

A Comparative Study of Selected Recordings of the Etudes of Claude Debussy

by

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ABSTRACT

This research paper focuses on selected recordings of the Etudes of Claude Debussy. It provides a comparative study of these recordings.

There are some dissertations on the topic of Debussy's Etudes. Most of them are about performance-related aspects such as fingerings, pedaling, or technical guidelines. Some of the dissertations examine compositional analyses, discussing harmony, texture, rhythmic structure, motivic development, etc. There also is a dissertation that makes a comparative study of the etude genre in Chopin and Debussy. Since there is no research yet on the recordings of Debussy's Etudes, this may be a meaningful contribution to research. Debussy's *Douze Études* are technically difficult to play, but the technical problems are always subordinated to musical beauty and variety in this work. This research is concerned with the sound of the music as achieved by a variety of performers.

Nine representative pianists from various schools and traditions are chosen: Michel Béroff, Aldo Ciccolini, Walter Cosand, Walter Giesecking, Werner Haas, Yvonne Loriod, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Mitsuko Uchida and Yevgeny Yontov. In this project, the focus is on listening to the selected recordings, making comparisons and summarizing certain performance-related aspects of them. Each etude is discussed individually in order to make a comprehensive study of different aspects of the selected recordings. In the last chapter of this paper, conclusions are drawn about the different performance features of the pianists examined according to previous analyses.

This research seeks to encourage performances of Debussy's Etudes, to aid pianists in obtaining interpretative ideas from the different recordings and finally to benefit their own performances.

To my teacher,

Walter Cosand

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Russell Ryan, who has been continually supportive of me during my school years. His kindness, patience and insightful ideas not only have contributed to the completion of this research project, but also to my continued growth as a musician. I would also like to thank Dr. Rodney Rogers. What I have learnt from his theory class benefits my research.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There is a story behind my choice to do research on the recording comparisons of Claude Debussy's *Douze Études*. One day twelve years ago I went to a bookstore and happened by chance to see a CD on a shelf. It was Mitsuko Uchida's recording of Debussy's *Douze Études*. I was attracted by its interesting cover image, so I decided to buy it. But when I played this CD at home, I was deeply intrigued by the music. Uchida's playing of these etudes is so beautiful that I could hardly tell these pieces were real etudes. Then I listened to this recording again and again, and dreamed that one day I could play Debussy's set of *Douze Études* in one concert. I made this dream come true in my final doctoral degree recital. I later gave a lecture recital on the topic of the recording comparisons of Debussy's Etudes, which is associated with my final project.

Debussy composed the *Douze Études* in 1915. The twelve pieces, divided into two books of six each, form his last work for piano solo. Debussy considered dedicating the set to Couperin or Chopin, either of whom he admired very much, finally choosing the latter.¹ The *Douze Études* were put in order by different types of techniques. His set of etudes was inspired by Chopin's Etudes, but Debussy added new technical studies, including elements such as double-fourths (Etude No. 3), ornaments (Etude No. 8), repeated notes (Etude No. 9), and opposing sonorities (Etude No. 10).

The high technical demands of the *Douze Études*, such as fully-voiced chords, leaping octaves, and running chromatic scales, challenge many pianists. Performances of Debussy's *Douze Études* were once rare. But this work has been played more frequently

¹ Stewart Gordon, *A History of Keyboard Literature: Music for the Piano and Its Forerunners* (Belmont, CA: Schirmer, 1996), 379.

in recent decades. This paper examines nine pianists in different generations and from different countries and traditions.

Three of the selected pianists are from the French School. Yvonne Loriod (1924-2010), a French pianist and pedagogue, and the second wife of composer Olivier Messiaen, once studied at the Paris Conservatoire.² She recorded the *Douze Études* on January 9th, 1968 in Paris at the Église Notre-Dame du Liban, which was the church where Erato recorded most of their titles.³ One of her pupils at the Paris Conservatoire, Michel Béroff (b. 1950), recorded the *Douze Études* during 1996-1997 in Germany.⁴ Jean-Yves Thibaudet (b. 1961) once studied with Aldo Ciccolini (also one of the pianists discussed in this paper) at the Paris Conservatoire.⁵ He recorded the *Douze Études* during 1997-1998 in Bristol, England.⁶

Representing the German School, the French-born German pianist Walter Gieseking (1895-1956), considered by many to be one of the greatest interpreters of Debussy's works, made a recording of the *Douze Études* in his later years; he recorded the set in December 1954 in London.⁷ Werner Haas (1931-1976) studied with Gieseking for two years in Saarbrücken, and Gieseking's interest in the music of Debussy may well

² Charles Timbrell, *French Pianism A Historical Perspective* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1999), 166.

³ Robert Fallon and Christopher Dingle, *Messiaen Perspectives I: Sources and Influences* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2013), 329.

⁴ Michel Béroff, *Debussy Douze Etudes*, Recorded in Germany, November 1996 and November 1997, EMI, CD.

⁵ Jean-Yves Thibaudet, "Biography," Jean-Yves Thibaudet artist website, Accessed March 10, 2018, <http://www.jeanyvesthibaudet.com/biography/>.

⁶ Jean-Yves Thibaudet, *Debussy Images, Etudes*, Recorded at St. George's, Brandon Hill, Bristol. October 15, 1994, August 12, 1995, January 20-23, 1997, and July 10-12, 1998, Classic Sound Ltd, CD.

⁷ Walter Gieseking, *Études, Books 1 and 2*, Recorded December 1954, Abbey Road Studios, London, Angel Records, USA, 1955, LP.

have steered Haas toward the French master's works.⁸ Haas recorded the *Douze Études* in 1961.⁹ Italian-born French pianist Aldo Ciccolini (1925-2015) entered the Naples Conservatory at the age of nine, where he studied with Paolo Denza (1893-1955), a pupil of Busoni. Ciccolini served as a professor at the Paris Conservatoire from 1971 to 1989.¹⁰ He recorded the *Douze Études* in 1991 in Switzerland for Erato.¹¹ Mitsuko Uchida (b. 1948), Japanese-born British pianist, recorded the work in April 1989 in England.¹²

There are two live recordings examined in this paper. American pianist Walter Cosand (b. 1950) has degrees and a Performer's Certificate from Eastman School of Music, where he studied with Cecile Genhart and Barry Snyder. He is a professor at Arizona State University where he has been teaching since 1976. Cosand performed the *Douze Études* Book II in a concert on January 22nd, 2006, in the Katzin Concert Hall, ASU. One can find his recordings of the Etudes on his website,¹³ or from ASU School of Music Performance Archive.¹⁴ Israeli pianist Yevgeny Yontov (b. 1989) once studied with Arie Vardi at Tel-Aviv University before he moved to the US; he is currently

⁸ Robert Cummings, "Werner Haas Biography," Allmusic.com, Accessed March 10, 2018, <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/werner-haas-mn0001661914/biography>.

⁹ Werner Haas and Noël Lee, *Debussy Complete Piano Music Vol. 2: Etudes, En blanc et noir, Suite Bergamasque*, Recorded in Berlin, 1963, 1971, Phillips Classics Productions, 1993, CD.

¹⁰ Stephen Siek, *A dictionary for the modern pianist* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 26.

¹¹ Aldo Ciccolini, *Debussy Children's Corner, 12 Etudes*, Recorded in La Chaux-de-Fonds, April, 1991, Erato Records, CD.

¹² Mitsuko Uchida, *Debussy 12 Etudes*, Recorded in England, April, 1983, Decca Music Group Limited, CD.

¹³ Walter Cosand, "Debussy Etudes Book 2," Walter Cosand Artist Website – Recordings, Accessed October 30, 2016, <http://www.waltercosand.com/CosandScores/Composers%20A-D/Cosand,%20Walter/Recordings/Debussy/Debussy-EtudesBook2-Cosandlive/>.

¹⁴ Walter Cosand, "Debussy Etudes," ASU Digital Repository – Walter Cosand, Accessed September 1, 2017, <https://repository.asu.edu/items/1019>.

pursuing his D.M.A. at the Yale School of Music. He performed the *Douze Études* Book I in the 8th Bösendorfer USASU International Piano Competition Semi Finals in January 2017, in the Katzin Concert Hall, ASU. One can find his video recording of the Etudes on YouTube.¹⁵

My research focuses on aspects such as tempo, dynamics, articulation, pedaling, etc., and more importantly, on the subtle musical interpretations that result from the individual perceptions of pianists that have recorded the music of Debussy. I also mention my personal tendencies in interpreting the Etudes in this paper. It is hoped that this research enables pianists, to gain insight into the profound musical poetry of Debussy's Etudes. Additionally, this paper is written in the year of the 100th anniversary of Debussy's death. So it is meaningful to talk about the music of this great composer in this particular year.

¹⁵ Yevgeny Yontov, "Debussy Etudes – 8th Bösendorfer USASU International Piano Competition Semi Finals," Katzin Concert Hall at ASU School of Music, Accessed January 15, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IearwcCHQk&t=2053s>.

CHAPTER 2

ETUDE NO. 1, POUR LES “CINQ DOIGTS”--D'APRÈS MONSIEUR CZERNY

Debussy’s first etude was inspired (as shown in its subtitle: “d’après Monsieur Czerny”) by Carl Czerny, one of the most prolific composers of piano exercises and studies in history. This is the only subtitle Debussy wrote for an individual piece among all the twelve etudes. This etude is based on a five-finger pattern, a basic exercise, so it is meaningful to list this etude as the first one.

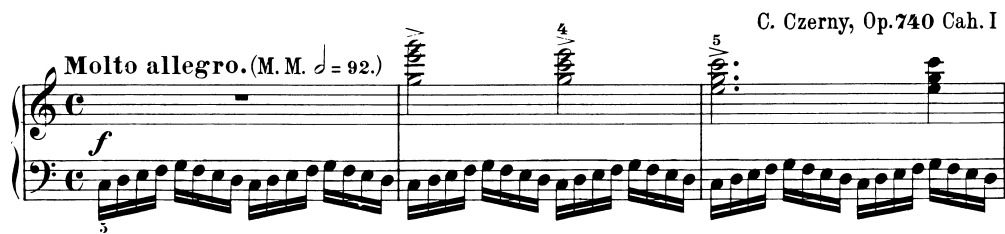
The pianists start playing this etude with different tempos. Figure 1 shows the opening metronome marks for the tempos of eight selected recordings. Loriod starts fastest and Ciccolini begins slowest among the eight pianists as Figure 1 shows.

Michel Béroff	Aldo Ciccolini	Walter Gieseking	Werner Haas	Yvonne Loriod	Jean-Yves Thibaudet	Mitsuko Uchida	Yevgeny Yontov
♩ = 80	♩ = 55	♩ = 72	♩ = 70	♩ = 90	♩ = 60	♩ = 82	♩ = 66

Figure 1: Opening Tempo Comparisons of Eight Pianists in Debussy Etude No. 1.

There is a marking “*Sagement*” on the top of m. 1, which means “wisely.” It is rather humorous since the etude begins with a simple repeating five-finger scale exercise, as do many Czerny exercises. For example, Czerny’s *The Art of Finger Dexterity*, Op. 740, No. 1 also starts with a repeating five-finger scale exercise (See Ex. 1). Debussy interspersed an A-flat staccato note in m. 2 and m. 4 like a tongue-in-cheek expression (See Ex. 2). In the first six measures Thibaudet and Ciccolini’s playing have short breaks between measures in the left hand and are very strict for the articulation on the score, while Béroff plays legato in the left hand for all the six measures. Some may prefer playing exactly the articulation notated on the score here, because this way one can express the humorous mood better, portraying a picture of a scrupulous student seriously

practicing notes on a score. Most pianists play the staccato triplet figures in the right hand (F-sharp-C-sharp-F-sharp) in m. 12 and m. 14 very detached and their recordings sound as though they do not use the pedal. But Ciccolini plays the rising staccato triplets with pedal, so that the effect is not staccato. One might prefer not to use pedal here and play shorter with crescendo, making a larger contrast with the legato five-finger exercise in the left hand to express the brusqueness required by the composer, who marked *brusquement* here (See Ex. 3).



