



The Development of Impressionistic Concepts in Jazz  
Guitar Performance

by

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## **Abstract**

The sounds of Impressionist composers share a number of aspects of their aesthetic and conceptual approaches with jazz. This includes exploring the textures used by Bill Evans and McCoy Tyner to create sounds associated with Debussy and Ravel such as parallel harmony, the whole-tone scale and pentatonicism. This research is directly linked to the authors own performance practice with the techniques studied to elaborate on previous practices and express the sound of impressionism. The aim is to develop an improvisational/compositional language that uses the sounds of impressionism in the context of a small jazz ensemble. The development of these techniques will promote re-harmonisation/interpretation concepts, new improvisational language over standard jazz progressions and extended comping vocabulary. a composition will also be written with an attempt to practice these sounds. The concepts to be explored are the textural uses of harmony, pentatonicism, the 7sus4 arpeggio and melodic/contrapuntal exploration derived from the voicings and harmonic movement chosen by Debussy and Ravel. There will be analyses of both of these impressionist composers to derive the concepts needed to recreate the impressionistic sound. The outcome of this research is to expand the musical language and express the impressionist music that appeals to the author.

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction and Literature Review

### Introduction

This study will focus on developing the impressionistic sound palette associated with Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel in modern jazz guitar. The investigation involves the influence of Impressionism on jazz and the improvising musicians who have employed impressionistic concepts. Understanding the sounds of the impressionists and having identified them in some jazz musicians will allow the development of the sounds and concepts in the author's own playing. This will be presented towards the end of the paper including an arrangement of a jazz standard in this style and a composition using elements of impressionism. The reason for limiting the study to Debussy and Ravel, apart from being two of the key players of impressionist music, is that the sounds they have produced appeal to the author due to their use of harmony and timbre. The translation of impressionistic music into jazz is mostly associated with the piano. Bill Evans and McCoy Tyner, two highly regarded jazz pianists have used the orchestral like instrument to their advantage in expressing sounds associated with Debussy and Ravel. This research will lean towards the adaption of these musical techniques to the guitar. This guitar lacks the extensive range and harmonic capabilities that piano boasts so it is a challenge to find and create ways to interpret the stylistic sounds that will be discussed.

Impressionism was a late 19<sup>th</sup> century art movement in France that developed in musical composition towards the end of the century and was labelled 'impressionism' by critics. Although the musical movement was considered to be associated with Debussy initially, it developed throughout France with composers such as Maurice Ravel, Erik Satie and Paul Dukas. The movement was also influential on other composers such as the English composer Frederick Delius and American Charles Griffes.

I have dedicated the majority of this paper to research the connection of this musical language to jazz. Being able to apply the creative techniques to existing jazz standards with

use of harmonic interpretation, melodic embellishment and improvisation is something that will be achieved with educated composition, analysis and the development of exercise.

### **Impressionism in Art and Classical Music**

Described by the *Oxford Dictionary* as “a literary or artistic style that seeks to capture a feeling or experience rather than to achieve accurate depiction” (2016) Impressionism is a 19<sup>th</sup> century art movement that originated from a group of Paris based artists who became prominent in the 1870s. Critic Louis Leroy coined the term in his satirical review of Claude Monet’s 1872 painting *Impression, Sunrise*. Impressionism takes its role in many art forms as a basis of creative expression. Its practice in painting relates to how we would experience and visualize the scene in reality as Callen states,

*I contend that new ways of seeing and representing were determined by differences in observing and experiencing the visible world, and that the constitution of these differences in painting depended on finding new techniques and ways to use the materials of painting. (2000: p2)*

Critics later labelled the term a musical and compositional movement, most notably including the works of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. In composition, impressionism is approached with colour of tone, timbre and the different emotions associated with harmony. Critic Louis Laloy, writes that Debussy’s *La Mer* contains “all the glimmerings and shifting shadows, caresses and murmurs of the ocean” (Priest, 1999). These timbral qualities are used somewhat differently to traditional compositional techniques. Traditional melodic structures and form become less relevant, as the role of the music is intended to give an ‘impression’ of a scene, story or emotion. Claude Debussy expressed this in his use of chordal colours, using a chord based purely on the texture and emotion it produces, regardless of function or voice leading. *Debussy: impressionism and symbolism* states that,

*We are accustomed to a linear interpretation of harmony. It is this thematic way of thinking, from which Schoenberg was never able to free himself, which has led us into this methodological rut. because the actual sound of chords was important to him and not merely their relationship according to pre-established successions, Debussy actually separated melody from harmony. (Jarociński, & Myers, 1976: p145)*

The works of Impressionist composers such as Claude Debussy and his successor Maurice Ravel are extensively documented in terms of their life, compositions and contribution to stylistic development. There is considerable literature covering the life and work of Claude Debussy. These include biographies such as *Debussy* (Jensen, 2014) and *Debussy: His Life and Mind* (Lockspeiser, 1962) both of which explore the life and inspirations that led Debussy to compose the way he did. In addition to biographical material, this study requires an analytical approach to truly grasp the concepts and be able to express them creatively in an original way. This includes score analyses of Debussy's *Nuages* (1909), the first movement from his orchestral composition *Trios Nocturnes* and two of his preludes *La Cathédrale Engloutie* (1910) and *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin* (1910). These pieces are prime examples of impressionism in music and there are readily available, scholarly analyses of these pieces such as in Roy Howat's *Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis* (1983) and Alvira's article analysis (2001). Many other analytical books and papers are also available that delve into Debussy's compositional style and thoughts. *Debussy: La Mer* (Trezise, 1995) goes into a deep understanding of the inspirations and complications Debussy was met with during his composition *La Mer*. This book takes more of a biographical approach in contrast with the analytical sense that many others do.

Maurice Ravel, whilst possibly not as widely documented as Claude Debussy still has a strong presence in published literature. Heinz's book *Maurice Ravel: variations on his life and work* (1966) and *Maurice Ravel* (Larner, 1996) both provide ample information about the life and general history of the composer. Biographical books such as these, although relevant in terms of discussing influence and development of musical style, offer minimal guidance to the technical aspect of composition. The most valuable literature for this research comes in the form of compositional analyses. There are countless analyses of Ravel works from scholarly publications, PhDs and articles. Some of these analyses include Gerard Schwartz video analysis of *Daphnis et Chloé* and Jeanne Marie White's contrasting analyses of the same piece. By juxtaposing analytical interpretations of the selected pieces it helps to discuss and develop the authors own analysis, which differs from the 'classical' interpretation in its intent to relate with jazz and improvised music.

The main sources for analytical studies are journals. *Pentatonicism from the eighteenth century to Debussy* (Day-O'Connell, 2007) covers Debussy's exploration of pentatonic harmony and function. Likewise, renowned jazz saxophonist Jerry Bergonzi has written an instructional book entitled *Pentatonics* (1993), a study of pentatonic use in jazz. *Brilliant*



*Colors Provocatively Mixed: Overtone Structures in the Music of Debussy* (Don, 2001) studies Debussy's consideration of the overtone series.

