

A New Type of Musical Coherence

Module 17 of *Music: Under the Hood*

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Outline

- Nationalism in music
- Biography of Claude Debussy
- Analysis of *Clair de lune*

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Nationalism in Music

- Rise of ethnic consciousness and nationalism
 - Mid-to-late 19th century
 - Rooted in colonialism and development of the concept of “a culture.”
 - As described by new field of cultural anthropology.
 - Whence self-conscious “national culture.”
 - Remains with us today, for better or worse.



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Nationalism in Music

- Rise of ethnic consciousness and nationalism
 - Led to nationalistic styles in music
 - During late Romantic era
 - Often inspired by rejection of “development”
 - ...and rejection of German domination of music scene.



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Nationalism in Music

- Some nationalistic schools
 - Scandinavian
 - Edvard Grieg, Norway (1843-1907)
 - Carl Nielsen, Denmark (1865-1931)
 - Jan Sibelius, Finland (1865-1957)





Grieg Nielsen Sibelius

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Nationalism in Music

- Some nationalistic schools
 - French
 - Georges Bizet (1838-1875)
 - Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
 - Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
 - Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)



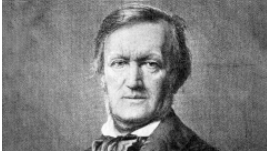


Bizet Saint-Saëns Ravel

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Nationalism in Music

- Some nationalistic schools
 - German
 - Richard Wagner (1838-1875)



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Nationalism in Music

- Some nationalistic schools
 - Russian
 - Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
 - The "Russian Five"
 - Mily Balakirev (1837-1910)
 - Cesár Cui (1835-1918)
 - Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)
 - Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)
 - Alexander Borodin (1833-1887)

They took an oath to avoid development in their music! →






Tchaikovsky
Borodin
Mussorgsky
Rimsky-Korsakov

Nationalism in Music

- Some nationalistic schools
 - British
 - Edward Elgar (1857-1934)
 - Gustav Holst (1874-1934)
 - Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)





Elgar
Holst
Vaughan Williams

Nationalism in Music

- Some nationalistic schools
 - Spanish
 - Issac Albeniz (1860-1909)
 - Manuel Da Falla (1876-1946)
 - Enrique Granados (1867-1916)





Albeniz
Da Falla
Granados

Nationalism in Music

- Some nationalistic schools
 - Czech/Slovak
 - Antonin Dvořák (1860-1909)
 - Hungarian
 - Franz (Ferenc) Liszt (1811-1886)




Dvořák
Liszt

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Nationalism in Music

- Some nationalistic schools
 - Romanian
 - Georges Enescu (1881-1955)
 - Brazilian
 - Heitor Villa-Lobos, Brazil (1887-1959)




Enescu
Villa-Lobos

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Biography

- **Claude Debussy, 1862-1918**
 - Born into poor French family
 - Aunt paid for piano lessons, age 7.
 - Entered Paris Conservatoire, age 10.
 - Studied composition, etc., 11 years
 - Sponsored by Nadezha von Meck, ages 18-20
 - She was wealthy patron of Tchaikovsky



Where Debussy was born

Biography

- **Career**
 - Received *Prix de Rome* composition prize, age 22
 - Included 4-year fellowship in Italy
 - Left after 2 years.
 - Went to Bayreuth, age 28
 - Strongly influenced by Wagner's *Tristan & Isolde*, which pushed boundaries of tonality.
 - But later ridiculed the music in *Golliwogg's Cakewalk*



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Biography

- **Career**
 - Musical milestones
 - *Suite Bergamasque*, ages 28-33.
 - *Prélude à l'après-midi d'une faune*, age 32.
 - *Pelléas et Mélisande*, opera, age 40, after 10 years of work
 - *La mer*, age 43
 - *Children's Corner Suite*, age 46, dedicated to his daughter.
 - *Préludes* for piano, first book, his best composition for piano, age 48



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Biography

- **Personal life**
 - Tumultuous
 - Various wives, mistresses
 - One of whom shot herself (but survived)
 - "He was a very, very strange man."
 - But was devoted to his daughter.



Debussy and daughter Claude-Emma

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Biography

- **Personal life**
 - Tumultuous
 - Various wives, mistresses
 - One of whom shot herself (but survived)
 - "He was a very, very strange man."
 - But was devoted to his daughter.
 - Died of cancer, age 55.
 - Daughter died a year later from diphtheria at age 14, due to doctor prescribing wrong medicine



Debussy and daughter Claude-Emma

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Biography

- **Approach to composition**
 - Perhaps not self-consciously nationalistic
 - But keenly interested in **symbolist** movement of French literature
 - Discussions with Stéphane Mallarmé about Wagner, Edgar Allen Poe
 - The purpose of art is "to depict not the thing but the effect it produces," according to Mallarmé.