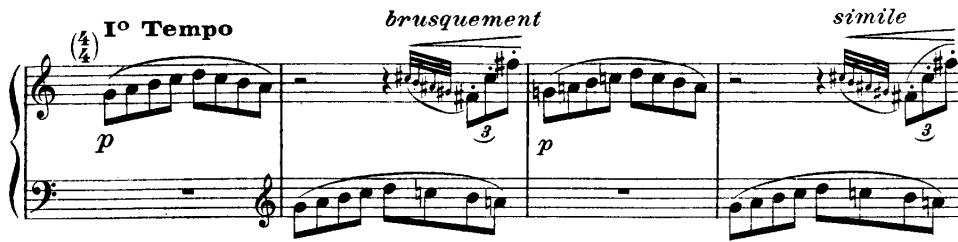
Example 1: Czerny, *The Art of Finger Dexterity*, Op. 740, No. 1, mm. 1-3.¹⁶



Example 2: Debussy Etude No. 1, mm. 1-10.¹⁷

¹⁶ Carl Czerny, Editor: Adolf Ruthart, *The Art of Finger Dexterity*, Op. 740, No. 1 (Leipzig: Edition Peters, 1888) 5.

¹⁷ Claude Debussy, *Etudes, Children's Corner, Images Book II and Other Works for Piano* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1992), 113. All examples from the Debussy Etudes are taken from this edition.



Example 3: Debussy Etude No. 1, mm. 11-14.

Etude No. 1 features multiple tempo and meter changes in which Debussy wrote the markings very carefully on the score. As Schmitz says in his book, “The relationship of these tempo changes must be very exactly calculated in their relationships to each other and must neither be anticipated nor continued into sections where they no longer apply.”¹⁸ Debussy marked *Accelerando* in m. 5 and changed the meter to 2/4 in the next measure and changed the meter again to 6/16 in m. 7 with a tempo marking *Animé (Mouv^t de Gigue)*. Giesecking accelerates very much from m. 5 and reaches a fast tempo in m. 7, the place of *Animé (Mouv^t de Gigue)*, around ♩. = 180. Yontov accelerates even more, starts the acceleration from ♩ = 66 and reaches ♩. = 216 in m. 7. Béroff and Uchida get a little bit slower at the end of *Animé* before *Tempo I* (m. 11). One might prefer not getting slower at the end of *Animé* since it would weaken the surprising effect of the tempo changes. Pianists could play with more diminuendo at the end and have a breath before *Tempo I* comes. Both Giesecking and Béroff accelerate in mm. 15-16, connecting to the next *Animé* section.

Giesecking and Béroff make a little bit of acceleration from m. 28 to m. 31 and Giesecking uses generous pedaling in this phrase. One can hear him change the pedal in m. 29 and keep the pedal down for the next three measures. Giesecking uses pedaling

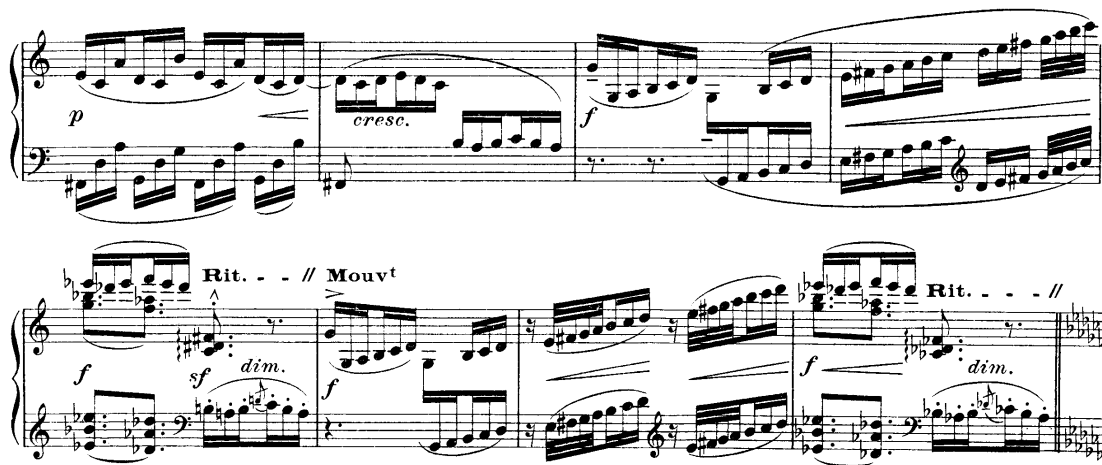
¹⁸ E. Robert Schmitz, *The piano works of Claude Debussy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 197.

according to the bass, in that he maintains the bass (C-G) through m. 31. Béroff's playing sounds as though he changes the pedal once in each measure. Thibaudet avoids the pedal for mm. 30-31, making the sound clearer and drier (See Ex. 4).



Example 4: Debussy Etude No. 1, mm. 28-31.

There are several places, especially at the ends of sections, where Debussy alternates slowing down and resuming tempo, such as mm. 32-35 and mm. 44-48. Debussy used one of his favorite words, the French term “*Cédez*” in m. 78 and m. 82, indicating a slight slowing down. Debussy also marked drastic dynamic changes accompanying these tempo changes, like *rinf.*, *sf.*, crescendo and diminuendo. Gieseiking and Béroff slow down in m. 32 for *Rubato* and m. 34 for *Molto rubato* just a little, not obviously. Gieseiking plays softly where there is a *rinf.* in m. 33, and does not make crescendo at the end of this measure. Uchida and Loriod slow down in m. 32 and m. 34, and Uchida makes the *rinf.* drastically. There is another place where the *Rubato* and *Mouv^f* alternate, from m. 71 to m. 74. Gieseiking performs it differently this time, in that he plays faster for *Rubato* instead of playing slower like other pianists, and slows down for *Mouv^f*. In m. 44 and m. 47, there is a *rit.* at the end of both measures (See Ex. 5). Gieseiking slows down just a little, and almost has no breath before the *Mouv^f*. In Ciccolini's recording, however, the *rit.* can be obviously perceived. In Béroff's recording, instead of noticeably getting slower, he adds a substantial breath at the end of the measure before *Mouv^f* comes.



Example 5: Debussy Etude No. 1, mm. 40-47.

The dynamic range of this etude is very wide, from *ppp* to *ff*. The most representative example is the cadenza from m. 91 to m. 96, which begins *ppp* in m. 91 and ends with a crescendo reaching *ff* in m. 97 (See Ex. 6). Gieseeking makes a significant dynamic change from very soft to very loud and accelerates *poco a poco* as Debussy indicated in the score. In Ciccolini's recording, the range of the dynamic change in the cadenza seems not as wide as Gieseeking's, and his tempo is very steady, without any acceleration. The cadenza is technically similar to Etude No. 6; two hands play the scale pattern alternately. Béroff makes a dramatic acceleration, playing the five-finger scale pattern rapidly, almost like a glissando effect on a harp. One may like Béroff's interpretation here, in that he makes the music reach a climax and finally comes to a triumphant conclusion.

poco a poco accelerando e cresc. - - -

ppp

molto cresc.

f

Mouv (♩ = ♩)

ff

Example 6: Debussy Etude No. 1, mm. 91-97.

CHAPTER 3

ETUDE NO. 2, POUR LES TIERCES

This etude, as well as the following two, deals with playing double notes in different intervals. Etude No. 2 is written for thirds, which is an important piano technique, but it is not the first time that Debussy wrote a piece solely for thirds. In his Prelude Book II, No. 11 *Les tierces alternées* (Alternating Thirds), the title simply describes the technical challenge that applies throughout the piece. This prelude features the rapid alternations of thirds between two hands (See Ex. 7). Chopin also wrote a famous study for thirds, his Etude in G-sharp minor, Op. 25, No. 6, which was undoubtedly an inspiration for Debussy to write such an etude (See Ex. 8). Chopin's etude for thirds, however, is different in many aspects like tempo, texture, articulation, compared to Debussy's. The tempo of Chopin's Etude Op. 25, No. 6 is faster than Debussy's Etude No. 2. Chopin marked *Allegro*, as Example 7 shows, while Debussy marked *Moderato, ma non troppo* on the score.

Un peu plus animé
Cédez - - - - - // légèrement détaché sans sécheresse;
les notes marquées du signe - doucement timbrées.

Example 7: Debussy Prelude Book II, No. 11 Les Tierces Alternées, mm. 7-17.¹⁹

Allegro (♩ = 69)

2 min. 5

sotto voce (pp) *p*

Example 8: Chopin Etude, Op. 25, No. 6, mm. 1-5.²⁰

¹⁹ Claude Debussy, *Préludes pour Piano, 2^e Livre* (Paris: Durand et Cie., 1913), 58.

²⁰ Frédéric Chopin, *Études, Op. 25*, ed. Alfred Cortot (Paris: Maurice Senart, 1916), 43.

In the first measure, Debussy marked *p legato e sostenuto*, which implies pianists are to play in a lyrical and melodious way with a tender touch. Almost all the pianists chosen for this study play the thirds very legato and smoothly as Debussy required. Ciccolini plays slower than the others as Figure 2 shows, which adds more clarity to the sound. He seems, however, to be using more pedal than any of the others, so there is very little of the staccato indicated by Debussy in certain passages. For example, in m. 6 and m. 7, the top line in left hand should be articulated staccato, but sounds legato in Ciccolini’s recording. Loriod plays the staccato notes here very clearly, shaping the top line independently and lively.

Béroff	Ciccolini	Giesecking	Haas	Loriod	Thibaudet	Uchida	Yontov
3:02	4:19	3:18	3:08	3:32	3:26	3:32	3:30

Figure 2: Timing Comparisons of Eight Pianists’ Recordings of Debussy Etude No. 2.

There is another example of barely perceived staccato in Ciccolini’s recording. Debussy wrote staccato notes in the middle line of mm. 49-52 (See Ex. 9), while Ciccolini seems to be using the pedal so much that the middle line sounds almost legato (and he gets softer at the end of that phrase in m. 52, instead of playing the crescendo indicated on the score.) It is difficult to play the middle melodic line staccato while still keeping the repeating bass notes E-flat on the bottom. It might be preferable not to use pedal, making the middle line staccato and changing from thumb to little finger in the left hand silently to keep the bass sustained. Banowetz discusses the use of pedal in passages with contrasting articulations in his book *The Pianist’s Guide to Pedaling*: “when there are contrasting articulation indications occurring simultaneously, one articulation should

not be altered at the expense of another by careless pedaling.”²¹ One can notice from Yontov’s video recording that he uses brief touches of the pedal for sonority and color on every two beats from m. 49 to m. 52. In Thibaudet’s recording, one can hear that he keeps the bass while he plays staccato in the middle melodic line in a dancing character, and plays the thirds in the right hand very softly and smoothly, perfectly balancing all voices.

Example 9: Debussy Etude No. 2, mm. 45-52.

From m. 18 to m. 21, every long note played by the right hand has a *tenuto* mark indicated by Debussy, and he also indicated *pp murmurando* here on the score. Ciccolini and Loriod make the long notes prominent, while playing the thirds very softly as the accompaniment, in a whispering sound. The trills in thirds above the pedal point B-flat

²¹ Joseph Banowetz, *The Pianist’s Guide to Pedaling* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 50.

that appear in m. 21 to m. 24 also act as a background (See Ex. 10). Ciccolini brings out the top note F in the right hand in m. 21 very clearly, and plays the bass note F in m. 22 a little bit softly as an echo. Loriod waits longer on the top note F before playing the trills in thirds, making the voices sound more independent.

Example 10: Debussy Etude No. 2, mm. 21-24.

The tempo of Thibaudet's recording seems inconsistent. He starts around the tempo $J=74$, then he gets faster from m. 3 and reaches $J=92$ in m. 6, although Debussy did not mark any tempo changes before m. 13. Gieseeking also accelerates from m. 3 to m. 12, and some may find that he tends to briefly accelerate when there is a crescendo at the end of a phrase. It is easy to perceive that he accelerates in mm. 5, 7, 8, and 12 along with a crescendo. Gieseeking sometimes anticipates the changes of dynamic. One example of anticipation in Gieseeking's recording is in m. 52, where he does not continue getting louder, but anticipates the *p leggierissimo* which marked in m. 53 by becoming softer before he finishes playing m. 52.

The thirds are mainly given to the right hand in Chopin's etude. Only in measures 31-34 do the thirds occur in both hands. In Debussy's etude, however, the thirds played in the right hand are often joined by the left hand. For instance, in m. 59 to m. 62, both

hands play the double thirds (See Ex. 11), making high demands on the pianist's technique. Gieseeking does not keep his hands together here; his left hand gets ahead of the right hand in mm. 59-61. Gieseeking seems to be trying for great brilliance, but he plays in too much of a hurry at the expense of clarity. Béroff does not play this phrase evenly; his playing has breaks between groups of the thirds. Especially in m. 62 one can hear a little stop after every group of four notes in Béroff's recording. It is technically hard to make a smooth connection between groups in a very fast tempo, since pianists need time to change hand positions from one group to the next.

