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FOREWORD

The French, as a nation, have a long history involving the dance. Dancing has been immensely popular with all classes of French society and a feature of the great entertainments at the royal courts, including that of Louis XIV, who was very partial to the dance and whose court ballet was admired by all of the civilized world.

Debussy inherited this French preoccupation with the dance and wrote dances and dance-influenced music throughout his career. Dance influence is present from his earliest piano piece, *Danse bohémienne* (1880), to No. 12 of the *Etudes* (1915), "Pour les Accords" (For Chords). A quick glance at the titles of some of his piano works immediately reveals this influence: *Danse bohémienne*, *Menuet*, *Passepied*, *Danse*, *Valse romantique*, *Mazurka*, *Sarabande*, *The Snow is Dancing*, *Golliwogg's Cakewalk*, *Ballet*, *Danseuses de Delphes* (Dancers of Delphes), *Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses*, *La danse de Puck*, and *The Doll's Dance*. A closer look at the piano works discloses numerous other dances with different titles: *Soirée dans Grenade* (habañera), *Hommage à Rameau* (sarabande), *Le petit Nègre* (cakewalk), *La plus que lente* (valse), *Minstrels* (cakewalk), *La Puerta del Vino* (habañera), *General Lavine-Eccentric* (cakewalk), *Hommage à S. Pickwick, Esq. P.P.M.P.C.* (jig), and No. 4 of the *Six Epigraphes antiques* entitled "For the Dancer with Rattles."

Debussy's orchestral work *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* was used for a very successful ballet production by the famous Russian dancer Nijinsky. The *Dances* for harp and string orchestra includes two pieces, "Danse sacrée" and "Danse profane." His *Le Martyre de Saint-Sebastien* contains a "Danse extatique et Finale." The first movement of the *Images* (Pictures) for orchestra is subtitled "Gigues." *Khamma* is a ballet-pantomime in three scenes (Légende dansée). *Jeux* (Games, subtitled "Poème dansée"), currently performed as an orchestra piece, was originally written for the ballet, and became very famous as such. Many of Debussy's songs, as well as some of his chamber music, show strong dance influence. The Spanish composer Manuel de Falla said: "... the second movement of [Debussy's] String quartet, if only because of its texture, might well be one of the most beautiful Andalusian [a region in southern Spain] dances ever written."

This volume contains nine pieces that show Debussy's great interest in composing dances for the piano, his favorite instrument.

In the section "About the Pieces," I have provided some analysis of each work. But it is never a safe method to attempt to second-guess a composer as to how he went about the creation of a work. The worksheets, first drafts, and the notebooks of a composer are often of illusory aid in this regard, since they provide us only with that part of his working processes which he found necessary to write down. Most musical works, however, contain a center or idea, from which all its parts spring and to which they return as to a unifying principle. It is here that analysis can be of some help to performance: a grasp of this center or idea may very well make the difference between a fine performance and an inadequate one—but it should be added that the grasp may be unconscious, and the interpretation intuitive. While I have not tried to read Debussy's mind as it relates to the pieces in this collection, it is obvious that the dance is a springboard full of inspiration for him, and each of the pieces in this collection seems to have had a dance-influenced idea present at its inception. Together they provide a broad spectrum of Debussy's great interest in the dance and contain some of his most exciting and interesting music for the piano.

I have also included a discussion on how to perform *pianissimo* in Debussy's piano works—one of the most important performance problems in Debussy's piano music. This is comprised of a series of 12 steps that I have used in my own teaching for many years.

