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Secrets of a Toy-box

A Study of Claude Debussy's *La Boîte à joujoux*

by

Mirna Lekić

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts, The City University of New York

2014

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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A Study of Claude Debussy's *La Boîte à joujoux*

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Mirna Lekić

Adviser: Prof. Sylvia Kahan

The influence of Claude Debussy's inventive musical language can be traced through to the most modern classical repertoire. Yet of the composer's three ballets, which provided the counterweight to the Russian dominance of Parisian ballet culture in the early 1900s, only *Jeux* has received substantial scholarly attention. The following document is a monograph on *La Boîte à joujoux* (1913), Debussy's innovative ballet for children or marionettes. It offers an exploration of the work's broader significance and contextualizes it both within Debussy's oeuvre and in a broader historical realm. Included is a survey of the ballet's performance history, as well as an analysis of its musical language, which establishes *La Boîte à joujoux* as a microcosm of Debussy's stylistic elements and an encyclopedia of allusions and direct borrowing from other composers, styles, folk and popular music.

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I dedicate this work to my family, for every success of mine is equally theirs.

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CHAPTER 1 - *A Collaboration*

*“Please believe that your idea of a ballet cannot leave me indifferent. Therefore, I ask that you come see me next Monday around 10:30 in the morning.”*¹

In February 1913, Debussy arranged to meet André Hellé, a successful author and illustrator, whose charming story about life inside a toy-box, *La Boîte à joujoux*, would provide the scenario for the composer’s final and most unusual ballet. The meeting took place on the advice of Gérard Ricou, Secretary General of the Opéra-Comique, a man confident of Debussy’s interest in the project.² Hellé’s story and his candid and childlike illustrations appealed to the composer who, as he once explained to writer Henry Malherbe, shared a similar aesthetic: “I want to sing my inner landscape with a childlike candor.”³

André Hellé (1871-1945), born André LeClôtre, worked successfully as a caricaturist, author, illustrator, painter, decorator, costume designer, furniture and toy maker. He contributed drawings and cartoons to over a hundred different newspapers and periodicals,⁴ and sold his toys and children’s furniture through major French retailers, including the department storehouse Printemps. His legacy rests chiefly on an evocative, yet simple style of illustration that

¹ “Vous croirez volontiers que votre idée de ballet ne peut me laisser indifférent. Aussi vous demanderai-je de me venir Lundi prochain vers 10 ½ du matin.” Claude Debussy, *Correspondance (1872-1918)*, eds. François Lésure and Denis Herlin (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005), 1584.

² Ricou, acting as an intermediary between Hellé and Debussy, urged Hellé to contact the composer. Ricou had known Debussy since 1902 when he asked him to complete an essay on the inspiration behind *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Denis Herlin, “André Hellé et *La Boîte à joujoux*: interview, conférence et texte intégral de *L’Histoire d’une Boîte à joujoux*,” *Cahiers Debussy* 30 (2006): 97-123, especially 100.

³ “Je veux chanter mon paysage intérieur, avec la candeur de l’enfance.” Jean-Yves Tadié, *Le songe musical* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 23.

⁴ These include *L’Assiette au beurre*, *Le Figaro illustré*, *Commedia illustré*, *Le Cri de Paris*, *Fantasio*, and *Graphic*. Denis Herlin, “André Hellé et *La Boîte à joujoux*”: 98.

incorporated elements of modernism into the universe of the child, elements that permeated Hellé's stories as well as his toy creations.