Example 11: Debussy Etude No. 2, mm. 59-62.

CHAPTER 4

ETUDE NO. 3, POUR LES QUARTES

This etude is a special and creative work, which is written specifically for the interval of the fourth. In Debussy's letter to Jacques Durand, his publisher, on August 28th, 1915, Debussy says that this etude for the fourth is an exploration of special sonorities. "The other *Etudes* deal with the search for special sonorities, including 'Pour les quartes' in which you'll find unheard-of things, even though your ears are well accustomed to 'curiosities'." ²² Schmitz writes, "That Debussy had a rightful pride in this particular "Étude" is quite understandable, for it further pioneers the role of the fourth in musical literature." ²³

The first six measures act as an introduction of this etude. Some pianists, like Loriod, Uchida and Yontov, begin to play the first six measures with fluid rubato, while some, like Béroff, Haas and Giesecking, play in a steady tempo (See Ex. 12). Uchida plays the short notes faster, and plays the long notes slower, to achieve a flexible rhythm. Yontov also takes more time on the long notes, and goes faster on the short notes, creating a feeling like a boat rocking in the water.

²² Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*. Selected and Edited by François Lesure and Roger Nichols, Translated by Roger Nichols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 300.

²³ E. Robert Schmitz, *The piano works of Claude Debussy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 200.

Andantino con moto

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's Etude No. 3, measures 1-6. The tempo is marked 'Andantino con moto'. The score is in 6/8 time and features a piano (*p*) and dolce dynamic. It includes slurs, triplets, and a ritardando (*Rit.*) marking at the end of the section.

Example 12: Debussy Etude No. 3, mm. 1-6.

In mm. 5-6, six of the eight pianists play the repeating notes C very short and do not use pedal; and among them Béroff and Thibaudet even play these notes very loud although Debussy marked *pp* here. The other two pianists, Ciccolini and Yontov, use pedal for the repeating notes C and make them sound rich and long. One might prefer to use pedal here if one can play quietly enough for the repetitions. As Debussy marked a slur over the repeating notes in each measure, it should not sound staccato and should be extremely soft just like a little drum, especially the second group in m. 6 in which Debussy wrote *più p*.

The next two phrases in *Stretto* break the quiet mood established in the introduction, like a burst. One can hear Béroff, Ciccolini, Giesecking and Loriod use the long pedaling for mm. 7-9 (similar for mm. 10-12), making a blend of resonance from the different registers (See Ex. 13). In contrast, Uchida and Yontov seem to be clearing the sound before playing the long notes in m. 8 and m. 11, presenting the double fourth notes

in a transparent sonority. This way of pedaling makes it easier to perceive three different dynamic levels *f*, *p*, *pp* as Debussy indicated.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's Etude No. 3, measures 7-12. The score is in 3/4 time and features a 'Stretto' marking. It shows a complex texture with multiple layers of sound, including a 'f sonore martelé' section and a 'Rit.' section. Dynamics range from *f* to *pp*. The score includes a treble and bass clef with various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Example 13: Debussy Etude No. 3, mm. 7-12.

Uchida plays the 32nd notes with rubato in m. 18 (See Ex. 14), as she does in the introduction. She first starts slower, then speeds up while playing the crescendo from *f* to *ff*. In the next measure, she stops the F major chord by changing the pedal and just retains the single note F on the bottom, making a smooth connection of the descending scale F-E-D-C in the bass. In m. 24, Uchida also changes the pedal after playing the rolling chord by the left hand and only keeps B-flat on the top, connecting to the double fourth progression in the right hand (See Ex. 15). But in Thibaudet's recording, it seems as though he does not change the pedal before playing the double fourth progression in the right hand.

Example 14: Debussy Etude No. 3, mm. 16-19.

Example 15: Debussy Etude No. 3, m. 24.

There is a similar place in m. 45 of Etude No. 11, in which one can hear Ciccolini, Haas and Uchida wait a long time on the fermata and let the strings vibrate longer, then suddenly change the pedal to clear the harmony and just keep the single A-sharp note (See Example 16).

Example 16: Debussy Etude No. 11, mm. 43-47.

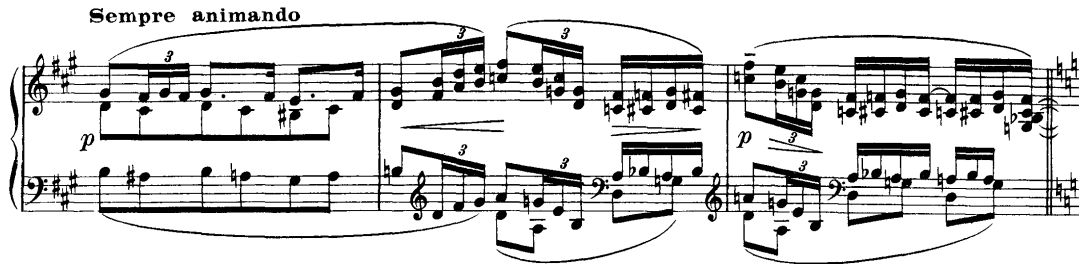
There is a recitative-like passage from m. 25 to m. 28, which Debussy marked *expressif*. Ciccolini's playing is very poetic and full of imagination. One can hear that he may hold one key down after pressing the next key, creating an overlapping legato. Ciccolini plays this etude slower than any of the others, and his playing is somewhat lacking excitement in some places where Debussy marked *poco animando*. For example, Debussy marked *Ballabile e grazioso (poco animando)* in m. 29, which means playing with a danceable and graceful feeling and accelerating slightly. But Ciccolini keeps the tempo around $J = 55$ without any acceleration from m. 29 to m. 36, and he seems to be using the pedal so much that the double fourths in the right hand in some measures sound almost legato, as he did in Etude No. 2. In addition, his playing of the double-dotted 8th notes in mm. 32-34 sounds somewhat dull (See Ex. 17), which might be ascribed to the slow tempo and excessive pedaling. Maybe this is done partially because of the instrument and recording equipment.



Example 17: Debussy Etude No. 3, mm. 32-34.

Loriod's playing shows her exquisite interpretation of tempo and dynamic changes. For instance, she slows down a little in m. 44 as Debussy indicated *sostenuto*, and makes a *subito p* in m. 46 after playing a brief crescendo at the end of the previous measure. Furthermore, she makes a surprising timbral change between m. 47 and m. 48 by playing softer in m. 48 and slowing down at the end of the measure, and bringing out

the bottom note G-natural of the last chord (See Ex. 18). Giesecking does not play the double fourths evenly in m. 48, in that he makes an unexpected accent on the first 16th note of the 2nd beat, maybe because he moves his arm too fast before playing that beat.



Example 18: Debussy Etude No. 3, mm. 46-48.

The passage from m. 49 to m. 64 is the most dramatic and technically demanding section of this etude. Giesecking plays very fast and accelerates from m. 53 but sacrifices the clarity of sound. One can hear that he plays the running double fourths on the 2nd beat of m. 57 and the 3rd beat of m. 59 without clarity, and he plays the last two chords in m. 55 so hastily that he does not have enough time to make the crescendo, making the second chord lack sharpness. On the contrary, Ciccolini performs this section in a relatively slow tempo and even makes ritardando in m. 49 and m. 52, but finally starts acceleration from m. 56 to the climax.

The music goes back to calm and soft from m. 65 to the end, which is a great contrast to the preceding passage. Uchida plays the double fourths triplets in m. 65 with rubato as she plays in the introduction, and becomes slower and softer from m. 72 where Debussy wrote *Calmato*, going back to a dreamlike state.

CHAPTER 5

ETUDE NO. 4, POUR LES SIXTES

This etude is written for the interval of the sixth, as Debussy says in a letter to his publisher: “For a long time the continuous use of sixths reminded me of pretentious young ladies sitting in a salon, sulkily doing their tapestry work and envying the scandalous laughter of the naughty ninths... So I wrote this study in which my concern for sixths goes to the lengths of using no other intervals to build up the harmonies; not bad! (Mea culpa...)”.²⁴ Debussy wrote a tempo marking *Lento* at the beginning of this etude, which is very different from Chopin’s etude for sixths, Op. 25, No. 8. Chopin marked *Vivace* for his etude and did not prescribe any tempo changes through the piece, while Debussy indicated many, with such words as *Animando poco a poco, un poco agitato, rit., Rubato* in his etude. But this is not the only etude that Debussy used *Lento* for indicating the tempo; Debussy marked *Lento, rubato e leggiero* at the beginning of Etude No. 8, wrote *Lento, molto rubato* at the beginning of the middle section of Etude No. 12 (m. 80), and also used *Lento* briefly in Etude No. 10 (mm. 61-62).

Uchida plays the opening phrase with rubato, as she does in the introduction (mm. 1-6) of Etude No. 3. Thibaudet also plays rubato in the first phrase, especially for the portato 16th notes in m. 5 and m. 6 (See Ex. 19). Most of the pianists examined use pedal for the portato notes in these two measures. One can hear Béroff using pedal for the portato notes in m. 5, but it seems as though he uses flutter pedaling in m. 6, making it sound drier than the previous measure. In Yontov’s video recording he puts the pedal down for the portato notes in the right hand in m. 5, and changes the pedal for every

²⁴ Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, 300.

portato 16th note in m. 6. The reason for Béroff and Yontov changing the pedal frequently in m. 6 might be in order to get softer here. Thibaudet lifts the pedal too suddenly on the fermata at the end of m. 6, destroying the poetic beauty. Ciccolini and Haas do not take enough time for a breath at the end of m. 6, and Giesecking even waits less, hardly breathing before going to the next phrase. It might be preferable to wait longer on the fermata and release the pedal slower, in order to make the strings vibrate longer and keep the cessation of sound from being abrupt.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's Etude No. 4, measures 1-6. The score is in 3/4 time and B-flat major. It features a piano accompaniment with a right hand melody and a left hand accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Lento'. The right hand melody is marked 'mezza voce, dolce sostenuto'. The left hand accompaniment is marked 'calando'. The score includes a fermata at the end of measure 6 and a 'Rit.' marking at the end of measure 6.

Example 19: Debussy Etude No. 4, mm. 1-6.

However, performers might use less pedal for the passage in which the right hand plays the 16th-note triplets portato in mm. 21-24, because here the tempo gets faster than the opening phrase, as the composer marked *in poco agitato* (sic), and the harmony changes rapidly (See Ex. 20). It seems Giesecking, Haas and Thibaudet use the pedal briefly in this passage, and Giesecking makes the 16th-note triplets in the right hand very detached. One can see that Yontov uses very short pedaling here, but holds the pedal slightly longer when playing the crescendo to build rich sound effects.

Example 20: Debussy Etude No. 4, mm. 21-24.

There are many places where Debussy marked tempo changes in this etude. For example, he wrote *Animando poco a poco* on the top of m. 13. Most pianists in this study speed up drastically in m. 15 and make a substantial crescendo reaching to the first *f* in this piece (in m. 16). In the next phrase, Gieseking does not start slower and then gradually get faster at *in poco agitato (sic)* in m. 21. Instead, he begins with a fast tempo, around $\text{♩} = 75$, and keeps the tempo steady. Debussy wrote *rit. poco a poco e calando* in m. 43, and marked *slentando* in m. 46 where the opening melody comes back, but Gieseking does not get slower (See Ex. 21). Furthermore, in the last phrase Gieseking does the opposite of what the composer marked. He plays the last phrase, where Debussy wrote *Più lento*, even faster than the very beginning of this etude in which Debussy marked *Lento*; he starts playing this etude around $\text{♩} = 50$, but plays the *Più lento* phrase around $\text{♩} = 57$, and he does not wait enough time for the quarter rests in the bass line in m. 57 and m. 58 (See Ex. 22).

Example 21: Debussy Etude No. 4, mm. 42-46.

Ciccolini's performance is significantly different from Giesecking's in terms of tempo changes. Unlike Giesecking, who sometimes ignores the tempo changes, Ciccolini gets slower in some places in which Debussy did not indicate slowing down. For instance, he slows down in m. 47. But Ciccolini seems not to be getting softer in m. 45 in which the composer wrote *smorzando*. His pedaling for m. 57 and m. 58 is special; he clears the sonority by totally releasing the pedal on the quarter rests in the bass line, and only keeps the sound of the upper notes (See Ex. 22).

Example 22: Debussy Etude No. 4, mm. 52-59.

