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# Editor's note



**M**ost of us have dabbled with Debussy. In fact the results of our last reader survey confirmed he's the No 1 composer that people love to play! What's his secret? What's the allure? Is it that gossamer, dreamy, Impressionist effect that his music portrays? Could it be that for most of us – whether beginner, intermediate or advanced level – there's always something that we can learn by the French master.

Even if his music might sound effortless, it takes hours of hard work to be able to play satisfyingly well. And that's where we are here to help. Inside this special Debussy issue I've chosen some of my favourite Debussy Scores from past issues of *Pianist*, which cater to all levels. There are two easier pieces – *The Sleeping Soldier* and *The Little Shepherd*. Try your hand at these, and you'll be well on your way to discovering the beauty of this composer. Then there's the gorgeous *Rêverie*, perfect for the intermediate-level pianist. It is one

of Debussy's most evocative piano pieces.

Then there's *Serenade for the Doll*, for the intermediate/advanced pianist. You can watch our house pianist Chenyin Li perform it (a great learning tool). For the advanced pianist, there's the magical *Clair de Lune*. Make sure to read Lucy Parham's in-depth lesson on the piece to help with the learning process.

Finally, for further guidance on how to improve your Debussy playing, we feature two important masterclasses – *Learning French Repertoire* and *Leggiero Playing* – written by Kathryn Page and Mark Tanner respectively. There are lots of video lessons to watch, too, from popular contributor Graham Fitch.

*Erica*

**ERICA WORTH, EDITOR**

*P.S. I'm always delighted to receive feedback from Pianist readers and piano lovers in general. Whether it's about a topic you'd like us to address, or anything piano-related, do drop me a line at [editor@pianistmagazine.com](mailto:editor@pianistmagazine.com) and I'll be happy to answer you!*

## Pianist

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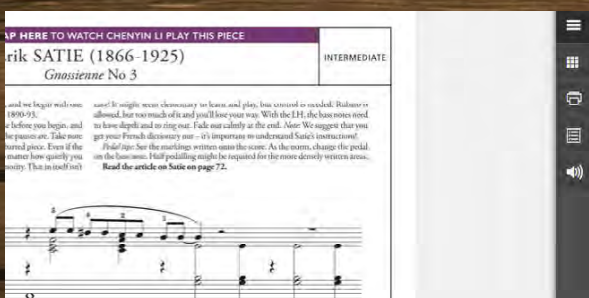
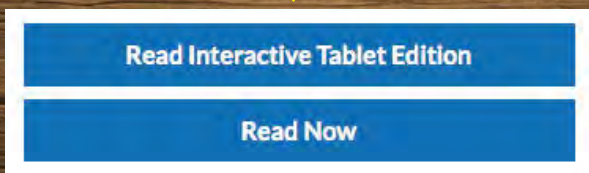
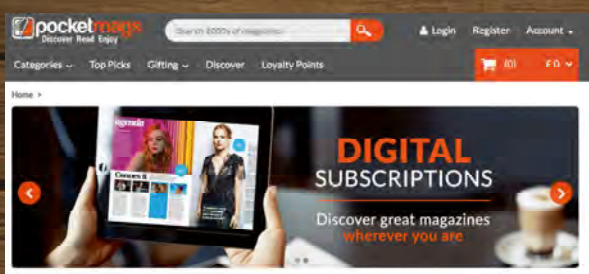
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# A light touch LEGGIERO PLAYING

The great pianists understood the beauty and power of soft playing, says pianist and teacher **Mark Tanner**, who offers a gentle guide to improving your light touch and quiet inflection

**F**ranz Reizenstein (1911-1968), the formidable German-British composer, pianist and teacher, considered 'technique' to be merely another word for 'control'. We would do well to keep Reizenstein's observation in mind when gearing up to do our daily practice. Pianists tend to esteem the acquisition of speed more highly than the cultivation of dependable touch control; moreover, as a facet of technique, quiet playing usually ranks pretty low down the priority list. The fact that pianists have so many more notes to play surely does not exempt us from working to improve the *quality* of sound we make. Whereas the crafting of a mellifluous, softer tone is seen as vital to the learning of the violin or clarinet, it all too often slips under the radar with those who are learning the piano.

Among the hardest facets of piano playing is controlling a lightness of attack, and when coupled with playing at a faster speed, a reliable *leggiero* touch must rank as among the most prized piano skills. Yet when preparing students for diplomas and recitals, I've often heard statements along the lines of, 'I'd love to include that little piece by X, but I'm worried it's too easy.' Just because a composer or examination board chooses to label a piece as 'intermediate' doesn't really tell us much about its potential attractiveness when performed by an expert pianist who has mastered touch control. For this reason, Schumann's *Träumerei* might just as easily be considered an advanced FRSM-standard piano piece as a Grade 6 piece, dependent entirely on how sophisticated and artistic a performance is. Indeed, in times past, pianists such as Sviatoslav Richter thought nothing of threading short, poetic pieces into recitals – they certainly had no fear of being criticised for including something that was too 'easy'.

So, what can you do to improve this elusive 'perfumed' quality of sound on the piano? A good initial approach would be to take stock of what is currently happening when you attempt to play at a dynamic quieter than *mf*. If

you 'tickle' the keys, you will invariably produce a pallid, frail sound. In my experience the cause of this can to an extent be environmental. Pianists who regularly practise on a piano possessing a shallow action often relax into a default flat-fingered attack; in other words, they permit the limitations of the instrument to skew their technique, which can be hard to rectify later. This type of compromise may come off acceptably well on that particular instrument, but does not anticipate the requirement for a firmer approach when tackling pianos with a heavier action. Aim, in general, to play more decisively than instinct might suggest when playing an excessively light piano, even when practising pieces like Debussy's 'Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum' (No 1, *Children's Suite*).

