

Debussy, "... La cathédrale engloutie"

Theoretical exercise (not specific to this piece)

The most even way to partition an octave into a 7-note scale, if your only available intervals are whole steps and half steps, is with 5 W's and 2 H's. The diatonic collection (for example the white notes) is one way of doing this. There are two others: figure out what they are and write them down in letter or staff notation.

Think carefully: you are looking for distinct ways of distributing the W/H steps, not just different rotations (modes) or transpositions of the same pattern. For instance, C Ionian and D Dorian are not distinct in this sense: they are rotations of the same W/H pattern. Likewise D Dorian and E-flat Dorian do not present intervallically distinct patterns: they are transpositions of the same pattern. This may help: Imagine that you have 7 beads, 5 white (whole steps) and 2 hazel (half steps). How many different ways can you string them to make a bracelet?

"Cathédrale": Scales and modes

- 1) List all the different pitches used in mm. 1-2: _____
- 2) Taking G as the keynote (modal tonic), what kind of scale do these pitches form? _____

Note that the rising quarter note figure becomes an ostinato. The ostinato pitches used do not change, making this motive a sort of "super-pedal" or harmonic cloud that sounds a whole scale instead of one or two pitches.

- 3) The bass notes do change, adding new pitches. Using E (the goal of this bass line) as the tonic, what kind of mode or scale is formed by all the pitches of mm. 1-6, inclusive?

An E _____ scale

Note the prevalent parallel fifths, both in the quarter-note ostinato and in the long-term motion of the bass—this was fairly blatant flouting of basic compositional "rules" at the time.

- 4) The E in m. 6 becomes a pedal tone, and is also a common tone to the new, contrasting pitch collection of mm. 7-12. This consists of six pitches, or most of what mode?

An E _____ scale

- 5) the pitches of mm. 68-71 belong to what kind of scale? _____

Motive: The quarter-note ostinato of the beginning outlines a 3-note motive, which we'll call motive **x**, which unifies the whole piece. First stated as a rising step followed by a rising fifth (D-E-B), it is later transformed somewhat.

- 6) Find motive **x** in the second segment (mm.7-13). Indicate measure and pitches.

a) m. _____ ; pitches _____

b) m. _____ ; pitches _____

- 7) Find two different statements of motive **x** on the second page (mm.16-27). Indicate measure and pitches, and if the motive has been altered, note how.

a) m. _____ ; pitches _____

b) m. _____ ; pitches _____

(continued on reverse)

Harmony

- 8) Find a clear and extended example of parallel triads:
- 9) Find a clear and extended example of parallel dom7th (Mm7) chords:

Imagery

- 10) Describe the mood or atmosphere of the piece (preferably before answering the next question)

- 11) Translate the following (you may use dictionaries, the internet, Québécois shoppers on Church Street...)
 - Profondément calme

 - Dans une brume doucement sonore

 - Peu à peu sortant de la brume

 - La cathédrale engloutie

- 12) Re-listen to the piece with these directions and images in mind. Now what does the piece suggest to you? Can you hear any program?

- 13) Only **after** you have done this, look up the legend of the Chateau d'Ys. Write down any reflections. If you didn't know the connection before, does it change how you hear the piece?

- 14) Notice that Debussy put the titles of his preludes **after** the music. How does that affect your response, compared to the ordinary practice of putting the title at the top?