CHAPTER 6

ETUDE NO. 5, POUR LES OCTAVES

Etude No. 5 is written for the octaves. This etude is like a joyous outburst, as Debussy wrote *Joyeux et emporté, librement rythmé* at the beginning of this piece. Schmitz describes this piece like “a stylized waltz,” as he writes in his book, “A stylized waltz, the “Étude” brings both rhythmic and harmonic zest to the staid octave interval. Syncopated accents, rests on the first beat, swelling upward surges, work out an infectiously gay romanticism in the opening and closing sections, to which a square cut, near military precision, in the middle section brings stark contrast.”²⁵ Giesecking plays fastest and Uchida plays slowest among the eight pianists as Figure 3 shows.

Béroff	Ciccolini	Giesecking	Haas	Loriod	Thibaudet	Uchida	Yontov
2:21	2:54	2:12	2:23	2:32	2:37	3:05	2:46

Figure 3: Timing Comparisons of Eight Pianists’ Recordings of Debussy Etude No. 5.

Uchida performs the opening phrase (mm. 1-10) with rubato, and makes the ritardando very obvious in m. 8 (See Ex. 23). But Giesecking plays the opening phrase in a steady tempo, and he does not get slower in m. 8 and continues to m. 9 without taking a breath.

²⁵ E. Robert Schmitz, *The piano works of Claude Debussy*, 202.

Joyeux et emporté, librement rythmé

The image shows the first ten measures of Debussy's Etude No. 5. The tempo is 'Joyeux et emporté, librement rythmé'. The music begins with a piano introduction. The first measure has a dynamic of *sf* (sforzando), followed by *f* (forte) in the second measure. The third measure has *ff* (fortissimo), and the fourth has *p* (piano). The fifth measure is marked *cresc. molto* (crescendo molto). The sixth measure has *f* (forte). The seventh measure has *mf* (mezzo-forte). The eighth measure has *f* (forte). The ninth measure has *p* (piano). The tenth measure has *f* (forte). The score includes a first ending bracket over measures 8 and 9, and a 'Rit.' (ritardando) marking over measure 10, followed by a double bar line and 'Mouv't' (movimento).

Example 23: Debussy Etude No. 5, mm. 1-10.

It seems that Giesecking does not make the ritardando in m. 20 as well. In addition, he hits some wrong notes at the end of this measure (See Ex. 24). Giesecking plays very fast and makes a substantial crescendo from m. 76, but sacrifices the clarity of sound. In m. 79, one can hear him miss some notes when playing the octaves (See Ex. 25).

The image shows measures 20 and 21 of Debussy's Etude No. 5. The tempo is 'Rit.' (ritardando) and 'Mouv't' (movimento). The music begins with a piano introduction. The first measure has a dynamic of *f* (forte), and the second measure has *ff* (fortissimo). The score includes a first ending bracket over measures 20 and 21.

Example 24: Debussy Etude No. 5, mm. 20-21.

Strepitoso

The image shows measures 76, 77, 78, and 79 of Debussy's Etude No. 5. The tempo is 'Strepitoso'. The music begins with a piano introduction. The first measure has a dynamic of *ff* (fortissimo), and the second measure has *ff* (fortissimo). The score includes a first ending bracket over measures 76 and 77, and a 'les 2' (second ending) marking over measures 78 and 79.

Example 25: Debussy Etude No. 5, mm. 76-79.

In Béroff's recording, the rhythm in m. 30 that he executes sounds unnatural; he accelerates unexpectedly when playing the triplets (See Ex. 26). Perhaps the drastic tempo change is caused by splicing two recordings together.

Example 26: Debussy Etude No. 5, mm. 30-33.

The pianists examined play different rhythmic patterns in m. 37 and m. 39. In the original edition, the first beat in the right hand in m. 37 has dotted rhythm, as in m. 33 or m. 35; but m. 39 has, instead, two equal sixteenth notes (See Ex. 27). Béroff and Thibaudet's performances exactly follow the original edition. Uchida also plays different rhythmic patterns in m. 37 and m. 39 according to the original edition, but the difference is not so obvious as in Béroff and Thibaudet's recordings. However, in more recent editions, both measures appear with two equal sixteenth notes rather than dotted rhythm. One can hear Yontov play two even sixteenth notes in both m. 37 and m. 39. Ciccolini, Giesecking and Haas perform both measures with dotted rhythms as in m. 33 and m. 35.

Example 27: Debussy Etude No. 5, mm. 34-42.

Yontov plays the passage in mm. 49-58 without using the damper pedal, making the sound detached and clear (See Ex. 28). Performers can use the soft pedal in this passage, as *con sordini* is shown on the score in m. 49. In m. 59, the composer indicated *garder la sourdine, la pédale forte sur chaque temps* (translation: keep the soft pedal but put the damper pedal down on each beat). Notice in Yontov's video recording that he flutters the damper pedal in mm. 59-67 while keeping the soft pedal depressed.

au Mouvt
très également rythmé, sans presser

(con sordini)

rinf. poco - - //

pp

pp

Garder la sourdine,
la pédale forte sur chaque temps.

pp

simile

pp

Example 28: Debussy Etude No. 5, mm. 49-67.

CHAPTER 7

ETUDE NO. 6, POUR LES HUIT DOIGTS

This etude is a study for eight fingers. Debussy indicated not using thumbs, as he wrote a footnote on the first page of Etude No. 6: “The constantly shifting hand position in this Etude makes it difficult to use the thumb, and the performance will become an acrobatic exercise.”²⁶ Etude No. 6 is technically similar with Etude No.1, in that both of the etudes are based on ascending and descending scales. As Schmitz writes about the musical patterns in Etude No. 6 in his book, “The musical patterns are, very largely, graphically divided into four plus four, in complementary directions, i.e., four notes ascending and four descending.”²⁷

Debussy marked *Vivamente, molto leggiero e legato* at the beginning of this etude. Uchida plays fastest and Ciccolini plays slowest among the eight pianists, as Figure 4 shows.

Béroff	Ciccolini	Giesecking	Haas	Loriod	Thibaudet	Uchida	Yontov
1:31	2:01	1:30	1:25	1:33	1:35	1:23	1:36

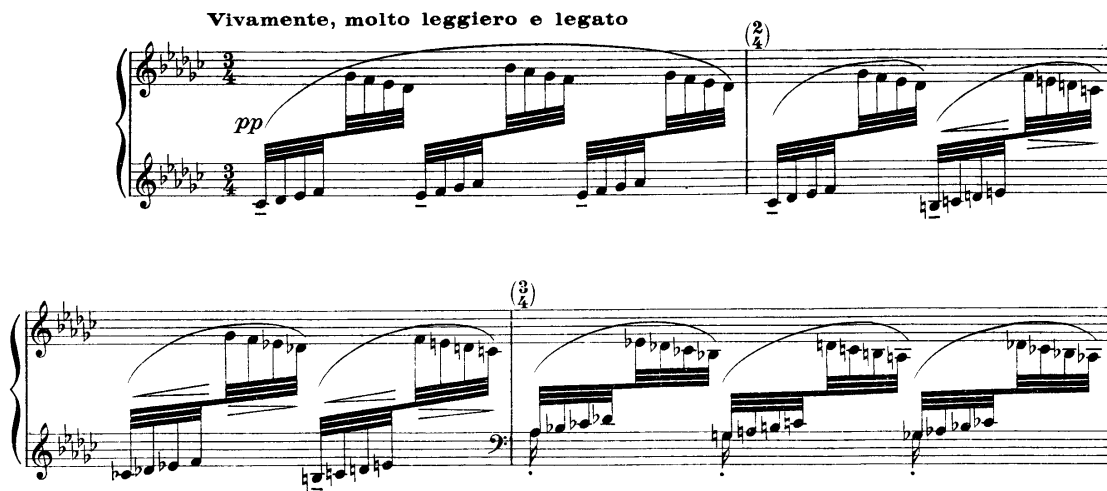
Figure 4: Timing Comparisons of Eight Pianists’ Recordings of Debussy Etude No. 6.

This etude features the alternation of two hands, and performers can play the right hand crossing over the left hand or vice versa. But either way, one should play smoothly when changing from one hand to the other and be careful not to make any unexpected accent. One can notice from Yontov’s video recording that he plays his right hand crossing over the left hand at the beginning of this piece, but he plays the opposite way in some later passages.

²⁶ Claude Debussy, *Études. Livres I et II*. Edited by Claude Helffer (Paris: Durand, 2007), 37.

²⁷ E. Robert Schmitz, *The piano works of Claude Debussy*, 204.

There are some passages in which Debussy wrote tenuto marking on the first note of every beat. It can be easily perceived from Thibaudet's recording that he makes a slight accent on every tenuto note in the left hand in mm. 1-3 (See Ex. 29). Notice that Debussy wrote staccato rather than tenuto on the first note of every group of eight notes in m. 4. Gieseking, Thibaudet, Uchida and Yontov play the staccato notes shorter and more prominent in m. 4 than the tenuto notes in the preceding three measures, in order to observe the different articulation. Performers can think of playing diminuendo when playing the ascending four-note groups in the left hand in m. 1, and try to emphasize the first note of each group.



Example 29: Debussy Etude No. 6, mm. 1-4.

In mm. 54-59, Debussy also marked tenuto on the first note of every beat. Here, however, the tenuto notes should be played longer and projected as a melodic line, since the composer wrote double stems for these tenuto notes and indicated *les basses légèrement expressives* (translation: slightly expressive bass) in m. 54 (See Ex. 30). Most of the pianists examined make the long tenuto notes prominent and play the other 32nd notes softly, keeping the melodic notes and the other 32nd notes on two levels of sound.

Yontov changes the pedal on every beat in this passage from his video recording, using the pedal according to the melodic tenuto notes.

(3/4)
p
les basses légèrement expressives
p
cre - scen - do
f

Example 30: Debussy Etude No. 6, mm. 54-59.

There is another place in this etude where the composer wrote tenuto markings: in mm. 62-63, the tenuto marking appears on the fourth note of every group of four 32nd notes (See Ex. 31). One can hear Yontov slightly accentuate the tenuto notes, making them sound independent from the running 32nd notes. However, in Haas's recording, it is difficult to perceive the difference between the tenuto notes and the other notes.

Accelerando poco a poco

sempre f ma sempre leggeriss.

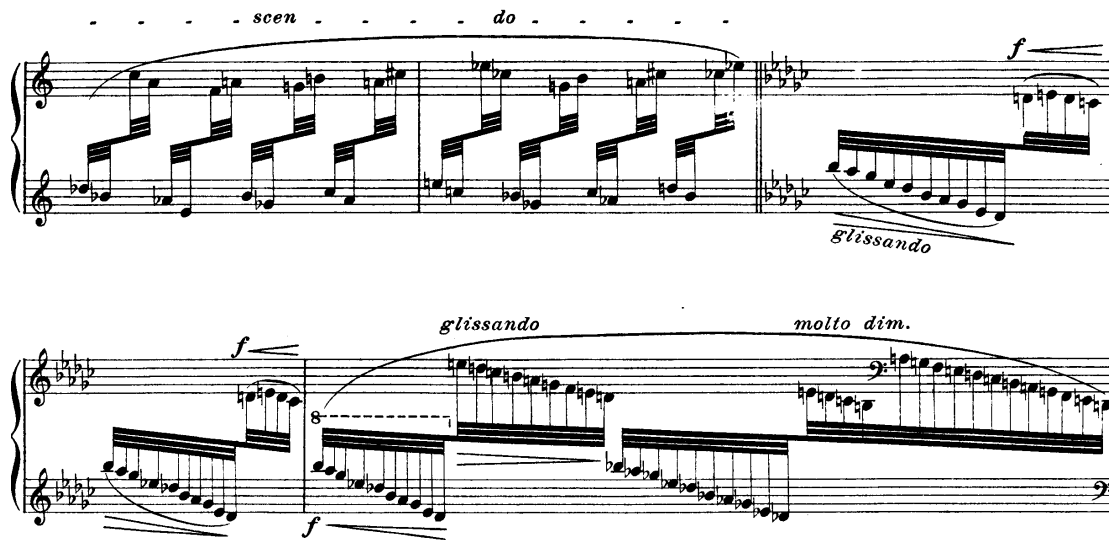
dim.

p dim.

dim.

Example 31: Debussy Etude No. 6, mm. 60-63.

