

Analysis of Debussy's "Reflets dans l'eau" and Exploration of Performance Techniques

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes Debussy's piano work "Reflets dans l'eau" as the research object and conducts an in-depth exploration of its music analysis and performance techniques. Through the analysis of the harmony, melody, rhythm, timbre and other aspects of the work, as well as the discussion of its musical elements and performance essentials, it reveals the musical characteristics contained in Debussy's piano works and the artistic charm of Impressionist music in music. At the same time, combined with performance practice, the technical essentials of key touch, pedal, and dynamics control are elaborated, hoping to enable music lovers to have a deeper understanding and interpretation of this work.

KEYWORDS

Debussy; "Reflets dans l'eau"; Music Analysis; Performance Techniques

1 Introduction

As a representative figure of Impressionist music, Achille-Claude Debussy left magnificent movements in the history of Western music with his unique musical language and innovative artistic techniques. More and more people begin to study, research and perform Debussy's piano works. The author wants to conduct a study on the music analysis and performance techniques of his representative work "Reflets dans l'eau" in order to provide useful thinking for an in-depth understanding of Debussy's musical style and the musical connotation of Impressionism.

By using various research methods such as music analysis method, cultural research method, and performance practice method, the musical form structure, harmony progression, melody trend, rhythm characteristics, era background, and cultural atmosphere of "Reflets dans l'eau" are analyzed, and the phenomenon of cultural blending reflected in the work is deeply explored to grasp the overall framework and musical development logic of the work. The author personally performs "Reflets dans l'eau" or analyzes the performance versions of different performers to experience the technical difficulties and differences in interpretation methods in the actual performance. The processing of speed, dynamics, and key touch can reflect different understandings of the musical connotation of the work, which is helpful for in-depth research of the work from a practical perspective.

2 Music Analysis of "Reflections in the Water"

2.1 Inspirations for the Work

In 1905, Debussy created "Reflets dans l'eau", the opening piece of "Images," which is regarded as a masterpiece of Debussy's mature period. The author believes that its creation background and inspiration mainly come from personal experiences and moods as well as the exploration of musical elements. He pursued objective impressions of things and increasingly opposed Romantic music in terms of consciousness and emotion. This kind of experience and concept made his creation style unique. In the creation of "Reflets dans l'eau", Debussy boldly attempted new musical elements. For example, the work creates a dreamy and flowing sound with innovative whole-tone and pentatonic scale elements. This exploration and innovation of musical elements made his musical style distinct and unconventional.

2.2 Harmony Analysis of the Work

2.2.1 Chord Selection

Third-Interval Superimposed Chords: There is still the use of traditional third-interval superimposed chords in the work. These chords are not connected completely in accordance with traditional functional harmony but add a soft and hazy color to the music. **Non-third-interval Superimposed Chords:** Debussy extensively used non-third-interval superimposed chords, such as augmented triads. The use of this kind of non-traditional chords breaks people's conventional cognition of harmony and makes the music more innovative and expressive. **Chords Related to Pentatonic Mode:** The influence of the Eastern pentatonic mode is also reflected in the work, and chords related to the pentatonic mode are used. The interval structure of these chords is different from that of traditional major and minor chords in the West, bringing a unique

Eastern charm to the music.

2.2.2 Chord Application

Parallel Chords: Debussy often used the technique of parallel chords, that is, multiple chords maintain the same interval structure in arrangement and proceed successively. This technique makes the progression of harmony have a lateral fluidity, like the constantly spreading ripples on the water surface. **Compound Chords:** In "Reflets dans l'eau", Debussy superimposed different chord structures through the application of compound chords to make the harmony layer of the music more abundant. **Harmonic Changes on the Sustained Note:** The work often uses the sustained note as the basis of harmony and conducts harmonic changes above the sustained note.

2.3 Melody Analysis of the Work

2.3.1 Melody Form

The first two measures of the entire piece present the "water" motif in the middle voice part, which is composed of three sounds of A-F-E continuously descending from the D pentatonic scale. Starting from the second beat of the first measure, this concise motif becomes the core element of the entire piece, appearing repeatedly and constantly changing, giving the work a unified structure and theme.