Debussy's Ideas on the Dance

Debussy's ideas on the dance were somewhat unique for his time and did not always coincide with those of his contemporaries. While watching a music-hall dance (ballet) at the Empire Music Hall in London in 1903, Debussy allowed his thoughts to wander on the nature of an ideal ballet. He felt that conventional ideas on choreography or mime were to be distrusted: "The action must never be defined except by the mysterious symbolism inherent in the movements of the dancer or the rhythm of her body." Emotional intensity should be conveyed in a purely physical manner: "Love or hate can be more effectively expressed in the agitated movements of a dancer's feet than by conventional gesture." Especially significant are Debussy's ideas on the scenery and lighting of the ballet: "A dreamy imprecision [l'imprécision rêveuse] is desirable with changing effects of lighting rather than clear-cut lines." These changing effects of lighting, recalling the methods of the Impressionist painters, were used to create effects by the well-known dancer Loïe Fuller, who, in May 1913, presented at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées choreographic versions of two movements from Debussy's symphonic triptych *Nocturnes*. In 1912 Serge Diaghilev, the Russian ballet entrepreneur, had himself planned to present a choreographic version of *Fêtes* (Festivals), the second movement of *Nocturnes*, but it did not materialize, possibly because the tendency toward the use of mime in the Russian Ballet, encouraged by Igor Stravinsky in his ballet *Petrouchka*, was beginning to underline a serious divergence between Debussy and Diaghilev. An idea of the ballet he wished to write was firmly established, however, in Debussy's mind, though, like several other of his most cherished projects, it was never realized. He confided to his friend, the painter Jacques-Emile Blanche, that his was a most revolutionary conception. "He spoke to me insistently," Blanche writes, "of a rather nebulous project and even begged me to supply him with a sketch for it. He imagined a cosmogonical [i. e., concerning the origin of the universe] drama without words or action in which the singers, consisting of a chorus and soloists who would be invisible, would utter onomatopoeic [the formation of a word by imitating the natural sound associated with the object or action involved] sounds while the stage would come to life by the play of light effects. The performers, forming part of the scenery, were to represent symbolical forms of clouds, of wind, and of the sea."

Debussy was also interested in producing a children's ballet, *La Boîte à Joujoux*, the scenario of which was devised by André Hellé, a painter who specialized in children's books and who later supplied the imaginative cover for Ravel's *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*. Hellé had come to an agreement for this ballet with Debussy in 1913, before the production of Debussy's dance poem *Jeux* (Games), and by October of the same year the piano score of the work was completed. The orchestral score, sketched out in view of a production by April of the following year, was put aside, however, during the war years. In November of 1917, when a production was again proposed, Debussy reported that the orchestral score was "nearing completion." It was in fact completed by André Caplet after Debussy's death, and first produced at the Théâtre de Vaudeville on December 10, 1919.

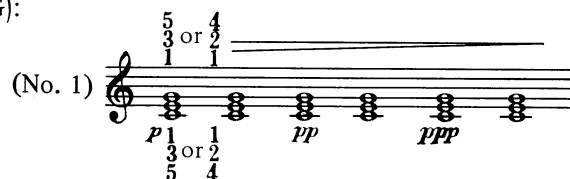
La Boîte à Joujoux was a charming but unpretentious work aspiring to none of the sophistication of Ravel's ballet. It is a companion piece to the earlier suite *Children's Corner* of which there are several reminiscences, notably of "Golliwogg's Cakewalk" in the music accompanying the entrance of an English soldier. Letters and other references make it clear, however, that *La Boîte à Joujoux*, which some writers have persisted in comparing to Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* in stature, was tossed off as a musical work for a children's party. It is merely a "pantomime," Debussy announced in 1914, "on music which I have written for Christmas and New Year albums for children—a work to amuse children, nothing more." Primarily intended for Debussy's daughter, Chouchou, the work has as its subject a love triangle among marionettes who inhabit a large, old-fashioned toy box. Music box effects are introduced, also folk songs, including "Il pleut bergère." Mendelssohn's Wedding March and themes from *Carmen* and *Faust* are used good humoredly, and there is a miniature battle scene in which the ammunition of the warring punchinellos consists of nothing more dangerous than dried peas. "I have tried to be clear and even amusing without any kind of prose," he told Durand, his publisher. At first he thought the little work should be given as a marionette play. Later he agreed with Hellé that the characters should be played and danced by children. (See discussion of *Danse de la Poupée* on page 7.)

Performing the Pieces in this Collection

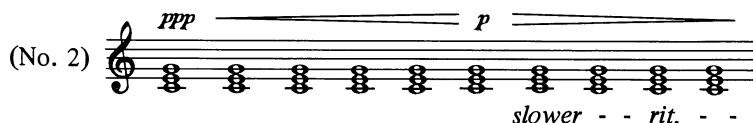
Debussy was very particular about a mellow, liquid tone production, so much so that when, on rare occasions, he played in public, he requested the top of the concert grand remain closed, to better produce that sonority. Successful production of this type of tone, so much a part of Debussy's music, lies in the ability to produce subtle dynamic shading—in particular, an effective *pianissimo*.