This etude is the only piece from the *Douze Études* that applies the *glissando* technique (See Ex. 32). Thibaudet accentuates every B-flat—the first note of every descending *glissando* in the left hand. It seems he does not use the pedal for the *glissandi* in mm. 33-34. But Haas and Yontov are using long pedaling for m. 34; they catch the black-key *glissandi* and the white-key *glissandi* into one pedal. Using pedal for the *glissando* helps pianists achieve the *forte* level, which occurs for the first time in the etude in m. 33. Performers might change the pedal when switching from the left hand to the right hand, in order to make the *molto diminuendo* at the end of m. 34.



Example 32: Debussy Etude No. 6, mm. 31-34.

Before the glissando passage, Debussy indicated *cresc. poco a poco* from m. 29 to m. 32. Most of the pianists examined make the music grow all the way through to the *forte* in m. 33. Giesecking and Uchida even make an acceleration from m. 31, building tension and excitement for the audience. But the crescendo here is not obvious in Haas and Ciccolini's recordings.

Haas does not seem to pay attention to the dynamic changes in several places within this etude. He does not follow the crescendo and diminuendo markings in mm. 2-3, and does not make a crescendo in m. 26 and m. 28. In addition, Haas does not get softer in m. 39 where Debussy marked *molto dim.* But Thibaudet strictly follows the dynamic markings on the score. For instance, Thibaudet creates a significant crescendo in m. 5 and m. 11, and makes the top note of the ascending scale sound very bright.

There is a drastic dynamic contrast at the end of the etude, where Debussy wrote *ff* in m. 67 and *p* in m. 68 (See Ex. 33). Uchida plays the 64th notes in m. 67 fast and loud, producing a sound like a whirlwind. She then plays the last G-flats in the two hands

softly, making a noticeable contrast between the two measures. But Ciccolini does not play the last G-flats softly enough, so there is little dynamic contrast. Yontov uses the pedal for the descending 64th notes in m. 67, and releases the pedal on the eighth rest at the end of the measure. He then puts the pedal down again on the last G-flats and releases very soon, producing a tenuto effect.

The original edition appears to end with a B-flat (See Ex. 33). More recent editions insert a treble clef before the final right hand note in m. 68.²⁸ Haas, in fact, seems not to be following any edition here; he plays G-flat in the right-hand two octaves lower than in the recent editions.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's Etude No. 6, measures 66-68. The score is written for piano and consists of three measures. The first measure (m. 66) features a dense texture of sixteenth-note chords in both hands, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second measure (m. 67) continues with similar textures, marked with fortissimo (*ff*). The third measure (m. 68) is marked with piano (*p*) and features a final right-hand note (a G-flat) and a final left-hand note (a G-flat). The score concludes with the text "Fin du 1^{er} Livre" and "m.d." below the final notes.

Example 33: Debussy Etude No. 6, mm. 66-68.

²⁸ Claude Debussy, *Études. Livres I et II*, 43.

CHAPTER 8

ETUDE NO. 7, POUR LES DEGRÉS CHROMATIQUES

Etude No. 7 is written for chromatic scales, and is one of the more technically challenging pieces among Debussy's *Douze Études*. Burge writes about Etude No. 7 in his book, "Number seven, 'Pour les degrés chromatiques,' is somewhat academic in its square rhythms; it requires unerringly quick lateral displacement of either hand as the performer sustains a four-note chromatic scale in a rhythmically calm and unruffled manner."²⁹

Debussy indicated *pp* in the first measure of this etude, and marked a big crescendo in m. 2. The next two measures exactly repeat the musical material of mm. 1-2 (See Ex. 34). One can hear Ciccolini and Giesecking do not make the crescendo in m. 2 and m. 4. Thibaudet follows the markings on the score strictly. He makes an accent on E in m. 2 and plays a big crescendo, and then he takes a slight breath before resuming *pp* in m. 3. Most of the pianists examined make the staccato octaves in mm. 5-6 very detached and prominent.

²⁹ David Burge, *Twentieth-Century Piano Music* (New York: Schirmer Books/A Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1990), 21.

Scherzando, animato assai

The image displays the first six measures of Debussy's Etude No. 7. The music is in 3/4 time and is marked 'Scherzando, animato assai'. The score is written for piano and features dramatic dynamic contrasts. It begins with a piano (pp) section, followed by a crescendo leading to a subito piano (pp) section. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings such as 'pp' and 'cresc.'.

Example 34: Debussy Etude No. 7, mm. 1-6.

Debussy wrote *Scherzando* at the beginning of this piece, which is largely expressed by the dramatic dynamic contrasts throughout the etude. There are many places the pianists play the *subito p* or *pp* after making a big crescendo, to embody the *Scherzando* character. Uchida plays crescendo in m. 24 and then plays very softly in the next measure, just outlines the melodic note C in the left hand. She also makes the *pp subito* in m. 30 after playing the crescendo in the previous measure (See Ex. 35).

Example 35: Debussy Etude No. 7, mm. 22-30.

There is another example in which the composer prescribed *p subito* after a crescendo. In m. 58, Uchida plays F-E-natural in the right hand loudly and makes the *p subito* in m. 59 (See Ex. 36). She takes a breath after the crescendo at the end of m. 62, then plays very quietly and makes a timbral change in the next measure. Thibaudet tends to take a breath before making the dynamic change. He plays the notes F-E-natural in m. 58 very brightly and takes a brief breath before playing the *p subito* in m. 59, similar to what he does at the end of m. 2 as mentioned before. He also takes a breath at the end of m. 60 as well as m. 62, in order to make a color change. But Ciccolini plays F-E-natural in m. 58 too softly, not following the dynamic markings on the score here, and continues playing the next measure without taking any breath. One can notice that Giesecking makes no crescendo for the two notes F-E-natural in m. 58. In addition, he does not play two

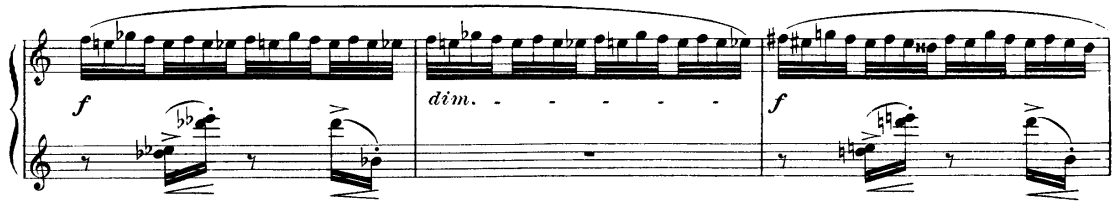
hands together in mm. 59-62, and even misses several notes in the left hand in m. 62. He also does not play the last four 32nd notes in the left hand in m. 42 clearly (See Ex. 37).

Example 36: Debussy Etude No. 7, mm. 56-64.

Example 37: Debussy Etude No. 7, mm. 42-44.

The pianists examined execute the pedaling in different ways in certain places where the composer wrote slurs. In m. 7 and m. 9, Debussy wrote slurs for the two-note groups in the left hand (See Ex. 38). Ciccolini, Cosand and Thibaudet use the pedal to make the “slur” effect, connecting the two notes that cannot be accomplished by the fingers. But it seems Béroff and Giesecking do not make the slurs. Performers might

prefer to put the pedal down on the first note of the slur and release immediately after playing the second note, while making the crescendo.



Example 38: Debussy Etude No. 7, mm. 7-9.

One can find a similar passage in mm. 57-58 (See Ex. 36). Thibaudet accentuates on the *sfz* note while making it longer by using the pedal. One might prefer not to use the pedal on the *sfz* note, in order to enhance the sharpness.

Most of the pianists examined use the pedal for making the slurs in m. 86 and m. 87 (See Ex. 39). In m. 87, Cosand does not hold the pedal for the whole measure; he uses a brief touch of the pedal on the bass note A, so as to observe the rests after that. And then he plays staccato on the double notes in m. 88. Uchida makes the bass note A in m. 87 sound longer, and gets slower through to the end of the piece.



Example 39: Debussy Etude No. 7, mm. 83-88.

CHAPTER 9

ETUDE NO. 8, POUR LES AGRÉMENTS

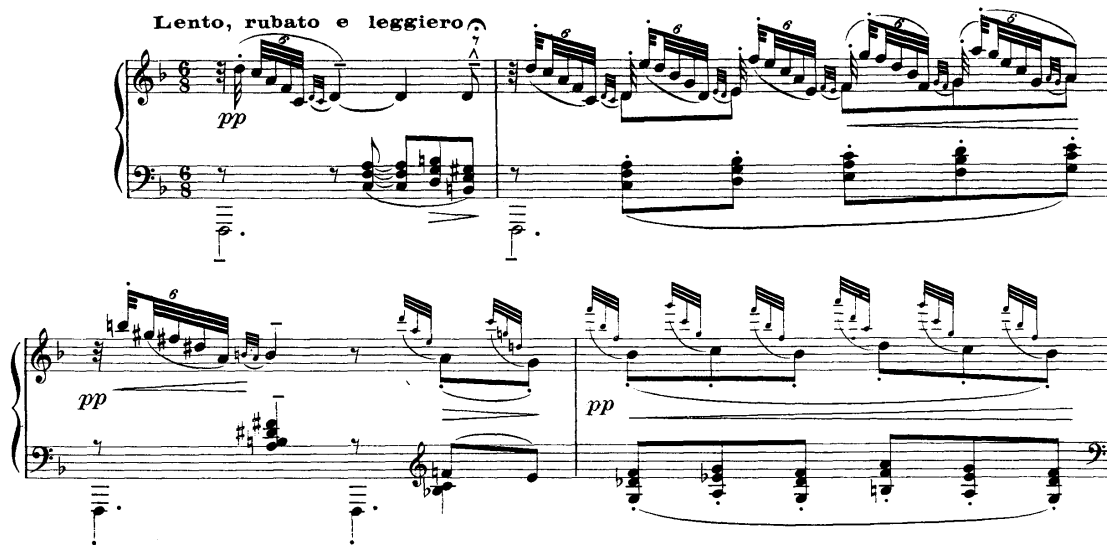
This etude is written for “*agréments*”, which can be translated as “ornaments” or “embellishments”. Debussy looked back to the French Baroque tradition and François Couperin’s keyboard music in this etude. He absorbed the idea of “*agréments*” from the French harpsichordists in the 17th and 18th centuries. According to the explanation of “*agréments*” in *A History of Western Music*, “lutenists and harpsichordists systematically developed the use of *agréments*, ornaments designed to emphasize important notes and give the melody shape and character. *Agréments* became a fundamental element of all French music, and the proper use of ornaments was a sign of refined taste.”³⁰ Debussy’s hesitation as to the dedication of his *Douze Études* to Couperin or to Chopin, which can be found in his letter to the publisher, “You haven’t given me an answer about the dedication: Couperin or Chopin?”³¹, also reveals his admiration for the French keyboard tradition.

The etude starts with a descending arpeggiation figure in the right hand (See Ex. 40). Thibaudet puts the pedal down before starting to play the first note, producing a richer sound. As Banowetz writes about the effect of the anticipatory pedaling in his book, “depressing the pedal before starting to play will produce a richer sound than will striking the note or chord first and depressing the pedal a split second later, since with the

³⁰ J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music* 8th ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 368-369.

³¹ Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, 300.

dampers already raised, the sympathetic partials will vibrate fully.”³² The use of anticipatory pedaling acts like glazing on the surface of a pottery, making a shining effect.



Example 40: Debussy Etude No. 8, mm. 1-4.

Some pianists, including Loriod, Thibaudet and Uchida play the beginning arpeggio with fluid rubato. Uchida plays the descending arpeggio from slow to fast, creating a feeling like a boat floating in the sea. The way she plays here recalls the flexible rhythm she plays in the opening phrases of Etude No. 3 and No. 4. But Ciccolini and Cosand play the opening arpeggio in a steady rhythm.

