

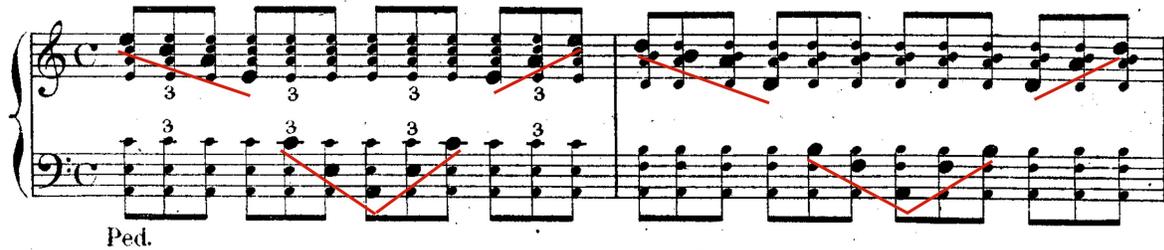
MPKS 472b Written Assignment 2

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Saint-Saëns, 6 Études, Op.52

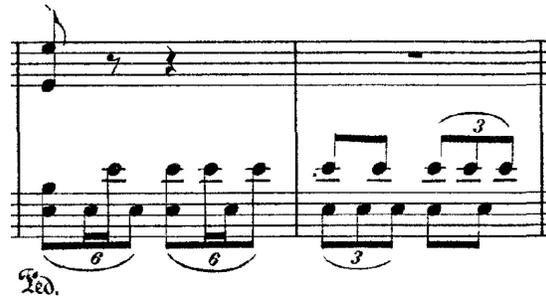
One of the most unique features in Saint-Saëns' Études is presented in No.2, *Pour l'indépendance des doigts*, translated literally to "for the independence of fingers". The piece consists of repeating chords, but the melody constantly travels "up and down", switching between two hands and cycling through all six different voices. Given the huge span of the chords, this étude undoubtedly tests the one's finger control and voicing ability to its utmost. Equally interesting is No.4, *Étude de rythme*. The entire piece consists of 3:2 polyrhythm; on top of that, the hands constantly switch roles. The piece is in $\frac{2}{4}$; in the beginning, the first quarter note of each measure is played by RH's 2 vs. LH's 3 and the second quarter note reverses this, i.e., RH's 3 vs. LH's 2. As the piece unfolds, more challenges appear, as the polyrhythm is required to be done by one hand at some places, for example figure 3 below.



An excerpt from *Pour l'indépendance des doigts*



Two-hand 3:2 in *Étude de rythme*



Single-hand 3:2 in *Étude de rythme*

As for the second sub-question, yes! In my opinion, Saint-Saëns successfully integrates characteristics of traditional études with his own, and then he also innovates by expressing these pieces in various formats. For example, one can clearly tell that the ending of No.3's prelude resembles that of Chopin's étude Op.25 No.12, and it is also surprising

that he chose to compose a *classic* fugue for No.5 and a Waltz as No.6 to conclude the set. Overall, I believe these are very interesting — and relatively technically demanding — études and they should not be overlooked.

Debussy, Études

The overall style of Debussy's études is somewhat different from Chopin's. Besides a freer tempo, the most notable difference is how Debussy usually incorporates multiple textures into one single étude. In all of Chopin's études, with the exception of Op.10 No.3, the entire piece follows a specific texture — for example, if it begins with the RH playing sixteen notes and arpeggios (e.g. Op.10 No.1/8), then the RH plays sixteenth arpeggios throughout the piece. Debussy, on the contrary, follows this rule *only* for VI, *pour les huit doigts* (for the eight fingers) and VII, *pour les degrés chromatiques* (for chromatic degrees).

In addition to the difference mentioned above, I will now briefly discuss the similarities and difference between the pieces mentioned in the prompt:

- (1) III, *pour les tierces* (for thirds). One can immediately tell that the overall tempo is far slower than Chopin's Op.25, No.6. Another notable difference is that Debussy did not write a full passage of never-ending sixteenths. Instead, he sometimes gives the melody to RH by writing longer notes that need to be held while other fingers continue the thirds:

Two excerpts from II. *Pour les tierces*

However, there are also similarities between the two. For example, given that Debussy dedicated these études to Chopin, it is reasonable to assume that the following similarities between Debussy (left) and Chopin (right) is no coincidence; it is more likely that Debussy is deliberately imitating Chopin's technique on rotation of wrist when playing thirds with 35-12 fingering here.