All of the pieces in this collection require the pianist to play *pianissimo*. This technique must be mastered to effectively perform Debussy's piano music. Use the following procedures to help develop this technique:

Depress both the *una corda* (left) and damper (right) pedals and begin playing the chord of C major (C-E-G):



Begin *piano*. Listen carefully and critically and be sure all *three* notes sound together. Also, be sure that the three have exactly the same volume, so that none is heard louder than the others. Play more and more *pianissimo*. Then vary the series, playing more slowly in order to hear more carefully the vibrations produced:



Keep the fingertips in contact with the keys at all times, even between the playing of each chord. The fingers should have a certain flexible firmness, with no *stiffness*.

The cushions of the fingertips should be very *sensitive*, and through their "feel," you should almost be able to predict the tone quality that will occur when a key is depressed. This was one of Debussy's own principles:

Play with more sensitiveness in the fingertips. Play chords as if the keys were being attracted to your fingertips, and rose to your hand as to a magnet.

Using the same procedure, practice other three-note chords:

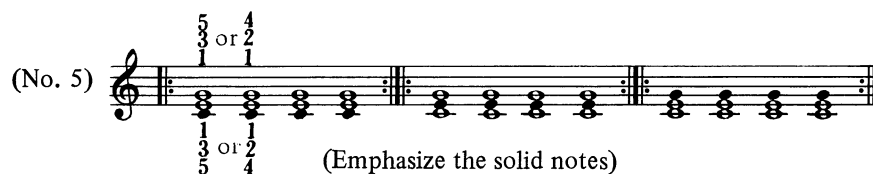


Also four- and five-note chords:



If a key is depressed gently and slowly, just before it reaches the bottom there is a slight resistance, which releases under continued finger pressure. This is called the "double escape" of the piano action. You can use this part of the action to great advantage in your *pianissimo* playing, by getting your tone from this lower part of the stroke. Be sure and keep your fingers in constant contact with the keys, and do not allow the keys to come all the way back up—only about halfway, keeping the two pedals depressed all the time.

For the next step, we need to practice bringing out in turn each single note of all the chords we previously practiced, since Debussy's music makes frequent use of this technique:



Continue with four-note chords:

(No. 6)

(Emphasize the solid notes in all examples on this page)

Then five-note chords:

(No. 7)

(Practice in the same way on all possible chords of three, four and five notes, in various keys and positions.)

Then work on a longer succession of the same chord, repeating it approximately 16 times, giving the crescendo on the single note a wider range, and using both pedals in the combination indicated in the next example:

(No. 8)

Damper pedal:

Una corda pedal: on - - - - - off - - - - - on - - - - - again

The crescendo from *pianissimo* to *forte* must be very gradual. The diminuendo must be treated in the same manner.

The best way to bring out a single note is to hold the finger, depressing the key a little *firmer* than the others. These must remain focused on producing the *pianissimo* tone, as described earlier. This procedure requires patience and careful, critical listening. Try again and again, until improvement is heard and satisfactory results are attained.

Another important procedure in tone coloring relates to playing octaves. It is generally a good idea to give distinct colorings to the two notes:

(No. 9)

The musical context will determine which note should be brought out.

When both hands play octaves together, this coloring can be more varied:

(No. 10)

(To be practiced on both white and black keys; on the black keys, use also the 4th finger instead of the 5th.)

Practice the following in all keys:

(No. 11)

Also changing the two middle notes:

(No. 12)

DANSE (Tarantelle styrienne)

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**About
the
Pieces**

This is one of Debussy's most brilliant dances; it was such a favorite of Maurice Ravel's that he arranged it for orchestra in 1923. Debussy originally published this piece under the title *Tarantelle styrienne* in 1890, but reissued it in 1903 under the title *Danse*. He had sufficient faith in it to recycle its thematic material in 1891, in the Verlaine song setting "*L'échelonnement des haies*." All the themes in *Danse* are germinally related to the opening left-hand melody. This 6/8 main theme is vitally rhythmic, with stress on the F-sharp, but also with the accent on the following chords, the fourth beat of the measure. In the prescribed *pp* dynamic level, these values can be conveyed by very slight force, but they must be present, and they appear frequently throughout the dance. For measures 29–43, however, the 6/8 has been turned into 3/4 by the phrase designs. During measures 58–69 and 77–86, use no pedal, but bring out, like a strum on a mandolin, the rolled chords. At measure 96 forward, be sure to maintain the 6/8 feeling. Stress the first beat in measure 107, with the E-flat much lighter, like a very high kick. In the *molto crescendo* (measures 124–131), increase also the articulation, and end with a good accent on the B (measure 131), perfectly in time. From measure 155 forward, the vanishing rhythm is implied beneath the sustained chords with their melodic upper voice, and becomes audible again at measure 163. From measure 179, melody takes precedence over rhythm. Use the pedal through such passages as that from measures 211 to 218, observing that the E in measure 215 moves to the following F-sharp and C-sharp in the left hand. The figure on which the transition (measures 239–270) is built is derived from measure 51. The editor suggests using pedal throughout the rebounding chords in measures 241–242, and so on.