Hellé's visual style evolved over three distinct stylistic periods: his early manner, characterized by the arabesques of the Belle Époque (stylistically reminiscent of Toulouse-Lautrec); an evolution (after 1904) toward a simpler style, showing a marked concern for clear lines and touching naiveté of its characters; and his last decades which bear the influence of cubism.⁵ *La Boîte* drawings belong to the middle period, with a new cubist style represented in the later, expanded version published in 1926 by Tolmer editions.⁶ In addition to *La Boîte*, Hellé's books for children include *Drôles de bêtes* (Funny Animals), *L'Arche de Noé* (Noah's Ark), and *Grosses bêtes and petites bêtes* (Big Animals and Small Animals). He left behind several paintings, best known of which are *Le Premenoir du Casino de Paris en 1900* and *Le Beuglant*, canvasses exhibited at the Salon d'Automne of 1943.⁷ His many products for children included the coloring books and stationery preferred by Debussy's daughter, Emma-Claude, better known by her nickname, Chouchou.⁸

Seven of Hellé's toy-collections received commercial distribution: *Les Grenadiers*, 1910 (*The Grenadiers* —10 wooden soldiers with felt hats); *L'Arche de Noé*, 1911 (Noah's Ark —featuring Noah and 24 painted wooden animals); *Le Moulin Joli*, 1912 (The Pretty Mill—farm animals and a mill with an action for pulling up little bags of flour); *Tommy Fuzbuz*, 1914-16 (Nine British soldiers made of fabric and felt); *Jeu de l'alphabet de guerre*, 1916 (War

⁵ For samples of Hellé's artwork from different periods, see Béatrice Michielsen, *Drôles de Jouets! André Hellé ou l'art de l'enfance* (Ville de Poissy: Éditions Mare & Martin, 2012), 15-19, 26-27, and 34.

⁶ André Hellé, *La Boîte à joujoux* (Paris: Éditions Tolmer, 1926).

⁷ Pierre Sanchez, ed., *Dictionnaire du Salon d'automne 1903-1940*, Vol. 2 (Dijon: Éditions de l'Échelle de Jacob, 2006), 670.

⁸ Claude Debussy, *Correspondance (1872-1918)*, eds. François Lésure and Denis Herlin (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005), 1628.

Alphabet—84 cardboard letters); *Soldats alliés*, 1917 (Six Allied soldiers), and *La bergerie berrichonne*, 1917 (Farmhouse of the Berry region—farmer, dog, house to hold all the animals).⁹ Toy characters from *Les Grenadiers*, *L'Arche de Noé*, and *Le Moulin Joli* collections, many of which were based on the famous Nuremberg toys,¹⁰ served as the inspiration for characters in *La Boîte*. Animals in *La Boîte* resemble those from *L'Arche de Noé*, presented at the Paris Autumn Salon of 1911.¹¹ The vision of the toy-box itself, one made of bent pine, is a reproduction of boxes traditionally used as packaging for German wooden toys. Other characters and props in the ballet recall toys from the famous toy factory in Nuremberg: rigid soldiers, farmer girls resembling bowling pins, and round trees on wooden sticks. The Dancing Doll, the female protagonist in *La Boîte*, is based on traditional Nuremberg dolls that were mounted on four pins to allow for dance-like movement.

In his book *L'histoire d'une boîte à joujoux* (1912), Hellé tells the story of life within a toy-box, an idea that first came to him after working on sets for *1912*, a Gignoux & Mueller revue,¹² at the Théâtre des Arts.¹³ In the night, when the toys come alive, the Doll, the Soldier, and the villain, Polichinelle, engage in a love triangle. The Soldier is in love with the Doll, but Polichinelle charms her. A battle ensues and the Soldier is left wounded in the field, holding onto the red flower given to him by the Doll. Abandoned by Polichinelle, the Doll takes pity on the

⁹ Béatrice Michielsens, *Drôles de Jouets! André Hellé ou l'art de l'enfance* (Poissy, France: Éditions Mare & Martin, 2012), 53-57.

¹⁰ The city of Nuremberg was Europe's leading distributor of toys since the Middle Ages, and Nuremberg toys were popular all over Europe. Today the city hosts the most important international toy festival, and preserves its long-standing tradition in a well-known Toy Museum.

¹¹ Pierre Sanchez, ed., *Dictionnaire du Salon d'automne 1903-1940*, Vol. 2 (Dijon: Éditions de l'Échelle de Jacob, 2006), 668.