2.3.2 Melody Characteristics

Debussy used the pentatonic mode in the motif and employed the three notes of A-F-E in the D mode as the motif of the entire piece and ran through the entire piece. The interval relationship of the pentatonic mode is the second and third degrees, making the melody have an ethereal and mysterious Eastern charm, which is in harmony with the artistic conception of the reflections in the water depicted in the work and integrates seamlessly. This unique application of the pentatonic mode breaks the major and minor scale system of traditional Western music and adds novel colors to the work.

2.4 Rhythm Analysis of the Work

The work has both long and slow rhythms. The application of such long rhythms gives people a sense of stability and calmness. At the same time, there are also short and agile rhythms, reflecting the diversity of rhythms. For example, when expressing water ripples or flickering light and shadow, there will be rapid combinations of short notes and runs of thirty-second notes. These short rhythms bring a lively and jumping feeling, making the music full of vitality and vigor.

2.5 Timbre Analysis of the Work

As a piano work, "Reflets dans l'eau" fully utilizes the extremely rich timbres of the piano instrument (the bright and crisp in the treble range, the warm and soft in the middle range, and the deep and heavy in the bass range) to show the different levels of the water surface. For example, the notes in the treble range are often used to simulate the sparkling on the water surface, the melody in the middle range is the main presentation part of the reflections in the water, and the harmony in the bass range creates a stable foundation and a deep atmosphere for the entire music.

3 Performance Techniques of "Reflections in the Water"

3.1 Key Touch Skills

The key touch skills of "Reflets dans l'eau" are very important, as they directly affect the timbre and expressiveness of the work. When performing this work, the key touch skills to note are: 1. Gentle key touch. The musicality of the entire work is relatively slow and soft. Even when playing forte, the force should not be too strong. Try to produce a soft yet powerful sound. Many phrases require a gentle key touch to make the timbre softer and more delicate and enhance the expressiveness of the music to represent the calm and tranquility of the water surface. 2. Variable key touch methods. During the performance process, different key touch methods such as legato, staccato, and sautillé can be adopted according to the emotion and atmosphere of the music to enrich the expressive tension of the music. At the beginning of the piece, the right hand's continuous triads representing water ripples require a gentle and delicate key touch to ensure the coherence of the phrase. The key touch at measure 49 should be deeper because it describes the increase in water ripples here, and the sound effect from weak to strong should be reflected; after measure 57, there is the forte forte marking, and the key touch should exert a little force while ensuring the relaxation of the sound as much as possible to

avoid a stiff sound.

3.2 Application of the Pedals

The application of the pedals is one of the important techniques in performing "Reflets dans l'eau". When performing this work, the application skills of the pedals to note are: 1. Application of the right pedal. The right pedal can increase the resonance and color of the music, making the timbre richer and fuller. During the performance process, the right pedal can be used timely according to the emotion and atmosphere of the music to enhance the expressiveness of the music. 2. Application of the left pedal. The left pedal can weaken the volume and timbre of the music, making the music softer and more delicate. During the performance process, the left pedal can be used timely according to the emotion and atmosphere of the music to create different musical effects. 3. Application of the middle pedal. The middle pedal can be used in some special cases, such as the need to maintain the continuous sound of a certain note and the need for special processing of soft sounds, etc. This needs to be flexibly applied based on the score marking or the processing of the music.

3.3 Grasp of Rhythm

The grasp of rhythm in "Reflets dans l'eau" is one of the important techniques in performance. Pay attention to the following key points of grasping: 1. Accurate rhythm. The rhythm in the work is complex and changeable, adopting the uncommon compound time signature (8/4 beat), and the rhythm varies diversely. During the performance, it should be meticulous and accurate, strictly following the score marking. For example, in measures 16-19, multiple notes of different durations appear successively, accompanied by triplets and ties. This requires the performer to count carefully when beating time, and the beats and rhythms should be "accurate", and there should be no rhythm errors. 2. Changes in rhythm. The rhythm changes in the work are rich and diverse. The performer needs to adjust the rhythm timely according to the emotion and atmosphere of the music to enhance the expressiveness of the music.

