

# On the Creative Characteristics of Debussy's Children's Garden

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## Abstract

As a piano composer, Debussy is with distinct artistic characteristics, the "Children's Garden" is a variety of artistic techniques, multiple elements of music and art features and the combination of many divertimentos in six different music styles of piano opusculum. Debussy's composition one side expresses soft, the other side reflects incisively and vividly. He is one of the most varied and splendid piano composers. Through reading a large number of French and foreign literature, the author studies and analyzes the creative ideas of Children's Garden from the aspects of the composer's historical background and the musical elements included in the work.

## Keywords

Children's Garden, Creative Features

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## 1. Introduction

Debussy's piano suite "Children's Garden" was composed in 1906-1908, which is the peak of his artistic career, including "Doctor Etud", "Baby Elephant Lullaby", "Doll's Serenade", "Snowflake Dancing", "Shepherd Boy" and "Puppet gait Dance" six different styles of ditties. It was inspired by Debussy when he played with his five-year-old daughter Xiu Xiu. He created it for his daughter with full paternal love. He wrote an inscription for his daughter at the beginning of the volume, expressing his gentle love for his daughter as a father. Debussy's standing in a father's point of view of careful observation daughter surroundings, as title wrote: with the elephant, dolls, puppets, snowflake, little shepherds for creative sources; the music language is concise, clear and vivid, innocent, and applies the Debussy's unique writing gave us a more tender feeling to the child.

## 2. Music Images and Musical Form Characteristics

Although the musical structure of “Children’s Garden” adopts trilogy style, the structure scale is not large. Each piece of music has two or more themes for comparison, sometimes beautiful lyric sometimes happy and lively, and the reproduction part finally returns to the theme. Debussy stood in children’s unique perspective, highlighting the image of different music images; the music style is fresh and delicate, and depicts children’s simple and pure music world with single melody theme.

### 2.1. Etude “Doctor”

The original text is “*Gradus ad Parnassum*”, which is Latin and means “road to poetry”. The music begins with rigid chord decomposition as the theme motivation, throughout the music, the music is often regarded as slightly ironic, Debussy himself explained: “The Etude ‘Doctor’ is like an advanced, healthy sports. It should be done on an empty stomach every morning, starting at a moderate pace and ending at an active pace, and I hope you will be impressed by my clear explanation (Bai, 2014). This song adopts the structure of a complex trilogy, as shown in the figure below: Section A (1-12) is the theme part (Example 1), and the whole song appears three times in total. At the beginning, the appropriately fast broken chord of 16 notes is the development motivation, and *pp* is used to express the hazy and soft colors. The rhythm and color of the melody are enhanced by the alternation of linking and skipping.

In the middle Section (13-44) (Example 2), although this piece is well known as etude, its musical texture is relatively complex and its expression forms are colorful: Theme A appears many times in the middle and reappearance parts, and the 22<sup>nd</sup> section is accompanied by free reflection and free expansion of the main theme (Qian & Qian, 2000).

In the recapitulation part (from bar 45) (Example 3), when the main Theme A reappears, the structure is supplemented and expanded, and the continuous crescendo of coda at the end indicates the end of this piece. The musical structure is:

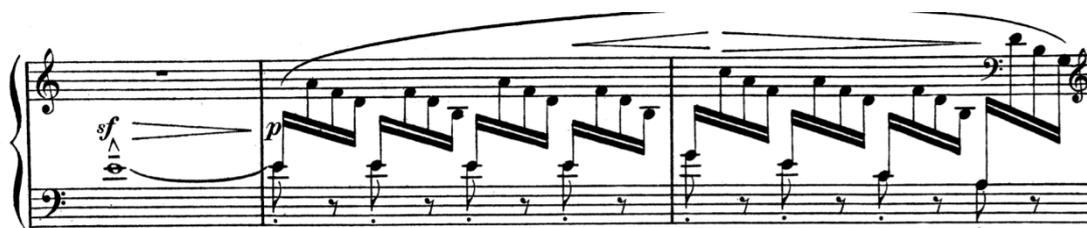
a                    b                    a<sup>1</sup>                    c                    a

Example 1

**Modérément animé**

PIANO *p égal et sans sécheresse*

Example 2



Example 3



## 2.2. Lullaby of the Elephant

This song is a relatively slow one in this cycle. Debussy uses his daughter Xiu Xiu's doll elephant as a metaphor to break away from the complicated music theme and return to the simple image of simplicity.