Form. Rondo: **A B A C A**. **A** = measures 1–58; **B** = 58–131; **A** = 132–158; **C** = 159–270; **A** = 271 to the end. Source: editions by Choudens, 1891; Fromont, 1903. Duration: 4 minutes, 35 seconds.

DANSE BOHÉMIENNE (Bohemian Dance)

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This was Debussy's first piano piece. At the time he composed it he was employed as a private musician in the house of Madame Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky's patroness. Debussy visited her in Moscow in 1880 and 1881 (when she was there for a short stay) and traveled with her in Russia, Italy, and Switzerland. In a letter to Tchaikovsky, dated September 8, 1880, she wrote:

I would like to draw your attention to a short work by Debussy the pianist. The young man wants to devote himself entirely to composing; he writes really delightfully . . .

Tchaikovsky's reply, dated October 8, 1880, was:

It is a most charming piece, perhaps a little short . . .

The piece is based on a polka rhythm and has a mild gypsy character; Debussy may have been exposed to this music by gypsy singers in Moscow nightclubs. Its texture is similar to Tchaikovsky's salon style, but simpler. The polka is a Bohemian dance that originated around 1830 and became extremely popular throughout Europe and in America during the 19th century. It is in a moderately fast 2/4 meter.

Form. Ternary: **A** = measures 1–44; **B** = 45–70; **A** = 71–81; Coda = 82–92. The return of the **A** section, 71–81, is unduly abbreviated. Source: collection of Alexandre de Meck, Schott, 1932. Duration: 2 minutes, 15 seconds.

DANSE DE LA POUPÉE (The Doll's Dance) – Valse from *La Boîte à Joujoux*

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In 1913 Debussy composed *La Boîte à Joujoux*, a "ballet for children." He was no doubt inspired by a story which he heard from André Hellé, an illustrator of children's books. "Toy boxes are actually a sort of a city where puppets live like people – or the reverse is true, and cities are just toy boxes where people live like puppets. In one of these boxes – *La Boîte à Joujoux* – the dolls dance. A cardboard soldier sees one of them and falls in love with her who, however, is in love with a slothful, frivolous, and quarrelsome Pulcinello. The soldier and Pulcinello fight and the poor wooden soldier is badly wounded. Deserted by the nasty Pulcinello, the doll picks up the soldier, nurses him back to health, and falls in love with him. They get married, have lots of children, and live happily ever after. Pulcinello becomes a village constable and life goes right on in the toy box."

In writing the music Debussy endeavored, as he told his publisher, "to be clear and amusing without poses or pointless acrobatics." For his inspiration, Debussy wrote, he was trying to " . . . get some secrets out of Chouchou's old dolls." Chouchou, his seven-year-old daughter, was no longer a little girl, but it is clear from this statement that Debussy was trying to recapture some

of the spirit of his earlier *Children's Corner Suite*. There are several reminders of the suite in the ballet, most notable that of "Golliwogg's Cakewalk" in the music accompanying the entrance of an English soldier. The final result was a kind of Christmas album, with an array of figurines, each with its appropriate music. "The Doll's Dance" is one of the most charming pieces in the entire work. It begins in a style that recalls the "Serenade for the Doll" from the *Children's Corner Suite*. *La Boîte à Joujoux* was originally composed for the piano. After it was completed, Debussy made plans to orchestrate it but meanwhile couldn't resist an offer to go to Russia to conduct a number of concerts devoted to his music. André Caplet, his friend and pupil, was entrusted with the orchestration, a task which he fulfilled admirably. The orchestral version was not performed until December, 1919, over a year after Debussy's death. Despite the fact that Debussy was preparing to orchestrate this work, it is wholly successful as a work for piano like Mussorgski's "Pictures at an Exhibition," which was also originally written for the piano and later transcribed for orchestra (by Ravel).