3.4 Control of Dynamics and Speed

The control of dynamics and speed is also one of the key techniques in performing "Reflections in the Water". Pay attention to the following control skills of dynamics and speed: 1. Hierarchical changes in dynamics. The entire piece is mostly played pianissimo, but there are also continuous changes within the pianissimo. For example, in measures 25-28, the upper voice is ppp and the middle voice is pp. The performer should show the difference between the two to reflect the layering of the work; in measures 55-59, there are crescendo and ff. When playing, it should not only form a contrast with the pianissimo part but also pay attention to the overall harmony, be slightly reserved, and avoid the destructive effect of a strong percussive forte on the artistic conception and beauty of the piece. 2. Control of speed. The speed in the work is not uniform but varies diversely. The choice of speed can affect the expressiveness and emotional transmission of the music. The performer should correctly choose the appropriate speed for performance.

The following is the analysis of the performance techniques of some phrases of Debussy's "Reflets dans l'eau": The entire piece consists of 95 measures, and the piece adopts the rare five-section rondo form (ABACA).

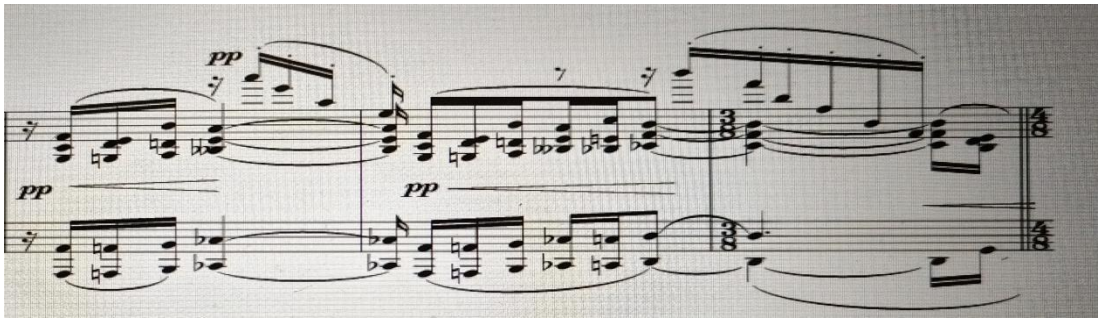
At the beginning:



Floating chords are like gurgling water. Touching the keys should be gentle and illusory, using more fingertips to touch the keys, and using the power of the big arm and even the shoulder to control the volume and tone, creating a background music-like effect. After playing the previous chord, the sound is naturally transferred to the next chord by rotating the wrist and transferring the power between the arm and the fingertips, reflecting the coherence of the water

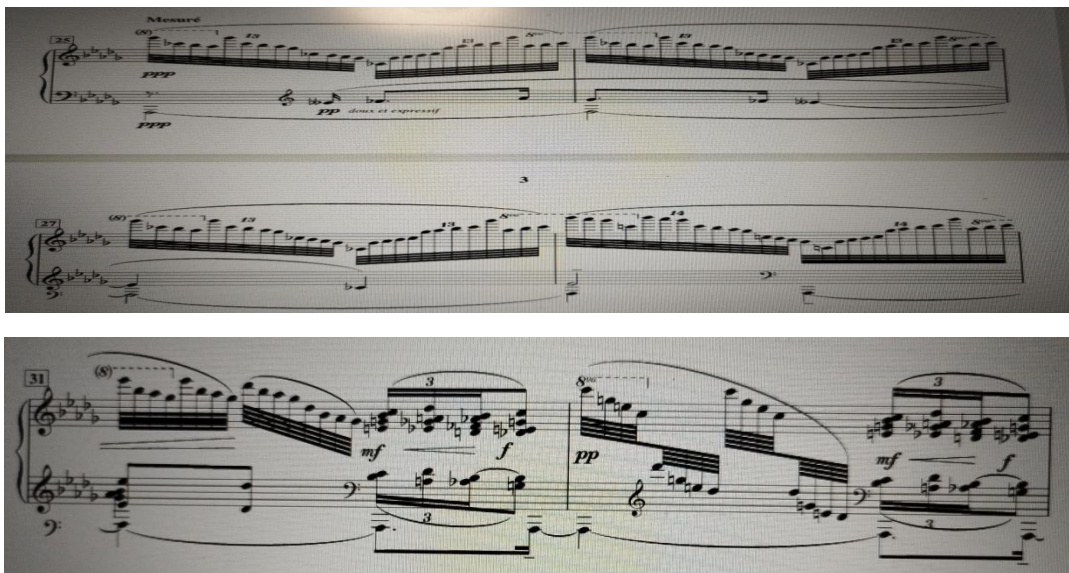
flow.

