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## Features of Form Building in Debussy's Music in the Light of Bergson's Conception of "La Durée"

### ABSTRACT

#### Background

The paper is devoted to the philosophical and aesthetic substantiation of the possibility to interpret forms in Debussy's music as an analog of the process of thinking and the work of consciousness: that is, in terms of the psychology of perception specified by Bergson's conception of *la durée*. It's well-known, that Debussy equated regularities of development of musical material to natural laws. There is the impressive example — the appeal to peer into the gradually changing colors of the sunset, to listen to the changing rhythms of sea waves, etc. Hence the scientists undertake attempts to interpret the composition of Debussy's works in accordance with the natural-science principles. For example, R. Howat, following J. H. Webster, investigates the manifestation of Golden Section progression, one of the most important regulators of growth and ordonnance of living organisms, in *L'isle joyeuse* and *La Mer* (Howat 1983, 46–135). But, besides laws of objective reality, in relation to Debussy's art, it is also relevant to take into account the laws governing the subjective life of the psyche and mentality. First, the features of the thinking process of any composer inspire properties of the musical composition. Secondly, in the case of Debussy, the ordering of musical time and ways of its filling with material finds correspondences in the specifics of the organization of psychological time.

Henri Bergson was the first, who had paid his attention to this peculiarity. In search of an equivalent of *the pure duration (la durée pure)*, the philosopher rejects visual images as appealing to space. He invokes to hearing: the last, without being absolutely free from spatial correlations (sound is always localized in space), produces the perceived spatial representations in comparison with other sensory abilities in a less degree. Because of the fact that Bergson connects *the true duration (la durée vraie)* with the deep life of the psyche, therefore among acoustical phenomena he chooses those that are able to convey the continuity of the work of consciousness, the incessant change of states of mind. As a result, he comes to the idea of the ontological relationship between *la durée* and music, since the time of sounding of a musical work is identical with the time of its perception. The duration reveals itself as 'the continuous melody of our inner life, — a melody which is going on and will go on, indivisible, from the beginning to the end of our conscious existence' (Bergson 1946, 175), and extension of which assumes specific interpenetration of mental conditions and images of consciousness, and also unpredictability of each subsequent moment (See: Bergson, 1965, 44–5).

Vice versa, from an ontological point of view, the melody, as Bergson thinks about it, is the sounding duration. Bergson's

usage is not literally: it is important for the philosopher to emphasize not so much the presence of a melodic line, as the aspect of an audible duration embodying the continuity of an aesthetic-psychological experience. Despite sympathies for Beethoven, Chopin and Wagner, among composers Bergson chooses the musician with similar understanding of the essence of musical time: it was Debussy who has declared: '... my music is no other than a melody!' (Cit. ex: Long 1960, 137). Bergson believes that in Debussy's oeuvre the continuing melody (*la mélodie continue*), expressing 'a unique, uninterrupted current of emotions', has found its implementation (Bergson 1959, 354).

Even Debussy's and Bergson's contemporaries have noted the correspondence of the art of the first and the philosophy of the second from the gnoseological perspective with aesthetical overtones — the last implies problems of artistic perception. (See, for instance: Muller, Picard 1913, XXXIV; Vuillermoz 1957, 33–9).

The ontological aspect of such correspondences has been designated by Stefan Jarociński. For example, according to researcher's thought, in Debussy's oeuvre 'seem to be undeniable links with the Bergsonian theory of duration' (Jarociński 1976, 107). However, in Jarociński's investigation the essence of similar connections is rather guessed, than defined exactly.

#### Aims and repertoire studied

1) The main purpose is to find the concrete correspondences between the organization of Debussy's compositions as a dynamic structures and structure-forming qualities of *la durée*.

2) The complementary aim means to define what features of Debussy's creative process conduce to the unique organization of musical time and, therefore, of the form in his compositions.

3) The third goal is to offer the synthesizing method of analysis of Debussy's music, taking into account the psychology of perception, which has been actualized by Bergson in respect to artistic thinking.

4) In consequence of using of inductive reasoning from the special to the general, the fourth task arises: to show practical usefulness of correlation between the musical and philosophical conceptions of time, belonging to the same epoch or (and) representing the same world outlook.

