14</b>
B pentatonic	Bar 16
E b major	Bar 19
<b>C ionian</b>	<b>Bar 22</b>
<b>C mixolydian</b>	<b>Bar 33</b>
G# aeolian	Bar 47
<b>C j3nico</b>	<b>Bar 72</b>
<b>C mixolydian</b>	<b>Bar 77</b>
<b>C ionian</b>	<b>Bar 83</b>

Debussy makes use of pedals to emphasise the tonal center, being the fact that without this weight, due to the melodic notes, there would often be ambivalence when interpreting one scale or another. Looking closely at the bass line, we can see the use of median relationships to

move to new notes/between new tonal centers. Simplifying the bass line in the following scheme...



...we can observe the mediantic jumps between the structural notes of the bass.

At a structural level, the structure can be divided into five sections, which also correspond to changes in tonal centers.

A. Introduction	B. Climax	C. Mediantic center	D. Rythmic variation	E. CODA
Bar 1-22	Bar 28-46	Bar 47-71	Bar 72-83	Bar 84-89
Main theme appears with different centers than C	Climax of the piece de pieza, centred in C	Centred in aeolian G#, wich would be Ab, in other words, it is a mediant from C	Centred in C, it is por un cambio de acompañamiento rítmico	Centred in C

So the structure is solidified with the use of different tonal centers.

The generating motif or minimum thematic unit of the work (in the picture, marked as *motivo A*) is an interval jump that appears in the second beat of each measure. These three notes as a motive appear every few bars in the piece, either in the accompaniment or in the main melody: ascending first a second, then a forth, wich equals correspond to a pitch class of 0, 2 and 5 or 0, 2 and 7 if the last interval is a forth.



The motif appears very frequently both in the accompaniment and at different points in the melody throughout the piece, such that the rhythmic pedal in section D (bar 72) features that same jump.



Another thematic element, if not even a metaphorical one, of the piece are the leaps of fifths or fourths, which undoubtedly allude to the sound of the bells of the "submerged church" to which the piece is dedicated.

The theme resulting from the generating motif appears in its entirety at the beginning of section B and D, in bar 28 and bar 72, in both cases centred on C.



This pattern appears in several forms: ascending and descending, simple and with intervals of thirds or overlapping fourths and fifths.



In fact, it can be said that harmony, based on non-functional chords, is often formed through intervallic constructions of fourths, fifths or thirds, maintaining the same intervals on each note of the motif respecting the alterations of the modal scale, that is In other words: the effect of the modal scale predominates over the exact maintenance of the intervals (for example, a chord formed by thirds, the third is major or minor or the fifth is perfect or diminished, depends on the alteration that these notes have in the scale in which we are at this moment).

Apart from the use of modal or pentatonic scales and the use of overlapping intervals not associable to any conventional harmony on a motivic unit, at a stylistic level it is worth noting the use of pedals to emphasise the scale at all times and the use of acute registers and bass ends of the instrument to guarantee greater sound richness. The contrast between open and closed range can in fact be considered another element of motivic development of the piece, going from moments of two octaves of maximum range or others with the lowest and highest notes of the piano being heard simultaneously.

To embark on this analysis also other essential musical parameters, although in this work they are not very important for the development or style of the work, it is written entirely in a ternary rhythm,  $3/2$ , and with two exceptions in *ff* in bars 28 and 61 written in dynamics *pp*.