

REVISITING DEBUSSY'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERNESS: DIFFERENCE, VIBRATIONS, AND THE OCCULT

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VICTOR SEGALEN, DEBUSSY'S FRIEND and a world traveller, once defined exoticism as the 'power to conceive Otherness'. Only those with 'strong individuality', he surmised, could experience something truly and impenetrably different from the Self, be it sexes, races, or the non-human. 'Existence is exalted through Difference and the Diverse', he suggests, that is, 'the foreign, unusual, unanticipated, surprising, mysterious, loving, superhuman, heroic, and divine, everything that is Other'.¹ As the Caribbean writer Edouard Glissant put it more recently, 'every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other'.²

For Debussy, experiencing Otherness, rather than merely imagining it, took acute form beginning in the summers of 1880 to 1882. As the piano accompanist of Tchaikovsky's patron Mme von Meck, the young French artist of humble origins toured Europe and spent considerable time at her mansions in Fiesole and a suburb of Moscow. Through musical tastes and practices, the line between one class and another, one nationality and another—Austrian, Italian, French, Russian—could collapse, or at least appear fluid for the composer, Otherness inhabiting a kind of liminal, in-between space characterized by sameness as well as difference. Did these experiences, about which the composer never commented, give rise to an understanding of identity as contingent, interrupting any assumptions he had grown up with? An openness to Otherness, not shackled by fear? A willingness to cross those lines, perhaps hoping to enrich the Self and thereby grow and change?

In 1884, the year Debussy competed for the Prix de Rome in composition, new values permeating the Academy led to the choice of a libretto set in the Middle East, *L'Enfant prodigue*. Ernest Reyer advised composers to seek inspiration therein, to 'leave for the Orient'. Reyer saw in biblical exoticism not an occasion to give listeners the thrill of an imagined adventure, followed by the self-satisfied pride of return to the comforts of home, but a way to liberate composers from Graeco-Roman formalism.³ With not only a modal melisma reminiscent of *Lakmé*, but also subtly shifting timbres and bar-length ostinati that create moments of stasis, the composer recognized that grappling musically with Otherness can loosen the grip of one's limitations, internal and external.

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¹ Victor Segalen was also a novelist and naval doctor who had worked in China and Polynesia. From his notebook (1908–18) published in his *Essai sur l'exotisme: Une esthétique du divers (notes)* (Saint-Clément-de-Rivière, 1978), 19, 22–5, 75, 82. All translations from the French, except where noted, are by the author.

² Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, 1997), 11.

³ Ernest Reyer, 'Revue musicale', *Journal des débats*, 1 June 1884.

Five years later at the 1889 Paris Exhibition, Debussy encountered the radical Otherness of non-Europeans. Much has been written about his fascination with Javanese music, in particular, that he went to hear ‘countless times’.⁴ Debussy was already familiar with pentatonic and whole-tone scales, having incorporated them into *L’Enfant prodigue* and *Printemps* (1887). What drew special interest were the *angklung*, the rhythmic complexities of the *gamelan*, and the effect these produced. In October, as the Exhibition was ending, Debussy began a *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra, inspired in part by Javanese sonorities, rhythms, and formal processes. Yet, he forbade its publication, subsequently deleting the Javanese elements he had previously assimilated. Perhaps, as Richard Mueller has proposed, the effect of Javanese music in it was too literal.⁵ Still, the Exhibition’s impact continued to resonate. Annegret Fauser has found ‘less obvious and often masked’ references to *gamelan* sounds in the Verlaine songs that followed (1891–2).⁶ What was the source of Debussy’s anxiety about this appropriation and how did this evolve thereafter?

Offering a new musical palette through unusual scales, rhythms, harmonies, timbres, and approaches to musical form, the Orient thus was not just a vague, passive pretext for Western escape, or an opportunity to foreground self-assertion and the ‘positional superiority’ of us versus them, as Edward Said has argued. Certainly, French music often presented aggressive marches representing imperialist desire, veiled dancing by girls seductive and mysterious, and passionate love duets defying irreconcilable differences, the conventions of Western dreaming pointing to a wide array of cultural referents. Oriental spectacles performed in France at the time were inevitably constructed around stereotypical binary oppositions, a replication of the dichotomy of Self–Other projected onto another culture. Echoing the flux of colonial politics, music could be used to fuel colonialist desire, to sell to the public the benefits of its imperialism, as well as to express resistance to it. French attitudes towards its Oriental ‘Other’ were complex and sometimes contradictory.⁷

Beyond colonial contexts, the more common term for signalling the Other was exoticism, embraced in music for its allure and its pleasures. In the case of Debussy, this could include ‘the West’, which Vladimir Jankélévitch calls ‘the great magical Other of the Debussyste world’. The characters in his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* come from ‘nowhere . . . a country that doesn’t exist’.⁸ Whereas many scholars today prefer related concepts such as ‘cultural hybridity’, ‘cultural transfer’, ‘syncretism’, or ‘transculturation’, and processes like ‘multicultural’, ‘intercultural’, or ‘transethnic’, Ralph Locke returns to exoticism to define it more broadly as ‘the process of evoking . . . a place, people, or social milieu that is not entirely imaginary and that differs profoundly from the home country or culture in attitudes, customs, and

⁴ Robert Godet, ‘En Marge de la marge’, *Revue musicale*, 62 (1 May 1926), 56–60. For recent scholarship and her response, see also Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair* (Rochester, NY, 2005), 198 n. 138, 195–206.

⁵ Richard Mueller, ‘Javanese Influence on Debussy’s *Fantaisie* and Beyond’, *19th-Century Music*, 10 (1986), 157–86. For other resemblances with *gamelan* music and scholarly debates on this, see Roy Howat, ‘Debussy and the Orient’, in Andrew Gerstle and Anthony Milner (eds.), *Recovering the Orient: Artists, Scholars, Appropriations* (Chur, Switzerland, 1994), 46–57. See also Mueller’s *Beauty and Innovation in La Machine Chinoise: Falla, Debussy, Ravel, Roussel* (Hillsdale, NY, 2018).

⁶ Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair*, 200–1.

⁷ See Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley, 2009), ch. 7: ‘Musical Hybridity and the Challenges of Colonialism’.

⁸ Vladimir Jankélévitch, Préface to Stefan Jarocinski, *Debussy: Impressionisme et symbolisme*, trans. from the Polish by Thérèse Douchy (Paris, 1966), 10.

morals . . . or is *perceived* as different'. If some music can be considered exotic because of 'specific musical signifiers of Otherness', that is, 'overt exoticism', while other music gives rise to 'submerged exoticism', he argues significantly that exoticism is not 'contained' in works, but rather arises through 'an interaction' between work and perceiver.⁹

Musical Orientalism and exoticism often involve 'appropriation', 'the action of taking something for one's own use, typically without permission' or, in French, 'the act of appropriating something to make it one's own property', sometimes through 'violence or a trick'.¹⁰ Other terms include adaptation, manipulation, accommodation, and sometimes fusion with Difference, thus ranging from taking what remains perceptible in its new context to incorporating something that loses its essence and becomes part of the Other.¹¹ Far less attention has been given to the contentious and ever-shifting discourse on assimilation in France, perhaps because of its political subtext, rooted in the challenge of coexistence in its colonies amid sometimes insurmountable differences. A process necessarily involving a certain acceptance of the Other's difference, it points to what some associated with French identity, beginning with the Romans' assimilation of the Gauls. Unlike the 'German spirit', 'self-contained and autonomous', as a reviewer of the French premiere of *Die Walküre* in 1893 put it, 'we, more sophisticated descendants of the Latins, have retained the greatest and brightest ability, that of assimilation'. This allows French listeners to 'create for themselves a German soul with which they obligingly follow the paths Wagner occasionally opens into the sublime'. Without this, Léon Kerst concurred, 'you are good as lost'.¹²

Republican monogenists, unlike monarchist polygenists, did not consider differences as categorically unbridgeable. Civilization involved not only the recognition of change that can occur in contact with the Other, but also the embrace of Difference as a way to increase the scope of one's identity. Like Rousseau, Republicans believed that civilized man is completed only through the Other. With their working-class sympathies, Republicans actively promoted the ideal of assimilation, hoping acclimatization through education would help diminish class differences and insure more

⁹ See Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge and New York, 2009), 3, 47, 48, 214, 229, and my review of it in *H-France Review*, 1, no. 134 (June 2011) (online at <https://www.h-france.net/voll11reviews/voll11no134Pasler.pdf>).

¹⁰ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/appropriation>; 'Action de s'approprier une chose, d'en faire sa propriété; appropriation par violence ou par ruse', and for 's'approprier': 'faire sien; s'attribuer la propriété de qqch', from Paul Robert, *Le Petit Robert* (Paris, 1973), 79.

¹¹ The language for discussing such techniques, and the techniques themselves, are tied to the political context in which they functioned. In *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993), Edward Said asserts: 'thinking about cultural exchange involves thinking about domination and forcible appropriation: someone loses, someone gains' (p. 195). In contrast, Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh refer to the distinctions used by Leonard Meyer in discussing Westerners' use of past music in the Western tradition: 'paraphrase, borrowing, allusion, simulation, and modeling, ranged along a spectrum between more and less freely modeled or imitative, and more and less formal-structural or thematic uses'. To include the 'different self-reflective, cultural, psychological, and affective properties' associated with such techniques, they argue that one should also theorize 'pastiche, parody, juxtaposition, and montage in music', these needing 'analysis in more than formal terms' (Born and Hesmondhalgh, 'Introduction: On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music', in their edited book, *Western Music and its Others* (Berkeley, 2000), 1–58 at 39–40). See also Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas* (Chicago, 1967), 208. Hesmondhalgh considers that 'musical otherness can be simple aesthetic difference . . . unburdened by ideological associations and the psychic dynamics of projection and splitting' (p. 41), though I would not see this as an option in the colonial period. The other essays in this volume address how techniques of musical appropriation functioned in a range of music over time and in various contexts. For the Orientalist aims and desire for distinction of two French composers in their musical responses to India just after 1900, see my 'Race, Orientalism, and Distinction in the Wake of the "Yellow Peril"', in this volume, pp. 86–118.