Those who play on digital pianos – even those models that possess a well-designed weighted action – are at risk of falling into a false sense of security when it comes to playing at a more daringly quiet dynamic level. You may have overlooked an opportunity to adjust the touch setting built into the keyboard itself (I'd advise playing at the keyboard's heaviest setting). Following a protracted period of playing on a keyboard with a flimsy action, you may find it necessary to have a wholesale



Mark Tanner is a pianist, composer, writer and educator. His PhD addressed the music of Franz Liszt. For the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) he has undertaken 35 international tours; he is also a Moderator, Trainer and co-author of Teaching Notes, which accompanies the latest ABRSM Piano Syllabus. Mark has over 20 pieces on current examination syllabuses – his music is published in 65 volumes, and his book, *The Mindful Pianist*, is published by Faber Music. His forthcoming book, *Mindfulness in Music: Notes on finding life's rhythm*, will be published by Leaping Hare Press early in 2018.

rethink of approach to graduating your touch control, so that your playing will translate effectively when you find yourself seated at an acoustic piano. Aim to play really crisply, whatever the dynamic or mood of the music, maintaining curved, active fingers, and in general expect to hear yourself produce a much greater volume of sound when playing quietly. This tactic will help prepare you for playing in a larger performing space with greater bloom to the acoustic, where you can usually expect to be playing on a much larger, louder instrument. Headphone practice is particularly prone to giving a false reading on the dynamic level you are really producing, so it may be good to turn the volume *down* a notch or two to encourage you to project more clearly.

## Small in a big way

There is a critical difference between playing quietly and making a 'small' sound. A 'soloist's *piano*' – by which I mean that a soloist must always project, even when operating within the confines of a score which happens to state *p* – still implies a degree of projection and intensity. A divinely nuanced sound is the opposite of one lacking control and decisiveness; alas, the latter will cause your audience's attention to evaporate within seconds. Good piano playing has a tendency to appear overly projected in a small room – it's in the very nature of the instrument's percussive attack – but on

## 5 TOP TIPS

### PERFECTING THAT GENTLE TOUCH

- 1 Controlling your quieter playing warrants as much attention as any other element of your technique.
- 2 Rethink your dynamic range to permit a decisive, solid tone at the softer extreme, avoiding an over-reliance on the *una corda* pedal.
- 3 Whether playing at speed or not, aim to be tension-free and responsive; your softer moments playing should be just as authoritative as your tempestuous explosions.
- 4 Don't tickle – attack! Aim to play crisply when practising on light-actioned pianos or digital keyboards, and keep in mind how your lighter touch will project in a larger performing space.
- 5 Take written descriptions of technical matters with a pinch of salt – trust your ears and fingers to convey quieter *leggiero* passages effectively.

no account should you shrink back and resort to making a feeble, vapid sound.

A more projected sound is not an option but a prerequisite in a larger performing space. Indeed, effective piano playing needs to be assertive and committed at all times, even when playing at a level of *pp*, which arises surprisingly commonly in music composed in the past hundred years or so. No composer ever wanted you to produce a wispy, thin sound, as distinct from the 'veiled' or 'distant' effects required by the so-called Impressionist composers. Take 'Canope' (No 10 from Debussy's *Préludes* Book 2), which features on the current ABRSM Grade 7 syllabus [the piece appeared in *Pianist* No 67]. Remarkably, within the work's 33 bars Debussy includes no fewer than 26 indications to play at either *p* or *pp*; moreover, nothing louder is marked in anywhere. From the opening static crotchet chords it is vital to sink to the bottom of the keys in a series of progressive, 'caressing' downward actions, allowing the wrist to return upwards unhurriedly after each, and resist the urge to 'stab' sharply as though the keys were red hot. Only then will you be able to link up the chords warmly and persuasively, aided of course by deft touches of pedal.

As with all aspects of piano playing, listening is the key to success if we are to enter the composer's soundworld and not become intimidated by the score markings – we must be our most critical audience if we are to monitor and respond to what is actually emanating from the instrument. Debussy does hint, albeit obliquely, at places where he'd like a firmer attack (*p marqué*) to balance off the translucent effect he's after elsewhere in 'Canope', so be bold with these, or you will flatten out the composer's carefully constructed tapestry of effects.

Another splendid example is *Canción para dormir una muñeca* by Antonio Estévez, on the current ABRSM Grade 4 syllabus. Not unlike the aforementioned Debussy piece, this lullaby inhabits a rather narrow dynamic range: *pp-p* throughout. The songlike mood nonetheless presupposes a clear contrast between tune and accompaniment (think along the lines of *mp* for the right hand and *pp* for the left) and a brave shaping of the right hand quavers to counter any possibility of non-speaking notes. An effective way to practise both the above examples would be to imagine they were marked *f-ff*, so that you overcome tension and frailty simultaneously. Once under control, you can gradually ease off the downward exertion from your upper body – you should be left with a beautifully radiant effect; soft, but still colourful. Bear in mind that, on the

whole, we are not practising to match the space we are currently in, but in anticipation of the one in which we may ultimately find ourselves performing, be it a concert venue, church hall or examination room.

### Quietly speedy

Let us take a brief look at so-called *leggiero* touch (Liszt's Concert Etude *Gnomenreigen* is a splendid example), which to all intents and purposes can be interchanged with 'legero' and 'leggeramente', all of which crop up frequently in 19th-century piano scores. If you read the rather wordy descriptions of *leggiero*, alongside other facets of touch control (such as staccato, legato, non-legato, portato) by Walter Gieseking, Tobias Matthay or Denes Agay, you will doubtless find yourself reeling at the subtle variants in terminology, the sum of which may serve to confuse rather than clarify matters. The precise point at which, for example, legato turns into non-legato is terribly hard to describe in words but comparatively easy to hear or demonstrate. Then we have 'jeu perlé', a form of touch control sported magnificently by the likes of Alfred Cortot, and which remains the envy of many modern pianists. It involves playing lightly at high speed, but with an effect that sounds closer to non-legato than legato.