### **The Jazz Impressionists**

Although the connection and inspiration from the music of the 'classical' impressionist composers is apparent in the music of jazz greats such as Duke Ellington, Bill Evans, McCoy Tyner and Johnny Smith, research into this phenomenon is quite scarce. Very few have investigated the connection of these two musical styles with more than an observational comment. Whilst published literature is rare, there have been some articles and scholarly papers expressing the relationship between the two. Helander's essay discusses the influence of Debussy on Bill Evans' playing style (2013). This is likely the closest literature to the research discussed in this paper, which intends to expand on the connection of Impressionism with Evan's and its development as a concept in jazz. Possibly the only analytical styled paper on the relationship of Impressionism and Jazz is that of Italian musician and educator Cesare Grossi. The work is entitled *Maurice Ravel and Bill Evans: Observations on certain aspects of French music of the late 1800s in the pianism of those marked the beginning of modern jazz*. (2006) As the title suggests, an observation of the relationship between these two musical styles is analysed by means of consecutive, comparative excerpts. The *UK Telegraph* and the *New York Times* have published brief articles discussing the relationship between jazz and Impressionism. In *The Telegraph's* article Ivan Hewett talks about Kate Williams's idea to combine the music of Bill Evans and compositions from Debussy and Ravel in one concert (2014). Although hardly documented as being 'impressionistic' players, guitarists Johnny Smith and Django Reinhardt have clear connection to the works of Debussy. Reinhardt, born to a French family in Belgium grew up in encampments close to Paris. Due to this geographical placement it was inevitable that the music of French composers of the era had an effect on the music he produced. Django's compositions such as *Nuages* (1940) have a notable relationship with Debussy's compositional style. This mutuality includes use of the whole tone scale and dissonant textures that were uncommon in American jazz at the time. Johnny Smith's chordal playing is arguably impressionistic in his use of wide intervallic structures, parallel harmony and contrapuntal choices. Johnny Smith later went to confirm this influence by recording the Debussy Prelude *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin*. (1956)

## **Conceptual framework**

Studying form, phrases and harmonic techniques in Impressionist works will be an important aspect of this research. Identifying the sounds and the way in which they are produced will be the basis of further exploration in concepts and instrumental technique. Many Impressionist composers favour the piano and orchestra. This instrumentation holds wide possibilities for textural variation and harmonic construction. Compared to this, guitar in a small ensemble lacks the timbral and harmonic range.

In addition to the investigation of the similarities and relationships between Impressionism and jazz musicians, a series of techniques will be developed to express the sounds studied. Creating exercises to practice these sounds is a way to not only internalize them as an improvisational tool but share the concepts with others making the sound accessible to anyone interested in exploring it. In addition to these exercises the compositional aspects of impressionism will be explored with an original composition and an arrangement of Duke Ellington's *In a Sentimental Mood*.

# CHAPTER II

## Insights from Debussy

Impressionism is identifiable in a number of modern musical genres including jazz, rock/pop and many art/electronic genres. Some aspects of modern harmony can be associated with the sounds of Debussy including the use of parallel harmony in modern electronic music due to sampling and the heavy use of Lydian chords and pentatonic content in pop music. Shannon Hall, who is to be referred to in the *Nuages* analysis in this chapter, states that,

*Debussy's methods, to some extent, were based on: subtle changes of forms in French language and poetry; on the character and length of sound (as opposed to strong metrical and rhythmic accent); and on the flowing and nonsymmetrical organization of French meter, rhythm, accent, and phrase. (1981: p8)*

To develop these sounds I will be analysing selected works from Debussy to focus on the key elements of his compositional technique. These analysed concepts will then be brought into my own playing through exercises discussed in Chapter V. Selected pieces for this chapter include *Nuages*, the first movement of Debussy's *Nocturnes* and two of Debussy's piano preludes *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin* and *La Cathédrale Engloutie*.

### **Trios Nocturnes: Nuages**

Compositions by Debussy often include as little as one or two melodic themes that are sometimes only three or four notes in length. This often modal or pentatonic 'statement' is embellished over time as the piece develops using more and more dissonant counterpoint and harmonic decoration. The first melodic statement (figure 1) from Debussy's *Nuages* is a very simple example containing a series of crotchets descending in a diatonic, skip based pattern.



Figure 1- First voice, bar 1, *Nuages*

The piece contains three of these strong melodic statements and develops around each one accordingly, interweaving them subtly and using them with different colours and dissonance. We can see its development throughout the piece by analysing the embellishments used.

The first four bars (figure 2) contain the phrase stated twice with chromatically descending counterpoint. This results in only thirds and fifths giving it a consonant sound despite the chromaticism, the consonance is emphasised by the linear movement of the phrase.



Figure 2- bars 1-4, Nuages

The phrase is then restated but with a slight variation, still containing the skip pattern with descending movement. Bars 3 and 4 also contain chromatically descending counterpoint and this phrase is connected by the second voice of bar 2 continuing down to create a fluid chromatic line as depicted in second voice in figure 2. This form of counterpoint appears to be common in Debussy's music. What is unique about this technique is that although the melody voice is purely diatonic, the counter voice is essentially a-tonal. This creates movement that is difficult to achieve over jazz standards due to their fixation with pre-determined chords and will be explored in Chapter V.

The first melodic statement (figure 1) continues to be altered throughout the piece, creating different textures and tonalities whilst still containing the 'impression' of the original phrase. The melody is altered to the point where it is only descending crotchets but is still recognisable as a fragment of the original phrase.



Figure 3- bar 14, Nuages, true Parallelism

In figure 3 the original six crotchet phrase is preceded by another six crotchets descending in whole tones (except the first interval) with parallel moving minor triads. The effect of this phrase is a sudden loss of tonal centre and is an abrupt transition to the next section. The use

of whole tone harmony to modulate key centre is very effective as the one scale can have six different resolution keys<sup>1</sup>. Parallel harmony<sup>2</sup> can be used in a similar way and its application to jazz composition and improvisation will be discussed in Chapter V.



Figure 4- bars 5-7, *Nuages*

The second melodic statement (figure 4) is of a different nature and plays a different role in the development of the piece than the first. It represents a fragment of the diminished scale or ‘whole half’ and creates tension by accentuating tones (in this case the F natural) that are non-diatonic to the previously stated key. This phrase appears seven times during the piece, always played by the cor anglais, creating a theme and tension that can be easily recognised. The metre of the piece is 6/4 but the melodic statement is represented in common time. This gives the composition a free, almost rubato type feel as “Debussy shows. . . that music should not be hindered by bar lines or metres” (Hall, 1981: p20). Lines like these are common in many of Debussy’s compositions, they act as a motif that is recognisable throughout the piece.

The third melody in *Nuages* (figure 5) can be seen as a section in itself. It consists of a simple pentatonic melody notably influenced by traditional oriental music. Debussy was known to have been influenced by these styles. The phrase starts over a pedal of the tonic with a IV chord for one beat at the end of the phrase before going back to the pedal. This almost random chord gives an uplifting colour and emphasises the openness of the tonic pedal.



Figure 5- bar 63, *Nuages*, Pentatonicism

<sup>1</sup> Due to the whole tone scale’s symmetrical nature each note can act as the tonic of a dominant chord, meaning there are six different dominant functions in the one scale.

<sup>2</sup> Parallel harmony or ‘planing’ is a signature technique of Debussy’s Music and consists of taking a voicing and moving it around in either equal intervals or an intervallic pattern. The two types of parallel harmony are true parallel and diatonic parallel. Diatonic movement is where the chord’s tonality adheres to the scale or key, true parallel movement is when the intervals within the voicing do not change.

The phrase concludes with a diatonic phrase harmonised with block chords finishing on the IV chord. This concludes the consonant section of the theme and the melody is repeated but with a IV pedal and counterpoint that outlines a IV half diminished. This creates tension around the melody before repeating it again with the tonic pedal, again creating resolution. This strong pentatonic phrase manipulated with different tensions and then resolved without altering the melodic line is one of the devices that could be isolated and used in a jazz format. It is common in jazz to play a line ‘out’ and resolve it around the harmony but in this case the application would be to use this concept, manipulating the counterpoint and harmony around the line to create tension rather than taking the melody out of key. The use of pentatonic scales is a key part of Debussy’s compositional language. Along with its traditional usage, Debussy has developed this in new ways as Day-O’Connell states,

*To recognize this history is not to minimize Debussy's undeniable contribution. But the composer of such extraordinary pentatonic works. . . when so much of his pentatonic output suggests such strong connections with tradition at the same time, however, connections with tradition do not necessarily render a composer ‘traditional’” (2007: p232)*

The sound derived from this will be describe as ‘open’, a vague term referring to the open intervallic relationship between scale degrees and harmony. It is also due to the fact that it lies intervallically somewhere between a traditional arpeggio (with its harmonic implications) and a scale. The absence of semitones makes the melodic language highly consonant and ambiguous. Due to lack of leading tones, the scale results in alternative cadential movement. Day-O’Connell mentions the “Plagal Leading Tone” (2007: p160) as a key aspect of the pentatonic scale, referring to movement of the sixth to eighth degree. It is this wide intervallic sound in which the term ‘openness’ will be referring too.