There are several places in this etude where Debussy marked subtle dynamic changes. For example, Debussy indicated *pp* in m. 3 after a crescendo played in m. 2. Loriod and Thibaudet take extra time for a breath after playing m. 2, before the timbral change in m. 3. One can hardly perceive the dynamic change from Ciccolini’s recording; instead of playing softer, he slows down a lot in m. 3 to make a difference from m. 2. Ciccolini does the same way in m. 10 where the composer marked *più p*; He makes a

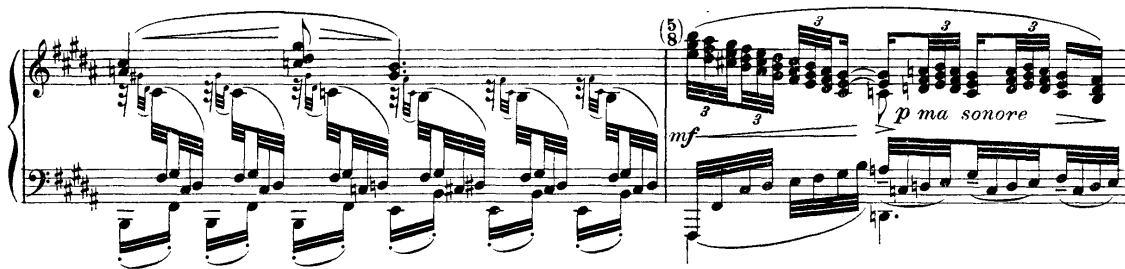
³² Joseph Banowetz, *The Pianist’s Guide to Pedaling*, 70.

ritardando in m. 10 rather than getting softer. There is a similar place in Etude No. 4, where Debussy marked *più p* in m. 19 (See Ex. 41). The dynamic change between m. 18 and m. 19 is also not obvious in Ciccolini's recording.



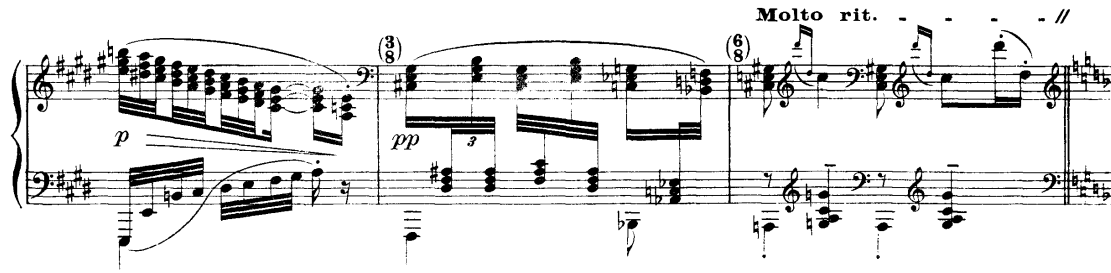
Example 41: Debussy Etude No. 4, mm. 16-20.

In m. 35 of Etude No. 8, Debussy wrote *mf* and crescendo in the first half of the measure, and indicated *p* in the second half (See Ex. 42). Cosand makes a big contrast changing from *mf* to *p*, and slows down a little bit in the second half of m. 35. Giesecking, however, plays the second half of this measure as loud as the first half, not making any difference in dynamics. Thibaudet plays the inner voice beautifully here; he emphasizes the tenuto notes, A-G-sharp-F-sharp in m. 35 and C-B-flat-A-flat in the left hand in m. 36, to which many pianists do not pay attention.



Example 42: Debussy Etude No. 8, mm. 34-35.

In m. 41, Loriod emphasizes the change from G-sharp in the right hand to G-natural in the left hand (See Ex. 43), shaping a beautiful connection between different voices.



Example 43: Debussy Etude No. 8, mm. 39-41.

Debussy indicated the articulation very exquisitely. Some pianists examined strictly follow what the composer marked, but some do not pay attention to some short notes. Also in m. 41, one can hear Cosand keeps the bass note A longer while he still makes the staccato chord in the right hand sound shorter. He might hold the bass longer by the finger and depress the pedal after the right hand releases the staccato chord, in order to produce different articulation in the separate voices. Cosand uses similar pedaling in the next measure; he puts the pedal down after releasing the top staccato note D. In mm. 27-29, Cosand plays the staccato broken chords in the right hand very detached while still making the octaves in the left hand sound legato (See Ex. 44). He seems to use the pedal after playing the broken chords. But most of the pianists examined play long broken chords. It might be preferable not to hold the keys after rolling the chords in the right hand, and care should always be taken that the staccato broken chords are not caught in the pedaling.

1^{er} Mouvt

p souple et ondoyant *cresc.*

dolce sostenuto

Rubato (poco scherzando)

mf *f m.g.* *pp subito* *pp*

m.d. *p*

Example 44: Debussy Etude No. 8, mm. 27-30.

The phrase in mm. 24-26 shares the same material with the passage in mm. 12-16. But one can notice that there is a tiny difference in the articulation; the note E in the right hand in m. 16 is marked with a slur (See Ex. 45), but the note E in m. 26 is indicated to be non legato (See Ex. 46). One can hear Ciccolini, Giesecking, Loriold and Thibaudet play the E in m. 26 very detached, making a big contrast with the legato E in m. 16.

Rit. //

p

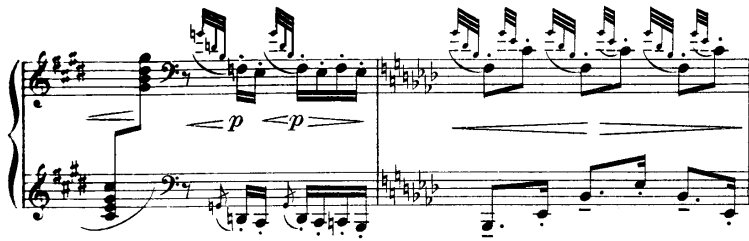
Example 45: Debussy Etude No. 8, m. 16.

Cédez

Example 46: Debussy Etude No. 8, mm. 25-26.

There are many passages in this etude in which Debussy wrote grace notes.

Thibaudet plays the grace notes in the right hand very lightly and staccato in m. 30. The *scherzando* effect of this measure is very similar with mm. 32-33 in Etude No. 11, in which he also plays the little grace notes very delicately (See Ex. 47).



Example 47: Debussy Etude No. 11, mm. 32-33.

Thibaudet plays the grace notes in the first half of m. 31 of Etude No. 8 very fast and soft like strumming, while making the notes in the left hand sound detached and prominent. But Ciccolini does not make a good balance here; he seems to be playing the grace notes too loud and it all sounds like the little notes are drowning out the big notes. One can find another example of the strumming effect in mm. 33-34, where the grace notes appear in the middle voice (See Ex. 48). Giesecking plays the grace notes very quickly and blurred. Cosand outlines the top melody clearly, while playing both the middle part and the pedal-point bass line very soft, creating a hazy atmosphere.

Rit. // **1^{er} Mouvt animando poco a poco**

p *piu p* *p* *molto leggiero* *pp* *expressif*

Example 48: Debussy Etude No. 8, mm. 32-34.

CHAPTER 10

ETUDE NO. 9, POUR LES NOTES RÉPÉTÉES

Etude No. 9 is a study for repeated notes. This etude is like a toccata, requiring performers to play the rapidly repeated notes in various dynamics and with different articulations. Schmitz describes the repeated note technique for this piece in his book, “the repeated note technique is given a thorough appraisal in the alternate use of both hands, or one hand in playing repetitions which can be either slurred, staccato, portamento, lifted or dropped, accented in groups of two, four, or gradually over a phrase.”³³

Debussy indicated *Scherzando* at the beginning of this etude, as he did in Etude No. 7. Some pianists play rubato in some passages as a means of expressing the humor. Cosand plays the opening passage with rubato, and he tends to take longer time on the rest to create a humorous feeling. One can hear him slow down at the beginning of m. 3, and pause on the two eighth rests after the F-natural. He speeds up a lot while playing the alternating repeated notes in m. 7, and waits longer on the rests at the end of m. 8 (See Ex. 49).

³³ E. Robert Schmitz, *The piano works of Claude Debussy*, 212.

Scherzando

Example 49: Debussy Etude No. 9, mm. 1-9.

Debussy indicated *Poco rubato* in mm. 47-48 (See Ex. 50). Ciccolini slows down a little bit at the beginning of m. 48, then speeds up in the middle and slows down again at the end of the same measure, creating a feeling of floating. However, Gieseking and Thibaudet do not make any tempo changes here.

Poco rit.. - - - // Poco rubato
dim.

Example 50: Debussy Etude No. 9, mm. 46-48.

Debussy required performers to play rubato in mm. 58-61 as well, as he wrote *in pochettino rubato (sic)* on the score (See Ex. 51). Later editions read *Un pochettino*

rubato.³⁴ One can hear Cosand slow down at the end of m. 59. He outlines the top melodic notes C-B-A-sharp in the right hand along with playing crescendo in m. 60, and then he accelerates while playing the repeating notes F-sharp very lightly. In m. 61, Cosand plays a different note from the previous measure; he plays A-natural in the right hand instead of playing A-sharp, making a special color.³⁵ Thibaudet and Uchida also speed up while playing the repeating F-sharp in m. 60 and m. 61. But Ciccolini plays the repeating F-sharp without any acceleration.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's Etude No. 9, measures 58-61. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a piano part with a right-hand melody and a left-hand accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'in pochettino rubato'. Dynamics include 'pp subito, armonioso' and 'pp'. The score shows a crescendo in measure 60 and a change in the right-hand melody in measure 61.

Example 51: Debussy Etude No. 9, mm. 58-61.

Uchida tends to speed up when there is a crescendo. It is easy to perceive that she accelerates in m. 2 and m. 7 while playing the repeated notes (See Ex. 49). She also puts more energy into both dynamic level and tempo for the alternating repeated notes in m. 67 and m. 69 (See Ex. 52).

³⁴ Claude Debussy, *Études. Livres I et II*, 66.

³⁵ Measures 60 and 61 have A-natural in the original edition, as shown in Example 3.

// in Tempo 1°

Example 52: Debussy Etude No. 9, mm. 66-69.

Besides playing rubato, some pianists make dramatic dynamic contrasts as a means of achieving the *Scherzando* character. Most of the pianists examined play the chords in m. 40 very stridently, exaggerating the dynamic contrast with the previous measure in which the composer wrote *p* (See Ex. 53).

Example 53: Debussy Etude No. 9, mm. 37-40.

One can hear Thibaudet making a diminuendo in the second half of m. 43 as well as m. 44, and playing the chords at the end of these two measures very softly (See Ex. 54).

Uchida plays the triplets in these two measures loudly, and then makes *subito p* on the chords. But the dynamic contrast that she makes sounds unnatural. Perhaps the change of dynamic level was achieved by splicing two recordings together. Cosand pauses slightly before playing the chords at the end of m. 43 and m. 44, in order to get softer and to change the color.



The image shows a musical score for Debussy's Etude No. 9, measures 43 and 44. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves. The right hand (treble clef) plays a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure of each measure, followed by a series of chords. The left hand (bass clef) plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The score includes dynamic markings: *f* (forte) for the triplets and *p* (piano) for the chords. There are also *ten.* (tension) markings above the right hand in the second measure of each measure. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4.

Example 54: Debussy Etude No. 9, mm. 43-44.

CHAPTER 11

ETUDE NO. 10, POUR LES SONORITÉS OPPOSÉES

Etude No. 10 is a special and innovative piece among Debussy's *Douze Études*, as shown by its title: "opposing sonorities". This etude embodies Debussy's exploration of new piano sounds, featuring oppositions among different textures, voices, dynamics and articulations.

The dynamic range of this etude features intensive use of soft levels. For most of the etude the composer indicated *p*, *pp*, and even *ppp* on the score. Debussy only wrote one *ff* (in m. 50) and two *f* (in m. 49 and m. 74) throughout the piece.

Cosand seems to be keeping the pedal for the beginning three measures, making the effect of a fight between the sonorities of G-sharp and A (See Ex. 55). In mm. 4-6, he plays with a slight rubato when playing the melody in the middle voice, and gets slower in m. 6. Thibaudet and Uchida outline the melody in mm. 4-6 well, and take a big breath at the end of m. 6. In contrast to the *pp* in the previous three measures, Debussy wrote *p* for the melody here, and he marked *dolente* (translation: sorrowful) for the descending three-note scale D-C-B in m. 4. So the performers can play the melody D-C-B prominently and smoothly, to express the melancholy mood.

Modéré, sans lenteur

pp

p dolente

Example 55: Debussy Etude No. 10, mm. 1-5.

In mm. 7-11, the repeating A-flat in the upper voice is not a part of melody (See Ex. 56), just like the G-sharp octaves in the opening three measures. Here the music is somewhat suggestive. The repeating A-flat sounds like bells very far away, and the repeating F in the bass like the echo of the bells. This is not the first time that Debussy implied bells in his compositions. Debussy wrote *Cloches à travers les feuilles* in 1907, which is the first piece of *Images, Book II*. The translation of this title would be “Bells through the leaves.” As Schmitz writes in his book, “the nostalgic vibrations of the bells permeating the forests from one village to another, from sunrise to evening, is, according to Louis Laloy’s claim, the stimulus which suggested the idea of this composition to Debussy.”³⁶

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's Etude No. 10, measures 6-15. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a bass line. The second system continues the bass line and includes a treble clef staff with a melodic line. The tempo is marked 'Animando poco a poco' and '1° Tempo'. Dynamics include 'p expressif et profond', 'pp', and 'p poco cresc.'. The key signature is G major and the time signature is 3/4.