This is a trilogy composed of three themes. The structure is as follows:

Theme A (Example 4) is slowly introduced with monophonic melody, which seems to imitate the slow pace of the baby elephant, so as to highlight the musical image of the baby elephant, which is clumsy and lazy and sleeps intermittence, and make it more vivid and vivid. Then the first variation of Theme A, A1, appeared (Example 5). The second tone of left and right hands supported each other, the left hand used quarter note as the accompaniment tone, and the range of the right hand increased two octaves from the large character group of Theme A to the small character group, which not only formed a contrast with Theme A but also increased the sense of weight of music levels.

Compared with the sleepy musical image of Theme A imitating the baby elephant, the middle B, the left hand bass image imitates the baby elephant's lively and lovely happy dance steps. After that, syncopation and dichotomous alternation are added, which is in sharp contrast to Theme A.

The repetition part A2 is the second variation of Theme A, and there are three parts of high, middle and low (Example 6). Theme A is raised to the second group of small characters, and the middle part of the theme has a continuous skipping sound throughout the whole. The solid and steady bass of the left hand lasts for 16 beats to show the musical image of sleeping.

**a            a<sup>1</sup>            b            a<sup>2</sup>**

Example 4

**Assez modéré**

PIANO

*p* doux et un peu gauche

Example 5

un peu en dehors

*pp* *pp* *sempre pp*

Example 6

**Retenu** **10° Tempo**

*più p* *pp*

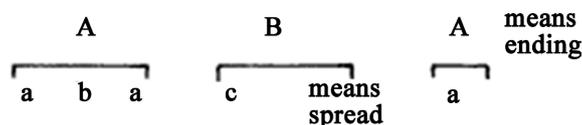
### 2.3. "Serenade for a Doll"

As the title says, just as the name implies, it depicts the music image of children being naive and innocent. With French children's songs as the theme material, it depicts a little girl holding a doll in her hands singing a musical picture of serenade, which is a child's caprice. At the beginning, it has a light rhythm pattern, and the continuous jumping sound of left and right hand alternating runs through the whole theme. It is imitating the sound effect of pluck instruments, guitar and banjo, and the melody line is clear and clear. Debussy required players to use muted pedals throughout the song to highlight the tranquility and silence of the serenade.

This song is in the form of A trilogy, and the A Section is composed of A trilogy (A + B + A). The music is elegant and lively. Section B (C + development) is soft and lyrical compared with the lively musical style of Section A. Melody line using a series of mold into two bass circulation, has the different region amorous feelings, left hand bass melody liaison lyrical halcyon, become the main melody (Example 7), but not clear melody tonality, a part of the main melody again loudly, echoing the theme, the composing characteristics and Debussy technique

mature performance.

Finally, the part A, a is completely reappeared, like the memory of the bell before good night, A little bit weakened, the music slowly ended in the artistic conception.



Example 7

*Allegretto ma non troppo*  
*léger et gracieux*

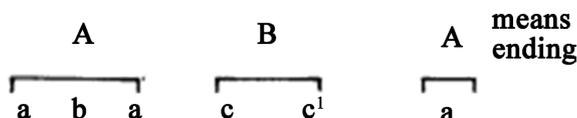
PIANO *pp*

(\*) *la m.g. un peu en dehors*

## 2.4. Snowflakes Dancing

This song takes the nature as the creation inspiration, is a kind of way that Debussy used to express his emotion. The continuous ascending and progressive writing technique of the four-tone series of the music is as if the dots and colors in the painting are empty and wobbly, resulting in the flow of the music and the changing sound and painting effect depicting the light drift of snowflakes in the wind (Qian & Qian, 2000). The use of skipping notes highlights the lively and upward musical style of the song. It depicts a glittering and translucent snow in winter, flying all over the sky and falling beautiful scenery.

This song is in the form of A complex trilogy, with A + B + A form. In Section A, there is A single ascending four-tone sequence progression (Example 8), and in Section B (Example 9) there are four pairs of three, which are homophonic and repeated, and the triplets with connected jumps, forming A color atmosphere and creating A movement process of music, which makes the music more free and relaxed. In terms of strength contrast, Section A basically wavers back and forth between PP and P, while Section B changes obviously, with stress marks, extremely strong and very weak, forming A sharp contrast with Section A. If Section A is lively, Section B is more like telling melancholy feelings. The recapitulation section returns to Theme A. The overall curved structure sketch is as follows (Qian & Qian, 1999):



Example 8

**Modérément animé**

**PIANO** *pp doux et estompé*

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a rhythmic accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Modérément animé' and the dynamics are 'pp doux et estompé'. The second system continues the piece with similar notation and dynamics.