¹² At the beginning of the 20th century, writer Charles Mueller and artist Régis Gignoux revived the revue genre, of which their satire titled *1912* is a well-known example. Pierre Crabos, *La Forêt des Cippes: Théâtre Classique: Chronique de la scène en 1912* (Paris: Nabu Press, 2011), 133-135.

¹³ Denis Herlin, "André Hellé et *La Boîte à joujoux*": 108.

Soldier and they fall in love. They buy a farm where they raise a family and live happily ever after.

L'histoire d'une boîte à joujoux was accompanied by Hellé's delightful watercolors that especially charmed Debussy.¹⁴ Debussy's interest in the project, following their initial meeting in February 1913, was also sparked by the recent successes of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and Fauré's *Dolly* (he attended the 1913 performance of the latter, set to a scenario by Louis Laloy).¹⁵ At the time Debussy was fascinated with Maeterlink's views on puppets: "The soul of the doll is more mysterious than even Maeterlink would have imagined,"¹⁶ and as always, monetary issues likely played a role in accepting Hellé's proposal.¹⁷

Hellé signed the initial contract for *La Boîte à joujoux* with Durand in July of 1913, agreeing to a fee of 2000 francs (about \$9000 today)¹⁸ for both the scenario and the illustrations. Debussy was to receive 8000 francs for the piano score¹⁹ and he set to work in August of that year. In his letters to Durand that summer, Debussy portrays himself as a composer immersed in the world of the toy-box and in the process of "extracting secrets" from Chouchou's dolls.²⁰ Inspired by Hellé's drawings, he worked quickly, finishing the first tableau on September 5, and

¹⁴ "Votre dessins me ravissent!" Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1646.

¹⁵ Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré - A Musical Life*, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge, UK: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1991), 62-63.

¹⁶ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1667.

¹⁷ According to Denis Herlin's findings, 1913 and early 1914 were prosperous years, registering as some of the highest paid in the period between 1905 and 1918, with significant income from royalties and concerts. Debussy, however, often lived beyond his means, and was perpetually in debt, owing to various lenders, as of June 1914, a remarkable sum of at least 80,000 francs.

¹⁸ "Convertisseur franc-euro: pouvoir d'achat de l'euro et du franc," last modified March, 2013, <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/calcul-pouvoir-achat.asp>.

¹⁹ Robert Orledge, "Debussy, Durand et C^{ie}: A French Composer and His Publisher (1884-1917)," in *The Business of Music*, ed. Malcom Talbot (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002): 121-151, especially 133.

²⁰ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1646, 1653, 1663, 1667.

the second on September 27. After some difficulties with the third tableau,²¹ Debussy completed the piano score on October 30, 1913.²²

In a conference speech many years later, Hellé remembered his own inept page-turning when Debussy offered to play for him for the first time the music of the first tableau. Sometime after, he heard Debussy play the same part for Durand, who this time took the role of the page-turner. Hellé describes the experience of hearing this music then: “. . . seated in an excellent armchair, I was listening, and I saw pass in front of my eyes, in a joyous sarabande, and dressed in joyous and bright colors, all my little fellows, which were only then being born and moving toward an ideal life that only they have the good fortune to know.”²³

Debussy also worked on the visual aspect of the score, requesting a particular placement of the main characters and their respective leitmotifs on the first page.²⁴ By July 1913, he had already expressed his wish that a red rose also be included among main characters and featured on the opening page.²⁵ According to Debussy, the rose, whose leitmotif is a long silence marked *pianississimo* and *decrescendo*, had “as much importance as any of the characters,” as

²¹ The nature of these difficulties seems to have been both creative and practical, as indicated in Debussy’s letters to Durand. The composer alludes to problems with understanding the mysterious soul of a doll, and notes unexpected rehearsals of *Nocturnes*.

Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1667 and 1676.

²² “. . .il ne reste plus qu’ à trouver le théâtre!” Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1678.

²³ “. . .assis dans un excellent fauteuil, j’écoutais et je vis passer devant mes yeux, dans une joyeuse sarabande tous mes petits bonshommes, habillés de couleurs gaies et claires, qui naissaient alors seulement et s’en allaient vers une vie idéale qu’eux seuls ont la félicité de connaître.” Denis Herlin, “André Hellé et *La Boîte à joujoux*”: 112.