### **La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin**

*La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin* is one of twenty-four preludes written by Claude Debussy. It contains extensive use of pentatonicism and non-cadential harmonic modulation. The very first phrase (figure 6) is a clear example of Debussy’s use of pentatonicism and contains no leading tones. As noted by Day-O’Connell (2007: p250) the first cadence in the piece is plagal and the sub-dominant triad of this is the first actual chord in the piece. The first two phrases are rhythmically distinct pentatonic statements based in G major (figures 6 & 7). The

lack of leading tones within the pentatonic scale leads to the absence of dominant chords, leading to plagal movement within the melody and often non-cadential modulation.



Figure 6- bars 1-3, *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin*



Figure 7- bars 5-6, *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin*

The first phrase is then repeated but as similarly examined in *Nuages* the harmony is altered to create a new texture around the previously stated melody. The new harmony is quite difficult to analyse theoretically. Alvira (2001) labels the chords as dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords with the VII in the bass (figure 8). This is theoretically correct but by analysing aurally it is possible that these chords are used for their textural contribution, rather than their dominant function. The result is a consonant tension that resolves with yet another plagal cadence. Techniques like this are very useful for creating tension without dissonant dominant harmony.

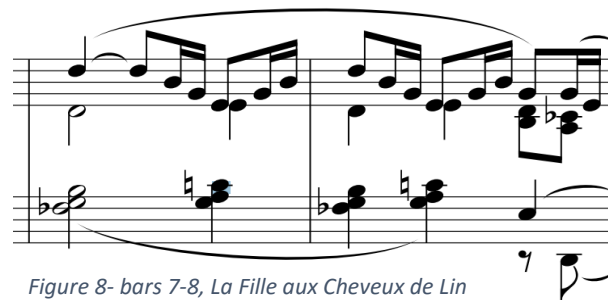


Figure 8- bars 7-8, *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin*

The use of bass movement to modulate is common in Debussy's works. The line in bar 14 (figure 9) is a descending sequence accompanied by diatonic descending triads; B, Bbm, Abm and Gb. Each chord is in first inversion with quartal movement in the left hand, adding to the richness of the voicing. At the start of bar 15 the key is then modulated by the E major7 chord, which is the result of the F being flattened. Keeping the sequence diatonic would

result in an F half diminished 7th, a perfectly functional line. In this case flattening the F changes the mood drastically as a result of the Lydian qualities of the new chord.



Figure 9- bars 14-15, *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin*

These techniques are common throughout this piece. Debussy's use of pentatonic structures and motifs are the key aspects to his atmospheric sound. The wide intervals created with pentatonic melodies produces little dissonance. It can be logically interpreted that Debussy's use of non cadential modulation is a textural choice to contrast the consonant sound of the pentatonicism.

### **La Cathédrale Engloutie**

Some of the most obvious uses of pentatonicism are evident in Debussy's preludes. Following on from the examples in the previous work, *La Cathédrale Engloutie* provides more rich resources for investigation. This piece contains many sounds and techniques that are key components of Debussy's compositional style and that lend themselves to application in the author's compositions and improvisation. *La Cathédrale Engloutie* is full of pentatonic structures, parallel chordal movement and non-functional modulation. *La Cathédrale Engloutie* translates to *The Sunken Cathedral*, which was written as a representation of the mythical tale of *The Legend of the City of Ys* (Guyot, Cavanagh, & Tymoczko, 1979). The story talks about a city near the Bay of Douarnenez in France that was flooded and completely submerged. The bells of the cathedral are still said to be heard and once every one hundred years the cathedral emerges and the bells become louder. Debussy uses an array of techniques to express the sounds of the bells and the cathedral rising. It is the practice of musically interpreting a story like this that defines Impressionism. Although this can be defined as program music, Impressionism is not quite the same. Charles Hoffer confirms that,

*Many Works by Impressionistic composers are programmatic. What makes Impressionism different from most other program music written in the 19th century is that the nonmusical associations are with impressions, not the stories or characters.*

(2008: p212)



In the first section of the piece, rising open fifths (figure 10) are described by Houle as the distant cathedral. He states that,

*The piece begins very softly with indistinct, faraway hollow sonorities. . . Using rising parallel open fifths and fourths (Gs and Ds) at the extreme ends of the keyboard to evoke barely heard distant cathedral bells, Debussy gradually lifts the cathedral closer to the surface (“peu à peu sortant de la brume,” measure 16) and then brings the cathedral out of the water by modulating upwards to the key of B major (measures 16-19). Sonorities are gradually amplified and the cathedral comes to life (2012: p6)*



Figure 10- bars 1-3, La Cathédrale Engloutie

The sound of open fifths and quintal harmony in general is an important part of Debussy's compositional technique. This first bar is relevant to this project as it expresses a pitch set, which is apparent throughout many of Debussy's compositions. The notes used are E, A, B and D, which are the result of stacking fifths starting on the D. For the sake of naming the concept associated with this pitch set, I will refer to this as a 7Sus<sup>4</sup> chord. It is unclear as to which theoretical approach Debussy used to arrive at these pitches but together they create an E<sup>7</sup>sus<sup>4</sup> arpeggio in this example.

Although I will refer to this as the 7sus<sup>4</sup> chord, I have yet to find any example of Debussy using this as an actual dominant 7<sup>th</sup> sus chord. This is used most frequently in Debussy's music is as a Lydian sound. When played a semitone below the bass note, the sus chord outlines a major 13 chord in an ambiguous way. As an example, an E<sup>7</sup>sus<sup>4</sup> over an F bass note gives us the Maj7(E), 3<sup>rd</sup>(A), #11(B) and the 13(D). What gives this its nebulous quality is the omission of the root and natural fifth and the unsupported extensions<sup>3</sup>.

In addition to the function of the 7sus<sup>4</sup> chord in this context, it is also important to notice its non-functional attributes. There is ambiguity in tonality within this arpeggio as made apparent in the bass movement of the first 3 bars. Note that in the first bar a G is played in the

<sup>3</sup> Often when extensions are added to chords they are supported by their previous diatonic extension. For example, the 13 on a major7 chord is supported by the 9 and the 9 is supported by the 7.

bass creating an allusion to G major outlining it with the 2, 3, 5 and 6. In bar 3 the bass moves down to an F and although the rising fifths do not change the tonality has modulated, now alluding to F Lydian. Techniques like this are a large part of the sound I will be exploring and the functional concepts using the 7sus<sup>4</sup> will be covered in Chapter V.

Amongst the many conceptual practices in this piece, that of parallel harmony is quite prominent. Regarding Debussy's unorthodox harmonic approaches DeVoto states that,

*Most first-year students of harmony, taught from the first that parallel fifths and octaves are forbidden in common-practice voice-leading, soon happily discover that Debussy is the unmatched rule-breaker in this regard, and that his music must be judged by different matrices of harmonic analysis. . . Debussy's melodic and harmonic use of parallel intervals thus forms a fascinating but enormous subject for study, and the present essay can do little more than point to a few examples of this central aspect of his art and compositional technique.* (Bempéchat & Cazeaux, 2003: p459)

In bars 28 to 41 (figure 11) Debussy harmonises each melody note with its own triad. These triads are played over a tonic pedal point.



Figure 11- bars 28-30, La Cathédrale Engloutie, diatonic planing

This serves as a point of resolution in the piece. Harmonising this way gives great strength to the melodic movement and programmatically is most likely to allude to the cathedral having fully emerged from the ocean.