¹² Jean sans Terre, 'L'Ame allemande', *Petit Journal*, 16 May 1893, p. 1, and Léon Kerst, 'Paris au théâtre: Académie nationale de musique. Première représentation de *La Valkyrie*', *Petit Journal*, 13 May 1893.

social equality in France. With the pretence of redeeming the unwashed from ignorance, while seeking to enhance the power of one religion and the Western patriarchy at its centre, this preoccupation shaped colonial policy until 1900. Assimilation appeared as a way not only to have growth through accumulation (in cultural as well as political domain), but also to remove the shock of the unknown or little known, to deny its distinction as well as its capacity for resistance. Consequently, I would argue, assimilation, more than Orientalism and exoticism, defined the field of meaning for French encounters with Otherness in Belle Époque France, both more narrowly conceived and more complex in principle and practice, which resisted as much as it embraced.¹³ As hybridity became a lightning rod for the failures of assimilationist colonial policy from Africa to Indochina, not surprisingly Debussy might have felt ambivalent about it in his own music, at least until after 1900. At that point, a new colonial policy based on the principle of association, or gaining the cooperation and participation by native peoples in their own administration, education, and defence, gradually took its place and ‘primitive art’ was increasingly admired in its own terms.

To shed light on Debussy’s approaches to Otherness, I step back from his music. I support Fauser’s contention that non-Western music at the 1889 Exhibition saw its greatest impact in ‘the abstract rather than picturesque engagement of alterity’.¹⁴ However, I focus on lesser-known, more philosophical French domains in which his perspectives may have developed and found meaning. I examine possible influences from friends—Robert Godet, Edmond Bailly, Louis Laloy, and Victor Segalen—and show how their experiences and viewpoints found resonance with Debussy. I investigate the paradoxical nature of French *japonisme*, to which the composer was attracted but showed distance, and how complicated assimilation became for the French when practised by an Other, Japan. I build on recent interest in the Art Indépendent bookshop, owned by Bailly, as a place where Debussy made so many important contacts, especially with Symbolist writers, but turn instead to the Asian philosophies of sound, nature, and the occult that the composer would have encountered, especially through Bailly, and their possible impact on his thinking. What emerges is new appreciation of the importance Debussy ascribed to seeking ideas not ‘within oneself’, but ‘outside the self’, and what could be achieved not through dominating the Other, but using music to create relationships with it. Finally, bringing some musical specificity to contemporary fascination with Jankélévitch, I compare the language and ideas he employs in writing about Debussy’s music with those of Godet, Bailly, and Laloy. I close with how these writers’ insights set the stage for understanding the concept of music as ‘relations’ today, including the return to music as ‘vibrations’ in current discourse.

GODET AND THE JAVANESE SOUL

I first turn to two essays by Debussy’s lifelong friend Robert Godet. A Swiss Wagnerian with whom the composer travelled to Bayreuth in 1888 and 1889, Godet shared with

¹³ See discussion of exoticism and assimilation in Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, and its colonial ramifications in Pasler, ‘The Racial and Colonial Implications of Early French Music Ethnography, 1860s–1930s’, in Markus Mantere and Vesa Kurkela (eds.), *Critical Music Historiography: Probing Canons, Ideologies, and Institutions* (Farnham, 2015), 17–43 at 21–6.

¹⁴ Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair*, 206. I also agree with her suggestion that we ‘reinterpret his fascination with the spectacle of the *kampong javanais* and the *Théâtre Annamite* as an encounter with alterity, not as an agent of rupture as so often posited by the modernist construction of Debussy but as a form of appropriation firmly inscribed in the traditions of French music of the 1890s’ (p. 205).

Debussy the experience of visiting the Asian pavilions at the 1889 Paris Universal Exhibition, later documented in his memoirs. Was it their fascination with Wagner's operas that drew them to Annamite theatre where, as Godet later recounts, Debussy 'recognized the tetralogical formula, albeit with more gods and fewer sets'? A perception of something shared would have established a basis for connection. Or was it the 'the role of the evocative word in the Far East' that 'incited him to transpose this inspiration into his own autonomous music'? Or the dancing Bedayas, 'enveloped in mystery', to which 'Debussy plays implicit tribute', as Fauser has suggested in the character of Mélisande and her music?¹⁵ The notion of 'transposition' here refers to a concept popularized by Maurice Denis, substituting the 'reproduction' of reality in art, or, in this case, some aspect perceived as Other, for a 'transposition, a passionate equivalent' of it through an 'expressive synthesis, the symbol'.¹⁶ The 'mystery' in what Debussy perceived not only informed his respect for its Difference, but also his attraction, as in most exotic fantasies. Godet adds still another, more radical interpretation. He describes the musical relationship to Otherness in Debussy's music—be it the reality of the theatre, the poetry of the word, or the movements of the dance—as something that 'recomposed within himself . . . as he awaited the decisive sign to respond, finally, to the perfect image . . . that he had only to transcribe, as if dictated'.¹⁷ For Godet, writing in 1926, Debussy sought not to evoke the Other, but to possess it for his own purposes—an Orientalist endeavour. That this might involve transcription, 'as if dictated', alludes to the practice of transcribing non-Western music, such as Julien Tiersot did, taking down musical examples 'dictated by an indigenous musician' in the Javanese pavilion, in order to fix it for study and thereby to possess it.¹⁸ However, without the Orientalist intent of vaunting his superiority, Godet is implicitly suggesting that this process—resulting from listening to the Self in its engagement with the Other—produced music from an occult-like union with it.

In an earlier, little-known article from 1896 on the 'Javanese soul', Godet expands on what he had learned in a visit to Java he had hoped to share with Debussy.¹⁹ Above all, Godet sought to deepen his experience of Difference that started at the 1889 Exhibition. Eschewing Batavia (Jakarta) because its 'artificial and cosmopolitan environment' and its 'representatives from so many diverse races' might 'falsify his notions of the true indigenous life', he travelled to the 'heart of the yellow country', where he imagined he would find its soul, 'defiant and impenetrable'. Indeed, in the traditional princely capitals of central Java, Surakarta and Yogyakarta, he encountered the 'immense distance that separates the Western soul, its art, and its life conditions'. There, to his delight, he found that 'music reigns in Java'.²⁰ This search for the old and the traditional, which he associated with Javanese courts in the rural landscape, and this rejection of the modern and the cosmopolitan, which found expression in Jakarta, was widespread not only among French ethnographers, but also colonial administrators. Only in rural contexts could one encounter the 'authentic' and the

¹⁵ Godet, 'En Marge de la marge', 60, 61. See also Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair*, 203–4, and Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, i (Cambridge, 1962), 113–15.

¹⁶ Maurice Denis, *Du symbolisme au classicisme: Théories* (1912; Paris, 1964), 51, 119, 165.

¹⁷ Godet, 'En Marge de la marge', 55, 57, 59, 61.

¹⁸ Julien Tiersot, *Musiques pittoresques: Promenades musicales à l'Exposition de 1889* (Paris, 1889), 17; see also pp. 13, 35–6, 43.

¹⁹ Robert Godet, 'Ame javanaise', *Revue de Paris*, 1 Nov. 1896, pp. 193–224.

²⁰ That is, Godet found what he was looking for there: the dance he had seen at the 1889 Paris Exhibition came from these courts, its performers from Surakarta. See Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair*, 168.

‘pure’ and, through them, engage with supposedly ancient cultures, mediums in which to study evolution and racial hierarchies. As in France, the notes of a folksong were understood as the remnants of resistance to outside influences and the impact of urban civilization, pointing to a time before layers of assimilation and hybridization.²¹ Some saw themselves as protectors of the past, abroad as at home, even if this meant opposition to Western influences.

Yet, like Tiersot, Arthur Pougin, and others, each of whom attempted to come to terms with musical Otherness at the 1889 Exhibition through comparison with Western music, Godet continues to digest Difference in Java through the prism of the Self. He alludes to the *Pange lingua* in reference to the ‘poignant monotony’ of certain phrases and to Wagnerian leitmotifs when discussing how their melodies functioned in Javanese dramas. The gongs recalled for him the bells in *Boris Godunov*, whose intervals are shorter and shorter, the tempo accelerating. Like so many writing about non-Western music, he waxes eloquent when attempting to describe ‘the cavernous voices of the gongs, the sobbing voices of the strings, and the screaming ones of the flutes’ as well as the bamboo angklung with its ‘vibrating natural symphony’ so fascinating to Debussy, a concept that returns in other writers close to Debussy. Godet’s essay also attempts some analysis: it presents Javanese scales, points to the prominence of the tritone in certain melodies, and notes music’s function in society, closely tied to religion. On his return to Paris, Godet surmised that this information could be useful to Debussy. He offered the composer numerous theoretical treatises on Oriental music with the intention of “orienting” Debussy’s memory or fantasy.²² However, perhaps still wary from experiences with assimilation in his *Fantaisie*, the composer took no interest, noting that they ‘would kill the spirit’.²³ Still, Godet’s account of the heterophonic use of melodies and instrumental timbres and, in one case, the sound of female voices singing at the octave over them, building to an ‘immense crescendo’, may have found an echo later in Debussy’s ‘Sirènes’. So too the counterpoint of timbres which Debussy later confessed to admiring so much in Javanese music.

What impressed Godet most was how in Java ‘everything gives rise to music: animal voices, the palpitations of wings, the rustling of leaves’.²⁴ First, as in frequent discussions of non-Western music at the time, he uses metaphors that call on the non-human, as if to distinguish its incommensurability from the rationality of Western music. Importantly for Debussy, who would later compose *La Mer*, Godet observes, this ‘tide of sound was like an ocean, its broad waves rolling with the same undulation’.²⁵ Debussy may have been harking back to such experiences when, in 1913, he wrote similarly of the Javanese whose ‘Conservatory is the eternal rhythms of the sea, the wind in the leaves, and the thousand little noises they listen to without consulting any arbitrary treatises’.²⁶ Second, without necessarily knowing anything about the knowledge systems of the Javanese, Godet turns to his assumptions about what

²¹ Pastler, ‘The Racial and Colonial Implications of Early French Music Ethnography’, 38–43. Similarly, as Fauser points out in *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair*, ‘folk-music researcher Julien Tiersot showed himself to be well aware of the richness of Arab musical traditions. But he was even more dismissive of the Middle Eastern music in the café-concerts than his amateur counterparts because it was urban music for the café-concert instead of folk-music performed by artisans and peasants’ (p. 236).