Some pedagogues, notably Agay, emphasise the concept of 'weightless' arms (i.e., arm weight is accommodated by the shoulders and not permitted to transfer through to the fingers). This approach has a certain allure in that it can be applied, at will, to either a legato or a staccato touch as a 'requisite for attaining velocity with a *leggiero* touch'. Tension quickly becomes an unintended consequence of attempting to play *leggiero*, so the importance of learning to relax can hardly be overstated. It is possible to play very fast and very loudly, especially if you have massive hands, but unless you happen to be Sergei Rachmaninov or John Ogdon, it is more pragmatic to accept a trade-off between speed and power. Paradoxically, when we practise fast running passages at a slower tempo, we may inadvertently adopt an inappropriate technique. It's a bit like trying to practise sprinting but at a walking pace!

Practising high finger action is definitely beneficial, whether to strengthen individuality and a more assertive attack for deployment in Baroque or Classical repertoire, or as a precursor to playing with hardly any visible finger movement, which is invaluable when playing filigree passages in Romantic or contemporary pieces.

When practising scales, why not experiment more adventurously with

aspects of touch control at all dynamic levels: gauge for yourself the optimum speed at which you can produce a *forte* dynamic, then *piano*, then combined with legato or non-legato. You might ultimately see if you can achieve something akin to Cortot's dazzling *leggiero* effect, to really impress in an exam! A deft lateral movement of the hand and arm will, by necessity, prove critical in faster-moving music, which is immediately apparent if you watch videos of Horowitz, who seems to glide effortlessly up and down the keyboard, avoiding jerks and jolts.

Finally, abstinence from una corda pedal is a good idea, at least while you recalibrate your dynamic palette in favour of a more focused and robust soft sound. Over-reliance on the una corda is a crutch, which can unfavourably affect the tone in many circumstances, though it does admittedly make quiet playing a whole lot easier as a quick fix. Aim to trust in the flexibility of your fingers and wrists, whether playing quickly or slowly at a quieter dynamic, and you will find yourself nearer to possessing Reizenstein's cherished 'control'. ■

## Play BEETHOVEN



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# Learning to play FRENCH RÉPERTOIRE

There's a myth that French music is watery and so can be played without precision, but nothing could be further from the truth, explains **Kathryn Page**. She reveals the secrets of playing *à la française*

**W**ithout question the best singular piece of advice that can be given to any prospective player of Debussy, Fauré, Ravel, Chabrier and Poulenc is to concentrate on precision, focus, and musical and technical discipline at all costs. This is also the case for many other French composers, including Couperin, Rameau, Bizet, Saint-Saëns, Grovlez, Chaminade, Messiaen and Françaix.

Let's line them all up. Though they are very individual and different from one another, they share a talent for being able to write music with economy, directness and exactitude – as well as with phenomenal concentration. In their oeuvres there is not much room for the Lisztian broad brushstroke. The ghost of Wagner may be heard in fleeting moments in both Ravel and Debussy, but it is always tempered by a refined sensibility and contained discipline.

This means that French composers nearly always write exactly what they want to say. You as an interpreter therefore have the huge responsibility of following every marking written on the score religiously. Do not let a single dynamic, articulation sign, nuance or pedal indication go by without consideration. Study the music away from the piano, and think carefully not only about basic dynamics and instructions, but also about what type of sound each marking can be realised as. There is more than one possibility for *forte*, staccato or *sforzando*. How long does a staccato note need to be? How does one pace a particular ritenuto, cèdez or rallentando? What does 'piu piano' actually mean? Of course these are questions that should be asked in all repertoire, but in French music, a fastidious approach to these questions is essential. You need a precise awareness of all the varied tonal possibilities available so that they can then be quickly and efficiently realised in performance.

As performers we need to be able to listen as carefully as possible to the sounds we are creating, and savour the possibilities of adjusting and



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balancing of our sonorities as carefully and meticulously as we can in each practice session. We need to work with a palette of sonorities for each piece – returning to the possibilities for creating a specially veiled sound, a brighter flash of light, and subdued and covered *pianissimo*, and so on. Resonant weight and sonority tends to be less of a priority with French composers than with their German counterparts. Indeed, heaviness and overly rich tone can become a handicap, as lightness of touch – even in *fortissimo* passagework – is often essential. Debussy's *préludes* 'Feux d'artifice' and 'Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest' are filled with transcendental élan and bravura, yet most of the sounds in these showcase numbers need to be lifted out rather than pushed down into the keyboard.

## The floating world

In comparing the technical approach required in Beethoven with that for Ravel, one of the most noticeable differences is the need in the latter for sounds to be 'floated' and released early. 'Bedding' the keys by depressing and sustaining them for their fully notated value is a valued attribute in the 19th-century Germanic repertoire. In Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*, Debussy's *Estampes* and Chabrier's *Bourrée fantasque*, strength of fingerwork needs to be allied to the virtuoso release of notes – often at a mercurial speed – so that sounds can glisten, shine and captivate via brilliant effervescence.

Imaginative and skilful pedalling is a vital ingredient for success too. If you can only play *pianissimo* by using the *una corda* for help, then clearly your tonal range is limited. Experiment with the sustaining pedal. Discover the different colours that are possible by depressing the pedal down only partially. 'Shallow pedalling' (where you depress the pedal only partially – not all the way down) can help you to sustain long held notes without smudging the overall texture. The opening of 'Pagodes' from *Estampes* [Scores, *Pianist* No 56] is a good example of this, as the low semibreves in the bass clef are simply too resonant and obtrusive without shallow and carefully coordinated pedalling. You can also find new sounds and textures by depressing the sustaining pedal down to the very bottom, by aiming for 'halfway down' pedalling, or even 'quarterway down' pedalling. Bear in mind that pianos vary enormously when it comes to pedal action, so experimentation and pragmatism will always be important!