At the conclusion of this section the 7sus<sup>4</sup> is brought back but in arpeggio form (Figure 12), This time the line is a G<sup>7</sup>sus<sup>4</sup>.



Figure 12- bars 40-42, *La Cathédrale Engloutie*, 7sus<sup>4</sup> ascending

At the top of the ascending line (3<sup>rd</sup> bar of figure) the tonality is modulated, once again with use of bass movement. The tonality in the first two bars is clearly C major but the Bb in bar 3 creates a new tonality, C natural minor. Theoretically this would be interpreted as an implied mixolydian but the following bass movement (figure 13) to an Ab changes the tonality to C natural minor or Ab Lydian in reference to the bass movement.



Figure 13- bars 43-44, *La Cathédrale Engloutie*, bass modulation

Debussy's use of parallel movement, pedal point and the 7sus<sup>4</sup> are key elements to consider when trying to recreate the sounds of these compositions. The array of sounds that Debussy wields affect form and motivic development in a significant way in comparison to traditional techniques as Houle states that,

*In musical terms, Debussy prefers smaller "motives" (short groups of notes) with numerous inversions and transpositions to fully developed "themes" (or melodies) which typically require accompaniment (as in "La Mer").<sup>9</sup> Each section in the narrative -- cathedral underwater, cathedral resurrected, organ playing, chant, return underwater -- has its own musical palette out of which Debussy creates a closely integrated mood (2012: p9-10)*

Many of these techniques are key contributors to the Impressionism sound and are not often heard so clearly in jazz. Debussy delivers these sounds consistently in his compositions and in investigating them in this way allows concepts to be applied to jazz improvisation.

# CHAPTER III

## Insights from Ravel

Ravel is widely considered to be an Impressionist composer of near or equal significance to Debussy. This chapter focuses on the motivic development of Ravel, particularly in the third movement of his composition *Piano Trio in A Minor*. Ravel's use of pentatonicism is also quite prominent and sometimes more obviously stated than in compositions of Debussy. *Daphnis et Chloé* a ballet written by Ravel containing lush harmonies and extensive instrumentation including a wordless choir will also be analysed. These two contrasting pieces are valuable to this paper as they express many attributes of Impressionism including parallel chord movement and pentatonicism.

### Passacaille: Tres large

*Passacaille*, the third movement of Ravel's *Piano Trio in A Minor* (1915) is based off a pentatonic theme maintaining the same rhythmic motif throughout the two main sections of the piece. This theme is initiated by the left hand of the piano (figure 14).



Figure 14- bars 1-5, *Passacaille*, pentatonic theme in left hand

The most important aspect of *Passacaille* that will be explored in this chapter is the development of this pentatonic theme. Concepts that will be derived include how Ravel creates different timbres around this motif and his use of dissonance in the harmony and counterpoint. The theme, as stated in *figure 14* is developed by the cello joining in with a melody above the bass movement and then finally joined by the violin above that. The

harmonic content gradually starts to add more Lydian sounds implied by the bass moving to a D as seen in *figure 15*. The Lydian chord commonly occurs in Impressionist music and is accentuated even further in the third bar of *figure 15* by having the #11 in the melody. As is noticeable in the harmonic analysis of *figure 15* the movement is entirely diatonic with creative use of upper structures. As the piece develops the harmonic textures become more and more dissonant.

F#m<sup>9</sup> C#m<sup>7</sup> F#m D<sup>M9</sup> E<sup>7</sup> F#m D<sup>M#11</sup> /C# Bm<sup>9</sup> C#m<sup>7</sup> D<sup>M7</sup> E D/F# Gm<sup>7b5</sup> C#m Bm<sup>7</sup>

Figure 15- bars 17- 22, Passacaille

The piece moves into a B section which builds tension with a five note motive. (figure 16) The motive does not resolve, but repeats in an ascending manner.

Figure 16- bars 41-44, Passacaille, B section motive

In conclusion of the B section the first theme (figure 13) is brought back exactly as played in the first 5 bars (figure 14). The melody line (played in the piano right hand) retains its simple pentatonic structure but the harmony around it completely changes the emotion associated. Strong amounts of dissonance and ambiguity are created by the use of the ascending augmented chords.



Figure 17- bars 58-60, last A section, *Passacaille*, parallel augmented and major triads

This is a clear example of the impressionistic use of harmony for its timbral qualities over functional applications. The ascending augmented chords have no function although it could be argued that they possess dominant attributes or even plagal qualities due to their remote association to the major<sup>7(#5)</sup> but it is clear they are used for an ambiguous sound. In addition to these augmented chords the third bar of *figure 16* shows the chords turning into straight major chords descending. These chords change the mood of the piece, slowly opening it back up into more functional, diatonic harmony. It is important to note that these chords are all moving in true parallel motion, a key part of the Impressionist sound.

### Daphnes et Chloe

The 1912 ballet *Daphnis et Chloe* was written for a very large orchestra and chorus. This huge instrumentation means the timbral and harmonic options for Ravel were vast. Ravel's use of harmony is connected to jazz in its heavy use of extended upper structures and modes, whilst still acknowledging most classical tradition as White states,

*In spite of the Impressionistic flavor of Maurice Ravel's music the underlying foundations of his style are erected upon the classical major and minor triad. He seems to have taken the framework of classical tradition and woven into it threads of ancient modes, pentatonic scales, parallelism, seventh, ninth and eleventh chords freely joined together, intriguing rhythms, and sometimes polyharmony. But with all this, Ravel remains classically correct and reserved in style. (1944: p1)*

The importance of the piece to this research is that it contains many key elements of Impressionist composition, particularly its parallel chordal movement and non-cadential modulation. Although these topics have previously been explored, the vast instrumentation and chorus used in this work means that it will be more of a challenge to adapt to a small ensemble. This section will focus on two areas of the piece, the parallel movement of the chorus and the non functional modulation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the use of bass movement to alter the tonality or key of a pitch set is common in Impressionism. Much like Debussy, Ravel uses similar techniques. This piano reduction (figure 18) shows the sustained chords, the sequential harmony in the strings and the melody line. This figure is important as it uses common tone modulation. Common tone modulation is a technique in which common tones between keys are expressed as a chord or melody and one or two note (often the bass note) moves chromatically out of the diatonic scale resulting in non cadential modulation. This form of modulation, although non cadential, sounds very natural and often goes unnoticed as a prominent key change. In *figure 18* Ravel uses an Cm<sup>13</sup> (first bar) moving to a B<sup>MA7(#11)</sup> (second bar) which is similar to Debussy's Eb<sup>major7</sup> in *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin* (figure 9). The chords are both played in second inversion resulting in a perfect fourth in the bass, which adds to the richness of the voicing and is common in Debussy and Ravel's work.



Figure 18- bars 21-22, *Daphnis et Chloe*, common tone modulation

The most important common tones in these two modulations are the primary chord tones. The Cm<sup>7</sup> and B<sup>maj7</sup> share the same 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> (Eb and Bb), in addition to this they also share the same 11 (F) which acts as the natural 11 on the Cm and #11 on the B. This sound is common in the work of Ravel and Debussy lending itself to smooth voice leading and reharmonisation of pentatonic melodies. The use of this in the authors playing will be discussed in Chapter V.

Ravel's use of parallel harmony is possibly more prominent than Debussy's. *Figure 19* shows a very obvious use of the technique to modulate from A major to C major which, although moving entirely chromatically, makes quite a smooth transition to the new key. The fact that the voicings stay true to each other gives the line a consonant flow that is hard to question its



Figure 19 bar 202, *Daphnis et Chloe*, chromatic, true parallelism

intentions. Due to the chromaticism it is easy for the key change to go unnoticed as the tonal centre becomes so ambiguous that when it does resolve it does not sound overtly new, that is to the non-perfect pitched ear.