²⁴ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1658. This letter includes Debussy’s drawing, which illustrates the requested placement of the main characters on the first page of the score.

²⁵ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1648.

“everything in this little tragedy is tied to a thrown rose! As long there have been women and roses, that has been the eternal story!”²⁶

At the end of 1913, Durand published the score in an oblong version illustrated by Hellé.²⁷ As requested by Debussy, musical markings appear in a font different from that of the scenic instructions. Although the bright colors and basic silhouette of Hellé’s watercolors suggests the world of childhood, the introductory text makes it clear that the musical work is intended for an audience of both children and adults: “ This story takes place in a toy-box. Toy-boxes are really just like towns in which toys live like people — or maybe towns are really just toy-boxes in which people live like toys.”²⁸

In the spring of 1914, Debussy began orchestrating *La Boîte*,²⁹ a project interrupted by war and illness. Of the 118 pages of the orchestral score, seven-and-a-half were written by Debussy. The orchestration was completed, at the request of Pierre-Barthélemy Gheusi, then director of the Opéra-Comique, by Debussy’s friend, composer and conductor, André Caplet, in November, 1919.³⁰ It was edited and published by Durand the following year. A comparison of Debussy’s original piano version and Caplet’s orchestration can be found on page 50.

²⁶ “..cette rose a autant d’importance que n’importe lequel des personnages”; “Tout dans ce petit tragédie, tient à une rose jetée! Depuis qu’il y a des femmes et des roses, c’est l’éternelle histoire.” Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1648 and 1646.

²⁷In 1914, Léon Roques arranged several excerpts from the ballet as a short suite for piano four-hands. He also made arrangements of “Danse de la Poupée” for violin and piano and flute and piano. These were published by Durand that same year.

²⁸ “Les boîtes à joujoux sont des sortes de villes dans lesquelles les jouets vivent comme des personnes. Ou bien les villes ne sont peut-être que des boîtes à joujoux dans lesquelles les personnes vivent comme des jouets.” André Hellé, *La Boîte à joujoux* (Paris: Durand, 1913).

²⁹ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1812.

³⁰ In 1919, Gheusi wanted to present *La Boîte* at Théâtre Lyrique du Vaudeville in Paris. He turned to Caplet who had previously orchestrated several of Debussy’s scores, including *Childrens Corner* and *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien*.

Inspired by his collaboration with Debussy, Hellé continued to work on ballets after the composer's death in 1918, collaborating with Florent Schmitt on *Le Petit Elfe Ferme-l'oeil* (1924), a story he adapted from Andersen's fairy tale. In 1926, the success of Ballets Suédois' performances of *La Boîte*, prompted him to publish a revised edition of the text, this time dedicated to the memory of Claude Debussy and to Emma Debussy. Published by Tolmer Editions, the new version featured an expanded storyline (featuring good and evil fairies that awaken the toys at night) and drawings in a newer, cubist style.³¹

Today, the manuscripts of both the piano and orchestral versions are housed in the Music Department of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. The 1913 edition is currently available online as part of the International Music Score Library Project. The French publishing house Durand is presently working on a new edition of the ballet as part of its New Edition of Debussy's *Œuvres complètes*.

³¹ Denis Herlin, "André Hellé et *La Boîte à joujoux*": 113-123.

CHAPTER 2 - *A Composer Reinvents Himself*

In the period 1911–1913, as he ventured into the composition of ballet, Debussy kept to his motto “*toujours plus haut*,” (“onward and upward”) continuing to reinvent his musical language and skillfully adapt its nineteenth-century roots to a new aesthetic. As in his other works of the period, in *La Boîte* we find Debussy’s mature style, the modern aspects of which reach beyond the realm of exotic oddities and momentary excursions to become structural elements at the core of the compositional process. The language of *La Boîte* is, furthermore, a strikingly pure and ‘decluttered’ one, characterized by a remarkable directness, clarity of line, and transparency of texture.