Manet's portrait of Mallarmé

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Biography

- Approach to composition
 - Perhaps not self-consciously nationalistic
 - Often identified with French **impressionism** in art
 - Debussy himself **rejected** this identification
 - He liked J. M. W. Turner.
 - Unclear what symbolism or impressionism can mean in a **non-representational** medium.



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Biography

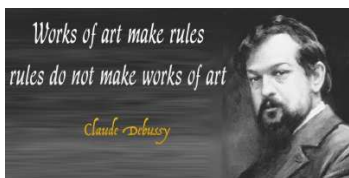
- Approach to composition
 - Always experimental, on the cutting edge
 - Departed somewhat from tonality.
 - Nonstandard scales
 - Modes, whole-tone
 - Parallel and “nonfunctional” harmonies.
 - [La fille aux cheveux de lin](#) (1:04)
 - We will see something similar from Jule Styne!
 - Late pieces are scarcely tonal.
 - [Préludes, book 2](#)



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Biography

- Approach to composition
 - Debussy's fundamental challenge
 - Find a new type of musical coherence
 - A new type of organization for an abstract medium



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Biography

- Legacy
 - Closed out the romantic era
 - Pushed tonal framework to the limit.
 - Even though Mahler, Bruckner were yet to come.
 - Innovative harmony influenced many
 - Stravinsky, Bartók, Boulez, Villa-Lobos, Ravel
 - Gershwin, Ellington, Strayhorn
 - Particular influence on jazz
 - 9th, 11th, 13th chords and other tensions.

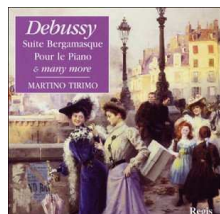
Great Ravel piece:
[Le tombeau de Couperin](#)



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Clair de Lune

- Movement 3 of *Suite Bergamasque*
 - 1890, substantially revised 1905.
 - *Bergamasque* = a type of country dance
 - *Clair de Lune* (Moonlight) is not a dance!
 - Debussy originally called it *Promenade sentimentale*.



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Clair de Lune

- Perhaps Debussy's best-known composition
 - Successfully blends traditional and novel techniques to achieve coherence.
 - Easy to follow because this early work relies primarily on traditional methods.



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Clair de Lune

- Traditional organizational techniques
 - Approximate sonata allegro form
 - Tonal center (D \flat major)
 - Unifying motif
 - Melody based on major triads
 - Some traditional V-I cadences
- Debussy's own techniques
 - Couplets
 - Replace I-V-I with I-III \flat -I

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Audio file

Approximate sonata allegro form:
A₁A₂BA₃+Coda

Melody consists of major triads.
V: A \flat E \flat C A \flat
I: A \flat F D \flat
A classic technique. Compare with [Mozart](#)

Classic V⁷-I cadence, then I-IV-I progression, relying on traditional expectations.

Clair de lune

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Couplets with approximate repetition

I-III \flat -I replaces I-V-I (pivot on A \flat)

Melodic & rhythmic motif

Couplets with almost literal repetition

Rhythmic motif

Melodic & rhythmic motif
Couplets with almost literal repetition

III \flat -I cadence, then remain in III \flat (spelled as E major).

E: vi⁷

Melodic & rhythmic motif

Couplets with approximate repetition

Couplets with almost literal repetition

Return to recapitulation with V⁷-I^{ma7} cadence. (but suspended 4th in V⁷, Tonic omitted from I^{ma7})

Fairly standard progression.

Move to coda with traditional V⁷-I⁷ cadence

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Couplets with approximate repetition

Coda

Couplets with almost literal repetition

I-IIIb-I replaces I-V-I

Conclude with **IIIb-I** cadence rather than **V-I**

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Couplets, an ancient technique used in Hebrew poetry (e.g. the *Psalms* of David) help the ear digest the music.

Psalm 8 (KJV)

[1] O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.

[2] Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

[3] When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

[4] What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

[5] For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

[6] Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:

[7] All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;

[8] The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

[9] O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

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[Audio file](#)

Replace **I-V-I** with **I-IIIb-I** by pivoting on **A^b**

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