Example 56: Debussy Etude No. 10, mm. 6-15.

Uchida plays the repeating A-flat in the upper voice and the repeating F in the bass very soft in mm. 7-11 (See Ex. 56). She outlines the melody in the middle voice. One can hear Thibaudet use generous pedaling in mm. 7-14. The resonances create a

³⁶ E. Robert Schmitz, *The piano works of Claude Debussy*, 110.

mysterious atmosphere, possibly suggesting a portrayal of a picture of the church bells ringing in the valley mists. Performers can use the long pedaling in this passage if one can play the notes soft enough, making a blurring sonority. One can hear Thibaudet and Uchida change the pedal to clear the harmony and just keep the single A-flat at the end of m. 14.

In m. 60, Cosand emphasizes F-sharp in the left hand, making it last longer, and smoothly connects to E-sharp in the next measure (See Ex. 57). He gets slower in m. 62, and catches the staccato triplets into one pedal. Loriod does not wait on the fermata, but she takes a breath after making the crescendo at the end of m. 61. Then she makes *subito pp* and changes the color in m. 62, and she also gets slower here, as Cosand does. One can hear Haas change the pedal to clear the harmony and just keep the fermata F-sharp in m. 61. But then he plays the E-sharp too loud so the connection between F-sharp and E-sharp is not smooth. He pauses slightly on the last F-sharp in m. 61, and gets softer and slower in the next measure.

Example 57: Debussy Etude No. 10, mm. 56-64.

Cosand emphasizes the dissonant harmony in m. 69 surprisingly, making a big dynamic and timbral contrast with the previous measure in which the composer indicated *pp* (See Ex. 58).



Example 58: Debussy Etude No. 10, mm. 65-69.

In the last measure of this piece, it seems Cosand and Uchida retake the chord in the bass silently after playing B in the upper voice and change the pedal, by which they get rid of B but retain the chord in the bass through to the end (See Ex. 59).



Example 59: Debussy Etude No. 10, mm. 70-75.

CHAPTER 12

ETUDE NO. 11, POUR LES ARPÈGES COMPOSÉS

This is the most popular one of the *Douze Études*, frequently performed for decades. As Burge writes in his book, “Kaleidoscopically colorful, this study is particularly well written for the instrument, containing passages of sly, finespun humor, and exhibiting a near-perfect balance of form and content.”³⁷ This etude is written for arpeggios, and has some similarities in texture with Etude No. 8. Both of the two etudes contain passages of big melodic notes alternating with groups of grace notes. One can find an example of this similarity in the cadenza passage in m. 50 of Etude No. 8, in which features arpeggios and a melodic line in the bass (See Ex. 60). The texture in this measure is very similar with the arpeggiation passages in Etude No. 11, such as mm. 7-10 (See Ex. 61).

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's Etude No. 8, measures 49-50. The score is in G-flat major and 3/4 time. It features a piano (p) section with a cadenza in measure 50, marked with a circled '6' and '8'. The bass line includes the lyrics 'ere - scen - do mol - to'. The score shows arpeggiated chords in both hands, with a melodic line in the bass. Dynamics include piano (p) and fortissimo (ff).

Example 60: Debussy Etude No. 8, mm. 49-50.

³⁷ David Burge, *Twentieth-Century Piano Music* (New York: Schirmer Books/A Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1990), 21.

Example 61: Debussy Etude No. 11, mm. 7-10.

Gieseeking does not balance the two voices well in both examples shown above; he makes the little notes sound too noisy and does not play the big notes in the bass clearly enough. Maybe this is partially just because of the recording quality, since he recorded the *Douze Études* in 1950s. Loriod plays an incorrect rhythm for the big notes in the bass in m. 7 and m. 9; she plays the two 8th notes on the 3rd beat of the two measures unevenly (See Ex. 61). The reason might be that she takes too much time on playing the little notes so that the B-flat comes too late. Loriod also plays a wrong rhythm for the big notes in m. 24. She plays the short note C almost as long as the long note B.

In mm. 2-3, performers should bring out the melody and treat the arpeggios in two hands as the accompanying part (See Ex. 62). Cosand and Uchida outline the melody well, keeping the melody and the other notes on two levels of sound. But Béroff and Ciccolini seem not to play the arpeggios softly enough.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Debussy's Etude No. 11. The first system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melody of eighth notes, grouped in threes and marked with a '6' (sextuplet). The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line. The tempo/mood marking 'dolce e lusigando' is written below the first staff. The second system also consists of two staves. The upper staff continues the melody, and the lower staff continues the bass line. Dynamic markings 'rf' (riformando) and 'pp' (pianissimo) are present in the second system.

Example 62: Debussy Etude No. 11, mm. 1-4.

Thibaudet uses agogic accents to help bring out the melody besides playing the arpeggios softer. He pauses slightly on the melodic note before playing the high note right after it. He does the same in mm. 12-13; one can hear him wait longer on the dotted notes before moving to the high register (See Ex. 63).

Example 63: Debussy Etude No. 11, mm. 11-16.

Debussy marked *mf sonore* on the 3rd beat in m. 14, which means keeping loud. But Ciccolini does not play the arpeggio on the 3rd beat louder than the other chords. Thibaudet plays the arpeggio louder, making this chord sound different from the other chords. Then he pauses briefly and clears the pedal before playing the F in the right hand, so as to make diminuendo at the end. In the next measure, he also takes the pedal off before playing G in the right hand in order to observe the quarter rest and get softer. Giesecking makes a beautiful color change by playing the arpeggio in m. 14 *mf sonore*, and then playing the beginning of m. 15 much softer.

Ciccolini makes some beautiful dynamic changes in this etude. In m. 25, he makes the ascending arpeggio very bright and then plays the bass note B very soft. He plays much softer in m. 28 than in m. 27, although the two measures are exactly the same. In addition, he makes the dynamic contrast drastically between m. 38 and m. 39; he plays strongly on the trill in m. 38, but makes *subito* piano after the key signature changes from flats to sharps in m. 39, and plays the staccato septuplet lightly like strumming a harp (See Ex. 64). Cosand also makes dramatic dynamic contrast between m. 38 and m. 39. He plays the trill on E-flat in m. 38 loud, then plays the trill on D-sharp in the next measure very gently and makes a big crescendo on the last four staccato 32nd notes surprisingly.

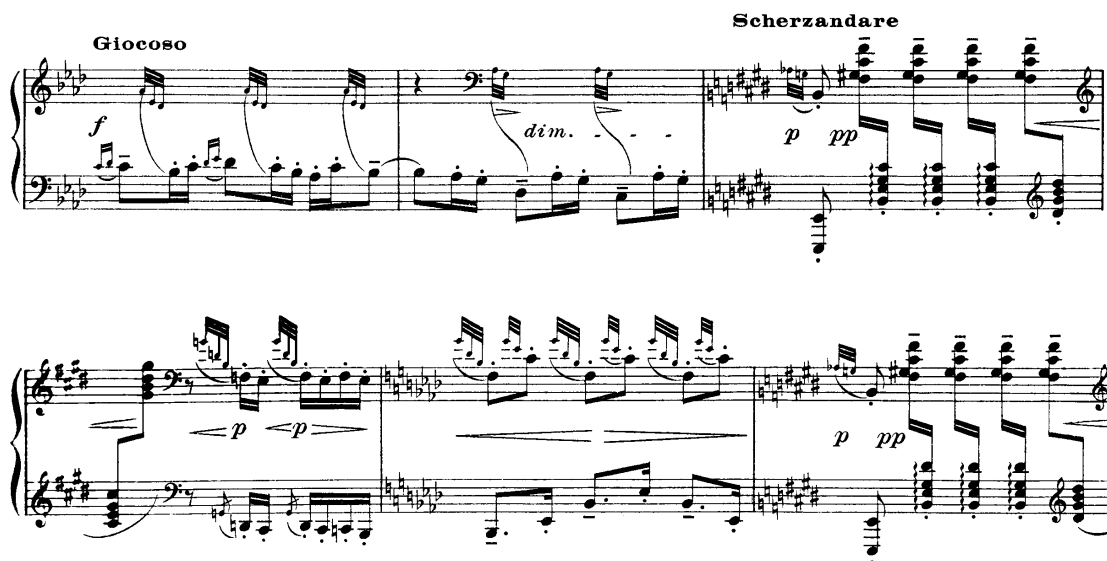
Example 64: Debussy Etude No. 11, mm. 37-39.

But sometimes Ciccolini seems not exactly follow what the composer indicated. He does not play louder on the third beat of m. 3 and m. 6, in that Debussy marked *rf* (See Ex. 65).



Example 65: Debussy Etude No. 11, mm. 3-6.

Cosand uses rubato to make the humorous character in certain passages. One can find that Debussy marked *Giocoso* in m. 29 and indicated *Scherzando* in m. 31 (See Ex. 66). Cosand slows down a lot at the end of m. 30 and then gets fast while playing the alternating chords in m. 31, so as to make a playful mood.



Example 66: Debussy Etude No. 11, mm. 29-34.

There is another example of his rubato playing in this etude. After making the big crescendo at the end of m. 39, Cosand waits longer on the eighth rest before playing m. 40 (See Ex. 64). And he puts more energy into both dynamic level and tempo in measure 41, making a big crescendo and acceleration. He plays the alternating chords in m. 43 from slow to fast as well (See Ex. 67).

Example 67: Debussy Etude No. 11, mm. 40-45.

One can hear Thibaudet make a big crescendo at the end of m. 31 and a diminuendo in the low notes in m. 32 (See Ex. 66). Thibaudet also plays rubato for expressing the humor; he accelerates in m. 33 and m. 41.

Most of the pianists examined play the alternating chords in m. 31 and m. 34 without pedal, making the chords sound clear and soft (See Ex. 66). But one can hear Ciccolini and Gieseeking use pedal for these two measures. It might be preferable not to use the damper pedal here. Performers can use soft pedal in order to make the sound quiet enough.

It seems as though most of the pianists examined change the pedal on the bass note A-flat in m. 65, to get rid of the D-flat sound (See Ex. 68). But one can hear

Ciccolini catch D-flat and C in one pedal. Performers might prefer to change the pedal on the bass note, making the harmony sound clean and transparent through to the end of the piece.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's Etude No. 11, measures 64-67. The score is written for piano and features a complex harmonic structure. The right hand (treble clef) plays a series of chords, with a large slur encompassing the notes from measure 64 to 67. The left hand (bass clef) plays a series of notes, with a large slur encompassing the notes from measure 64 to 67. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ppp* (pianissimo) and *m.d.* (mezzo-dolce), and the instruction *laissez vibrer* (let vibrate). The key signature is B-flat major, and the time signature is 3/4.

Example 68: Debussy Etude No. 11, mm. 64-67.

CHAPTER 13

ETUDE NO. 12, POUR LES ACCORDS

This etude is written for chords and is one of the most difficult pieces among all the twelve etudes. It is the last one of the *Douze Études*, serving as a brilliant conclusion. As Schmitz writes in his book, “its character is decided and buoyant, bringing a final enthusiastic apex to that which has preceded.”³⁸ This etude also features a wide dynamic range, as many other etudes do from the *Douze Études*. The dynamic range of this piece is from *ppp* (m. 95) to *ff* (m. 52 and m. 179).

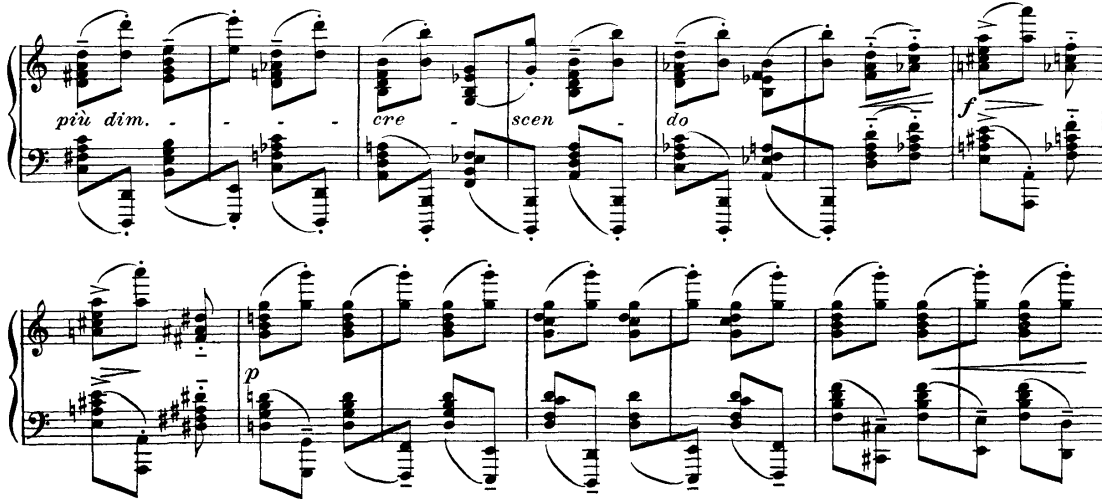
Béroff plays fastest and Thibaudet plays slowest among the eight pianists as Figure 5 shows.