Example 9

**Cédez un peu**

*pp un peu en dehors*

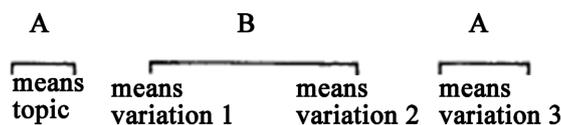
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### 2.5. The Shepherd Boy

The tone of the flute is the most appropriate to imitate the young and simple musical image of Shepherd Boy. The flute has a narrow range and the music is composed of three different musical textures, but all of them are in major rather than minor, which is the author's intention to highlight the bright and light musical style of the music. In terms of creative techniques, Debussy used the creation techniques of up and down type level and not big jump, showing people a looming, confusing and fleeting musical picture.

With the repeated use of dot notes, the shepherd boy's carefree and carefree mental state (Example 10) is fascinating, which is different from the classical realistic still life picture. Therefore, his musical language broadens the broad realm of music. Many scholars think that this song is a variation, the author thinks that it is more like a lyric improvisational variation. The improvisation of this piece is reflected in the fact that although there is a clear mode of tone (A-E-A), in the musical style, from quiet to passionate to quiet, and the termination of each paragraph has a regular pattern to follow (subordinate to subordinate to master), the musical texture used is relatively free and casual, which adds interest and

humor to this young and simple piece of music (Qian & Qian, 1999).



Example 10

**Très modéré**

PIANO

*p* très doux et délicatement expressif

*< mf <* *p >*

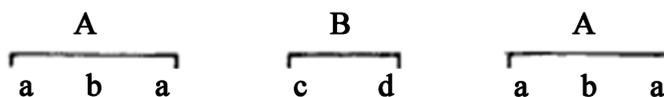
**Plus mouvementé**

*p* *p* *p < poco >*

## 2.6. The Puppet Gait Dance

This song is inspired by ragtime music (the predecessor of jazz) popular in the Black Areas of the United States in the 1890s, with a strong black jazz style (Qian & Qian, 1999).

In Section A (Example 11), the typical rhythmic syncopation of the right hand breaks the traditional rhythm, and the eighth note is accompanied by the unhurried accompaniment tone of the left hand, which vividly depicts the mechanical and dynamic steps of A black puppet with its unique rhythmic tone. In Section B (Example 12) and Section 28 (Example 13), the interlacing of eighth notes with left and right hands, with homophone repetition, is also slower than in Section A, showing that the puppet has changed A single step and jazz dance has become tap dance. Debussy's music will not stay the same. In 63 bars (Example 14), the intensity changes from P to PP, and the skip chord with grace note returns to the original speed. It is more tense and shorter than the previous bar, which is a mockery of Wagner's works. In the reproduction section, the theme melody appears again. The music texture is unchanged, the intensity is slightly stronger, and the rhythm is more rigorous and dynamic.



Example 11

**Allegro giusto**

PIANO

*f* *più f* *sff*

*p* *pp*

**très net et très sec**

Example 12

**Un peu moins vite**

Example 13

Example 14

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system is in bass clef and includes the instruction "Cédez p avec une grande émotion". The second system is in treble clef and includes the instruction "a Tempo" and "Cédez". The notation consists of multiple staves with various musical symbols, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *pp* and *p*.

### 3. Harmonic Characteristics

In the use of harmony, he broke the traditional aesthetic mode and created many special harmonic textures, such as the extensive use of augmented, subtraction, complex and parallel chords, which greatly weakened the functionality of chords. Mode tonality is no longer constrained by the traditional major and minor tone, and the addition of the medieval mode and pentatonic mode with Oriental flavor makes Debussy's music covered with a mysterious veil and has foreign temperament (Halford & Yang, 2007).

#### 3.1. The Extensive Use of Dissonance

Dissonance is a kind of creation form adopted by composers in order to create a tense musical atmosphere and highlight the ideal musical color. In the children's garden, this work the author through the use of a large number of the dissonant sounds, such as: two consecutive four degrees superimposed chord progressions and 5 degrees do not prepare does not solve the seventh chord of nine chords are widely used, and often form multi-layer complex structure, chord connection nor basis from tight to loose, never union to solve the model (Halford & Yang, 2007). This innovation fundamentally breaks through the rules and limitations of traditional harmony, thus strengthening the expressive force of musical color and creating the artistic conception of music.