Figure 20- bars 162-164, *Daphnis et Chloe*, diatonic parallelism

In addition to the jarring sound of the true parallel chords, Ravel also tastefully uses diatonic parallelism. This form of parallel harmony can add strength to a melody and outline the mode strongly associated with that melody. In bar 2 of *figure 20* Ravel uses closed triad voicings moving up diatonically with the melody, similar to Debussy's *La Cathedrale Engloutie* (figure 10). Ravel's use of triads as a harmonic basis for parallelism and melodic harmonisation is unique in the way that he uses the movement and extensions for their emotional and timbral attributes, as White states that,

*It is rather evident that, In this suite, Ravel prefers using the major triad as an entity to represent gaiety and animation, since they are used most in the lively Danse Generale, less in the pantomime and only once in a parallel progression In the Laver de Jour.*

This chapter proves a number of useful concepts can be derived from the music of Ravel. It is important to note that although Ravel's influence on jazz is the focus point of this chapter, his correspondence with George Gershwin was bound to have a jazz-based influence on his compositional style. Ravel was famously quoted for refusing to give lessons to Gershwin apparently asking "why should you be a second-rate Ravel when you can be a first-rate Gershwin?" (Schiff, 1998). While most of the literature investigates influence of jazz on Ravel this study has focused on the reverse.



# CHAPTER IV

## Key Jazz Impressionists

With reference to the interaction of jazz and ‘classical’ Impressionism, Hewett states, “Jazz and Impressionism seem like unlikely bedfellows”. This comment is correct in that the defining traits of both genres express contrast, although this chapter investigates the similarities that become apparent through closer analysis. One of the issues faced in this discussion is the very definition of ‘jazz’ and ‘Impression’. Like Impressionism, the definition of jazz is quite vague and is subject to change from different opinions. Jazz in this paper is a representation of ‘art music’ that is subject to improvisation. When searched for, Impressionism in jazz can be found everywhere, from the chord voicings of Bill Evans to the pentatonicism of McCoy Tyner.

This chapter will focus on the playing of Bill Evans and McCoy Tyner. Impressionism is mostly expressed through the piano due to its orchestral like qualities, ability to pedal and play wide intervallic structures. Evans and Tyner are definitely not the only jazz musicians to have expressed Impressionism, notable recognitions include the chordal work of Johnny Smith and Duke Ellington, pentatonicism of Kurt Rosenwinkel and use of whole-tone and augmented harmony in the compositions of Django Reinhardt.

### **Bill Evans**

As a sound, rather than a technique, Impressionism has been identified in the playing of Bill Evans. Born in 1969, Bill made an impressive musical career studying classical piano from a young age. His playing has influenced almost every jazz pianist to follow him, as Helander states that,

*Evans’ singular playing style and prolific career, in turn, deeply influenced the major jazz pianists who came after him, as well as shaped the development of jazz in the latter half of the twentieth century. (2013: p1)*

The most notable traits of Evans' playing include his rootless chordal movement and non-functional harmony. All this has contributed to his association with Impressionist music. Helander contuse to say that

*Though Evans's playing drew from a wide breadth of both classical and jazz influences, he was one of the first jazz pianists of his time to incorporate into his music the ideas of musical Impressionists such as Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Erik Satie. In large part, his connection to Impressionism gave his playing its unmistakable nature. (2013: p1)*

One concept that has particular links with the music of Debussy is Bill Evans' use of non-functional harmony. This is often described as using chords for their emotional and timbral effect rather than harmonic function. In Evans' composition *Time Remembered* (1963) (figure 21) the choice of harmonic movement feels almost random. There are no dominant chords, only extended minor and major sevenths. The result of this is frequent key modulation and a sense of ambiguity or lack of resolution throughout the piece. This technique is noticeable in many Impressionist works such as Debussy's *La Mer* and Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe*. Coupled with Evan's non-functional or purely timbral use of the whole-tone scale, this creates arguably a direct nod to the impressionistic works of Debussy and Ravel, as Mussy states that,

*He [Evans] learned from Debussy and Ravel the ambiguities of tonality, from Bartok to employ wider chord intervals, and from Milhaud how to use bitonality. The compositional characteristics and techniques that he learned from studying the great classical composers would become evident in his composition and playing. . . What is sometimes referred to as whole-tone harmony was often used to accomplish this tonal ambiguity. This ambiguity comes from the French Impressionist composers, particularly Debussy and Ravel. (2011)*

# TIME REMEMBERED

-BILL EVANS

Handwritten lead sheet for "Time Remembered" by Bill Evans. The sheet consists of eight staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature. The music is written in a simple, melodic style. Chord symbols are written above the notes on each staff. The chords are: B-9, Cmaj7 (#11), Fmaj7, E-9, A-7, D-7, G-7, Ebmaj7, Abmaj7, A-9, D-9, G-7, C-7, F-9, E-9, B-9, Eb-9, A-1, C-9, F#-9, B-9, G-9, Ebmaj7, D-9, C-9, and FINIS. The word "FINIS" is written in parentheses below the final staff.

Figure 21 Time Remembered lead sheet

The use of non cadential harmony in Bill Evan's playing is a key aspect of his sound and is noticeably one of the most commonly referred to traits in his relation to Impressionist music. Each major chord in *Time Remembered* represents a Lydian mode and every minor chord as an implied Dorian. This means that the piece never truly resolves. The melody focuses on extensions, particularly the #11<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> on the major chords and 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> on the minor chords. This use of extensions, Lydian harmony and implied pentatonics is relatable to the impressionistic sounds of Ravel's *Passacaille*, as discussed in Chapter III.

Bill Evans has become the most notable jazz practitioner that utilises aspects of the impressionistic ideal. Potentially, his association with classical performance practice has equipped him with an exposure to repertoire that has informed his approach and style.

### **McCoy Tyner**

As previously discovered, Debussy and Ravel are strongly recognised for their use of pentatonicism and that has also noticeably developed through jazz. McCoy Tyner is often noted as being one of the main jazz pianists to fully explore the sounds and applications of the pentatonic scale as Provisor mentions,

*McCoy's approach, his strategy, his solution [to adapting to Coltrane's unorthodox style], was to alter his playing so that the harmony he played was based on "perfect" intervals-4ths and 5ths-and yes, in this most sophisticated of musics, the musical scale this most accommodated was our old friend, the 'primitive' pentatonic scale. In McCoy's "open" harmony, almost anything could happen. (2010)*

The pentatonicism in Tyner's playing elaborates on the impressionistic application of the scales. The use of pentatonics as a pitch set in Debussy's compositions allows a theme to be developed prominently in the piece. Tyner's use of pentatonics acts slightly differently by using the strength of the pitches to create modulating harmonic movement. As shown in *figure 22* he is using four different pentatonics to play over a ii V I IV progression. Each pentatonic has its own tonal qualities, so to the ear, even though it does not modulate, there are qualities that sound as if the tonality is modulation with every shift in pentatonic. This creates movement in the line and due to the intervallic structure of the pentatonic scale the line always sounds harmonically strong.

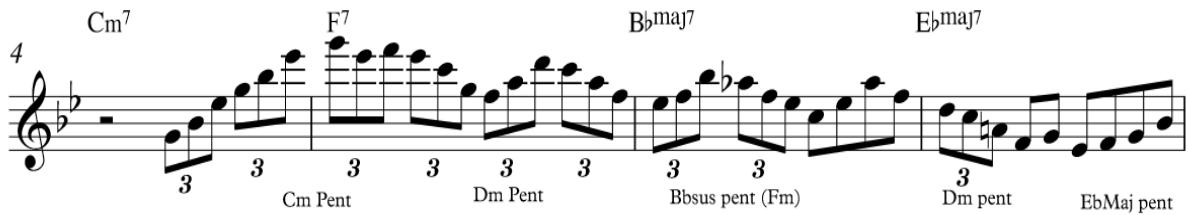


Figure 22- McCoy Tyner's improvisation excerpt from *Autumn Leaves*, pentatonics

Beyond pentatonics, and in likeness to Debussy, McCoy uses the  $7sus^4$  arpeggio in similar situations from Lydian to half diminished harmony. In McCoy's Version of *Autumn Leaves* (1988) over the minor ii V he uses a  $D^7sus^4$  to outline the A half diminished (figure 22). This gives the 11<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> scale degrees, although it can be argued that the strength of the sound does not come from the chord tones outlined but the strength of the pitch set itself.