There are two special technical approaches that are especially important with regard to tonal production in French repertoire. One is the so-called 'jeu perlé' touch and the other is the use of mezzo staccato within pedal. Jeu perlé is a sparkling quasi-staccato touch similar to a guitarist's rapid tremolandi right-hand technique. It can be practised by rapidly scratching with fingers 4, 3 and 2 in turn towards you on a tabletop. Keep the movement within the knuckles and

## 5 TOP TIPS

### BRINGING OUT THE FRENCH IN YOUR PLAYING

- 1 Follow the directions on the music to the letter! Don't let anything pass by without careful consideration.
- 2 Clarity and precision in articulation are essential.
- 3 Experiment constantly at the keyboard – balancing is everything in this multi-textured music.
- 4 Do the unthinkable with your feet! Experiment with longer pedalling and vary it via syncopated and multi-levelled techniques.
- 5 Always begin with strong, clear and direct rhythmic control. Rubato can be considered as an added colouring on top of a strong metrical pulse.

move your hand as little as possible. Transferring this to the keyboard may prove challenging at first, but can be gradually built up from a slow to a fast tempo. Avoid heaviness at all cost, and eventually you will achieve coordination and be able to apply the technique to many passages, including the triplet flourishes on the first page of Debussy's 'Les collines d'Anacapri' (Préludes Book I) as well as much of his 'Jardins sous la pluie' from *Estampes* [Scores, issue 61].

Of course there is a huge range of possibilities for variety of staccato sound while using the pedal. From the slowest, least dry touch (such as at the opening of Debussy's 'La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune' (Préludes Book II) to the most rapid-fire finger staccato in Ravel's infamous 'Scarbo' from *Gaspard*, pedalling in combination with a 'lifted up' rather than 'dropped down' staccato technique can transform the mundane into the extraordinary. Above all, the lifted 'half' staccato touch in combination with sustaining pedal produces a sense of 'floating tone' of dream-like reverie and fantasy. There are so many examples of this touch in French music! Ravel's *Sonatine*, 'Oiseaux tristes' from *Miroirs*, *Jeux d'eau* and *Pavane pour un infante défunte* [Scores, issue 59] all contain numerous instances of the floating tone.

### Seeking subtlety

French music is heavily saturated with extra-musical inspiration, connotations and background. In Debussy and Ravel especially we must remember that subtle evocation and stimulation rather than literal 'musical painting' is the norm from these composers' standpoints. For this reason it is important to distil, refine and carefully nurture your pianism, dynamics, voicing and sound if you wish to find an idiomatic approach to interpretation. Debussy's exquisite 'Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir' (Préludes, Book I) serves as a perfect illustration of so-called Impressionist or Symbolist French music. Inspired by Baudelaire's poem *Harmonie du soir* (a remarkable work in itself, complete with visionary synaesthesia and highly evocative symbolism), Debussy's breathtaking sonorities, hushed phrases and veiled mysteries will only truly come to light when literally every single sonority on the printed page has been carefully gauged, balanced and considered by the pianist after many hours of work in the studio. The cloudy, 'vague' and watery overview that appears in successful performances of the piece is, ironically, the result of hours of painstaking precision and care taken through balancing every note.

But labelling all of Debussy and Ravel as Impressionist or Symbolist

can be confusing and limiting. I would strongly urge all prospective interpreters of this music to become as widely read and artistically informed as possible. This is especially true with Ravel, who was influenced not only by the great French painters and poets, but also by neoclassicism, jazz, the French Baroque harpsichordists and much else. One should not forget either that Debussy was influenced in later years by the young Stravinsky. And in his earlier music Debussy showed other, non-Impressionistic qualities. At times there is a quirky prophetic nudge toward the surrealism of a Salvador Dalí in, for example, more than a few of the juxtapositions of texture in 'Cloches à travers les feuilles' (*Images* Book II) or 'Des pas sur la neige' (Préludes Book II – see Scores this issue, page 40). This latter is an especially disturbing outpouring. Surely nothing could be further removed from the dreamy musings of an Impressionist painter or Symbolist poet than this! The rarefied, ominous world created requires extremely sensitive ears throughout, as sounds are more significant as they die away than when they are first heard. Thus the ability to listen with acute sensitivity is crucial for interpretive success in French music.

One of the biggest mistakes you can make when playing French repertoire is to assume that you do not need to worry about articulation. Sadly, there is still a myth in many piano-playing circles that poor articulation and technical command are no obstacles to success in French music because it is essentially delicate, watery and dreamy – qualities that can readily be achieved by pianists who have 'no fingers'. Nothing could be further from the truth, as even a casual play-through of the music in question will quickly confirm. This repertoire is saturated with challenges for the ten digits. Just look at Fauré's Impromptus, Poulenc's Improvisations or Ravel's *Jeux d'eau*, to give but a few examples, not to mention Debussy's *Children's Corner* or Bizet's *Variations chromatiques*. These are pieces that will severely test the finger dexterity of even highly proficient players. If you want to play works by the French masters, then master your finger technique first. Develop and continuing maintaining your ten digits via five-finger exercises, Czerny, scales and other exercises until they are infallible.

Another common interpretive error is to assume that strict adherence to the pulse and tempo indication is 'unmusical'. Perhaps because the harmonic shifts in this repertoire can be so complex – as well as beautiful and entrancing – it is understandable why non-professional pianists often rely heavily on ritenutos and rallentandos for security as well as an increased sense of heightened expression as they play.

This tends to take away the kinetic energy and forward momentum of the music, making it appear humourless, dirge-like and pompous in the process. Roy Howat has commented at length on the detrimental effect this has had on many of the most important works of Fauré – the sixth Nocturne in D flat (to give but one famous example) is certainly a piece that has been grossly misrepresented through too many slow performances over the years.