The theme of "Baby Elephant Lullaby" is softly played by very soothing monosyllabic groups (Example 15), and the superposition of the left and right hand skipping second intervals in "Serenade for dolls" (Example 16) adds to the dissonance.

Example 15



Example 16



### 3.2. The Use of Parallel Four, Five and Octave

Parallel five, octave on sound extremely union, in the traditional aesthetic principles of music and creative is to be avoided is disabled, but is everywhere in Debussy's works, he broke the traditional mode, bold challenge to the traditional taboo, make its own characteristic, has created a unique harmonic language (Qian & Qian, 1999).

The appearance of the parallel fifth of the bass part in Etude "Doctor" reaches the climax of the whole piece, followed by the harmony with the alternation of dominant and dominant chords (Example 17).

Example 17



The grace note in "serenade for dolls" imitates the percussion effect of Javanese Gamelan band, progressing in parallel fourths and continuously on the tonic within an octave range, highlighting the pure musical image (Example 18).

Example 18

Allegretto ma non troppo  
léger et gracieux

PIANO

pp

(\*)

la m.g. un peu en dehors

### 3.3. The Use of Pentatonic Mode and Media Modal Mode

Debussy's music got rid of the imprisonment of traditional major and minor keys, but did not completely abandon tonality. He explored more complex chromatic tonal counter positions. In the Children's Garden, the eastern pentatonic scale was extensively used, sometimes with the addition of medieval church modes, which made his music sound different from any music of the past. He opened up a musical pattern of non-functional polytonality (Bai, 2014).

The appearance of #F in bar 23 of etude "Doctor" (Example 19) changes from traditional C major to Mediaeval C Lydia. In bar 33 (Example 20), the speed changes from moderately fast to the original speed, the rhythm pattern is doubled, and the tonality changes from C major to bD major, showing that children's curiosity and novelty about music at the beginning of learning to play the piano has changed to boredom and thinking. In Section 37, it changes from western mode to Chinese pentatonic mode. In the connecting part between Theme A and the middle part, the playing strength changes back and forth gradually and gradually for many times, which is the unexpected and unpredictable characteristic of Debussy's creative technique, which is rarely seen in traditional composing principles.

Example 19



Example 20

The image shows a musical score for Example 20, consisting of two systems of two staves each. The first system is marked "1° Tempo" and "expressif". It features a melodic line in the treble clef with a chromatic descent and a bass line with sustained notes. The second system is marked "Animez un peu" and "pp". It features a more rhythmic, repetitive pattern in the treble clef and a bass line with sustained notes. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat).

The theme Section A (1-18) of Lullaby of Baby Elephant (Example 21) adopts pentatonic mode, which is changed from D quotient to G quotient mode.

Example 21

Assez modéré

PIANO *p* doux et un peu gauche

### 3.4. The Use of Four-Tone Series, Diatonic Scale and Chromatic Scale

In Children's Garden, in addition to the wide use of pentatonic mode and medieval adjustment, the integration of chromatic scale and "whole tone scale" without chromatic relationship (such as C, D, E, F sharp, G sharp, A), constitute a novel and unique mode style (Qian & Qian, 1999).

The small like hypnosis, by continuous leap quaver, accompanied by diatonic and chromatic alternates as motivation of music development (Example 22), "snow" quad tones column technique (Example 23) and a variety of rhythmic pattern of joined the freedom of (Example 24), improvisation, is a style of typical toccata, breakthrough the traditional concept of scale mode. The chromatic elements of the diatonic scale in the Shepherd Boy (Example 25), the use of dot rhythms, which seem to imitate the call of the cuckoo on the grass, and the shifting back and forth between natural major and minor and media Ural modes, are influenced by Gamalan music.

Example 22

Example 23

Modérément animé

PIANO *pp* doux et estompé

Example 24

**Cédez un peu**

*pp* *pp* *p un peu en dehors*

Example 25

**Plus mouvementé**

*p* *p* *p* *poco*

#### 4. The Use of Multiple Musical Elements

The Children's Garden is affected by the composer Musuvsky base, and a variety of music style such as: the oriental music, gamelan music, ragtime music, pop music and so on at that time, condensate extraction in this unique, full of drama and fiction of the fairy tale world, is a technique with the music element of double stack (Halford & Yang, 2007).