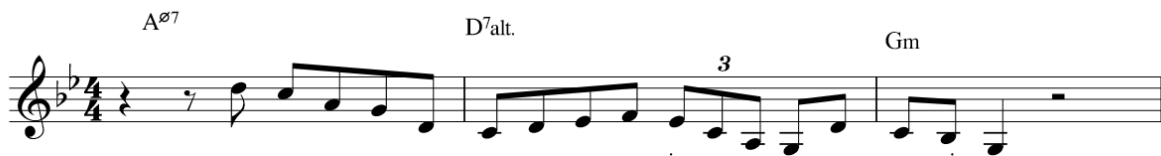


Figure 23- McCoy Tyner's improvisation on *Autumn Leaves*,  $7sus^4$  application

Tyner's playing is not necessarily directly influenced by Debussy or Ravel and his use of the techniques are not overtly similar to that of the Impressionists. In saying this it is still arguable that the techniques employed by Tyner are of similar nature and the execution of these sounds is what separates them from Impressionism.

The aspects of Impressionism expressed in jazz music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is more apparent than originally thought. The use of these concepts and harmonic techniques are evident and even if they were not directly influenced by Debussy or Ravel, the sounds and concepts are identifiable in their playing.

# CHAPTER V

## Application to Creative Practice: Concepts and Exercises

In this chapter the research presented will be realised in my own composition and improvisational performance. Techniques and concepts that have been identified in previous chapters will be discussed in their relation to four areas of creative practice: Improvisation, Comping, interpretation and composition. This includes improvisational language and techniques for soloing over traditional jazz harmony by extending these melodic textures, comping techniques and new approaches to harmony. These areas will be explored by the creation of exercises. In addition to improvisation and harmonic accompanying, an arrangement of *In a Sentimental Mood* by Duke Ellington and an original composition will be created and discussed based on the concepts explored in previous chapters.

### **Debussy and Ravel: Harmonic Textures in Improvisation**

The ideas and concepts investigated and discovered in Chapters II and III represent a rich source of creative ideas for the improvising musician. Translating these to the improvisational vocabulary requires a focused practice regime based on sets of clearly defined musical material. This section will explore the harmonic textures derived from Debussy and Ravel's compositions. The development of these techniques will support re-harmonisation, interpretational and compositional concepts in addition to new improvisational language over standard jazz progressions, including extended comping vocabulary. It is with these new techniques that new 'jazz' compositional concepts can be explored also. The sounds to be explored are the textural uses of harmony, timbre of instrumentation/technique and melodic exploration derived from the voicings and harmonic movement chosen by Debussy and Ravel.

By taking another look at the first phrase of Debussy's *Nuages* (figure 2) we can take the functional concept and create exercises to enable assimilation of this approach. The melodic line is diatonic and represents a tonic natural minor scale. The counterpoint is moving chromatically up and down, flowing with the melody creating various intervals, which do not

sound disturbingly dissonant due to the linear movement. To use this technique, exercises can be developed in which diatonic phrases or scales can be accompanied by chromatic counterpoint. *Figure 24* shows an A minor (C major) pentatonic with the melody starting on the third (C) and doing a ‘leap frog’ pattern in thirds which strongly outlines the tonality. Accompanying the melodic pattern with chromatically ascending counterpoint adds a contrasting colour that disregards any functional harmony or the tonality of the melodic line. Due to the consonance of the melodic line, the two voices blend in an artistic way with the melody strongly outlining the harmony yet having the dissonant texture of the chromaticism underneath.



Figure 24- Exercise 1, chromatic counterpoint

This concept can be applied to numerous scales providing the two lines do not start to create intervals too large, as this disconnects the lines from each other. Here, three scale exercises are shown with their function.

Ascending diatonic movement in groups of three outlining C Ionian



Sequential descending patterns outlining Ionian



Figure 25- Exercise 2, chromatic counterpoint

This technique can be adapted to almost any melodic line and is purely textural and in most cases non-functional. The use of this technique and others in this chapter are most effective when developed over the form of a piece. Slowly incorporating different contrapuntal movements of varying levels of dissonance is one key aspect of Debussy’s impressionistic style.

To expand on the impressionistic use of counterpoint, it is useful to look at Maurice Ravel’s *Piano Trio in A Minor*, as discussed in Chapter III. What we can derive from this movement is the development of dissonant textures and the ‘harmonic journey’ under a very simple

pentatonic melody. The melodic motif is very true through the whole movement but the development is in the harmony and counterpoint. To develop this technique in improvisation it will be approached in the development of a pentatonic motive. *Figure 26* shows a simplified version of the Passacaille motive, which also happens to be the 7sus<sup>4</sup> arpeggio.



*Figure 26- Exercise 3, pentatonic development*

This means that two important aspects of the research can be discussed; the function of the 7sus<sup>4</sup> in improvisation and the harmonic development of the line. By taking Ravel's uses of the whole-tone scale and augmented triads, we can split the line into two whole-tone scales. The first three notes being whole-tone from the E and the second three notes being whole-tone from the A. *Figure 27* shows augmented triads from each crotchet creating two whole-tone pitch sets.



*Figure 27- Pentatonic development, Augmented harmony*

In *figure 28* the related whole-tone scale is used to harmonise each note. In the first bar this is done by adding a major 3<sup>rd</sup> under each note and in the second bar a 6th. By widening the interval in the second bar motion is added to the line, opening it up and creating less dissonance.



*Figure 28- Pentatonic development, whole-tone harmony*

This form of harmonisation adds strength to the melodic movement by using true parallelism. To create a more ambiguous melodic shape, similar to the chromatic counterpoint in the opening to Debussy's *Nuages*, a contrapuntal approach can be made. *Figure 29* demonstrates the same pentatonic line with the same whole-tone harmonisation approach, except the intervals have been mixed up to create a counter melody based off the whole-tone scale associated with each note.





Figure 29- Pentatonic development, whole-tone counterpoint

This form of harmonisation/counterpoint works to create the tonal ambiguity associated with the melodic development of Ravel and Debussy. This technique works in a similar way to the previously discussed chromatic counterpoint in that it creates dissonant textures around what is essentially a very consonant sound, usually diatonic, pentatonic or in this case the  $7sus^4$  arpeggio. The whole-tone function is applied as a purely timbral effect and the function of the line relies solely on the melodic content of the top voice. In this case the  $A^7sus^4$  functions well over the following chords;  $A^7sus^4$ ,  $Bb^{maj7(\#11)}$ ,  $C^{maj7}$ ,  $C\#7^{alt}$ ,  $Dm^{11}$ ,  $Em^{11}$ ,  $Em^{7b5}$ ,  $F^{maj7}$ ,  $F\#7^{alt}$ ,  $Gm^6$ ,  $G^{6/9}$ ,  $Am^{11}$ . This extensive range of harmonic application means a  $7sus^4$  motive can be taken and developed around almost any standard harmonic progression.

### **Harmonic Application of Impressionist Techniques in Jazz ‘Comping’**

The work of Impressionist painters like Claude Monet have a clear influence on Debussy’s work, being described by Simon Trezise as “Freed music from the semantic approach” (1995: p36). Monet’s art used light and blurring to create the effect of a memory of an image rather than an exact copy. Debussy used this device in a way that colours and emotions became more important than a focus point, melody or even resolution point and this can be re-interpreted in the chordal work of jazz guitar.