²² Godet, ‘En Marge de la marge’, 59.

²³ Cited *ibid.* 59.

²⁴ Godet, ‘Ame javanaise’, 195.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 200.

²⁶ Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, ed. François Lesure (Paris, 1971), 223.

mediates between their music and the rest of life. He imagines the dancers enacting a ‘sacred mathematics’ over ‘a music of the spheres’.²⁷ Referring to ‘universal patterns used in the design of everything in our reality’ from prehistory to Plato, Pythagoras and beyond, people have used mathematical ratios to link harmonics and proportion in music to cosmology. As mystics today put it: ‘By studying the nature of these patterns, forms and relationships and their connections, insight may be gained into the mysteries—the laws and lore of the Universe.’²⁸ At the same time, Godet stresses that ‘the unknown here is not eliminated’. For him, the essence of the Javanese ‘soul’ lies in its embrace of life’s mystery. In Javanese dramas, ‘the mystery is rendered palpable, all the while remaining mystery. This is why the art that it inspired, and which is responsible for suggesting it, has a universal character.’²⁹ In 1903, Debussy returned to this idea: ‘Music is a mysterious mathematics whose elements participate in the Infinite.’ Like Godet’s projections onto the Javanese, Debussy perhaps saw study of ‘Nature’ as access to this Infinite, and the mystery of an artwork’s beauty as something to be preserved.³⁰

Also significant, Godet senses in the Javanese a ‘common aspiration towards the same ideal of beauty’, as if a reference to this ‘sacred mathematics’. Still, he goes further, proposing that this ideal is ‘a dream where there are no individuals, but where the consciousness of a national personality crystallizes’.³¹ This denial of individuals, as if the Javanese exist only as generic members of a group, is a typical tactic of the outsider. Javanese Otherness may have functioned for Debussy as an imagined repository for shared ideals, but in 1896 it is not obvious that this supposition would have resonated with him. Debussy’s own experience of this collapse of the Self into national identity, especially one subsuming the Self, would have to wait until the success of his opera catapulted him into *le musicien français*, thereafter to represent the nation.

FRENCH JAPONISME: GUIMET VERSUS LOTI

Debussy’s experience of Difference was more complicated when it came to *japonisme*. In the absence of any commentary by him, scholars have been divided on its place in Debussy’s oeuvre, and for this reason studies of it are full of circumstantial references to what Debussy ‘may’ have or ‘probably’ encountered. Japanese decorative arts were brought to Paris for the 1867 Universal Exhibition and took many prizes in 1878. By 1879 one could even buy such things at department stores. As for its music, in 1875 a writer in *Ménestrel* asserted that the Japanese ‘find European music even more awful than we find theirs detestable’³²—a rare occasion showing French interest in the Other’s perception of them.

Roy Howat and Jean-Michel Nectoux have focused on the composer’s interest in Japanese visual art, as opposed to its music.³³ As Debussy once explained, ‘I like

²⁷ Godet, ‘Ame javanaise’, 205.

²⁸ <http://www.crystalinks.com/sg.html> and <http://www.halexandria.org/dward010.htm>. See also other websites on ‘sacred mathematics’ or ‘sacred geometry’.

²⁹ Godet, ‘Ame javanaise’, 205.

³⁰ Debussy, *Monsieur Croche*, 171, 224. In his *Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis* (Cambridge, 1983), Roy Howat has written on the role of Fibonacci numbers and the form of the spiral, so prevalent in nature, in Debussy’s musical structures.

³¹ Godet, ‘Ame javanaise’, 218; for related discussions, see pp. 193–5, 200–5, 208, 216, 222.

³² ‘Nouvelles diverses’, *Ménestrel*, 6 Nov. 1875, p. 390.

³³ Howat, ‘Debussy and the Orient’, 70–8; Jean-Michel Nectoux, ‘Je veux écrire mon songe musical . . .’, in *Debussy, la musique et les arts*, Catalogue de l’Exposition (Paris, 2012), 16–20.

images as much as music'.³⁴ Debussy collected woodblock prints by Hiroshige and Hokusai, a simplified version of the latter's 'Great Wave' reproduced on the cover of *La Mer* (1905). Godet notes that we should not 'underestimate the joys' that Debussy derived from a Hokusai nor how rhythms can 'transpose from one sense to another'.³⁵ For this reason, perhaps, Howat finds the visual proportions of Japanese engravings in the 'golden section divisions' of his music, though it may have been Japanese sensitivity to spiral growth patterns in nature that resonated with the composer.³⁶ A Japanese lacquered plaque with two carp inspired the title of 'Poissons d'Or', the last of his *Images*, book 2 (1907).

But what was it about these objects that attracted him? In 1876 Théodore de Banville saw Japanese art as 'saving our old world' dominated by varieties of grey, bringing a return to light and colour.³⁷ As Jessica Stankis points out, Debussy's friend, the sinologist Louis Laloy, used the word 'japonisant' in reference to 'modernist qualities' in the music of Debussy and Ravel, particularly when it came to line and colour. She analyses his musical textures in reference to the repeated patterns in 'Great Wave'.³⁸ The juxtapositions of colours and planes in Japanese art may have helped shape Debussy's emerging conception of music as 'de temps et de couleurs rythmés', with its important implications in later works such as *Jeux*.³⁹

If *japonisme* permeated Debussy's music in mostly veiled ways, he was not alone in this reserve, given mixed opinions about the merits of assimilation. Japan's ever-evolving status in the world inevitably played a role. Republicans who came to power in 1879 as Debussy was coming of age ardently believed in the ability of people, through education and reason, to adapt and change. Those who thought this possible deeply admired the Japanese. Rejecting the feudal Shogun and initiating a new order in 1868, the Japanese Emperor embraced progress and expansion through assimilating Western ideas. This included asking the French government to send a military band conductor to form a similar ensemble, teaching Western music theory in their Conservatory (founded in 1880), and harmonizing their popular music to 'make it on equal terms with European music'.⁴⁰

For the most part, what was known in France about Japan was gleaned from fans and vases. As they became fashionable, State-subsidized theatres put on Saint-Saëns's *La Princesse jaune* in 1872, about a Dutchman who fell in love with a Japanese figurine, and Lecocq's *Kosiki* in 1876, depicted in *L'Illustration* as a fan coming to life. Both used pentatonicism as a signifier giving new colour to their music. In 1879, the Opéra premiered *Yedda*, co-written by Olivier Métra and Philippe Gille, the librettist of *Lakmé*. This 'voyage to Japan in an orchestral armchair' depicted a Westerner's dream of a

³⁴ Cited in André Schaeffner, 'Debussy et ses rapports avec la peinture', in Édith Weber (ed.), *Debussy et la musique au XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 1965), 160. See also the earlier discussion of Hokusai and *La Mer* in Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, ii, 24–6.

³⁵ Godet, 'En Marge de la marge', 55.

³⁶ Howat, 'Debussy and the Orient', 70–8 and his *Debussy in Proportion*.

³⁷ Théodore de Banville, 'Le Japonisme', *Journal de musique*, 4 Nov. 1876, pp. 3, 4.

³⁸ Jessica E. Stankis, 'Maurice Ravel's "Color Counterpoint" through the Perspective of Japonisme', *Music Theory Online*, 21/1 (Mar. 2015).

³⁹ Claude Debussy, *Lettres à son éditeur* (Paris, 1927), 55. I understand 'rythmés' as modifying both 'temps' and 'couleurs', meaning that that form is the 'rhythmicization' of sections each with their own 'colour and sense of time'. See the discussion in Pasler, 'Debussy, *Jeux*: Playing with Time and Form', *19th-Century Music*, 6 (1982), 60–72.

⁴⁰ Cited in Robert Waters, 'Emulation and Influence: *Japonisme* and Western Music in fin de siècle Paris', *Music Review*, 55/3 (1994), 218.

Japanese peasant wishing to be assimilated into the upper class through marriage—a pretext for wishful thinking about social change in France under Republicans.⁴¹

Japan could remain primarily a function of French fantasies until Frenchmen went there; even what they sought to experience was rooted in their own ideologies and interests. In 1876 Émile Guimet, businessman-composer-orphéon director, and Félix Régamey, lithographer-painter, toured Japan on a government-sponsored mission to study Asian religions. In the second volume of their *Promenades japonaises* on the new capital, Tokyo, these two die-hard republicans focus on modern Japan. In their first sentence, they praise the Japanese for getting rid of the feudal Shoguns. Throughout, they describe what the Japanese assimilated from the West—trains, railroads, and photography. They also share what they learned about Japanese theatre, while understanding little about the ‘indecisive tonalities and incoherent rhythms’ of Japanese music.⁴²

Ten years later in his popular novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887), Pierre Loti took an utterly different approach, shared later with Godet and others when it came to rejecting the emerging modernity of Asian societies. Borrowing from the diary that he kept as a naval officer there in 1885, Loti sought to exploit conventional stereotypes. Like Godet later in Java, when he found Tokyo too Westernized, he explains that to find a woman ‘comme il faut’, he had to go ‘far from the recent railroads . . . to where the age-long immobility of the country has not been disturbed’. Portraying this world ‘which I knew already from paintings of lacquer and porcelain’, he recalls, ‘Long before I came to it I had perfectly pictured this Japan to myself’. When he meets his first intended, a diminutive dancing girl with a ‘coaxing air of childishness’, he exclaims, ‘why I know her already! . . . I had met with her on every fan, on every teacup.’⁴³ In the end, his tale argues against not only the desirability of assimilation, but also its very possibility. Diametrically opposed to Guimet’s and Régamey’s recognition of contemporary realities, Loti’s nostalgia for the Shogun era cannot be understood without acknowledging French monarchists’ nostalgia for the Ancien Régime, their resistance to colonization, and their rejection of assimilation. Whereas *Lakmé* was written during the height of imperialist expansion in 1883, Loti’s novel reflects rising anti-colonialist sentiment after France’s heavy losses in Tonkin in 1884.⁴⁴

By the 1890s, it was no longer fashionable to refer to the Japan of fans and vases. When they took on the Chinese in a war over Korea’s independence in 1894, the Japanese used modern technology to defeat a country previously thought more powerful. Subsequently, the musical world paid more attention to Japan. In March 1895, *Ménestrel* published its first article on Japanese music, while *Le Figaro* and the popular press reproduced Japanese music, transcribed for Western instruments. However, direct encounter with Japanese musicians accompanying Sada Yacco’s troupe at the 1900 Paris Exhibition was burdened by the inauthenticity of the performance, since there were no female actors in Japan. The troupe’s reception also coincided with increasingly critical attitudes towards assimilation, even among republicans, and

⁴¹ On *japonisme* in France, see Jann Pasler, ‘Political Anxieties and Musical Reception: Japonisme and the Problem of Assimilation’, in Arthur Groos and Virgilio Bernardoni (eds.), *Madama Butterfly: L’Orientalisme di fine secolo, l’approccio pucciniano, la ricezione. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi (Lucca – Torre del Lago, 28–30 maggio 2004)* (Florence, 2008), 30–50.