This chapter takes a closer look at the musical language and organization of *La Boîte*, showing Debussy’s masterful integration of symmetry (as emphasized by the extensive use of the tritone and of the octatonic and whole-tone collections) with diatonicism and tonal harmony. It points to a formal plan (and its constituents) that, while keeping in line with the scenario, also provides a commentary on the fine line between dream and reality, revealing the work’s inherent polarity, both in elements of its design and the meaning of its script. This chapter aims to elucidate the ways in which a skillful combination of traditional and modern compositional techniques functions to unify a collage of quotations and leitmotifs. The analysis includes an examination of the nature, sources, and treatment of individual leitmotifs, and provides a comprehensive annotated listing of numerous quotations and borrowings. The final section offers a comparison with the orchestral version, completed in 1919 by André Caplet.

I. Analysis

Grand design

Each of the six sections - The Prelude, four Tableaux and the Epilogue - can be assigned a primary tonal area, as confirmed in the final cadences, revealing the following, large-scale design:

Table 1: Tonal plan of *La Boîte*.³²

Prelude	Tableau 1	Tableau 2	Tableau 3	Tableau 4	Epilogue
C	A	F#	B	B-flat	C
mm..1-54	55-616	617-898	899-1048	1049-1271	1272-1288
Prel.1-54	Tab1.1-561	Tab2.1-281	Tab3.1-163	Tab4.1-66	Epil.1-18
Page 1- 3	Page 4 -24	Page 25 - 36	Page 37- 44	Page 45-47	Page 48

As the tonal plan shows, the arrival on F# at the end of the second tableau evenly splits the C octave and draws attention to the symmetry of the overall design. It corresponds to the end of the battle scene and reflects the importance of the tritone that will appear at multiple levels of perception.

The grand scheme also fits a traditional tonal plan, one marked by dominant and third relations, where F#, a dominant of B, is approached by a series of descending thirds. Both in terms of harmonic design and scenario, the arrival on B represents the end of a narrative thread, with the couple walking into the sunset and an uncertain future. At this point, the final progression from B to C is interrupted by an excursion to B-flat (Tableau 4), corresponding to a

³² With the new edition still pending, and old ones featuring no measure numbers, I have for practical purposes given each part (Prelude, Tableaux and Epilogue) its own measure numbers. (Prel.36 thus refers to the 36th measure of the Prelude, and Tab2.64 to the 64th measure of the second Tableau).

temporal displacement in the story and a glimpse into the future (“*Vingt ans après*” episode). In terms of the overall tonal plan, B-flat functions as the lower neighbor to B, and the brief transition to the Epilogue follows the ascent from Bb to C via B. The tonality of B stands as the middle ground, and axis of symmetry, between Bb and C, the juxtaposition of which dominates *La Boîte*. Existing simultaneously, yet apart, one is a world of reality or life inside the toy-box (C), and the other a symbol of its inhabitants’ dreams and desires (Bb). It is fitting that the heroes of the story should find a happy end in the key of their leitmotifs (Bb), and that the sonorities of Bb and C, which, for most of the play, are sounded superimposed over each other, should serve as the primary tonal areas of the conclusion, and as the work’s final chords. By setting both the Prelude and the Epilogue in the key of C, Debussy also musically identifies a frame that can stand apart from the action itself.

The structure of the individual tableaux reflects relations by thirds, a technique that seamlessly unifies a collage of materials, while revealing Debussy as a composer still tied to the nineteenth-century aesthetic. In the first tableau, the principal pairing (as exemplified by the local tonal/pitch centers) is that of F /F# and Ab/A, with F# at times functioning as the dominant to B. The second and third tableaux introduce B, Eb/D# and C (with Eb/D# a third away from both C and B) in the role of principal tonal centers. At the bitonal climax of the play (Tab2.262), the Bb representing the Soldier³³ is seamlessly absorbed as the third of the underlying F# major chord. Its true identity (that of Bb) is nevertheless visually preserved, suggesting its significance in the overall design. (Fig. 2.1)

³³ Throughout the piece, the Soldier’s leitmotif is presented in the tonality of Bb major.