Form: Ternary. Introduction = measures 1-12; A = 13-41; transition = 41-50; B = 51-72; A = 73-88; Coda = 89 to the end. Source: autograph: Bibliothèque nationale, MS. 976; Durand edition, 1913. Duration: 2 minutes.

GOLLIWOGG'S CAKEWALK from *Children's Corner Suite*

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This dance is one of the earliest examples of the influence of jazz on European art music. Golliwogg, a humorous little black doll, was created by Florence Upton in 1895; the name was possibly derived from "polliwog." Golliwogg was very popular in Europe at the time, as were American minstrel songs and ragtime. Golliwogg's hair stood up straight, and his grotesque and flexible positions, plus his large red smile and red eyes, made him an immediate hit with both children and adults.

Our gawky little ragtime friend is mainly diatonic (in the keys of E-flat major and G-flat major) but spiced with altered ninth and added sixth chords, crushed grace notes, chromatic passages, and a few touches of bitonality. An abundance of jazzy, syncopated harmony provides rhythmic dexterity to support Golliwogg's limber cakewalk and impish smile. The cakewalk originated around the 1840s among plantation slaves, and its syncopated 2/4 time anticipated ragtime rhythm. It originally was performed by slaves as a strutting promenade that mocked their owner's manners.

A mischievous allusion to a theme from the *Prélude* to Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* appears at measure 61. Debussy had much fun in contrasting this little theme to be performed "with great emotion," with the witty humor (also characteristic of *Minstrels*, No. 12 from the first book of *Préludes*) found in the rest of the piece. There is also a reminiscence of a Grenadier Guard's march heard in London, with bass drum and cymbals.

Humor is evoked through sudden stops, strong accents, extreme dynamic contrasts, and *staccato* touch. Golliwogg goes through a variety of jerky dance steps, grotesque stances, tumbles, picks himself up, and finally quickly departs.

The first section, A, (measures 1-46) should be steady, with no changes in tempo or rhythm. Be careful to observe the dynamic contrasts (*pp*, *p*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*) and especially the accents. Notice the two accents in measures 24 and 25: > and ^ . The second is stronger, and careful differentiation between the two will provide the strong rhythmic drive required in this section.

The second section, B, beginning at measure 26, is a little slower. Think of "brushing off the keys" when playing the right-hand part and the left-hand G-flat. Be sure the grace notes are played slightly before the beat. I like to translate the term "*avec une grande émotion*" as "exaggerated sentimentality", so play these four notes, A, F, E, E-flat, with a lot of schmalz. Begin the *a tempo* in measures 63, 67, 71, and 78, exactly on the beat, not later.

The third section, A¹, measures 92 to the end, requires treatment similar to that found in the first section. The main difference takes place at the final three measures, where the strongest rhythmic thrust and accents of the entire piece occur.

Golliwogg's Cakewalk requires a scintillating and humorous performance that will result only if Debussy's careful directions are strictly followed. Source: first edition, Fromont, 1905. Duration: 2 minutes, 40 seconds.

LE PETIT NÈGRE (Cakewalk)

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Debussy wrote this little dance piece in 1909 as a commission for Theodore Lack's *Methode de Piano*, a publication intended to supply the needs of young pianists. The title was in Debussy's own quaint English. It is written in the cakewalk dance style, and is much easier to play than

Golliwogg's Cakewalk, yet possesses similar features. It is, indeed, one of the very simplest of Debussy's compositions. The second theme (measures 21–35 and 54–68) is the whimsical music-hall favorite "Oh Where, Oh Where Has My Little Dog Gone?" or "Der Deitcher's Dog," by Septimus Winner. It gives a delightful impression of a little black boy ambling along the street. Debussy used the first 16 measures again in 1913 in his children's ballet *La Boîte à Joujoux*, but in the key of F and, strangely enough, with the title *Le soldat anglais* (The English Soldier). Be sure the first eighth note in measure 1 (and similar measures) is separated from the following sixteenth. *Portato* and *staccato* must be differentiated carefully. Form: Binary, plus repeat of A section at end. A = measures 1–21; B = 21–38; A = 39–54; B = 54–71; A = 72–87. Source: Theodore Lack, *Méthode élémentaire de piano*, Op. 269, Paris, A. Leduc, 1909. Duration: 1 minute, 20 seconds.