⁴² Émile Guimet and Félix Régamey, *Promenades japonaises: Tokio-Nikko* (Paris, 1880), 1, 5, 7, 94, 153.

⁴³ Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, trans. Laura Ensor (New York, n.d.). The citations in this paragraph, as well as further related discussion, come from pp. 14, 19, 24–5, 36, 447, 49, 97, 142, 149, 194, 196, 232.

⁴⁴ Judith Gautier, too, refused to embrace the new Japan in her play *La Marchande des sourires* (1888), which incorporated ‘ancient’ and ‘rustic’ songs Louis Bénédicte transcribed during the 1889 Exhibition.

growing interest in the kind of cultural differences that Loti and Godet found essential in their appreciation of the Other. In reviewing music at the 1900 Exhibition, Tiersot sought out not universals in the various musical traditions which he encountered, as in 1889, but instead ‘exclusively the races most different from ours and living the furthest from us’ whose music would presumably not be ‘contaminated by European influences’. This included Japan, though he quickly recognized that the Japanese were happy to submit to European influences and even to seek them out. While analysing a few songs and transcribing seven examples of what he heard, aided by a French interpreter who had long lived in Japan and had access to the musicians after hours, he nonetheless admits that he understood little, the succession of notes seemingly chosen ‘by chance’.⁴⁵ In the case of Japan, incomprehensible differences could lead to rejection of the Other rather than enchantment by its ‘mysteries’.

When Japan took on Russia militarily in 1904—the ‘yellow race threatening the white race for the first time since Genghis Khan’—the French press turned on the Japanese.⁴⁶ *Ménestral* noted that most Westerners who had heard Japanese music found it ‘barbarous’ or ‘at least very primitive’.⁴⁷ Still, acknowledging the East as powerful ironically generated desire to engage with its resources. Debussy apparently did not incorporate Japanese visual or musical influences until 1905, suggesting that he may have been sensitive to this new status of the Oriental Other. Indicating specific instances of what he calls the ‘emulation’ of Japanese music, Robert Waters argues that the harmonies produced in Japanese court music, gagaku, particularly its mouth organ, the sho, ‘closely resemble vertical combinations employed by Debussy in “Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut”’, another of his piano *Images* (1907). Waters points to ‘remarkably similar’ European transcriptions of Japanese music at the time and debates, from 1905 to 1910, on how to harmonize Japanese music.⁴⁸ But were Debussy’s choices influenced by his friend Louis Laloy, an expert on Chinese music, to whom the piece is dedicated and who suggested the title?⁴⁹ With little exposure to Japanese music and amid French anxiety about Japan’s rising political importance, not surprisingly Debussy kept such references discreet.

The allure surrounding exoticism had changed with the very different reception that exotic performances received at the 1900 Paris Exhibition. Tiersot judged it as vastly inferior to the 1889 one, with Westerners parading as Orientals, effects replacing mystery. Moreover, the hotchpotch spectacles, performed under electric lights and conceived for Westerners, were hardly authentic, and were primarily meant to amuse.⁵⁰ In addition, the failure of assimilationist ideals, at home and abroad, may have contributed to why Howat finds Debussy even ‘using gamelan-related techniques in progressively disguised ways’.⁵¹

SOUND, NATURE, AND THE OCCULT: BAILLY AND LALOY

Debussy rarely commented on another oriental domain that touched him, the occult. As with *japonisme*, those who embraced these non-Western and ancient-inspired ideas

⁴⁵ Julien Tiersot, ‘Ethnographie musicale: Notes prises à l’Exposition universelle de 1900’, *Ménestral*, 14 Oct. 1900, p. 324; 4 Nov. 1900, p. 347; 11 Nov. 1900, pp. 354–5.

⁴⁶ ‘Le Péril jaune’, *La Revue russe*, 9 June 1904, p. 7.

⁴⁷ ‘Nouvelles diverses’, *Ménestral*, 13 Mar. 1904, p. 86.

⁴⁸ In his ‘Emulation and Influence’, Waters here refers to a British collection published in 1893 (pp. 222–4).

⁴⁹ For example, see Louis Laloy, *La Musique chinoise: Étude critique* (Paris, 1910).

⁵⁰ Maurice Talmeyr, ‘L’École du Trocadéro’, *Revue des deux mondes*, 162 (Nov. 1900), 198–213.

⁵¹ Howat, ‘Debussy and the Orient’, 54.

and practices had various attitudes towards it and made diverse uses of it. Although, as Howat surmises, Debussy ‘indubitably worked in such symbols and images’, his perspective was guarded and never explicit. Howat hears *Masques* and *L’Isle Joyeuse* as representing opposite sides of the same Asian archetype—‘entrapment in, and release from, the circle of karma’, but admits this is conjecture.⁵² After 1906, when Debussy first met Segalen upon his return from Polynesia, the latter proposed collaboration on *Siddhartha*, Segalen’s text about the life of Buddha, begun in Sri Lanka; however, Debussy dropped the project when unable to find the right music ‘to penetrate its depths’ and the character’s ‘frightening immobility’.⁵³ Robert Orledge has discussed several other theatrical projects Debussy considered at the time, including a *Drame cosmogonique* (c.1908) with Jacques-Émile Blanche on the birth of the universe, and incidental music in 1911 for a work by the Rosecrucian *commandeur*, Saint-Pol-Roux, with whom he purportedly ‘shared Rosecrucian beliefs’.⁵⁴ Debussy’s friendship with the founder of Sufism (Muslim theosophy) in the West, Inayat Khan, whom he met in 1914, led to his association with this philosophy and possibly the idea of a ‘drame indien’ around 1914. There were also earlier esoteric-related projects: incidental music for Jules Bois’s *Les Noces de Satan* (1890), announced in *La Saint-Graal* (1892), but for which Debussy ‘lacked the necessary confidence’ since there was ‘too much of the Unknown’; the ‘musical plan’ for a Rosecrucian pantomime in 1897; and a song for Victor-Émile Michelet’s fantasy, *Le Pèlerin d’amour*, performed in 1903.⁵⁵

Debussy’s interest in oriental music and esoteric philosophy most likely was encouraged, if not also shaped, by his association with Edmond Bailly, a composer-poet-publisher. After contributing to and de facto directing *La Musique des familles* beginning in 1888, Bailly became editor in August 1889, then editor of its successor, *La Musique populaire*, in October 1889. There he published scores and his own music criticism.⁵⁶ These activities, heretofore ignored by scholars, deserve closer attention. In early 1889, just before he and Debussy met, Bailly was researching various types of African and Asian music, musicians, and instruments, publishing long, explanatory articles in *La Musique des familles*, with related images on several covers, as if to prepare listeners for what they might hear at the Universal Exhibition.⁵⁷ He was particularly drawn to those of ‘primitive’ people ‘still close to Nature’.⁵⁸ Starting in June, Bailly went on to write reviews of Javanese and other ‘musique pittoresque’ at the Exhibition, since then overshadowed by Julien Tiersot’s oft-cited articles in *Ménestrel*. During the 1900 Exhibition, like Tiersot, Bailly wrote another series on non-Western music, this time for *L’Humanité nouvelle*, where Victor-Émile Michelet was literary director. These essays, expanding on those of 1889 and drawn from his scholarly research, document not only Bailly’s thoughts on the cultural origins of non-Western instruments (from the Senegalese kora to the Laotien khen) and how they were

⁵² Ibid. 78–9.

⁵³ Annie Joly-Segalen and André Schaeffner, *Segalen et Debussy* (Monaco, 1961), 66.

⁵⁴ Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre* (Cambridge, 1982), 268–75.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 313–17; Debussy to Jules Bois, mid-March 1893, in Claude Debussy, *Correspondence*, ed. Denis Herlin and François Lesure (Paris, 2005), 105. For earlier work on this subject, see Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, ii. 274–6.

⁵⁶ In his *Les Compagnons de la Hiérophonie* (Paris, 1937), 70, Victor-Émile Michelet recounts Bailly’s request for scores from Villiers de l’Isle-Adam and Chabrier to publish in this journal. See also François Lesure, *Claude Debussy: Biographie critique* (Paris, 1994), 117, 126–7, and the English translation and revised edition by Marie Rolf, *Claude Debussy, A Critical Biography* (Rochester, NY, 2019).

⁵⁷ Thus, Tiersot was not ‘alone in his enquiries into the sound-world of the African and Ocean villages’ at the 1889 Paris Exhibition, as Fauser assumed in *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair*, 248.