Traditional jazz ‘comping’ is the art of expressing the harmony of a piece under the soloist. The voicings, extensions/alterations, rhythms and substitutions are completely up to the chordal player to improvise in real time to best compliment the soloist. This art can be taken to extreme ‘modernist’ levels, which defy traditional techniques. The purpose of this section is to approach comping in an impressionistic sense, changing the mood and density of the ensemble at will and using the harmonic techniques of Debussy and Ravel to find the distinct, colourful sound they are known for.

The work of Debussy is often praised for its coloured timbre and atmospheric sound. Adjectives like this can be interpreted in many ways but in this case describe the ‘open’ sounding harmony, which solely relates to the overtone series and how frequencies ‘fit’ over one another creating either consonance or dissonance. Certain intervals have different levels of dissonance such as a perfect fifth or fourth, which has little overtone clashes creating an open, more consonant sound when compared to a second or third. A common technique used

by Debussy is the use of a strict pitch set such as pentatonic scales, the whole tone scale and open arpeggios. The most extensive cell that Debussy uses to outline Lydian harmony and many other modal forms is that which identifies as a dominant  $7_{sus}^4$  arpeggio (figure 30). This four note cell is attained by stacking perfect fifths and has such strong harmonic implication that when used tastefully can change the tonality of the piece quickly without the need of pre dominants. It is this ambiguity that gives the Impressionist sound by use of non-cadential, non-functional harmony. Strong cells such as stacked fifths, pentatonic scales and the whole tone scale make use of this in a way that differentiates from traditional jazz voice leading and melodic structure. They do not contain any leading tones making their tonal centre more ambiguous resulting in the ‘open’, ‘colourful’ sound and lend themselves to parallel motion.



Figure 30-bar 7, *La Mer*,  $7_{sus}^4$

For the first study I will look at Debussy’s use of the  $7_{sus}^4$  arpeggio to outline Lydian and other modal harmony. Although referred to as a  $7_{sus}^4$  arpeggio here, this pitch set could be interpreted as stacked 5ths or simply the extensions of a Lydian chord ( $Maj7^{\#11}$ ) surrounding the root with the 3<sup>rd</sup>, #11, 13 and  $Maj7$ . These stacked 5ths also represent the four notes of a pentatonic scale. This device is common through his preludes and in this example in *La Mer* (Debussy, 1905) (figure 30) it has been used very clearly. The notes (C#, F#, G#, B) create an open sound that functions in different ways depending on the bass movement. In this case the bass is creating a cluster of the cell and alternating between B and A. The A is not part of the cell but it is the 5<sup>th</sup> degree of D which eludes to a  $D^{maj7}$  2<sup>nd</sup> inversion, or  $Bm^9$  but this is now irrelevant as the sound of the pitch set is so strong. This cell can now be manipulated and used by a comping instrument. Whilst the melodic aspect of the ascending line alone is strong, it can be still broken down into clusters with consistent function. *Figure 31* shows the previous (figure 30) transposed into C for ease of reading and octave displaced to create six individual voicings, which now outline F Lydian. I have omitted the alternating bass movement (A and B) as this is not part of the cell and acts in the bass motif to apply tonality to the cell.



Figure 31-  $7_{sus}^4$  chords from *La Mer* transposed and condensed

Due to the lack of the 4<sup>th</sup> degree (F) these voicings can be used for any chord diatonic to C major with tasteful extensions. E, A, B, D implies: C<sup>maj13</sup>, D<sup>m9</sup>, E<sup>sus(b9)</sup>, F<sup>maj7(#11)</sup>, G<sup>13</sup>, A<sup>m11</sup> and B half diminished (with the 11<sup>th</sup> instead of b5). This makes application over common jazz standards quite easy as it is a matter of recognising the key centre and then improvising with these as either tastefully thought out voicings or clusters of varying density. Traditional jazz language is built off V-I movement or ‘tension and release’. These voicings do not create any dominant function; the V chord is a sus so there is no true cadence or leading tones. This is what gives the sound of ‘openness’ as there is little tension in the progressions, or at least no dominant tensions. One form of modern dominant ‘tension and release’ technique is what’s known as sidestepping. This involves playing ‘out’ to create tension and then resolving when it feels necessary. This creates the illusion of dominant function and is probably a response to the commonly used altered dominant sound. This technique can be applied with these voicings by moving a half step up into the key of C# over the dominant (G<sup>7</sup>) and then resolving back over the C chord or by using tri-tone substitutions of the cell. An example over a II V I (figure 32).



Figure 32- 7sus4 arranged over ii V I

Moving up a key turns the G<sup>7</sup> into a 7sus<sup>4(#9/b13)</sup> chord. The tonal quality of the chord though is less important as it is the sound of the pitch cell that gives the strength to the sound. Figure 33 shows the same technique but with tri-tone substitution, which can create smooth voice leading. Instead of creating a dominant #11 sound, the tri-tone substitution changes the G<sup>7</sup> to a major7, this changes the function of the C to Lydian, rather than Ionian, adding to the ambiguity of the sound. With consciousness of the melody and bass movement, this can be a useful textural re-harmonisation.



Figure 33- 7sus4 arranged with tri-tone sub

Many other voicings can be created within this cell. Changing the density and rhythmic motives gives the player a huge range of timbral colour to use at will. This is also only one of the many pitch sets that Debussy has used to create the impressionistic sound. Further study with whole tones, pentatonics and other scale segments lead to greater colour that is beyond traditional jazz harmony. Jazz standards are continuously rendered and often re-harmonized. These techniques are all able to be implied in real-time and with consciousness of the melody it is possible to completely change the sound of the harmony whilst not altering the bass movement.

### **In Practice – Interpretation of Jazz Standards**

To approach Impressionism in its literal form would be to look to its origin. Oscar-Claude Monet has been coined as the founder of French Impressionist painting. The way in which the term was applied was through critics, labelling his art in a way in which he, quite like Debussy, found questionable and disrespectful. The label given to Monet was based on his art giving a vague ‘impression’ of a scene, lacking minor detail. His work was deemed scarce, often blurred and thus labelled ‘Impressionism’ in a disparaging way. Although originally criticised, the work of Impressionist painters grew popular and became arguably the most significant art movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Oxford dictionary defines the style as, “A literary or artistic style that seeks to capture a feeling or experience rather than to achieve accurate depiction”. (2016) Using this definition, an interpretive concept can be applied to jazz, creating an impression of the melodic and structural content of a jazz or pop standard to develop an impressionistic form of ‘Art Music’.

The following score (figure 35) is an arrangement of the 1935 Duke Ellington composition *In a Sentimental Mood* that utilises these principles. It takes the previously discussed concept of literal Impressionism by creating a vague depiction of the melody and then gradually working in the original harmonic and melodic content. Many techniques of Debussy’s approach to form and harmony are also explored within this rendition, including the use of dissonance and consonance with different contrapuntal, harmonic and rhythmic concepts.

This arrangement contains some major attributes of the impressionistic sound. The first and most consistent technique is to blur the melody, creating an impression of the piece before it is entirely recognisable. I have achieved this in various ways as the original melody contains a six note pentatonic anacrusis and I have removed two notes and used them in the countermelody instead. This creates a four note ascending phrase that outlines the harmonic

content of the original but with less notes. Throughout the A section I have picked key notes that I feel are important to the melody and have scattered them over the bars. The reason of making this as ambiguous as possible is to keep the anacrusis phrase the most notable phrase as it is arguably the most significant phrase of the A section melody. The scattered tones are just to outline the form of the A section, as each tone is harmonised with either quintal or quartal voicings. In bars 15 to 17 diatonic parallelism is used to connect the A and B sections. The parallelism is using triads based a fifth below the melody note, a common technique of Debussy as noted in Chapter II. These triads move in a broken descending pattern and upon reaching the E diminished triad the E is flattened to create an Eb major chord, which is yet another technique seen in *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin*. This Eb major becomes the flat VI of the new key of F natural minor, the F is then pedalled for two bars to establish the new key. Debussy often uses this tonic pedal technique when entering a pentatonic themed section, which results in a sense of consonance and resolution. The intention of the pedal is to establish a strong sense of tonality to create an undisturbed mood by not adding any bass movement or harmonic embellishments. As the B section melody is repeated I have used this as an opportunity to apply a concept much like that in Debussy's *Nuages*. The strong pentatonic based melody is presented clearly over a tonic pedal creating no dissonant intervals or any harmonic movement. On the second repeat of the melody the harmonic and contrapuntal material is approached in a highly dissonant manner. The guitar part is presented over an A pedal resulting in an A<sup>7</sup> altered sound. This alone creates an unsteady harmonic bed for the melody. The guitar part presents the melody in its original form but with use of chromatic counterpoint. Bars 20 and 21 show the melody moving as per the original but with a chromatically descending line in the second voice. This technique was taken from the first bars of Debussy's *Nuages* (figure 2) as discussed in Chapter II. The last A section is then played as the original melody with some diatonic dissonance<sup>4</sup> added in the counter voice, gradually opening up to more consonant intervals.