French composition tends to thrive when performers adopt a lucid, direct and clear approach in terms of rhythm. Rhythmic flexibility should be viewed as an ornamentation that is added as an additional decorative layer on top of a solid, metrical foundation. Don't wallow indulgently with over-slow tempos in the name of 'sensitivity'. Sustain the pulse and allow beauty and fantasy to emerge from the music's own inherent logic and development. Poulenc in particular consistently stressed the need for performers to hold a disciplined sense of pulse in his music.

French music demands from its interpreters tremendous discipline allied to imagination and tireless determination. But the glories and wonders of the repertoire will make all of your hard work worthwhile – a lifetime of industry and endeavour will be ahead of you if you wish to become an expert in this repertoire, but the effort in itself is a large part of the reward. Enjoy and celebrate as you practise! ■

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Advanced pedalling techniques





# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## The Sleeping Soldier from *La boîte à joujoux*

BEGINNER

Originally written as a piano score in 1913, *La boîte à joujoux* (The toy shop) was staged as a ballet in 1919 with a scenario by André Hellé, an illustrator and painter. Toys, and dolls in particular, fascinated Debussy. He wrote to a friend, 'The soul of a doll is more mysterious than even [the writer Maurice] Maeterlinck supposes; it does not readily put up with the claptrap that so many human souls tolerate.'

This piece is marked Beginner, but it may take time to learn the notes. Take your time! Then it's all about touch and sound. Notice how many different markings there are in the score. Try to adhere to them too. And always remember the pulse. Imagine that you're conducting yourself.

### Lent et mystérieux

*m.d. dessus*

Handwritten musical score for the first section, 'Lent et mystérieux'. It features a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand (RH) plays a series of chords and single notes, while the left hand (LH) plays a steady, rhythmic pattern. The tempo is marked 'Lent et mystérieux'. The score includes fingerings (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and articulation marks. The section ends with a 'u.c.' (tutti) marking.

### Retenu

Handwritten musical score for the second section, 'Retenu'. It continues the grand staff notation. The tempo is marked 'Retenu'. The piece features a series of chords and single notes, with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score includes fingerings and articulation marks. The section ends with a 'gliss.' (glissando) marking.

### Le double moins lent

Handwritten musical score for the third section, 'Le double moins lent'. It continues the grand staff notation. The tempo is marked 'Le double moins lent'. The piece features a series of chords and single notes, with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score includes fingerings and articulation marks. The section ends with a 't.c.' (tutti) marking.

Handwritten musical score for the fourth section. It continues the grand staff notation. The piece features a series of chords and single notes, with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score includes fingerings and articulation marks.

Handwritten musical score for the fifth section. It continues the grand staff notation. The piece features a series of chords and single notes, with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score includes fingerings and articulation marks.





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# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## The Little Shepherd from *Children's Corner*

BEGINNER/  
INTERMEDIATE

*The Little Shepherd* is one of the six pieces in the collection *Children's Corner*, composed in 1906 and 1908 and dedicated by the composer to his young daughter Claude-Emma, better known by her nickname Chouchou. The piece opens with the shepherd playing a tune on his pipe and the line of notes should be played freely, lightly and very legato; use a gentle rotation of the

wrist to transfer the weight from one finger to the next. The little grace notes in bar three shouldn't sound aggressive or tight. As ever with Debussy, there are numerous and subtle indications of speed, expression and dynamic, so the piece merits careful study. In performance, this piece should sound as simple and spontaneous as possible.

### Très modéré

First system of the musical score, measures 1-4. The tempo is marked **Très modéré**. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music is written for piano. The first staff (treble clef) contains the melody, which is a simple, flowing line of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second staff (bass clef) contains a simple accompaniment of eighth notes. Dynamics include *p* (piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *p* (piano). The instruction *p très doux et délicatement expressif* is written below the first staff. The piece ends with a fermata over the final note.

### Plus mouvementé

Second system of the musical score, measures 5-8. The tempo is marked **Plus mouvementé**. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music is written for piano. The first staff (treble clef) contains the melody, which is more active and includes some grace notes. The second staff (bass clef) contains a simple accompaniment of eighth notes. Dynamics include *p* (piano), *p* (piano), and *poco* (poco). The instruction *p* is written below the first staff. The piece ends with a fermata over the final note.

### au Mouvement

### Cédez

Third system of the musical score, measures 9-12. The tempo is marked **au Mouvement**. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music is written for piano. The first staff (treble clef) contains the melody, which is more active and includes some grace notes. The second staff (bass clef) contains a simple accompaniment of eighth notes. Dynamics include *p* (piano), *più p* (più piano), and *ppp* (pianissimo). The instruction *ppp* is written below the first staff. The piece ends with a fermata over the final note.

### au Mouvement

Fourth system of the musical score, measures 13-16. The tempo is marked **au Mouvement**. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music is written for piano. The first staff (treble clef) contains the melody, which is more active and includes some grace notes. The second staff (bass clef) contains a simple accompaniment of eighth notes. Dynamics include *p* (piano). The piece ends with a fermata over the final note.





Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)  
The Little Shepherd from *Children's Corner*

BEGINNER/  
INTERMEDIATE

Cédez ————— // au Mouvement

16

*più p*

*ppp*

*pp*

*un poco più forte*

20

*p*

**Plus mouvementé**

**Poco animato**

*cre* *scen*

25

*do*

*mf*

*p*

*p* *più p*

26

**Un peu retenu**  
(en conservant le rythme)

*pp*

*pp*

*p*

29

*pp*

*ppp*

Cédez ————— //



# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## Rêverie

INTERMEDIATE

This much-loved piece dates from 1890, the year which also saw Debussy produce the two Arabesques, the *Suite bergamasque* and lesser-known piano miniatures such as the Mazurka L67, the *Ballade slave* L70 and the *Valse romantique* L71. To be played very gently and expressively at a leisurely, though not sluggish pace, this piece features regular legato quaver figures in the left hand, which require a supple

wrist and, from bar 10, mobility of your arm to allow changes of position. Your fingers should remain close to the keyboard. At bar 35 the left hand takes the lead until bar 49, when the music leads into a contrasting hymn-like section (bars 51-68) based around regular crotchet chords. The melody returns at bar 76 with slight ornamentation. The piece dies away with a return of the hymn-like section.