The complex of parameters of Debussy's musical composition, considered in correlation with properties of *la durée*, serves as the subject of studying.

#### Methods

1) Comparative method is employed for research and correlation of properties of Debussy's compositions and qualities of *la durée*

2) An additional way of observation on Debussy's works is the complex analysis of means of expression in music. Similarly, it is necessary to apply contextual approach in regards to *la durée* as it exists not separately, and in connection with such phenomena as consciousness, memory, vital impetus (*élan vital*), intuition, spirit, matter etc.

3) The most specific method is the psychophysiological principle of analysis of the artist's thinking, offered by Bergson relying on Théodule Ribot (the originator of an experimental direction in French psychology). The most important adoption is the concept of *the dynamic scheme (un schema dynamique)*, which is something like a holistic mental image of an artwork in the phase before inventing the concrete material. The specification of the dynamic scheme comes in the process of composing and depends on the type of creative imagination which is possessed by the master of art: the reflective type moves from details to unity, the intuitive one moves on the contrary (Ribot 1900, 133). Extrapolation of above mentioned concepts on Debussy's oeuvre allows partly explaining unique properties of form building in his works.

### Implications

1. An expediency of considering Debussy's music in the aspect of the philosophy of *la durée* has been grounded for the first time. But it is also necessary to take into account that the similar perspective of consideration of this problem was authorized by Bergson himself: he had characterized Debussy's music as 'music of *la durée*' (Bergson 1959, 354).

2. Correlations between the qualities of *la durée* and some features of Debussy's compositions have been detected for the first time. The most important correlations are the following.

a) Indivisibility of the progressive movement — mitigation of boundaries between sounds by smoothing the attack and damping phases. Bergson believed that Debussy's music 'is indivisible, as absolute' (Bergson 2002, 1558). In orchestral music, Debussy models the duration of the attack phase and saturates it with overtones — for example, the beginnings of the *Gigues*, and of all movements of *La Mer*. For accentuating of the phase of sound stabilization, he often does not neglect the remark *laissez vibrer* even in piano pieces. The duration of the damping phase is emphasized graphically by means of ties stretching out to nowhere — in preludes *Les collines d'Anacapri* and *Bruyeres*.

b) The substantial changing (*le changement substantiel*), prevailing to itself — all-sufficient presence of coloristic juxtaposition and iridescence of chords, which are independent of tonal functions. There is dialectics of the intrinsic value of harmonic motion and the self-value of what moves (chords), the dialectics inherent in Bergson's qualitative, mental synthesis (*une synthèse mentale, qualitative*).

c) Continuous creation of novelty — tendency to non-repeatability of music material in principle. Debussy declared: 'I'll arrive at a music truly free of motives, or formed by the single continuous motive, which nothing interrupts and which never returns to itself' (Cit. ex: Wenk 1976, 164).

d) Heterogeneity of stream — capriciousness of rhythmic pulsation, explained by Debussy through the concept of arabesque with appeal to Gregorian chant, Palestrina, and Bach.

e) Interpretation of space as a trace of *la durée* and its inversion — emergence of musical architectonics in a listener's

consciousness a post factum, as a trace of development of material. As for Bergson, 'form is only recorded movement' (Bergson 1946, 287).

3. The synthesis of two types of creative imagination, reflective and intuitive, is established as the distinctive feature of Debussy's thinking. At listening, impression of unpredictability and at the same time logicity of form building is reached. Debussy, considering himself to be able 'to conduct the Music of the Spheres' (Cit. ex: Vallas 1933, 269), commensurated the number of bars and the proportion of sections, that is confirmed by the mathematical analysis of his works. But architectonics arises in the process of material-making — it is gradual clarification of 'vague vision of the unity' (Ribot 1900, 133). Consequently, the original proportional structure of the whole is whimsically corrected.

Everything has been told causes an opportunity: 1) to use the offered interdisciplinary approach in analysing the music of other authors, styles and eras; 2) to reinterpret the problem of the relation between phenomena of musical time, time of perception of artwork and psychological time per se; 3) to consider the musical form as a correlate of *la durée*, especially in music, in which Debussy's discoveries are developed (Webern, Messiaen, Boulez, Stockhausen).

### Keywords

Psychology of music, Debussy, Bergson, musical time

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