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<sup>4</sup> Dissonance created by diatonic intervals, for example a major7 voiced with the M7 and tonic together creates dissonance without altering the chord tones.

(BALLAD)

# IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD

- DUKE

D- D-(maj7) D-7 D-6

G- G-(maj7) G-7 / G-6 A7 D-

D7 G-7 Gb7 1. Fmaj7 2. Fmaj7 Ab7

Dbmaj7 Bb-7 Eb-7 Ab7 Dbmaj7 Bb7 Eb7 Ab7

Dbmaj7 Bb-7 Eb-7 Ab7 G-7 C7

D- D-(maj7) D-7 D-6 G- G-(maj7) G-7 / G-6 A7

D- D7 G-7 C7 b9 Fmaj7

DUKE ELLINGTON - "PIANO REFLECTIONS"

Figure 34- In a Sentimental Mood Lead Sheet

The image displays a musical score for the piece "In a Sentimental Mood" by Scott Joplin, arranged for piano and guitar. The score is organized into systems, each with a measure number on the left. The piano part is written in the upper staves, and the guitar part is in the lower staves. Dynamics such as *pp* (pianissimo) and *ff* (fortissimo) are indicated. Chord markings are provided for the guitar part, including *Fm*, *A7alt*, *Dm*, *Dm/C#*, *Dm/C*, *Dm/B*, *Bbmaj7*, *Gm9*, *Fmaj7*, *E97*, *Dm*, *D*, *Gm*, *C*, and *F*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and triplets.

Figure 35- Authors arrangement of In a Sentimental Mood

This arrangement is an example of how these techniques associated with Impressionism can be put to use in a jazz setting. The arrangement takes a familiar melody and ‘blurs’ it, taking it through a series of timbres, dissonant and consonant textures and develops them over the form from ambiguous sounds to a recognizable jazz standard. These conceptual practices can be applied equally to jazz composition.

### **Composition for Jazz Ensemble**

The final task to fully explore the sounds derived from this research is to compose a piece for a jazz trio to play (figure 36). This composition is targeted toward the playing capabilities of the guitar and has been arranged accordingly. Many aspects of impressionism studied in this research have been included in this composition to try and create a convincingly ‘impressionistic’ piece of music that still holds the improvisational qualities of jazz. The piece features a solo section and could be considered highly through composed, although minor motifs and themes are present throughout the piece. The odd number of bars adds to the ambiguity.

The opening six bars feature a simple crotchet based pentatonic line, similar to that of Debussy’s *Nuages*. This is accompanied by chromatic based counterpoint in the guitar’s second voice. This sets a pulse for the band to add textures at will. It is with the lack of instruction that the jazz elements are allowed to come through. There is then a strong sequential crescendo derived from Ravel’s *Daphnis et Chloe* outlining an Cm<sup>7</sup> and B<sup>maj7</sup>. I have used this to create anticipation for the main body of the piece. There is a somewhat anti-climax when the crescendo ends after three bars and is followed by a diatonic motive that descends in diatonic parallel movement until arriving at the main theme of the piece. These three bars are important as they set up the rhythmic motive for the main theme. The main theme (bars 17-21) is based on the harmonic progression throughout Ravel’s *Passacaille*. This diatonic progression lends itself to pentatonic structures and the use of 9ths and 11ths in the melody. The majority of the melody is harmonised only in parallel fifths, fourths and occasionally sixths. This wide intervallic system leaves space for timbral ornamentation in the bass and drums. In bar 27 I have used true parallel minor triads descending in minor thirds. This acts as a way to modulate to the new key of B minor. This section (bars 28-40) is heavily influenced and essentially a reference to Debussy’s B section in *Nuages*. I have used a similar pentatonic melody over a tonic minor pedal. These create a very open feeling from



the minimalist, wide intervallic structure. Like in *Nuages* I have taken the melody and repeated it with more dissonant harmony in an attempt to create distress in the emotional quality of the section. This is done by taking the bass pedal out of the diatonic key of B minor and adding major thirds below each melody note. At bar 37 the melody is brought into the relative major (A major) and a descending line, much like that of Debussy's *La Cathedrale Engloutie* is used to modulate the A major tonality into F Lydian. The purpose of the solo section is to express creative use of the 7sus<sup>4</sup> concepts studied in this chapter and outline their different functions. The piece concludes with the main theme with slight variation, omitting some notes.

This composition outlines the key aspects of Impressionism studied in this paper. In addition to playing the melodies and harmonies written, it is also important to approach the phrasing and instrumental touch in an impressionistic way to achieve the right sound.



27 G#m Fm Dm Bm Bm

*p* *pp* Ped.

Drums play dissonance

33 Bb/C Fmaj7 E

*p*

37 A(sus4) G(sus4) Fmaj7 E+

41 Eb(sus4)/C# Solos Eb(sus4)/E Eb(sus4)/C Eb(sus4)/Gb

*p*

Drums follow melody

49 F#m7 C#m7 F#m7 Dmaj9 E7 F#m7-3

52 F#m9/A B5 C#m Dmaj7 E F#m G#o7 Emaj13

Figure 36- Composition

# Conclusion

The goal for many jazz musicians is to achieve new sounds, concepts and develop an individual language of their own. This paper has explored the sounds, compositional techniques and musical language of the Impressionist composers Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. The aim of this research was to conceptualise the sound of Debussy and Ravel in a way that can be expressed in jazz performance. In addition to improvisation, the concepts are intended to help develop compositional and interpretational techniques. The paper has looked at the already present development of these techniques in jazz players throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The problem with this transition is the translation to guitar and small jazz ensemble from the orchestral like qualities of the piano and of course the orchestra, in which these composers mainly wrote for.

The huge array of notes and timbral qualities have been difficult to achieve on the unforgiving fret board of a guitar. Although these obstacles were and will be forever present, this research has proved that many of the conceptual practices are actually of a simple nature. This paper has outlined the key aspects that make Debussy sound the way he does. These aspects have proven to be much simpler, and more closely related to jazz than originally thought. The first thought was that of how improvisation, an ‘in the moment’, minimally arranged art form cannot possibly be truly related to the arabesque, dreamlike qualities of Impressionism. Often the intention is completely different, although jazz is arguably one of the most eclectic music forms. This research has taken one of the many sounds that have developed over the centuries and embedded it into the jazz language. Many of the techniques discussed here have already been explored by jazz musicians but as for intentionally recognising and expressing the sounds as impressionistic, this is quite rare. The analytical approach to the compositions of Debussy and Ravel has enabled an extraction of their concepts to be used in the author’s own playing. With this ‘analyse –conceptualise- exercise’ approach, the development the impressionistic sound in jazz improvisation and composition has come through. This topic is open to a vast amount of further research in regards to the expression of Impressionism through instrument tone, instrumentation and programmatic improvisation. The sounds explored in this paper can be used to express a real-time impression of a scene, story or work of art just as many Impressionist compositions have done.

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