⁵⁸ Edmond Bailly, ‘Ethnographie musicale’, *La Musique des familles*, 5 Jan. 1889, p. 93.

performed, but also his increasing engagement with the materiality of their sound and the kinds of vibrations they produced. Sometimes he cites the perceptions of travellers (e.g. Amiot and Delaporte) who heard them *sur place*, and reproduces their transcriptions. As with Tiersot's reviews, these essays also appeared as a book, with drawings of instruments and music examples.⁵⁹

In the early 1890s, Debussy stopped by 'almost every day' at Bailly's bookshop, 'Art Indépendant', founded in October 1889 on the rue de la Chaussée d'Antin. Calling it 'a salon for gatherings of those curious about esotericism', Michelet notes that Debussy was its most frequent visitor, sometimes bringing along Erik Satie.⁶⁰ As Denis Herlin has shown, symbolist ideas thrived here while Debussy was writing his opera, sometimes playing fragments on the piano behind the shop.⁶¹ Bailly published texts by Mallarmé, Debussy's friends Pierre Louÿs (*Chansons de Bilitis*), Jean de Tinan, and Henri de Régnier (*Poèmes anciens et romanesques*, with its 'Scènes au Crépuscule') as well as René Ghil, Paul Claudel, André Gide, and others who met there. He also issued lithographs by Odilon Redon, the first edition of Debussy's *La Damselle élue* (1893) as well as his *Proses lyriques*, along with music by Erik Satie, Ernest Chausson, Augusta Holmès, and himself. Michelet considered Bailly 'one of the surest and most penetrating among us, one the best companions in the pursuit of the great intellectual adventure'.⁶² Debussy, admiring how 'well-versed' he was in 'the sciences of magic', considered Bailly as someone of 'enormous knowledge (*haut-savoir*) and truly very artistic ideas'. His 'intransigence' filled even the composer with trepidation.⁶³

Music scholars have so far failed to look into discussions at this bookstore about ancient and Oriental religions, for which Art Indépendant published a journal, *La Haute Science*, and an important library of major sources. These included the Hindu *Bhagavad-Gita*, translated from Sanskrit; the *Tao Te Ching* of Lao Tzu, translated from Chinese; translations of the divination of Chaldo-Assyrians and the Ethiopian Apocrypha; the ancient Egyptian Tarot; and secondary literature on esoteric Buddhism and neo-spiritualism. The bookshop also sold the esoteric dramas of Jules Bois and the Rosecrucian works of Joséphin Péladan, including those Satie set to music.⁶⁴ Henri de Régnier remembered Bailly carrying around the *Upanishad* of Aranyaka, part of the Hindu vedas.⁶⁵ In this context, as Michelet explained, 'Debussy allowed himself to be strongly imbued with hermeticism. Besides his readings on this and conversations with Edmond Bailly, who studied the esotericism of music from the East and the West, he knew the sacred music of the Hindus from his association with the Sufi Inayat Khan and his two brothers.'⁶⁶

Bailly was particularly enthralled with theosophy, including that of Inayat Khan, whom he befriended in Paris between 1911 and 1914.⁶⁷ Unlike the popular Buddhist

⁵⁹ Edmond Bailly, *Le Pittoresque musical à l'Exposition* (Paris, 1900).

⁶⁰ Michelet, *Les Compagnons*, 63, 73.

⁶¹ Denis Herlin, 'Le Cercle de l'Art Indépendant', in *Debussy, la musique et les arts*, 76–89.

⁶² Michelet, *Les Compagnons*, 78.

⁶³ Debussy to Poniowski, Feb. 1893; Chausson to Debussy, 4 Sept. 1893, in Debussy, *Correspondence*, 117, 158. Note that Debussy also shared with Bailly an interest in the poetry of Charles d'Orléans. Bailly published his musical setting of three *rondels* in 1895, Debussy setting two *rondels* and other poetry to music between 1898 and 1908. Herlin suggests that Debussy's interest in this poet was 'without a doubt awakened by Bailly, not Pierre Louÿs', and that they based their songs on the same edition of the texts (*ibid.* 87 n. 57).

⁶⁴ *Catalogue de la Librairie de l'Art Indépendant* (Oct. 1896).

⁶⁵ Henri de Régnier, 'Souvenirs', *Revue musicale*, 1 May 1926, p. 90.

⁶⁶ Michelet, *Les Compagnons*, 73–5.

⁶⁷ On Bailly, see Joscelyn Godwin, *Music and the Occult: French Musical Philosophies, 1750–1950* (Rochester, NY, 1995), 151–7 at 174 n. 6.

sects in Paris (that Debussy once mocked) with over 100,000 members, their symbols officially celebrated at the Musée Guimet, theosophy had only 300 Parisian followers.⁶⁸ It aimed to synthesize the world's religions and promoted unity among the senses as part of a higher awakening. One of its goals was to 'explain to its adepts, under the oath of absolute secrecy, the meaning of all symbols and to give them a power similar to that of the gods of ancient cults'.⁶⁹ Bailly's bookshop published the theosophical studies of Mme Blavatsky, also a concert pianist, her psychic powers trained in Tibet; those of Annie Besant, a political activist in India; and the society's journal, *Le Lotus bleu*, edited by Mme Blavatsky until she died in 1891. This journal helped spread Hindu and Buddhist ideas in the West. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* (1888) discusses the human being's various capacities, especially those of 'sympathetic vibration'. She also draws attention to the esoteric meaning of sound and its transformative power, the 'voice of Nature', and Pythagoras's music of the spheres.

For Bailly, the ultimate Other was nature, whose identity is irreducible to the Self and which offers an 'example' of the organization of the universe and 'the key to all things'.⁷⁰ Non-Western music had drawn Bailly's attention to the importance of sound vibrations and, through them, music's capacity to bridge the Self and the Other, beginning with nature. While researching his articles for *La Musique des familles*, he had come across references to sound in essays written by travellers in Africa, Oceania, and the South Pole. This led him to thinking about sound of all kinds and its effects on the human listener. During the final six weeks of the 1889 Exhibition, Bailly published a series of articles called 'The World of Sound', subtitled 'Sound, Harmony of the Spheres, Voices of Nature' and drawing an analogy among them. These alluded to ideas in Madame Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*. He begins with Aristotle's definition of sound as 'movement that becomes audible at a distance'. Believing there is 'no absolute silence on our planet', he exhorts the reader: 'let's listen to the thousand mysterious noises vibrating around us'. In considering 'airborne voices', he cites Georges Kastner's book on the song of the Sirens,⁷¹ 'one of the luminous sounds of which mortals perceive only the shadow'. He refuses to consider this a 'fiction, a pure symbol'. The instalments that follow, echoing Godet's experiences in Java, explore 'microscopic ambient sounds', 'vegetal harmonies' such as those released by the wind through leaves or 'whistling trees', bird songs, the 'vocal music' of nature, and the effects of climate, storms, earthquakes, and volcanos on sound. For Bailly, these were capable of influencing the kind of instruments and tunings used around the world, and thus its diverse musical traditions. Like Pythagoras, Bailly believed that everything in the world, including planetary movements, 'was created and organized according to the laws governing music', music here defined as 'a harmony formed of several dissonant sounds'.⁷² Through music, he seems to suggest, one could enter into a relation with nature, the cosmos, and all else.

⁶⁸ Debussy, *Monsieur Croche*, 106; Jules Bois, *Les Petites Religions de Paris* (Paris, 1894), 41, 87.

⁶⁹ Bois, *Les Petites Religions*, 93.

⁷⁰ Edmond Bailly, *Le Son dans la nature* (Paris, 1900), 6. Bailly here refers to 'la loi sériaire', which Charles Fourier (1772–1837) had earlier defined as the law of movement and of universal life, and which of necessity governs the 'harmony of sounds' (Edouard de Pompery, *Théorie de l'association et de l'unité universelle de C. Fourier* (Paris, 1984), 221).

⁷¹ Georges Kastner, *Les Sirènes: Essai sur les principaux mythes relatifs à l'incantation* (Paris and London, 1858).

⁷² The citations in this paragraph come from Edmond Bailly, 'Le Monde sonore', *La Musique des familles*, 31 Aug. 1889, pp. 362–4; 7 Sept. 1889, pp. 372–373; 14 Sept., pp. 378–80; 28 Sept. 1889, pp. 396–8; 5 Oct. 1889, p. 404. See also the discussion in Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 579–80.

The phenomenon of sound, as construed by Bailly, returned as the focus of other multipartite articles published in *Le Guide musical* (1891) and the *Revue dramatique et musicale* (1893–4).⁷³ In 1900 Bailly expanded these into a book, *Le Son dans la nature*.⁷⁴ It begins with his intention to go beyond Aristotle's notion that 'every sound, every noise announces a movement'.⁷⁵ Indian sources suggest that creation begins with the clash of the creative and the destructive in matter. Moreover, 'all the sacred books of humanity, from Lao Tseu's *Tao* and Snorri's Scandinavian Edda... to the ancient texts of Persia and India', reveal, as Bailly puts it, that the 'Word, the Voice, and Sound' are the 'first manifestations of the universe'. From 'the geological ages to modern times', we hear this in 'the mysterious symphonies of the air, the diverse voices of the trees, the mountains... the music of the deserts'. To explain the harmony of the spheres, Bailly points to Plato's 'diagram' that uses the distances of an octave and a fifth to explain how the solar system is organized, but replaces the sun for the moon as its 'fundamental', in the musical sense. This is followed by his successors' critiques and their theories before coming to how relations between musical sounds and the planets developed through the 'succession of weaker sounds' accompanying their 'harmonics'. For Bailly, these result not from resonance per se, but from universal 'correspondances sériaires'.⁷⁶ All this builds on the theosophical idea that 'vibrations give form and structure on both the higher and lower planes' and acoustics 'remake the relations between the visible and the invisible'.⁷⁷ In the years that followed, Bailly's ideas entered the scientific and musicological discourse. *Mercur musical* (1906) published his article on the resonance of lower harmonics as part of the debates surrounding Riemann's theories and the origins of music.⁷⁸ In 1909 he summed up his ideas in *Musica*: 'Ancient philosophers proclaimed that the world lives and acts through sound and that everything that exists is the product of sound.'⁷⁹

Debussy could have learned much from Bailly and theosophy about the meaning of sound and music as well as the need for secrecy about it. Writing to Chausson in 1893, he asserted that 'music really ought to have been a hermetical science, enshrined in texts so hard and laborious to decipher as to discourage the herd of people who treat it as casually as they do a handkerchief'. He called for 'the foundation of a "Society of Musical Esotericism"'.⁸⁰ Debussy also shared with Bailly a fascination with listening

⁷³ Referred to in Herlin, 'Le Cercle de l'Art Indépendant', 178 n. 11, and by Marie Rolf in *Claude Debussy*, 417 n. 22.

⁷⁴ Facing the title page, it lists three other studies as forthcoming very soon: *Les Avatars de la gamme moderne, d'après l'histoire, la science et la symbologie*, *Les Vibrations du son et la vie universelle*, and *Du Merveilleux dans la musique et de la thérapeutique musicale*.

⁷⁵ Bailly, *Le Son*, 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 18, 26, 31–3, and Louis Ernault, 'Chronique littéraire', *L'Humanité nouvelle*, Jan. 1900, p. 747.