MAZURKA

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This work was composed in 1891. It shows Debussy still under the influence of his piano teacher, Madame Mauté de Fleurville, who had studied with Chopin. It is distantly related to Chopin in its rhythmic usage, accompaniment patterns, and modal tonality. The pianistic technique required is a development of that used by Chopin. The influence of Grieg appears in measures 54–110. In the forceful passages as well as in the tender, a velvety and distinctive character of playing is required. Accelerate from measure 135 to the end of the piece. This piece is effective as an encore and frequently leaves audiences wondering who composed it.

Form. Rondo: A B A¹ C A². A = measures 1–26; B = 27–45; A¹ = 46–53; C = 54–110; A² = 111–138. Source: J. Hamelle, 1904; Fromont, 1905. Duration: 2 minutes, 10 seconds.

MENUET from *Suite Bergamasque*

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Suite Bergamasque was composed in 1890, but not published until 1905. This menuet, which has more notes per beat than is usual in classical minuets, must be taken slowly enough so that the rhythm will exhibit real character. The stress at the beginning and often thereafter is on the second beat. Its atmosphere of dreamlike unreality is achieved through the use of delicate textures. Debussy replaces the older forms of Trio and Da Capo with a free sonata-allegro design. The A minor tonality is kept extremely fluid by use of modal features and the avoidance of more traditional chord progressions. Cramped right-hand figuration at the opening requires a light and fleet thumb. The contrast of phrasing and *staccato* chords must be very clear throughout. This dance flexes some unexpected muscle in its last two pages. Especially delightful is the ending, with its ghostly *glissando* that vanishes into the darkness. An archaic mood permeates the entire work.

Form. Sonata-allegro: Exposition = measures 1–42 (first subject = 1–21; transition = 22–25; second subject = 26–41); Development = 42–72; Recapitulation = 73–96 (measures 73–81 use sequences of the first subject; second subject = 82–96); Coda = 97 to the end. Source: Fromont edition, 1905. Duration: 3 minutes, 15 seconds.

PASSEPIED from *Suite Bergamasque*

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This charming dance comes closer to the style of the 17th- and 18th-century French keyboard composers (the *clavecinistes*) than any piano work Debussy composed up to this time. *Passepiéd* means, literally translated into English, "pass foot," and refers to one of the physical features of the dance itself. The time signature is 4/4, but the notation compellingly suggests that it should be 2/2. Steady, light left-hand figuration with its quick shifts provides a challenge, and is similar to that found in many of the early passepiés. Rhythmic dance episodes alternate with more lyric passages. Special phrase indications, such as those at measures 7–8, are vitally important. Slurred notes (measures 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, etc.) indicate how strongly Debussy reminds the pianist to give a full sense of the stress of appoggiaturas and their quiet resolutions. Dashes at such measures as 24, 39, 55, etc., do not indicate accents, but instead a distinct articulation necessary for the expressive rubato. The dashes and dots in section C (measures 59–75) indicate two levels of dynamics. The busy *non-legato* accompaniment, archaic modal usage (measures 1–6 are written in the Aeolian mode, and measures 147–156 are in the Dorian mode), and constant motion make this an extremely evocative dance, in which wistfulness and gaiety are mixed equally.

Form. Modified rondo, A B C D C¹ A¹ C¹ B¹ Coda. A = measures 1–38; B = 39–58; C = 59–75; D = 76–87; C¹ = 88–105; A¹ = 106–124; C¹ = 125–137; B¹ = 138–146; Coda = 147 to the end. Source: Fromont edition, 1905. Duration: 3 minutes, 30 seconds.