**Andantino sans lenteur (60 = ♩)**

*pp très doux et très expressif*

Measures 1-15 are shown, including dynamics like *meno p*, *mf*, *dim.*, and *pp*.





# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## Rêverie

INTERMEDIATE

20

*poco cresc.*

25

*più cresc.*

*f*

*p*

*f*

30

*p*

*dim.*

35

*pp espress.*

*pp*





# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## Rêverie

INTERMEDIATE

40

*sf* *mf*

45

*dim.* *p rit.* *m.d.* *(m.g.)* *(m.d.)*

51

*p* *più p* *p*

57

*più p* *pp*





# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## Rêverie

INTERMEDIATE

63

*cresc.* *mf*

69

*p* *più p*

72

*pp*

76

*pp*



# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## Rêverie

INTERMEDIATE

81

meno *p*

86

*p*

91

*p*

*un peu retenu*

96

*più p*

*pp*

*rit. e perdendosi*





# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## Serenade for the Doll, No 3 from *Children's Corner*

INTERMEDIATE/  
ADVANCED

'Serenade for the Doll' would have been a more natural heading, but Debussy titled *Children's Corner* and its movements in English that was never fluent: perhaps a gesture of gratitude for the work of 'Miss Gibbs', the English governess of his daughter Chou-Chou to whom the suite is dedicated.

*Playing tips:* This work is very fragmented. We suggested that you listen to it several times with the score at hand, marking up the different sections. Once you

have understood the structure of the piece, get learning. The LH fulfils more than a bass-line function and often takes on the melody (at bar 16 onwards, bar 45 and elsewhere). Take careful note of the expressive and dynamic markings – Debussy meticulously wrote them for good reasons.

*Pedal tips:* Even if not written in the score, you will need ample use of pedal to create the washes of colour. Use your ears.

### Allegretto ma non troppo

*léger et gracieux*

First system of the musical score. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The right hand (RH) features a melody of eighth notes, while the left hand (LH) plays a bass line of eighth notes. A fermata is placed over the first measure of the RH. Fingering numbers (3, 4, 1, 3, 1, 4, 1, 3, 1, 2, 1) are indicated below the LH notes. The tempo/style marking *la m.g. un peu en dehors* is written below the system.

Second system of the musical score, starting at measure 5. The RH continues with eighth notes, and the LH plays a bass line. A fermata is placed over the first measure of the RH. The dynamic marking *f* (forte) appears in the RH. The tempo/style marking *la m.d. un peu en dehors* is written above the system.

Third system of the musical score, starting at measure 9. The RH features a melody of eighth notes, and the LH plays a bass line. A fermata is placed over the first measure of the RH. The dynamic marking *pp* (pianissimo) appears in the RH, and *p* (piano) appears in the LH. Fingering numbers (1, 4, 2, 5, 5, 2) are indicated below the LH notes. The tempo/style marking *la m.d. un peu en dehors* is written above the system.

Fourth system of the musical score, starting at measure 13. The RH features a melody of eighth notes, and the LH plays a bass line. A fermata is placed over the first measure of the RH. The dynamic marking *f* (forte) appears in the RH, and *p* (piano) appears in the LH. Fingering numbers (4, 2, 1) are indicated below the LH notes. The tempo/style marking *la m.d. un peu en dehors* is written above the system.



Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)  
Serenade for the Doll, No 3 from *Children's Corner*

INTERMEDIATE/  
ADVANCED

17 *poco a poco crescendo*

3 5 2 1 2 5

22

*f* 2 1

26 *un peu retenu*

*f* 1. 1. *p* *dim.* 2

30 *a tempo*

*p* 5 3 3 1 5 2 3 1 5 3 2 1 1 3 4 1 3 5 4 3 1

34

*p* *dim.* 5 4 4 1 2 3







Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)  
Serenade for the Doll, No 3 from *Children's Corner*

INTERMEDIATE/  
ADVANCED

39 **cédez**

*più p*

5 3

43 **a tempo**

*pp*

*pp*

*p* *expressif*

4 5

48

*pp*

53 **en animant un peu**

*p*

2 4

57

*p*

2 4



Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)  
Serenade for the Doll, No 3 from *Children's Corner*

INTERMEDIATE/  
ADVANCED

61 **a tempo**

Musical score for measures 61-65. The piece is in G-flat major (three flats) and 3/4 time. Measure 61 starts with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The right hand has a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, Bb4) followed by a quarter note (C5). The left hand has a quarter note (G3) followed by a quarter rest. Measures 62-65 continue the melody in the right hand with various rests and chords in the left hand. Measure 65 ends with a fermata over the final chord.

66

Musical score for measures 66-69. Measure 66 starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand has a whole rest. The left hand has a quarter note (G3) followed by a quarter rest. Measures 67-69 continue the melody in the right hand with various rests and chords in the left hand. Measure 69 ends with a fermata over the final chord.

70

Musical score for measures 70-73. Measure 70 starts with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The right hand has a quarter note (G4) followed by a quarter rest. The left hand has a quarter note (G3) followed by a quarter rest. Measures 71-73 continue the melody in the right hand with various rests and chords in the left hand. Measure 73 ends with a fermata over the final chord.

74

Musical score for measures 74-77. Measure 74 starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand has a quarter note (G4) followed by a quarter rest. The left hand has a quarter note (G3) followed by a quarter rest. Measures 75-77 continue the melody in the right hand with various rests and chords in the left hand. Measure 77 ends with a fermata over the final chord.