⁷⁷ Leigh Wilson, referring to C. W. Leadbeater and Annie Besant's *Thought-Forms* (1905), in *Modernism and Magic* (Edinburgh, 2012), 85.

⁷⁸ Edmond Bailly, 'A propos de la résonance inférieure', *Mercur musical*, 1906, pp. 379–80, a paper on musical harmonics presented to the Académie des Sciences de Paris on 12 Mar. 1906. It was most likely a contribution to the debate discussed in Jean Marnold, 'Les Sons inférieurs et la théorie de M. Hugo Riemann', published serially in *Mercur musical* throughout 1905, and Martial Teneo's discussion of Rabaut Saint-Etienne's *Lettres à M. Bailly sur l'Histoire primitive de la Grèce* (1787) and 'Origine de la musique ou le premier langage de l'homme chanté', in 'Miettes historiques', *Mercur musical*, 15 Nov. 1905, pp. 205–9, presented to the Société Internationale de Musique on 26 June 1905.

⁷⁹ Edmond Bailly, 'La Musique hindoue', *Musica*, 1909, pp. 43–4. In 1912, L'Art Indépendant published Bailly's *Chant des voyelles, comme Invocation aux Dieux Planétaires*, performed during the Theosophical Congress of 1906, preceded by a thirty-five-page introduction to world religions. In this work, referring to French symbolists' preoccupation with the music of poetry, Bailly 'sought to recreate the magical invocations of ancient Egypt'. Theosopedia, accessed on 30 Jan. 2018. <http://theosophy.ph/encyclo/index.php?title=Music.Theosophy.and> [sic].

⁸⁰ Debussy to Chausson, 3 Sept. 1893, in *Debussy Letters*, ed. François Lesure and Roger Nichols, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 52.

carefully to the sounds of nature. Perhaps it was Bailly who got him thinking about the sound of the Sirens. In some ways, nature as Other was primordial also for Debussy, not just a person's first experience of exoticism, as Segalen proposed, which 'doesn't exist except at the moment when man conceives it as different from him... non-anthropomorphized'. At the same time, as Segalen put it, experience of nature leads to 'the recognition of two worlds, the physical and the moral'.⁸¹ Like Bailly, Debussy believed that 'music is the art closest to nature'.⁸² As noted above, he made frequent poetic comparisons and sought many ways to bring his music into relationship with it. For example, in *Pelléas*, he wished to 'capture all the mystery of the night' and follow the 'rhythm of nature', his arabesques 'participating in the laws of beauty inscribed in the total movement of nature'.⁸³ He returned to these ideas in 1913: 'Only musicians can capture all the poetry of the night and day, earth and sky, to reconstitute the atmosphere, and give rhythm to the immense palpitation'.⁸⁴

Sharing an interest in resonant sonorities and distant harmonics as well as a cult of nature, Bailly may have encouraged the composer to conceive of music, sound, and nature in relationship or, as I would argue, think of music as enabling relationship between Self and various kinds of Other. The first volume of Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine, Cosmogony* outlines the 'law of correspondences' between various aspects of reality and her system of 'cosmogony' (to which the Debussy–Blanche collaboration later alludes). Bailly builds on Blavatsky's notions, noting the 'law of analogies, of correspondences... of which Nature furnishes us examples at every turn, from which one must demand the key to all things'. One needs to understand better the 'psychic sensation, the emotion aroused in our soul by phenomenal action', that is, sound as it moves in nature.⁸⁵ Of course, the concept of 'correspondences' reaches back to Baudelaire, echoing the symbolist theory of synaesthesia that Debussy explored in his *Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire*, a score sold in Bailly's bookshop.⁸⁶ In April 1902, the month *Pelléas et Mélisande* was premiered, Segalen published a long essay on these 'sensorial correlations' which he saw as a 'new stage in the evolution of the mind' and, in the 'infinite scale of vibratory movements', one which brings 'joy to the senses'. As an example, Segalen points to how the Rosecrucian Saint-Pol-Roux thinks synaesthetically, 'proceeding musically' in choosing words like musical notes on an orchestral score, his poems thus becoming 'complete, synthetic, symphonic'.⁸⁷ Increasingly, Debussy, like Bailly, looked for relationships that music could forge with not only poetry, but also nature. In 1901, reflecting on music for the outdoors, he imagined 'a mysterious collaboration of the air, the movement of the leaves, and the perfume of the flowers with the music that would bring all the elements together in such an alliance that she would seem to be part of each of them'.⁸⁸ The following year, in

⁸¹ Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 25–6.

⁸² Debussy, *Monsieur Croche*, 239. See also Brooks Toliver, 'Debussy after Symbolism: The Formation of a Nature Aesthetic, 1901–1913' (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1994) and Caroline Potter, 'Debussy and Nature', in Simon Trezise (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy* (Cambridge, 2003), 137–51.

⁸³ *Debussy Letters*, 80; Debussy, *Monsieur Croche*, 66–7. Another example: 'without a doubt the interplay between trees and riverbanks is less impoverished counterpoint than ours'. *Debussy Letters*, 120.

⁸⁴ Debussy, *Monsieur Croche*, 240.

⁸⁵ Bailly, 'Le Monde sonore', 31 Aug. 1889, 362.

⁸⁶ Jann Pasler, 'Correspondences et la synesthésie: Debussy en lecture critique des *Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire*', in Malou Haine (ed.), *Bruxelles ou la convergence des arts, 1880–1914* (Paris, 2013), 89–106.

⁸⁷ Saint-Pol-Roux, *Les Reposoirs de la procession*, i (Paris, 1901), 198–9; Victor Segalen, 'Les Synesthésies et l'École symboliste', *Mercur de France*, Apr. 1902, pp. 63–4, 70, 80, 90.

⁸⁸ Debussy, *Monsieur Croche*, 45–6.

introducing *Pelléas*, Debussy went further: ‘Not limited to a more or less exact representation of nature’, music should express ‘the mysterious correspondences between nature and the imagination’.⁸⁹ Debussy’s integration of not only symbolist, but also occult influences from the Art Indépendant bookshop—together with his experiences at the Universal Exhibitions and perhaps inspired by Bailly’s research on non-Western music, sound, and vibrations—thus culminated in a new theory of music.

Laloy, who, as editor, published Bailly’s article in *Mercure musical*, was among those who understood nature’s relationship to the arts through ‘vibrations’. In Debussy’s *Nocturnes*, he perceived not clouds, festivities, and sirens, but ‘their lights, their reflections, the vibrations they communicate through the air’.⁹⁰ But by 1905 he detected in this ‘art of mysterious relationships and unexplained correspondences’ something new, as if the culmination of a theosophical initiation. Laloy suggests that Debussy perceived ‘superhuman voices that remain harmonious in their tumult’. His is not ‘music of dreams, but a revealing [*divinateur*] dream that seizes the soul of things’. In *La Mer*, ‘never by so few means was the mystery of the world revealed to us’. ‘Drawing on nature, at every moment a divining power reveals to him the secret affinity that unites one note to another, one chord to another, one melody to another’—a comment suggesting that, while this ‘affinity’ may begin with harmonics, it refers to much more. He continues: ‘Debussy confers on [music] a magical power. There was never a man more apt to hear the voice of nature and disentangle her vast harmonies, otherwise confused noises for the rest of us mortals; no one has lived in more intimate communion with the universe’ than Debussy. For Laloy, the composer had thus become an ‘initiate’ who ‘reveals to us the forgotten secrets of our being’ and for whom, ‘unafraid’, ‘the elements are his friends’. His music ‘seems to emanate from nature itself and, in a language that we understand without having learned it, translates all the movements and forms of universal life’.⁹¹ Resonating with the esoteric beliefs of Blavatsky, Bailly, and Inayat Khan, the latter too believing that ‘sound vibrations constitute the primordial movement, generating all other movements’,⁹² in 1908 Laloy called for ‘music of the future’. Liberated in its ‘vibrating movements’ through new and ever-varied sonorities, ‘just like the caress of wind on leaves, or the changing murmur of unequal waves’, this could become an ‘international language’ in a world beyond nations.⁹³ Such a concept of the universal goes well beyond what Tiersot was seeking through music at the Paris Universal Exhibitions. The next year Debussy echoed Laloy, pointing to the importance of seeking ideas not ‘within oneself’, but ‘outside the self’, that is, in ‘the thousand noises of nature around us . . . in the middle of which we have lived until the present without taking notice. For me, this is the new path.’⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Ibid. 61.

⁹⁰ Louis Laloy, *Debussy* (Paris, 1909), 30–1. Laloy, as well as perhaps Bailly, may also have been heeding the advice of Yeuh Chi, one of the earliest sources on Confucius’s concept of music: ‘Without the knowledge of sound, one cannot speak of music’, as cited in Chou-Wen-Chung in his ‘Single Tones as Musical Entities’, *Journal of the American Society of University Composers*, 3 (1970). <https://chouwenchung.org/writing/excerpts-from-single-tones-as-musical-entities-an-approach-to-structured-deviations-in-tonal-characteristics/>.

⁹¹ The citations from Laloy in this paragraph come from his ‘Paroles sur Claude Debussy’, *Mercure musical*, 1 Mar. 1906, p. 196, and his other articles in *Mercure musical*: 1 Aug. 1905, p. 239; 15 Oct. 1905, p. 487; 1 Apr. 1907, pp. 370–1. See also the discussion in Toliver, *Debussy after Symbolism*, 58–9.

⁹² Jacques Heugel, ‘Le Mysticisme du son’, *Ménestrel*, 12 Mar. 1920, pp. 111–12.

⁹³ Louis Laloy, ‘La Musique de l’avenir’, *Mercure de France*, 1 Dec. 1908, pp. 431–3.

⁹⁴ Debussy, *Monsieur Croche*, 281.

MYSTERY AND SILENCE: DEBUSSY, LALOY, AND JANKÉLÉVITCH

Suffused with a ‘sense of mystery’ through his encounters with Otherness and concerned about its loss in the modern era, Debussy recounted an anecdote about music’s ‘sacred origins’. In sympathy with Bailly’s research, he imagines how ‘the god Pan, in assembling the seven pipes of the syrinx, at first imitated the frog’s long melancholic note’, but later, in ‘competing with the song of birds’, he ‘probably’ in turn ‘enriched their repertory’.⁹⁵ Music’s mysterious power, he seems to suggest, comes from its capacity to affect, as well as be affected by, the Other. Creating relation between the Self and Other, music inevitably embodies an interaction and, as this story suggests, the impact can go both ways.

