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amato0106@gmail.com**Confident Chromaticism in Satie's *Nocturnes* as Determined by Hindemith's Harmonic Fluctuation****ABSTRACT****Background**

Paul Hindemith's compositions and theories reflect a fondness for preserving tonality, which is evident in his *Craft of Musical Composition*. His ideas on chord construction, for example, reflect his preference for the major triad as a point of departure and arrival (Hindemith 1942, 22). To accommodate the elaborations of harmony and tonality that characterized many twentieth-century musical styles, Hindemith stated that it is not the scalar context of chord roots that initiate tonality, but rather the juxtaposition of the chords' constituent intervals (1942, 107). Hindemith also criticized the scalar basis of melodies by earlier theorists, again focusing instead on intervals. In a later article, he argues that Rameau's derivation of notes of the scale with its notes out of ascending or descending order by juxtaposing the subdominant, tonic and dominant harmonies in his *Génération harmonique* (1737) undermines the role of the scale as a basis for melody and harmony (1944, 25).

As part of his theories and his compositional practice, Hindemith devised a system of measuring dissonance and tonal force in harmonies, classifying them by intervallic content into six groups of graduating dissonance (identified by Roman numerals I through VI), while discounting the scalar context of the chords' roots. He coined the term *harmonic fluctuation* to identify varying levels of dissonance between adjacent harmonies in succession. Recent analyses employing harmonic fluctuation show that it can be an important component of the analysis of many post-tonal styles, being adaptable to many contexts (Harrison 2016, 46).

Intervals also play a key role in Erik Satie's composition of his *Nocturnes* (1919) for solo piano. In the *Nocturnes*, Satie largely abandons functional harmony and systematically uses intervals as the basis for his harmonic language, and this is evident in the works' sketches. The preference of intervals instead of functional harmony as a main aspect of both Hindemith's and Satie's construction methods makes harmonic fluctuation applicable to Satie's *Nocturnes*. This study traces the evolution of Satie's use of chromaticism and obscured tonality in his *Nocturnes* by utilizing harmonic fluctuation.

Satie is usually remembered for his ballets and piano miniatures along with the outlandish, descriptive titles of some of his works, such as *Three Pieces on the Form of a Pear* (1903), *Cold Pieces* (1907) and *Dried Embryos* (1913). The works of his mature style often parody styles of earlier composers, including Chopin as in the second movement of *Dried Embryos* and Clementi with his parody of the sonatina, *Sonatine Bureaucratique* (1917). For his *Nocturnes* two years later, Satie shifted towards a more systematic and original style of composition. The death of Satie's simultaneous friend and critic, Claude Debussy, in 1918, is partly responsible this shift, according to Robert Orledge. Orledge underscores this idea by stating that the effect of Debussy's passing on Satie is analogous to that of Schoenberg's passing on Stravinsky in 1951, when Stravinsky freely turned towards serialism (Orledge 1990, 65–66).

Satie outlined his method of using intervals in the sketch of his second *Nocturne*, which is in D major. He stated that major seconds (minor sevenths were inverted and received this label), perfect fourths,

and perfect fifths are best, and that the perfect intervals can sometimes be diminished or augmented, but that minor seconds, major sevenths, thirds, sixths, and octaves are forbidden. The result is that each of the seven scale degrees can sound against one of two to four other scale degrees that form the acceptable interval below the scale degree in question. More accompanying notes that form the acceptable intervals below a specific degree improve that particular degree's status. Those degrees that can be accompanied by as many as four notes that fit the condition are labeled "good," while those with only two, such as $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{7}$ are labeled "weak," (Orledge 1984, 175).

Analysis of the composite chords of the second *Nocturne* tells us that Satie's preference for dissonant, if diatonic intervals resulted in the moderately dissonant chords of Hindemith's group III being the base level of dissonance in the work. Chromaticism is rare in the second *Nocturne* and Satie usually keeps this base dissonance level intact by accompanying chromatic pitches with notes that form the preferred intervals below them (Adams 1995, 463).