Béroff	Ciccolini	Cosand	Giesecking	Haas	Loriod	Thibaudet	Uchida
3:58	5:06	4:07	4:48	4:47	4:53	5:23	5:01

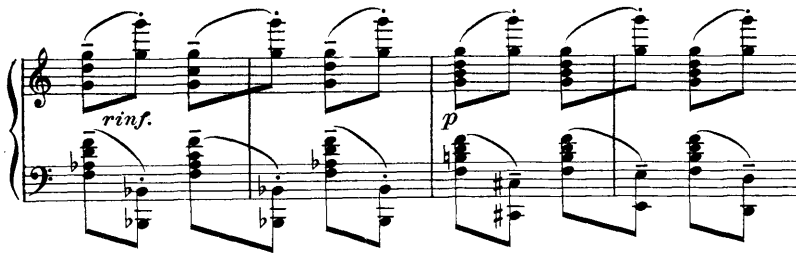
Figure 5: Timing Comparisons of Eight Pianists’ Recordings of Debussy Etude No. 12.

Cosand takes a slight breath at the end of m. 20, and then starts slower and makes a *subito p* in m. 21 (See Ex. 69). One can hear Béroff also makes a *subito p* in m. 21. But Ciccolini does not seem to pay attention to the dynamic change on the score; his recording sounds like he plays m. 21 as loud as m. 20. He also does not start softly in m. 29, where Debussy wrote *p* after the *rinforzando* in m. 27 (See Ex. 70).

³⁸ E. Robert Schmitz, *The piano works of Claude Debussy*, 219.



Example 69: Debussy Etude No. 12, mm. 13-26.



Example 70: Debussy Etude No. 12, mm. 27-30.

Loriod follows the dynamic markings on the score strictly. For instance, she makes the crescendo for the two-note group in m. 40, m. 42, m. 44 and m. 46, and then makes *subito p* in m. 47 (See Ex. 71). She makes an obvious dynamic contrast between *p* and *più pp* in m. 86 (See Ex. 72), to which many pianists do not pay attention. The composer also marked *più pp* in m. 94 (See Ex. 73), but here the dynamic contrast is hard to achieve. One can notice that Debussy marked *pp* at the end of the previous measure, so that the difference is subtle. However, it is easy to perceive the dynamic change in Loriod's recording; she might use the soft pedal to make the beautiful timbral change in m. 94.

Example 71: Debussy Etude No. 12, mm. 39-50.

Example 72: Debussy Etude No. 12, mm. 84-86.

Example 73: Debussy Etude No. 12, mm. 92-94.

In m. 93, Béroff gets faster first and then gets slower, according to the composer's markings for the tempo changes on the score (See Ex. 73). He changes the pedal after playing the bass A-sharp at the end of m. 93 and then pauses briefly on the upper chords before playing m. 94, in order to get softer.

Haas seems to be following the articulations on the score carefully. For example, he plays legato in m. 59 and m. 61 where Debussy wrote slurs for the chords; in contrast,

he makes the chords with accents in mm. 62-63 very detached (See Ex. 74). One can hear Cosand also make the difference for the articulations here. In Béroff's recording, however, it seems he makes no difference between the slurs and accents; the chords with either slurs or accents all sound detached.



Example 74: Debussy Etude No. 12, mm. 57-63.

Béroff, Cosand, Haas and Loriod put more energy into both dynamic level and tempo for the ascending chord progressions in mm. 165-168 and mm. 173-176, making the audience excited and finally reaching a triumphant ending of the *Douze Études* (See Ex. 75).

The image displays a musical score for Debussy's Etude No. 12, measures 161-181. The score is written for piano and consists of three systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system begins with a *molto dim.* marking and a *p* dynamic, followed by a *cresc.* marking. The second system features a *f* dynamic, a *p* dynamic, a *piu pp* dynamic, and another *p* dynamic. The third system includes a *cresc.* marking, a *f* dynamic, a *ff* dynamic, and a *sf sf sec* marking. The music is characterized by complex chordal textures and dynamic contrasts.

Example 75: Debussy Etude No. 12, mm. 161-181.

CHAPTER 14

CONCLUSION

Claude Debussy's *Douze Études* are late works and reflect his mature style. The pieces challenge performers both technically and musically. They were undervalued for a long time and once were rarely played. The composer himself also confessed that the Etudes present a formidable challenge to performers. As he wrote to Jacques Durand, his publisher, in September 1915, "I may say there are certain passages which sometimes bring mine to a halt too. Then I have to get my breath back as though I'd been climbing a flight of stairs... In truth, this music wheels above the peaks of performance! It'll be fertile ground for establishing records."³⁹ But they have been played more commonly in recent decades. Recordings played by the great pianists in different generations and from different countries and traditions have emerged. The nine pianists examined in this paper have different interpretations on the aspects such as tempo changes, dynamics, pedaling and articulations.

However, it is not a perfect scientific situation because the pianists examined played on different pianos and at different locations. Some pianists played in large halls or churches, some recorded in relatively small spaces such as recording studios. So there are many facets that are not scientifically equal. The pedaling, especially, cannot be measured perfectly, since the resonance is richer in a big space than a recording studio. Furthermore, musical art is always subjective and flexible. But I still can observe objective facts and certain common features among the pianists examined, and get insight into their distinctive performance styles after listening to the recordings very carefully.

³⁹ Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, 301.

Giesecking's recording of Debussy's Etudes is the earliest one among all the recordings examined in this paper. Despite some background noise in the old recording, one still can get a glimpse of his compelling playing of Debussy's music. As a reviewer wrote in 1999, "There is Giesecking's sonority, one of such delicacy and variety that it can complement Debussy's witty and ironic desire to write music 'for an instrument without hammers.'"⁴⁰ Giesecking seems to be pursuing excitement in the music, but he sometimes seems to be playing hastily at the expense of clarity. Béroff also plays wrong notes or does not keep hands together sometimes due to playing too fast.

Debussy's Etudes feature multiple tempo changes, which he marked very carefully on the score. Giesecking accelerates much in certain places and makes the music exciting, but does not pay much attention to slowing down where Debussy marked *ritardando* or *cédez*. And his playing has a lack of breath between phrases in many places. Béroff's playing is somewhat similar to Giesecking's on this point. On the contrary, Ciccolini tends to accelerate less, but the *ritardando* in his playing is obvious in certain passages.

Ciccolini plays slower than the others in most pieces (refer to timings of the selected recordings of the Debussy *Douze Études* in the Appendix), which adds a kind of clarity to the sound. Giesecking's approach is much lighter than Ciccolini, but Giesecking uses generous pedaling in many phrases according to the bass harmony. Thibaudet may have learnt the precision and clarity from his teacher—Ciccolini. Loriod's playing features equilibrium and exquisiteness, reflecting the old French school tradition. The

⁴⁰ Gramophone, *Gramophone Classical Good CD Guide* (London, UK: Omnibus Press, 1999), 259.

recording demonstrates “her remarkable virtuosity, especially in terms of elucidating the structures and combining clarity, speed, and rhythmic precision with an acute sensitivity to timbre”, as Timbrell reviews Loriod’s recording of Debussy’s *Douze Études* in his book.⁴¹ But her student, Béroff, seems as though he does not play with as much precision as Loriod does.

Debussy also marked many dynamic changes accompanying the tempo changes in his Etudes. In Ciccolini’s recording, the range of the dynamic changes is limited. He seems to make crescendo or diminuendo to a very small extent and rarely plays very softly. The sound varies less in his recording generally. Maybe this is partially just because of the instrument and recording equipment. The dynamic contrasts in Cosand’s recording can be obviously perceived. Giesecking’s playing features a big range of dynamic changes, but he anticipates the changes of dynamic sometimes. Furthermore, he tends to briefly accelerate when there is a crescendo at the end of a phrase.

There are many passages featuring different voices which have contrasting articulations. Loriod plays accurate articulations, making different voices come to life independently. Thibaudet is also strict with the articulations and balances the voices well as Loriod does. Cosand is faithful to the articulation indications on the score. He uses the pedal cautiously to produce different articulation in the separate voices in certain passages, as articulation and pedaling are always interrelated.

There are some subtle musical interpretations one can find in the recordings of the selected pianists. Cosand plays rubato for making the humorous character in some passages where Debussy marked *Scherzando* or *Giocoso*. Additionally, he emphasizes

⁴¹ Charles Timbrell, *French Pianism*, 166.

the dissonant harmony surprisingly in some places, making exquisite timbral changes. Thibaudet and Loriod tend to use agogic accents to help bring out the melody, making the melody and accompaniment on two levels of sound. Uchida is used to play rubato and flexible rhythm in certain places to express the fluidity of music. Haas's recording has less rubato playing, if compared to Uchida's. And in several places, some notes and rhythms he plays seem not to be following any edition of the score.

One can find the trace of splicing in some pianists' recordings, as some unnatural tempo changes or drastic dynamic contrasts are heard. The tempo in some certain places in Thibaudet's recording seems inconsistent. Perhaps part of the reason for this is that his recording is newer and I suspect that he made many recordings which were spliced together to make one recording. On the other hand, he anticipates changes of dynamic in several passages, which would indicate that he was recording a longer section in these spots. But these problems cannot be found in Cosand or Yontov's recordings, since they are live performances.

Yontov's recording is the most recent one among the nine pianists. He is a representative example from a great number of international students who have different backgrounds and came to US to further their musical studies. The background of the new generation is certainly more diverse than that of the pianists in older generations. They receive influences from multiple traditions rather than only one. Additionally, it is a live performance in an international competition, so his musical interpretation is somewhat conservative rather than showing much personalization. His playing follows the markings on the score strictly. And one can notice from his video recording that he uses much

fluttering pedal where the texture thins or the dynamics gets softer. He also applies soft pedal in many places.

Debussy's Etudes are like a palette of colors, and strike a good balance of technical study and musical charm. The letter Debussy wrote to his publisher demonstrates his emphasis on the musical value in the Etudes, "I'm sure you'll agree with me that there's no need to make technical exercises over-sombre just to appear more serious; a little charm never spoilt anything."⁴² This research may help performers further understand the musical interpretations of Debussy's Etudes through comparing the selected recordings. By standing on the shoulders of predecessors, pianists observe from multiple perspectives, obtain interpretative experience, and finally, find their own ways to perform Debussy's Etudes.

⁴² Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, 300.

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APPENDIX

TIMINGS OF THE SELECTED RECORDINGS

	Michel Béroff	Aldo Ciccolini	Walter Cosand	Walter Giesecking	Werner Haas	Yvonne Loriod	Jean-Yves Thibaudet	Mitsuko Uchida	Yevgeny Yontov
No.1	2:44	3:32		2:45	2:57	2:54	3:05	2:47	2:57
No.2	3:02	4:19		3:18	3:08	3:32	3:26	3:32	3:30
No.3	4:44	6:12		4:04	4:41	4:52	5:07	5:30	5:25
No.4	3:10	4:29		3:17	3:32	4:00	4:17	4:12	4:09
No.5	2:21	2:54		2:12	2:23	2:32	2:37	3:05	2:46
No.6	1:31	2:01		1:30	1:25	1:33	1:35	1:23	1:36
No.7	2:00	2:30	2:07	2:01	2:02	2:03	2:08	2:04	
No.8	4:40	5:26	4:23	4:04	4:19	4:33	5:26	4:53	
No.9	2:56	3:41	3:17	3:06	3:10	3:11	3:00	3:17	
No.10	5:19	6:06	4:24	4:33	5:20	5:02	5:21	5:13	
No.11	4:05	5:28	4:01	3:06	3:20	3:54	4:49	4:46	
No.12	3:58	5:06	4:07	4:48	4:47	4:53	5:23	5:01	