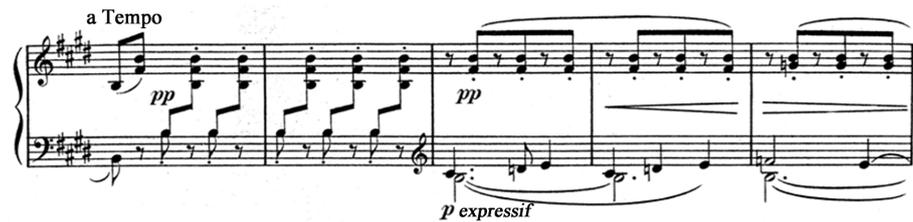
##### 4.1. Gamelan Music

Gamelan music is popular metal percussion ensemble music in Java and Bali, Indonesia (Qian & Qian, 2000). Its main characteristics are as follows: first of all, the band is mainly composed of percussion instruments, gongs in the center and orchestral instruments in the auxiliary position; secondly, there are two kinds of scale forms used. Most gamelan music uses two pentatonic scales with semitone and no semitone, but its temperament system (that is, the distance between notes) is different from the 12-equal temperament, a little close to the five-equal temperament. Moreover, gamelan music melody layer has the characteristics of "polyphony cascade", consists of a core melody layer as the main body, the slower, other melody layer according to the musical instruments playing performance and performance skills to add flowers, thematic layer variation, constitute a relatively independent melody line, around the theme layer for impromptu play or sing.

Melody left hand "the doll serenade" as the core melody, elegant, quiet, with the right hand accompaniment figure at two degrees, four degrees of dual tone chords alternates, continue to make music more lyrical again at the same time accompanied by lively rhythm, this style received gamelan music (Example 26),

the influence of the end of the song (Example 27), In the last section, the whole section is marked with an extended mark, and the artistic conception the author wants to express is the moonlight shining on the piano keys through the window at night. At this time, Xiu Xiu falls asleep holding her beloved doll to achieve the sound effect of lingering music. This creation technique is influenced by Mussorgsky's creation.

Example 26



Example 27



## 4.2. Reference to Mussorgsky's Creation

Mussorgsky is a famous Russian composer at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He is the composer with the most radical ideas, the most innovative and the most daring creative techniques in the "Powerful Group". No matter in his creation structure, harmony, texture, music, etc., the use of contrast technique, is the biggest characteristic of his creation (Halford & Yang, 2007).

The theme at the beginning of Snowflake Flying is based on the four notes of the above lines, accompanied by the continuous jumping pattern, which is motivated by the creation characteristics of Gamelan music. The octave of left and right hand alternating jumps are repeated, and the whole song is divided and expanded around this musical motivation. At the end of this piece, the alternation of semitones in the penultimate bar terminates, and the form of expression in sharp contrast to the theme is the result of Mussorgsky's influence (Example 28).

Example 28



### 4.3. The Use of Ragtime Music

Ragtime is a type of popular music based on black music that flourished in The Orleans area of the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Qian & Qian, 1999). Ragtime is the predecessor of jazz. Ragtime music is developed by absorbing the characteristics of European music. The complex syncopated rhythm and the improvisation of the hands are its main symbols.

The “gait of puppets” takes octant syncopation as the “core” of creation, breaking the traditional and inherent sense of rhythm and resulting in temporary changes (Example 29): Ragtime music is the main source of creation in this piece, and nine or eleven notes are added on the basis of the main seventh chord to illustrate this point; The theme is composed of adjacent third and double tones (Halford & Yang, 2007). When playing the keys, one should be neat. Pay attention to the ups and downs of the music and emphasize the melody in the high pitch area. Bar 47 is in sharp contrast to the theme A, and bar 61 (Example 30) is interwoven with jumps and rhymes, in the style of blues, and marked “with strong feelings”.

Example 29

*Allegro giusto*

PLANO

*très net et très sec*

Example 30

*a Tempo*

*Cédez*

*a Tempo*

## 5. Conclusion

As a piano composer, Debussy is with distinct artistic characteristics, the Children's Garden is a variety of artistic techniques, multiple elements of music and art features and the combination of many divertimentos in six different music styles of piano opusculum. Debussy's composition one side expresses soft, the other side reflects incisively and vividly. He is one of the most varied and splendid piano composers.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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