As Satie progressed to composing the fourth *Nocturne*, he developed his focus on intervals from his first three *Nocturnes* to devise a series of five-note chords, still consisting of notes of the D-major scale. His continuing deliberate use of dissonant intervals is underscored by Adams's pointing out that each of the sonorities forms a pentatonic set (1995, 464).

Because of the dissonant seconds, fourths, and sevenths occurring between the notes of the pentatonic sets, chords of Group III are the normal level of harmonic tension in the fourth *Nocturne*. Satie, in effect, retains the base level of dissonance from the earlier *Nocturnes* that I had pointed out (Amato 2010), despite the more frequent chromaticism than before. In the outer voices, it is the rare perfect fourths that provide the timbral contrasts with the less harmonic sevenths and ninths in the work's opening 'A' section. I underscore this contrast by classifying the chords whose outer-voice intervals form perfect fourths as indeterminate, quartal harmonies of Hindemith's Group V. This contrast in timbre is especially evident in that Satie harmonizes the high point of the melodic line (the downbeat of measure 2) with a chord from group V.

Satie's use of chromaticism evolves from restrained in the first three *Nocturnes* to less restrained in the fourth *Nocturne*, ultimately to frequent and deliberate by the time he composed the fifth. Still based upon intervals (Adams 1995, 466), the fifth *Nocturne* features more obscured tonality (F-major) and increased dissonance than the earlier *Nocturnes*, both due to the more frequent chromaticism. Both aspects are evident in the fifth *Nocturne*'s opening phrase. Satie moves from D minor⁶₄ (group I) to B-flat major on beat 3 of both m. 1 and m. 2. This would ordinarily suggest a vi-IV harmonic motion, but the higher dissonance level (group III because of the minor second between F and F#) of the B-flat chords obscures the motion. In m. 3, beat 4, he emphasizes C major⁶₄ (group I), which can function as a dominant that sets up the expectation of an F-major tonic. The D minor chord (group III) that follows on m. 4, beat 1 obscures F-major tonality because it is both a deceptive resolution and another abrupt increase in dissonance. Only in the final cadence (mm. 21–22) does Satie confirm F-major tonality with an authentic cadence, with both the dominant and tonic sounding as consonant, tonality-defining chords (Hindemith 1942, 132) of group I.

Aims and repertoire studied

In his *Nocturnes* for solo piano (1919), Erik Satie (1866-1925) favoured the use of dissonant intervals such as fourths, seconds, and sevenths, and this is evident in both the sketches and the finished product. This study explains Satie's compositional approach for his *Nocturnes* and traces the evolution of his use of chromaticism and the resulting obscured tonality.

Methods

This study employs Hindemith's system of classifying harmonies by their intervallic content as outlined in his *Craft of Musical Composition*. It shows how Erik Satie both followed and deviated from the principles of tonality in his *Nocturnes* composed for solo piano.

Implications

I have concluded that Satie's documented preference for dissonant, if diatonic intervals results in moderately dissonant chords (group three on Hindemith's scale from one to six) being the base level of dissonance in the second *Nocturne*. His more frequent use of chromaticism emerges in the predominantly higher level of dissonance and more obscured tonality in the fifth *Nocturne*.

Instead of using conventional harmonic analysis, pitch-class analysis, or a combination thereof, I have employed Hindemith's little-used analytical technique in an attempt to show its practicality. With use of it, I have provided insight into Satie's apparent increased confidence in the use of chromaticism as he progressed through the composition of his *Nocturnes*, which was a venture into a unique, systematic, and nationalistic style of composition. The author hopes that future analytical studies will employ Hindemith's analytical technique to find coherence in post-tonal music.

Keywords

- Analytical Theory
- Chromaticism
- Instrumental Music
- Advanced Tonality and Post-Tonal Music

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