Bars 9 to 11



The upper register consists of semi-continuous sixteenth notes, like dots of light on water. Play with a light touch of the fingers on the keys to ensure a clear and glossy tone, while using the wrist to join these notes together to achieve a semi-continuous effect, while maintaining the quality of the sound. Do not include a weak pedal in this part, sustain pedal should not be excessive, but gently carried through.

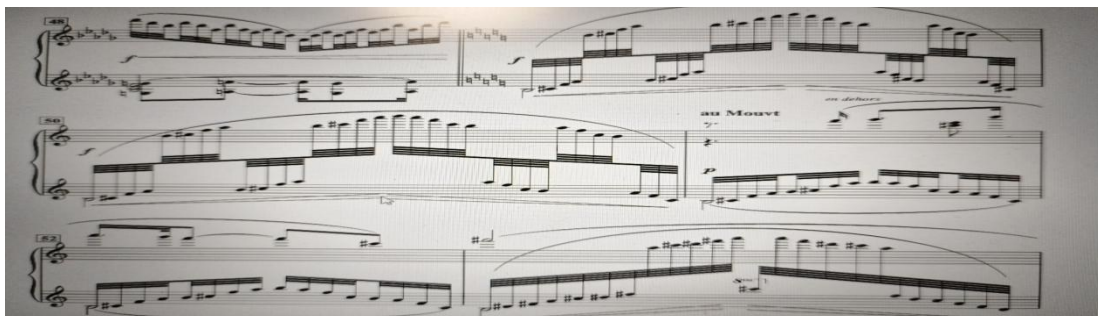
Bars 25 to 32:

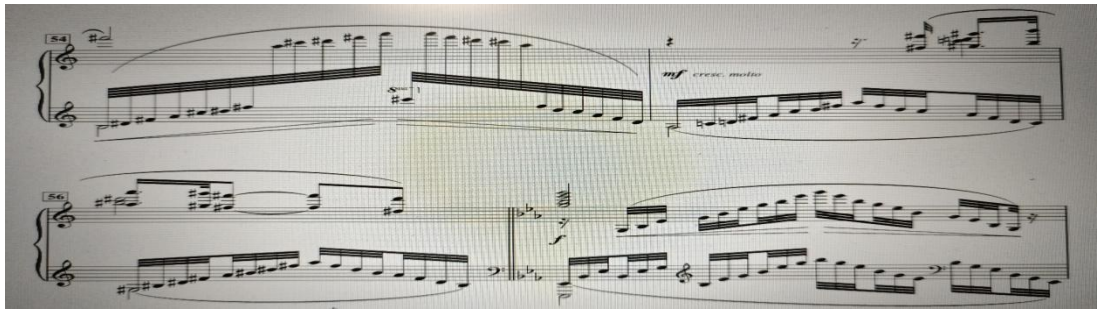


The soprano part of the right hand has thirteen, fourteen and fifteen legato notes, which should be played with even power, consistent tone and coherent phrasing, especially avoiding accents where the fingers are turned. At the same time, we should pay special attention to the division of the voice level, the left hand in this part of the two voices, the middle voice as the main theme, to the rhythm of the dotted mainly relative to the high part of the more quiet, as if the author of the inner monologue, playing the tone should be relative to the right hand is more calm, touch the keys deeper. The continuation of the diatonic notes in the lower part, as the "base colour", should be retained from beginning to end by using the sustaining pedal, and the right hand as a richly coloured part should have a sense of flow and luster.