Musical score for Debussy's 'pour les sixtes'. The score is in two staves, piano and bass clef. It features a complex texture with many sixths. Dynamics include *f* and *dim.*

Debussy

Musical score for Chopin's Op.25 No.9. The score is in two staves, piano and bass clef. It features a complex texture with many sixths. Dynamics include *leggierissimo*. There are markings for *aw.* and ***.

Chopin

- (2) IV, *pour les sixtes* (for sixths). I immediately wanted to compare it with Chopin's Op.25 No.9, and similarities indeed exist. Chopin's étude consists entirely of chordal notes, and a significant portion of Debussy's also employ the same pattern. In particular, the pedal notes also appear in both pieces:

Musical score for Debussy's 'pour les sixtes' showing pedal notes. The score is in two staves, piano and bass clef. It features a complex texture with many sixths. Dynamics include *p*. Markings include *Rubato* and *Poco rit. -//*.

Debussy

Musical score for Chopin's Op.25 No.9 showing pedal notes. The score is in two staves, piano and bass clef. It features a complex texture with many sixths. Dynamics include *molto legato* and *mezza voce*. Markings include *Vivace. M.M. ♩ = 69.*, *aw.*, and ***.

Chopin

It is also reasonable to draw connection to Chopin's *trois nouvelles études* No.2 in $A\flat$ major. Because of the multi-texture of Debussy's études, *pour les sixtes* also features multiple legato and slurs which correspond more to *nouvelles étude* No.2.

- (3) V, *pour les octaves* (for octaves). This one is drastically different from both Chopin's Op.25 No.9 (butterfly) and No.10. Its tempo is much less fixed and again the texture changes throughout the piece. I assume the most technically challenging place to be the following, where difficulty of RH jumping is further increased by the 3 against 2 from the LH, not to mention one has to start it relatively soft.

Musical score for Debussy's 'pour les octaves' showing a technically challenging passage. The score is in two staves, piano and bass clef. It features a complex texture with many octaves. Dynamics include *mf*, *cresc.*, *molto*, and *f*. Markings include *Accelerando poco a poco*.

- (4) VII, *pour les degrés chromatiques* (for chromatic degrees). This one may refer to Chopin's Op.10 No.2, but the fact that these are merely single notes makes the entire piece much easier than Chopin's chromatic étude.

Ravel, *Gaspard de la Nuit*

- (1) In *Ondine*, Ravel captures the fantastical nature of Ondine by various textures. He makes extensive use of repeating three-note chords, arpeggios, and leaps to mimic the flowing and shimmering effect of water. See the three examples below:

The image shows three measures of musical notation for the piece 'Ondine'. The first measure is marked 'Lent' and 'ppp' (pianissimo), featuring a repeating three-note chord in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The second measure is also marked 'ppp' and shows a similar texture with a different chord. The third measure continues the texture with a different chord. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a 4/4 time signature.

Ravel also deliberately creates dissonance to depict the eerie nature of this story. One example is when the piece reaches a climax and a **ff** for the first time. Ravel is probably depicting how Ondine “wept some tears, uttered a burst of laughter, and vanished” after the getting rejected:

The image shows a musical score for the climax of 'Ondine'. It is marked 'Un peu plus lent' (a little slower) and 'ff' (fortissimo). The score features a complex texture with many dissonant intervals and leaps in both the treble and bass staves. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a 4/4 time signature. A fermata is placed over the final notes of both hands.

Climax of *Ondine*; note the accidentals, leaps, and motions in both hands

- (2) The most distinguishing characteristic of *Le Gibet* is the B \flat ostinato, which imitates “the bell that tolls from the walls of a city, under the horizon” and creates an uncomfortably lonely atmosphere.
- (3) In *Scarbo*, Ravel tries to depict the anxiousness of the narrator, who is haunted by *Scarbo*, a mischievous dwarf whose tricks terrify the narrator during midnight. Ravel uses a significant amount of repeated notes, a technique that is also seen in similar pieces by other composers, for example Schubert’s *Erlkönig*. In addition to what Schubert had done, for example, Ravel uses E on the RH against the repeated E \flat on the LH, thereby adding up to the tension. Such dissonance can be spotted at various places.

Modéré

pp

sourdine

très fondu, en trémolo

Red.

Beginning of *Scarbo*

Ravel also combines dissonant double-note chromatic scales with an accelerating tempo to render the fear of the narrator. Below is an excerpt near the ending; due to limited space I have omitted 10 similar measures between the two lines, during which Ravel (or the editor) wrote *en accélérant* and then *toujours en accélérant* (always accelerating).

ppp

11 23 11 23 11 23

3

[More lines . . .]