SARABANDE from *Pour le piano*

This dance is the second piece in the suite *Pour le piano* which dates from 1901. The *sarabande* was one of the forms that Debussy used to free himself from the artistic climate of the day. On the whole, he was against using classical forms or rules of any kind in his music, but when classical forms were used, they were shaped and molded into Debussy's own musical language. Originally, the *sarabande* was a dance of grave character that was popular with the European aristocracy in the 17th and 18th centuries. Its origin is indeterminable; however, some speculate that its name comes from the Spanish word, "zarabando" or the Persian "serebend." Most likely it was from Spain and the Spanish court and was probably derived from the Arab invasion of Spain. The *Sarabande* in Debussy's setting remains true to the original dance structure. It has the gravity and elegance associated with its title and retains the rhythmic character of the dance, which involves frequent emphasis on the second beat. The parallel harmonic motion is a characteristic of many of Debussy's later works. Arpeggiate only those chords so marked, and roll these as inconspicuously as possible. The rhythm must be very firm and stately, even though the dynamic curves of the melodic line are clearly shaded. Differentiate clearly the rhythms of the third beat in measures 1 and 5, and similar phrases. Source: Fromont edition, 1901. Duration: 4 minutes, 30 seconds.

About This Edition

The Dances of Debussy focuses on one important area of Claude Debussy's work for the piano. Debussy's creative and inventive use of the dance in his work displays the genius that elicited the statement that Igor Stravinsky made in 1971: Debussy "is in all senses the century's first musician." This collection contains some of the most colorful dance pieces ever conceived by Debussy: there are pieces ethereal like sea mollusks (*Sarabande*), glimmering like satin and silk (*Menuet*), phosphorescent like glow worms in the jungle (*Passepied*).

I have carefully selected reliable sources, and each is identified in the discussion of the work, in the section "About the Pieces."

All fingering, pedal indications, and material in parentheses is editorial. My approach to pedaling this music shows that I treat most runs, arpeggios and passages from a sonorous, harmonic, and/or "vibrating" viewpoint, never as displays of finger velocity; therefore, the damper pedal must be used frequently when playing such passages. They must never be performed in a "neat and crisp" fashion, but rather should be literally drowned into what might be called a "wave of tone." However, pedaling is a highly subjective procedure, and any pedal marks should be taken as only one person's suggestion. The instrument, room acoustics, and other criteria must be taken into consideration to achieve artistic pedaling.

Metronome marks are editorial unless indicated otherwise in footnotes. Debussy said of the metronome: "The metronome is good – for one measure," although he required his students to practice with it. Therefore, my metronome marks indicate only the general or overall tempo of a given composition or section of it and must not be adhered to rigorously from measure to measure.

The pieces in this performance-oriented collection are arranged alphabetically by title. They range in difficulty from intermediate (*Le petit Nègre*) to moderately advanced (the two pieces from *Suite Bergamasque* and *Danse*). This collection could be used for a recital entitled *The Dances of Debussy* – or individual pieces or varied combinations could be selected.

All of the introductory material in this collection is aimed at helping the pianist achieve an intelligent and more authentic performance style of this great composer's art.

*This edition is dedicated to Mrs. Solveig Madsen,
with admiration and appreciation.*

Maurice Hinson

For Further Reading

Norman Demuth. *Musical Trends in the Twentieth Century*. London: Rockliff, 1952.

Maurice Dumesnil. "Debussy's Principles in Pianoforte Playing." *Etude* 56:153 (March 1938).

Roy Howat. *Debussy in Proportion*. Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Edward Lockspeiser. *Debussy – His Life and Mind*. Two volumes. London: Cassell, 1965.

E. Robert Schmitz. *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*. New York: Dover, 1967.

Danse

(Tarantelle styrienne)

Allegretto (♩=144)

pp très léger (Very light)
una corda

The musical score is written for piano in 6/8 time, featuring a treble and bass staff. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' with a quarter note equal to 144 beats per minute. The dynamics start at 'pp' (pianissimo) with the instruction 'très léger (Very light)' and 'una corda'. The score is divided into five systems, each starting with a measure number in a box: 5, 10, 15, and 20. The first system (measures 1-4) features a complex right-hand melody with many beamed sixteenth notes and a simple left-hand accompaniment. The second system (measures 5-9) continues the right-hand melody with some changes in articulation and includes a triplet in the left hand. The third system (measures 10-14) introduces a 'p' (piano) dynamic and features more complex right-hand chords and a triplet in the left hand. The fourth system (measures 15-19) continues with similar complex right-hand figures and a triplet in the left hand. The fifth system (measures 20-24) concludes the piece with sustained right-hand chords and a final triplet in the left hand. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. Slurs are used to group notes in both hands throughout the piece.

Danse bohémienne

(Bohemian Dance)

Allegro (♩ = 100)

mf

f

mf

p poco marcato

L.H. L.H.

5

10

15

20