Fig. 2.1: *La Boîte*, Tab2.276-281. A#, the third of F# major, spelled as Bb, a notational reminiscence of the Soldier.



Such enharmonic respellings (both implied and written) frequently create smooth transitions between sections. At the end of the fourth tableau, Gb in the bass can be reinterpreted as F# so that it functions as the dominant of B that appears in the first measure of the Epilogue. The expectation of a resolution thus helps maintain continuity over the empty bar (Fig. 2.2).

Fig. 2.2: *La Boîte*, Tab4.61-Epil.1. Gb reinterpreted as F#, the dominant of B.



These examples of different enharmonic respelling represent some of the ways in which Debussy combines the many segments within and between different tableaux. The tonality of individual sections is often challenged or kept ambiguous, and the transitions tend to defy implied

expectations. A more complete analysis, beyond the scope of this chapter, would closely examine additional local events involved in uniting this mosaic-like whole.

The Semitone

Chromatic passages and slides by semitones, which in the grand design connect the different tonal areas at the conclusion of the play, also mark transitional moments throughout the work. The long list of such examples includes: the entrance of the dolls to the repeating chromatic scale (Fig. 2.3), the entrance and exit of the Elephant (Tab1.80, 92), the half-step tremolo leading to *Danse de la poupée* (Tab1.227-228), the slide from Bb to A at the start of the *Giga* (Tab1.328-329), the chromatic passage leading to the final chord of the first tableau (Tab1.554-556), the transition to the battle march (Fig. 2.4), Polichinelle's exit (Tab2.216-221), and the transition to the *Scherzando* of the third tableau (Tab3.80). In the first of these instances (Fig. 2.3), two chromatic scales a perfect fifth apart, arranged as a compound interval cycle (+7, -6, +7, -6, etc.), mark the entrance of the dolls. Melodically they span the interval of a diminished fifth (tritone), which is featured prominently throughout the piece. The passage is set to the rhythm borrowed from Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz* No. 1 that depicts a similar storyline, thus suggesting mischief and also illustrating Debussy's humor (see also Chapter 2, Quotations and Allusions).

Fig. 2.3: *La Boîte*, Tab1.44-49. Two chromatic scales set to the rhythm from Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz No. 1*.



Fig. 2.4: *La Boîte*, Tab2.73-76. Chromatic transition to the battle scene. With the exception of the top voice, all voices move chromatically.



Half-step motion also generates much of the accompanying material. In these instances, semitone motion suggests rhythmic movement in small dance steps, while the oscillation around a single pitch parallels the circling and spinning seen on the stage (Tab1.384-387 and 391-399, Tab2.44-47, Tab4.19-22, Tab4.34-38, Tab4.59-65).

Fig. 2.5: *La Boîte*, Tab1.393-397. Semitone motion indicative of the spinning dance.



In addition to producing most of the transitional and accompanying material, the semitone also retains its traditional role as a symbol of uncertainty, tension and looming conflict. Even within the context of the gentle opening, the use of A-flat when framed by A-natural, creates the only disturbance, a hint of doubt and questioning, that foreshadows further such use of the interval (Fig. 2.6)

Fig. 2.6: *La Boîte*, Prel.1-6. Semitone tension as presented in the opening measures: Ab, marked *piano* and *crescendo*, is framed by *pianissimo* A of the surrounding measures.