Toujours en accélérant

p

11 23 11 23

Poulenc, *Soirées des Nazelles*

I will have to resort to Google Translate for the English translation, but there are several translations that I do not quite understand.

- (I) *Le comble de la distinction*, “the height of distinction”. Instead of treating this “variation” as a description of some particular personality, I tend to believe that this describes more of Poulenc’s greeting his friends in a casual, humorous manner (as opposed to a grand, formal welcome).
- (II) *Le cœur sur la main*, “the heart on hand”. This is a warmer, more formal welcome once the guests have arrived.
- (III) *La désinvolture et la discrétion*, “the casualness and discretion”. Self-explanatory title.

- (IV) *La suite dans les idées*, “the continuation in the ideas”. I prefer the word “contemplation” and prefer to think of this “variation” as the description of an introverted guest’s whimsical ideas.
- (V) *Le charme enjôleur*, “the seductive charm”. Self-explanatory.
- (VI) *Le contentement de soi*, “self-satisfaction”. The fast tempo, strong beats, and especially the low octaves vividly depict a prideful figure.
- (VII) *Le goût du malheur*, “the taste of misfortune”. Tranquil yet melancholy.
- (VIII) *L’alerte vieillesse*, “the old age alert”. This piece is *très rapide et bien sec*, “very fast and dry”. I would instead change the title to something like “old but flexible”.

Messiaen, *Catalogue des Oiseaux*

It managed to hold my interest at first, but then gradually my interest faded away... Indeed, I am intrigued intrigued by Messiaen’s attempts to imitate the birds. For example, he tries to bring in voices of multiple birds by creating different textures, and he does a successful job creating an aggregation of various birds. However, the lack of tonality makes this 15-minute-long piece less interesting. In contrast, I prefer Saint-Saëns’ *le coucou au fond des bois* in *le carnaval des animaux*, also a piece depicting birds.

Turina, *Sanlúcar de Barrameda*

Indeed, this sonata is filled with cyclic return. Two of the themes that appear most frequently are a soft, expressive, long slur and a more rhythmic theme possibly imitating timpani [?]. They correspond to the following two lines. I marked the first one as * (more of a transition) and the second as the C-segment of the first movement.

A musical score snippet for Turina's *Sanlúcar de Barrameda*. It shows a piano (p) expressive theme with a long slur. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is characterized by a long, flowing line with a slur, and the bass line provides harmonic support with sustained chords.

A musical score snippet for Turina's *Sanlúcar de Barrameda*, marked *Andantino*. The tempo is *pp como un rumor* (pianissimo like a rumor). The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is characterized by a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, and the bass line provides harmonic support with sustained chords.

I will now briefly outline the structure of the four movements, where red and violet words refer to the reappearance of a theme from a previous movement.

Movement & Structure	Breakdown (the score does not provide measures; please click for YouTube video with timestamp instead)				
<p><i>En la torre del castillo</i></p> <p>Rondo, [AB]-[AC]-[AB]</p> <p>The reappearance of * here may be treated as a coda</p> 	<p>A</p> 	<p>transition*</p> 	<p>B</p> 	<p>transition*</p> 	<p>A</p> 
	<p>C</p> 	<p>C with transition*</p> 	<p>A (octaves)</p> 	<p>B (octaves)</p> 	<p>transition* (arpeggios)</p> 
<p><i>Siluetas de la calzada</i></p> <p>Rondo, [AB]-[AC]-[AB]</p>	<p>A</p> 	<p>B</p> 	<p>A</p> 	<p>chordal transition</p> 	<p>C from 1st mvt</p> 
	<p>Tonal and textural variant of transition*</p> 	<p>more chordal transition</p> 	<p>A (grand recap)</p> 	<p>B</p> 	
<p><i>La playa</i></p> <p>Ternary form, [Intro]-A-B-A</p>	<p>Intro</p> 	<p>A</p> 	<p>transition* on LH</p> 	<p>C from 1st mvt</p> 	<p>A</p> 
<p><i>Los pescadores en Bajo de Guía</i> on next page</p>					

<p><i>Los pescadores en Bajo de Guía</i> Rondo, [AB]-[AC]-[A] Coda at end</p> 	<p>A</p> 	<p>B from 1st mvt</p> 	<p>transition* LH arpeggio</p> 	<p>A</p> 
	<p>C</p> 	<p>A from 3rd mvt Chordal texture</p> 	<p>A</p> 	<p>transition* LH arpeggio</p> 