Understanding precisely how this works, however, interested Debussy far less. To stand up to the ‘Barbarians’, those who ‘demand to know “how it is made”’, he implores, let us preserve its mystery, ‘this magic that is particular to music’, ‘the guardian of all that is *Secret*’.⁹⁶ For the composer, the perception, or at least the intuition, of mystery is critical to the experience of both its charm and its meaning.⁹⁷ Godet, Bailly, Segalen, and Laloy, friends whose stimulation and understanding helped fuel the composer’s musical and spiritual development, understood the importance of mystery in his music, while respecting the mystery with which Debussy veiled his life, perhaps protecting his own Difference, beginning with his lower-class roots, on which Laloy and Régnier commented.⁹⁸ In unpacking the forms mystery took in his music, Jankélévitch implicitly recalls their language even as he admits that, because of music’s ‘ineffable quality’, ‘there is almost nothing to say’ about it. He begins with acknowledging the influence of theosophy on Debussy’s ‘mysteriology’, and finds *La Damoiselle élue* ‘almost as Rosicrucian as pre-Raphaelite’. In terms Debussy himself used, he notes that the composer’s music ‘evolved gradually from secret to mystery’. For Jankélévitch, whereas what distinguishes the secret is ‘not the impossibility of knowing it, but the ban on revealing it’, ‘mystery, secrecy itself, that is, the universal, eternal, and naturally mysterious, for everyone, incomprehensible’—is (as Godet sensed in Java) ‘the principle of fraternal affinity and shared humility’. In this sense, it is mystery’s incomprehensibility that connects us, this relation facilitated by Debussy’s music in bringing ‘mystery into the fullness of light’. From *La Damoiselle élue* to *Pelléas*, he finds, like Laloy, that ‘occult mystery’ in his earlier music, ‘the arcane mysteries of the initiated’, transformed into ‘lucid mystery’, the mystery of ‘existence’, in later works, including that of the ‘familiar and everyday’, the mystery of the ‘eternal present’.⁹⁹

In his 1976 book, *Debussy et le mystère de l’instant*, Jankélévitch posits that ‘mystery is the thing [or the matter itself, *la chose*] of music’. He ruminates on the ‘mystery of the instant’, of ‘time’, and of ‘total presence’ in his music as well as the ‘mystery of destiny’, ‘of suffering, of sensual pleasure [*volupté*], and of death’. Mystery here is also ‘the mystery of multi-presence . . . the miracle of ubiquity . . . the intuition of omnipresence’, a translation of the ‘coexistence of all existence, the plenitude of total presence’. His music ‘renders absence magically present, and presence secretly absent’—which could be said of the vibrations and harmonics. ‘Omnipresence is the virtual presence

⁹⁵ Ibid. 224.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 222–5.

⁹⁷ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Debussy et le mystère de l’instant* (Paris, 1976), 17.

⁹⁸ Laloy, ‘Les Écoliers’, *Mercur musical*, 15 Apr. 1907, p. 372, and Régnier, ‘Souvenirs’, 90.

⁹⁹ Jankélévitch, *Debussy et le mystère de l’instant*, 15–19.

of all absences'. Echoing Laloy's understanding of Debussy as an 'initiate', able to reveal what few can perceive, Jankélévitch turns to specifics. He proposes that the succession of tonalities in his music 'hides a fundamental distant tonality, a latent one, a tonality that is implicit but forgotten'. And he continues in this theosophical vein:

Musical reality lies not in intentional, discursive succession, but in sounds and between chords, in the dying and mysterious vibrations of harmony. . . . Debussy counts not on modulations, but on the magical attraction of presences . . . harmonic resonances. . . . If there is not material continuity, there is instead a kind of sympathetic or telepathic communication.¹⁰⁰

As in Blavatsky's and Bailly's 'correspondences' and Pythagoras's harmony of the spheres, Jankélévitch explains, Debussy 'perceives secret and supra-sensory affinities that bring distant tonalities into relationship'. The composer also goes further, inviting the listener to take part in the experience of these affinities and, as in Musorgsky's *The Nursery* or *Pictures at an Exhibition* and his own *Jeux*, to perceive the 'mysterious link'.¹⁰¹ At the same time, just as in explaining the 'granular structure' of matter, Segalen rejected 'the rigorous application of mathematical continuity to reality',¹⁰² Jankélévitch points to the importance of discontinuity in Debussy's music: 'The imagination and auditory memory are responsible for filling in these discontinuities, creating a kind of magnetic aura. . . . The juxtapositions of dissonances reveal to the ear an apparent discontinuity in which we must decipher an esoteric continuity'. Thus continuity in Debussy's music is made of constant metamorphosis and continual renewal, like nature. Indeed, the way in which Jankélévitch engages with Debussy's music through his writing seems in this sense similar to Debussy's engagement with the 'language of things' as they are.¹⁰³

Such ideas seem to contradict what Jankélévitch writes about 'music and ontology' in the opening section of *La Musique et l'ineffable* (1961), around which discussions centred in a recent colloquy on the philosopher.¹⁰⁴ In it, he objects to looking for 'cryptic messages' in music, 'allusions to something else', 'an invisible and inaudible harmony, supra-sensory and supra-audible'. He notes that words can limit 'our freedom of interpretation'.¹⁰⁵ Like Debussy, who had an aversion to 'bookish theories' and looked to 'the primacy of the immediate', Jankélévitch turns away from 'musical metaphysics' and embraces what he calls 'musical realism'.¹⁰⁶ However, as the above citations from *Debussy et le mystère de l'instant* document, the philosopher does not retreat from reflecting on the meaning of music, even though, as James Hepokoski notes, earlier passages from *La Musique et l'ineffable* seem like 'impassioned pleas on behalf of the suppression of hermeneutic inquiry'.¹⁰⁷ Did his thinking or literary style change between 1961 and 1976? One salient difference is that there are forty-six musical examples reproduced and discussed in *Debussy et mystère de l'instant*, as opposed to only seven in *La Musique et*

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 101.

¹⁰¹ Debussy, *Monsieur Croche*, 29; Pasler, 'Jeux', 63, 69.

¹⁰² Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 68.

¹⁰³ The citations from Jankélévitch in this paragraph come from his *Debussy et le mystère de l'instant*, 16–17, 101–2, 106, 108, 128, 171–2, 190–1, 195–8.

¹⁰⁴ *Colloquy*: 'Vladimir Jankélévitch's Philosophy of Music', ed. Michael Gallope and Brian Kane, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 65 (2012), 215–56. These contributions were inspired, in part, by Carolyn Abbate's interpretations and 2003 translation of Vladimir Jankélévitch, *La Musique et l'ineffable* (Paris, 1961; repr. 1983).

¹⁰⁵ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *La Musique et l'ineffable* (1961), 18, 19.

¹⁰⁶ Jankélévitch, *Debussy et le mystère de l'instant*, 196.

¹⁰⁷ James Hepokoski, 'Ineffable Immersion: Contextualizing the Call for Silence', in *Colloquy*, 225.

l'ineffable, albeit one that compares excerpts from five works by Fauré. Yet the philosopher's focus at length in 1961 on music's effect on listeners—including questioning whether its 'Charm', a 'mystical, not magical process', can render one 'wise' in some way¹⁰⁸—returns in 1976 in many of the passages cited above. Suggesting that Jankélévitch's words prepare 'the reader's ears for precise sonic effects', and 'affect the way I hear the phrase as a listener, and the ways in which I seek to play it', Steven Rings finds 'the possibility of a two-way commerce between music and language . . . a two-way circulation'.¹⁰⁹ This would parallel other relationships between the Self and the Other, enabled by music.

Questioning the assumption with which many of these essays begin—Jankélévitch's statement that 'music was not invented for us to speak about it'—I agree with Rings that it is 'declarative, not imperative', a comment to be taken in context, echoing Debussy's attitudes cited above, not a prescription. Certainly, as Jankélévitch puts it, in comparing music with the 'poetic act', 'making [*faire*] is not of the same order as reciting [*dire*]'. There is the composer, the performer, and the listener, and the 'creation' or the 'recreation' each brings to it. After complaining about pedantic theorizing—notably making an exception for 'true musicology'—he suggests that music, like poetry, 'turns every listener into a poet' through its 'charm'. Moreover, 'if music, like God's nightingales, responds to our questions by the thing made and in the making, it's for us to know how to understand its captivating message', the listener's role being 'to understand'. However, Jankélévitch goes further, as if his earlier contrast between 'making' and 'reciting' can be applied to writing about music, in which he prefers showing to telling. With language, he attempts not just to understand music's charm and its effect on him, but also, like the poet, to capture and re-enact it for others, the beginning again of the process, however insufficient.¹¹⁰

Although Hepokoski reads this as the philosopher's call for 'silence on music', as in no more writing about it, the word 'silence' returns often in both the 1961 and the 1976 books in conjunction with music or the occult. When Jankélévitch writes 'we need silence to listen to music', silence instead of 'the noise of chatter', of 'conversations', he is referring to an acoustic phenomenon that arises when these 'presences coexist in space', and their 'simultaneous noises interfere with one another like clashing voices'.¹¹¹ Some passages from *La Musique et l'ineffable* echo the occult inferences cited above: 'The search for silence is the search for the beyond [*au-delà*] that surpasses experience, that is not accessible to the senses, more essential than thundering, roaring existence: it prepares us, if not to know, then at least to be receptive to truth.'¹¹² Jankélévitch frequently refers to silence in discussing Debussy's music, the silence of 'before' and 'after', as with 'birth and death', that results in it resembling 'a compression of cosmogony, a recapitulation of the history of the world'.¹¹³ This concept expanded into three volumes entitled *De la musique au silence*, of which *Debussy et mystère de l'instant* is volume 2.

Perhaps more accurately, Jankélévitch just does hermeneutics differently than his German predecessors and contemporaries, their 'hermeneutics of suspicion . . . reaching

¹⁰⁸ Jankélévitch, *La Musique et l'ineffable*, 148–56.