Bars 49:

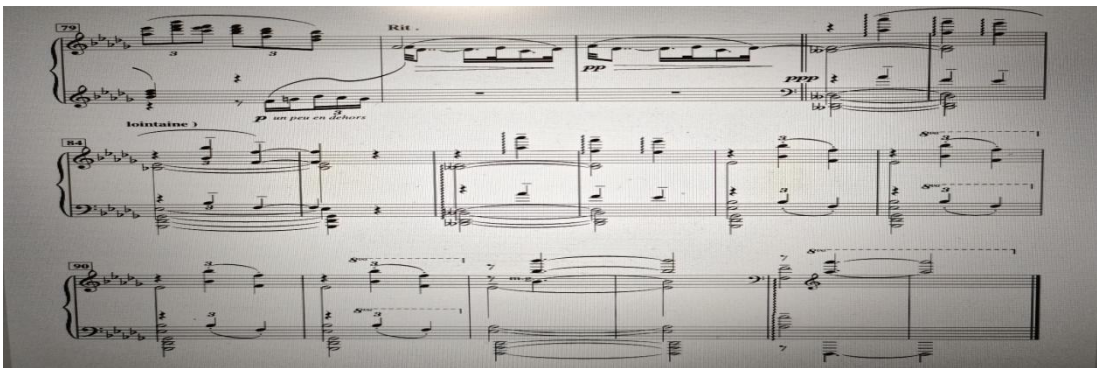
The tranquillity of the water is broken, the player is required to use the full power of the body, the power will be transferred to the arm, and then from the small arm to the fingertips and catharsis on the keys, the whole process pay





attention to the power of the power of the through, the power from the depths of the keys so that the tone like the raging waves of the soft and powerful. The sustaining pedal should be fully pressed to better accentuate the raging atmosphere of the climax, and the pedal should be changed according to the right hand melody one line at a time.

Coda:



The force is labelled "ppp" and the calm returns. The touch should be as soft and delicate as in the beginning, and the pedal should be sustained to create the image of the water gradually returning to tranquillity after a storm. In bars 82 to 88, the right hand has a glissando, like the sparkling waves of the water after regaining calm, at this time, the weak pedal should be released in time to obtain a layered acoustic effect. 89 to 95 is the coda, through the use of the three dominant tones, and the sustaining pedal is changed once a bar, and in the closing bars the sustaining pedal should be retained and prolonged, so as to give the listener an endless memory of the end of the piece, and let the piece end up in an ethereal and deep atmosphere.

The key of the piece changes frequently to convey a colourful sound effect. The piece begins in D major, then moves to A-flat major, then from D-flat major to B major, then from E-flat major to A-flat major, and finally back to the main key of D major. This style of modal shift presents a casual but precise effect, giving the piece a misty and dreamy colour.

4 Conclusion

Debussy's piano work "Reflets dans l'eau" showcases the essence of Impressionist music with its unique musical style and innovative artistic techniques, shining brilliantly in the entire history of Western music. Through the in-depth exploration of the music analysis and performance techniques of this piece, we can not only better understand Debussy's music creation concepts and enable us to appreciate the charm of this work more deeply but also provide valuable references and inspirations for performers. The following conclusions can be drawn:

In terms of the musical melody, its melody line is vivid and full of changes, as if the sparkling reflections on the water surface are swaying in the breeze. The undulating melody not only creates a mysterious atmosphere but also shows the natural and vivid beauty.

In terms of the application of harmony, the application of harmony is Debussy's ingenious "divine inspiration". He broke the traditional harmony rules and used rich chromatic harmony, adding magical colors and hazy artistic conception to the work. This innovation in harmony makes the audience feel as if they are in a dreamy underwater world.

In terms of the musical rhythm, the irregularity and flexibility of the rhythm endow the work with a unique sense of rhythm. It breaks free from the shackles of traditional rhythms and is closer to the natural rhythm changes, such as the surging of water and the blowing of the breeze.

In terms of performance techniques, the following points need to be emphasized. First, the delicacy of the key touch is of vital importance. Second, the application of the pedals should be just right. Third, the grasp of the rhythm should be precise and flexible. Performers should fully understand the irregularity of the rhythm in the work and show the unique

rhythm and dynamic of the work through flexible rhythm processing.

Future Prospects: The author believes that there are still many aspects of the research on "Reflets dans l'eau" that can be further explored in depth. The work can be studied from the perspectives of music psychology, music education, etc., to better understand and appreciate the work. At the same time, through performance practice and teaching practice, the performance techniques and teaching methods of this work can be continuously explored and innovated to contribute to the development of music education and music culture.

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