78

Musical score for measures 78-81. Measure 78 starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand has a quarter note (G4) followed by a quarter rest. The left hand has a quarter note (G3) followed by a quarter rest. Measures 79-81 continue the melody in the right hand with various rests and chords in the left hand. Measure 81 ends with a fermata over the final chord.

**sans retarder**

*dim. molto*







Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)  
Serenade for the Doll, No 3 from *Children's Corner*

INTERMEDIATE/  
ADVANCED

82

*p* *pp*

86

90

*f* *p* *più p*

94

*p* *expressif* *pp*

98

*p* *pp*



INTERMEDIATE/  
ADVANCED

119

*più pp*

Ped.

8va---1



# DEBUSSY

## *Clair de lune*

It's one of the most famous and most often played piano pieces ever – so how do you go about making it your own? Teacher and concert pianist **Lucy Parham** talks you through it

**Ability rating** Advanced

### Info

**Key:** D<sup>b</sup> major

**Tempo:** Andante très expressif

**Style:** Impressionist

### Will improve your

✓ Colour/tone control

✓ Sense of structure

✓ Fingering

*Clair de lune* would surely be in the **top ten** of any list of the most popular piano music. Although this piece is much loved by the public, its success puzzled its composer, who had much more fondness for *Reflets dans l'eau* and *Poissons d'or*. But the seductive delicacy of *Clair de lune* has captured listeners' imagination for over a century.

**It seems like a relatively simple piece** at first glance. However, like most works that seem relatively straightforward technically, this is by no means 'easy'. The challenges Debussy presents the performer with are numerous: balance, flexibility, voicing, orchestration, tone control and last, but by no means least, structure. The temptation to divide *Clair de lune* into several sections is all too present – especially as these sections are quite clearly defined. Regarding the fingering, it's important to note that Debussy quite specifically did *not* add fingering to his piano works, feeling it was important the pianist should come to their own decision about the best fingering for their hands. So the fingerings in the score here are merely that – suggestions – as are my own thoughts as to what might work for different hands.

**With this in mind, discovering the best fingering** is of utmost importance, as some of the passages can be awkward. The LH at bars 37, 41 and 45; the equality of the semiquavers in bars 27 and 28 and the RH in bars 45 and 46 are all worth looking at before you even start to learn the piece, as they present the greatest pianistic difficulties. Personally speaking, I think that it's significant that Debussy chose the key of D<sup>b</sup>, with its soothing quality and overtones. Debussy hugely admired Chopin and when you think of the great Chopin works in D<sup>b</sup> in this genre (such as the *Berceuse*, the D<sup>b</sup> *Nocturne* and the 'Raindrop' *Prélude*) you immediately get a sense of the type of mood he is trying to create.

### A poem of the same name by Verlaine

is at the heart of *Clair de lune*. One particularly poignant line shines a light on what Debussy is creating here: 'The still moonlight, sad and beautiful.'

**So, how to achieve this elusive stillness** that's needed in this piece without overuse of rubato and sentimentality? Debussy himself suggested you should start the piece with both pedals depressed and that the triplets all the way through must be 'within a general flexibility'.

In order to do this, try and sing the opening in your head before you play a note. Get a feel for the tempo and note that the first note is a rest – it must have its own 'breath'.

### The dynamic marking is *pianissimo*

but bear in mind there are even quieter moments coming up further into the piece so you don't need to be at that dynamic marking – keep something in reserve. Feel the rise from the LH to RH and the fall/the resolve onto the third chord (the last chord of bar 1). Try to imagine there are no bar lines – you want to create a flowing and elastic mood. Always be aware of the descending scale in the lower part of the LH from bar 2 to bar 8 and, because of that the feeling of 'floating', which exists until the first time the key note (D<sup>b</sup>) is present on the first beat of bar 9. Give this note a weight and meaning – its sonority should ring through the whole bar. Similarly, the RH octaves in bar 11 give us a different texture, enabling you to have a second melody line in the alto.

Tap here to read about Lucy Parham's Composer Portrait concert programme, *Reverie: the life and loves of Claude Debussy*. This words-and-music programme, in which Parham performs some of the most sublime piano music by Debussy, is performed with an actor playing the part of the composer.



### Try to keep the duplets and triplets

**flexible.** If they are in any way metronomic, you will lose the elasticity you so need. Here's a helpful tip if you

### Learning Tip

Spend a lot of time getting the right fingering to achieve a perfect legato – it's the shape of your hand that counts.

are trying to memorise this piece: take a close look at bar 9. The same passage repeats, but with a small change, at bar 59, and it would be easy to miss out most of the piece and jump straight to the coda. In bar 13 you are reaching the top of the phrase so far, so judge the next bar with care and make a well-judged diminuendo in both hands at bar 14, easing yourself in to 'tempo rubato' at bar 15.

### Bars 15 to 26 are one long sweep.

The outer parts are particularly important here. See how Debussy marks these weighted accents – meaning highlight the outer parts. Feel you have a steely rod in the tip of your outer fingers and balance in the inner notes accordingly. In bar 19 the ascending LH line is almost the reverse of the opening bars, with each bar now climbing a semitone higher (see lower bass note) than the preceding bar. 'Peu à peu cresc et animé' ('little by little crescendo and moving forward') is what is written in the score here. Use the bass line to help with the feeling of propulsion – always try to get over the bar on to the next bass note rather than 'sitting' on the bass note.

In bar 24 it is particularly important to get over the bar line into bar 25. Think of a harp in these rolled chords. They should be lush and voluptuous – every note is important. You only have two bars to go from a warm *forte* to *pianissimo*, which is not easy!