¹⁰⁹ Steven Rings, 'Talking and Listening with Jankélévitch', in *Colloquy*, 219, 220, 222.

¹¹⁰ Jankélévitch, *La Musique et l'ineffable*, 99–101, 103, 107, 111.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 172, 173.

¹¹² *Ibid.* 179.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 164.

back at least to Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud'.¹¹⁴ If 'listening gives us a glimpse of the ineffable', or, analogously, his own language gives us 'some sense of the unrepresentable', as Michael Gallope puts it, it is not that this signals the 'Romantic sublime', which, as Judy Lochhead proposes, represents 'the failure of the imagination to take into account the unboundedness of sensuous experience'.¹¹⁵ Rather, I would suggest, Jankélévitch's approaches resonate with those of other French writers, not only Henri Bergson, his intellectual predecessor and mentor, and those here discussed, but also Paul Ricoeur, the French philosopher whose phenomenological hermeneutics called for a 'reading of hidden meaning' and whose hermeneutical goal was 'self-understanding by means of understanding others'.¹¹⁶ In many ways, Jankélévitch's perambulations in Debussy's world result in a phenomenology of his images, movements, sounds, spaces, and tonalities that, for him, result in 'music of pure exteriority'. Jankélévitch's frequent return to the concept of mystery revealed in Debussy's music as encompassing and ultimately defining Otherness should also be understood in the context of his French contemporaries. Gabriel Marcel's *The Mystery of Being* (1949) and Ricoeur's book about Marcel, *Philosophy of Mystery* (1947), were both contemporaneous with Jankélévitch's first book on the composer, *Debussy et le mystère* (1949), reprinted in 1962.

Admittedly, as contributors to the *JAMS* colloquy have observed, Jankélévitch's writing on Debussy's music is complex and paradoxical. Consider how he writes of charm: 'nothing is musical in itself: not a dominant ninth, not a plagal cadence, not a modal scale—but anything can become musical, depending on the circumstances; everything depends on the moment, the context, the occasion'. After giving examples taken from Dvořák, Chabrier, Ravel, and Fauré, he continues: 'replace the fourth degree by the dominant, . . . change a single note . . . and everything becomes prosaic and banal: it all falls apart!'.¹¹⁷ Gallope recognizes how Jankélévitch 'mediates on "what music does"' in a way that is 'attentive to technical musical particulars', unlike those who focus on his frustration with traditional musical analysis.¹¹⁸ When it comes to what Hepokoski calls the 'proximity of his own prose', full of 'extravagant formulations', James Currie thinks that 'we just have to accept the text's whims' even if this 'seriously discredits the integrity of it as philosophical work, even if at times, it makes it seductive as a kind of cryptic-driven literature, or strangely analogous with music itself'.¹¹⁹ Reading it as an 'indictment of once-traditional musicology' and analysis, though it is not clear what the assumed references are (Laloy was one of the most respected musicologists of his generation), Hepokoski sees Jankélévitch's approach as an inherent critique of 'new musicology', its 'disparaging of interpretive conversation about music' as 'a rearguard, regressive posture'.¹²⁰ Currie sees Jankélévitch's work as a 'welcome respite from the prevalent practices of musicology'.¹²¹ In other words, perhaps we should be more open to writing about music that takes the forms of virtuosic essays, based in part on intuition. What might it mean to aspire to writing that captures the 'lived experience' of music, as Jankélévitch here seems to be

¹¹⁴ Hepokoski, 'Ineffable Immersion', 229–30.

¹¹⁵ Michael Gallope, 'Jankélévitch's Fidelity to Inconsistency', *Colloquy*, 237; Judy Lochhead, 'Can We Say What We Hear?—Jankélévitch and the Bergsonian Ineffable', *ibid.* 233.

¹¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur, Charles E. Reagan, and David Stewart, 'Existence and Hermeneutics', in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of his Work* (Boston, 1978), 101 and 106.

¹¹⁷ Jankélévitch, *La Musique et l'ineffable*, 131–2, 135.

¹¹⁸ Gallope, 'Jankélévitch's Fidelity to Inconsistency', 236.

¹¹⁹ Hepokoski, 'Ineffable Immersion', 224; James Currie, 'Where Jankélévitch Cannot Speak', in *Colloquy*, 248.

¹²⁰ Hepokoski, 'Ineffable Immersion', 229–30.

¹²¹ Currie, 'Where Jankélévitch Cannot Speak', 247.

seeking—which one might even compare to the ‘improvisation-éternelle’ he saw as ‘coursing through the life of all being’¹²²—albeit not ‘exempted from external critique’?¹²³ I would hope that, rather than turning us away from writing about music, Jankélévitch inspires us to think about it more fully, more deeply, more insightfully, as he has done for me in his reflections on Debussy’s music, even if his language may be too ‘cryptic’ for some, too philosophical, or, ultimately, too French.¹²⁴

SIGNIFICANCE TODAY

Debussy showed curiosity, fascination, and respectfulness towards Otherness of many kinds, from that of class, nationality, ethnicity, and culture to nature through the lens of esoteric philosophy. Symbolism had taught him the value of critical distance in life and work. His conservative politics may also have played a role in his resistance to overt mimesis and assimilated signifiers, the explicitly indicated raga accompanying the elephant in *La Boîte à joujoux* (1913) being a rare exception. What was important was not to dominate or, through its integration, to suggest some pretence at superiority, but to disrupt the limitations of music as he knew it. If his relationship with the Oriental Other through experience and appropriation was far more guarded and ambiguous than for world travellers like Saint-Saëns or Roussel, perhaps it was also more liberating. Laloy pointed out that Debussy’s music has ‘the right to be free’ from the conventions of ‘traditional harmony’ and ‘classical development’ because its ‘fantasy is not arbitrary, but explains primordial truths, inaccessible to human understanding; through it the life of things and our own lives are revealed’.¹²⁵ Supported and encouraged by his friends, Debussy’s adventure in Otherness set the terms for his transformation and compositional distinction, as with many who followed him thereafter.

Today, we continue to ignore or sometimes denigrate this aspect of Debussy’s life and work, most recently sidelined even in the forty-page colloquy in *JAMS*. And yet, though not part of the emerging sound studies discourse, references to ‘vibrations’ in music, nature, and the cosmos by the writers here discussed suggest that we return to these ideas for what they might contribute to contemporary understanding of ‘music as the practice of vibration’.¹²⁶ Vibrations bring into relation the materiality of sound and its effect on the listener. They can refer to a sensorial experience, such as during Revolutionary festivals when 100,000 people ‘vibrated in unison’ by singing the same song, in this way bridging their differences.¹²⁷ Connecting vibrations to the nerves and the production of affect, Helmholtz hypothesized that it is ‘through the mysterious assimilation of the nerves with certain effects of resonance that music affects our bodies... penetrates us... gives us emotions... and transports us to an ideal

¹²² Gallope, ‘Jankélévitch’s Fidelity to Inconsistency’, 236.

¹²³ Hepokoski, ‘Ineffable Immersion’, 225.

¹²⁴ When I first discovered *Debussy et le mystère de l’instant* soon after it came out, its insights and language—what one can say about this music—put into words my own experiences with Debussy’s music. What pleasurable relief from the German-inspired positivist musicology that dominated those times! Jankélévitch’s book planted the seeds for the question-spaces underlying much of my 1981 dissertation and my analysis of *Jeux*.

¹²⁵ For Laloy, a Protestant, Debussy’s music returns us to a ‘state of innocence... before rules were imposed... before original sin’. Laloy, ‘Paroles sur Claude Debussy’, 197.

¹²⁶ Nina Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (Durham, NC, 2015), 155. I discussed this in ‘Some Precedents: Sound, Vibrations, and the Occult c. 1900’, paper delivered at the conference (*Un*) *Disciplining Sound Studies*, University of California, Irvine, 12 May 2019.

¹²⁷ Cited in Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 113. In 1889, Julien Tiersot returned to this idea from the Revolution: ‘when voices are united, a kind of sympathetic current among singers draws them together and orients them to the same goal’. Tiersot was seeking ‘under what conditions, in what environment, and under what influences could a national song arise, a song in which the soul of the country seems to vibrate’ (p. 115).

world'. In one of his earliest essays (1899), Debussyste critic Emile Vuillermoz suggested that 'the progressive refinement of our nerves [by this music] leads us to think that *this is the path of musical progress*'.¹²⁸

From mystically oriented writers, including Jankélévitch, came 'an alternative analytical framework', beyond that of politics, acoustic theory, or musical progress. Like that studied today by Nina Eidsheim, this framework built on sound to go beyond it, based on 'an unfolding' of 'relations'. Predecessors of Eidsheim's work on 'vibrational practice as a basis for knowledge building around music's ontology and epistemology' and of scholars now studying the 'post-human', these Debussystes were seeking language, if not methodologies, to reach beyond the boundaries of the known and understand the 'ever-changing relations that constitute music'. They and Eidsheim have focused on what in music is 'an unrepeatable relationship and idiosyncratic experience, thus as that which ultimately cannot be named'.¹²⁹ It is this endless flux, the mystery of which is unnameable, and yet able to be expressed in music, that ultimately that calls us together as humans and connects us to the universe.

ABSTRACT

To commemorate the centenary of Debussy's death, this article proposes a new perspective on the composer's relationship to Otherness. While many have argued for the influence of *japonisme* and Javanese music on his oeuvre, here I look at experiences, influences, and ideas that shaped these and similar encounters, together with their implications. I argue that symbolism was not alone in motivating Debussy's resistance to overt mimesis and ambivalence about assimilation; Japan's evolving political identity between 1868 and 1904 may also have played a role. I examine what Debussy may have learned from, or at least shared with, Edmond Bailly, Robert Godet, Victor Segalen, and Louis Laloy. These connections draw particular attention to contemporary conceptions of sound, as promoted in esoteric philosophy, and especially nature's relationship to the arts through 'vibrations'—ideas later implicit in Vladimir Jankélévitch's philosophical approach, here re-evaluated after the 2012 colloquy in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. They offer intriguing historical foundations for today's 'sound studies' research.

¹²⁸ Cited in Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 399–400.

¹²⁹ Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*, 9, 10, 156, 167, 191 n. 31.