**Regarding bar 27, marked 'un poco mosso'** ('moving on a little'), Debussy was known to have said that 'the left-hand arpeggios should be fluid, mellow and drowned in pedal as if played by a harp on a background of strings'. Again, sinking into the LH dotted crotchets that form the bass line will

help give you a harmonic structure. Try to voice the top like muted horns – Debussy himself suggested this comparison. You can just imagine how beautiful this would sound if orchestrated! In bar 29 I like to take the eighth LH semiquaver (A<sup>b</sup>) with the RH second finger and then play the ninth (F) with the LH thumb. Try it and see. Be aware of the duet element here too – the reply of the alto part in bar 30 and the tenor line in bar 33 shadowing the RH melody.

**At bar 37 (En animant) I find it's easier** to finger the LH 3-5 (on the B and C sharp) then 2-1-2 and the same for the rest of the bar. But look at *Pianist's* fingering too – see which works best. In the final beat of bar 39, take your time to climb down from the high C sharp, as you don't want this to sound 'snatched'. Bars 41 and 42 should move on naturally. These two bars are very reminiscent of passages in *Reflets dans l'eau* and *L'isle joyeuse* – uplifting and flowing. They need real freedom.

Immediately the mood changes at Calmato (bar 43). Rotate your LH for the gentle rocking from A<sup>b</sup> to E<sup>b</sup>. In bar 45's LH I like to use the fingering of 2-5-2-1-2-1, 2-5-2-1-2-5, 1-2-5-1-2-5 as it limits the amount of moves the LH need to make. The duet is again prevalent in bars 45-48 so be aware of the LH in bars 47 and 48 and really shape it.

**Ebb away and ease into Tempo I** at bar 51. This is possibly the most breathtaking moment in the piece – its stillness is almost stifling. You will need both pedals here. Grip the keys at all times but the wrist needs to be fluid. For the next eight bars, the dotted minim and dotted crotchet lower line should resonate like muted bells. This passage is about revisiting the opening but with more hushed tones and re-creating the calm from the opening but with even more intensity (that's why the opening must not be too soft!). In bar 59 the C<sup>b</sup> has great significance – bring it out, again like a muted horn. Here the next few bars differ slightly from the opening in order to arrive at the coda in bar 66.

**'Morendo jusqu'à la fin'** ('dying away until the end) appears at bar 66. Each of these last lines should be more hushed than the preceding one – very hard to achieve. In the very last chord, I would play three notes in the LH (D<sup>b</sup>, A<sup>b</sup>, D<sup>b</sup>) then the RH plays the next four (F, A<sup>b</sup>, D<sup>b</sup>, F) – and the LH crosses the RH to play the final note – the top A<sup>b</sup>. Roll this gently and lift the pedal very slowly at the end while your hands remain on the keys. It's as if the last ember on the fire has died away. Take time and care with this gem of a piece – it will definitely repay all the study you put into it. ■

## What's an Impressionist?

*Impression, Sunrise* was the title of a painting made by Claude Monet in the 1870s, and 'Impressionism', originally used as an insult by a critic, became the shorthand term for an entire art movement of the late 19th century. The Impressionist artists despised the formality and stiff, unnatural style of the established Académie des Beaux-Arts, seeking instead to capture in their works the fleeting moment and the changing facets of light and shadow. The Académie rejected the Impressionist style, but its adherents – Renoir, Monet, Manet, Pissarro – opened the door to the art of the 20th century.

The composers categorised as Impressionists – Debussy and Ravel primarily, though many others were classified as such at one time or another – were as influential in their world as the painters were in theirs. They were not enamoured of the label. Debussy said that 'what the imbeciles call "impressionism" is a term which is as poorly used as possible, particularly by art critics.'

However, it's easy to see why Impressionism was such a handy label for this music. Like the painters, Debussy and Ravel overturned established styles, avoided conventional forms such as the symphony, enthusiastically employed new colours and methods (the whole-tone scale, for instance) and were open to the musical ideals of the non-Western world, notably Asia. From so-called Impressionist music, it's a short step away to more abstract and non-programmatic styles of music.



# PIANO TECHNIQUES



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# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## *Clair de lune*

ADVANCED

A staple of many pianist's repertoire, *Clair de lune* (French for 'moonlight') is the third movement of Debussy's *Suite bergamasque* (1890-1905). As with so many works in the Impressionist style, *Clair de lune* aims to evoke a mood, or in this case to evoke the atmosphere conjured up by a poem by Paul Verlaine – each of the four movement in *Suite bergamasque* is based on one of his poems. It's worth seeking out the original poem, which has lines like these: 'With the still moonlight, sad and beautiful / That sets the birds dreaming in the trees...'

*Pedal tips:* You will see that we have not put pedal markings onto the score, as we suspect that if you are learning this piece, you will have ample pedalling knowledge!

### Andante très expressif

The musical score for the first 12 measures of 'Clair de lune' is presented in a grand staff format. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 9/8. The tempo/mood marking is 'Andante très expressif'. The score begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and a 'con sordino' instruction. The notation includes various fingerings, slurs, and articulation marks. The first system (measures 1-4) features a melodic line in the right hand with a 5/3 fingering and a 4/2 fingering, and a bass line with a 2/4 fingering. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the melodic development with a 3/1 fingering and a 2/4 fingering. The third system (measures 9-12) shows a more complex melodic line with a 4/2 fingering and a 5/3 fingering, and a bass line with a 2/4 fingering. The score is written for a single piano, with no pedal markings.

# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## Clair de lune

ADVANCED

Tempo rubato

15

*pp*

18

*peu à peu cresc. et animé*

21

24

*8va*

*dim. molto*

Un poco mosso

27

*pp*

# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## Clair de lune

ADVANCED

29

31

33

35

37

**En animant**

*più cresc.*



# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## Clair de lune

ADVANCED

39

41

*f*

*dim.*

43

**Calmato**

*pp*

45

47

# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## *Clair de lune*

ADVANCED

49

51 **Tempo I**

8<sup>va</sup>

*ppp*

53

(8)

55

57

*pp*

# Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

## Clair de lune

ADVANCED

59 *pp*

62

66 *morendo jusqu'à la fin*

68

70