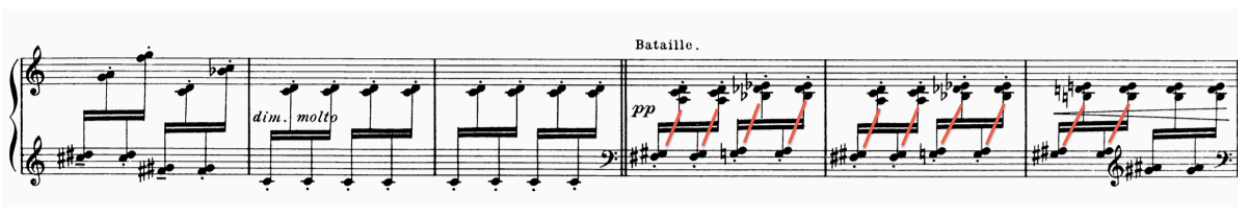
The semitone creates moments of suspense at the change of scene or at the entrance of a new character (for ex. the oscillation between bass A and Ab in the final measures of the dolls' entrance (Tab1.77-79). It features prominently in harmonically murky sections corresponding either to a character's nature, as in Arlequin's dance where E/Eb interplay in the bass hints at his

mutability,³⁴ or to the interaction between opposites. One of the best examples of the latter is the flirtation scene between the Doll and Polichinelle (Fig. 2.7), which contrasts Polichinelle's insistent C#'s with the C major of the Doll's responses. Another is the portrayal of the battle, with the opposing parties (left- and right-hand material) a semitone apart (Fig. 2.8).

Fig. 2.7: *La Boîte*, Tab2.27-33. In the flirtation scene, C-natural occurs as part of the Doll's leitmotif, while the repeated C#'s represent Polichinelle's attempts at wooing her.



Fig. 2.8: *La Boîte*, Tab2.104–109. The battle scene features major seconds representing Polichinelles, in struggle with the trichord [025] representing the soldiers.



Diads and Trichords as Characters

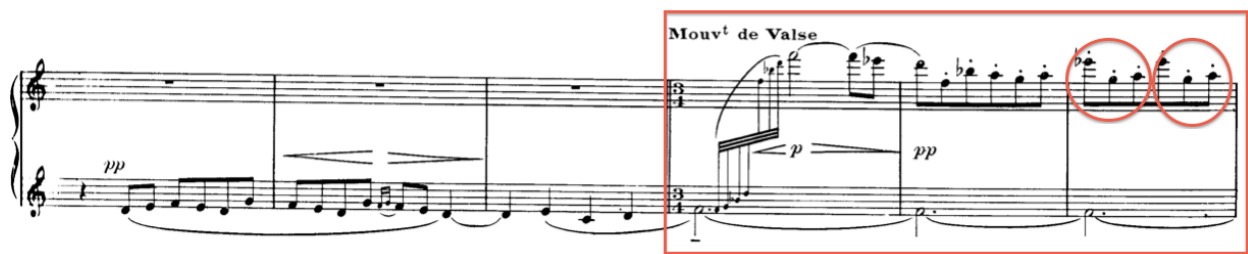
The harmonic structure of the deep background is closely linked to the immediate musical experience, where principal surface set classes – notably, trichords [025] and [026] – reflect the relationship of the large tonal areas. Both trichords are additionally allied with a particular set of characters. Of the five subsets of these trichords, three are featured prominently

³⁴ The Doll's waltz is also introduced with material that vacillates between E and Eb. (Tab1.229-236), suggesting her indecisiveness.

– major seconds, perfect fourths and the tritone– and are perhaps the most conspicuous structural elements in the ballet.

A common subset of both the octatonic and whole-tone scales, [026] represents the dolls and their jagged, marionette-like movement, accompanying various toy-box inhabitants, both in groups (as the dolls wake, Tab1.1–12) and individually: in the taming of the Elephant, in the Sailor’s dance, and most importantly at the entrances of Polichinelle. This set class is also synonymous with conflict and tension, and provides appropriate harmonies for the battle scene march (Tab2.92). In the Doll’s leitmotif, [026] is emphasized by a hemiola where it hints at her future dilemma (Fig. 2.9).

Fig. 2.9: *La Boîte*, Prel.21-26. The Doll’s waltz, sc [026] emphasized by the hemiola.



Set class [025], the most common trichordal subset of the diatonic collection, is identified with the heroes of the story: the soldiers as they push against the major seconds of Polichinelles³⁵ (Fig. 2.8), as accompaniment to the celebratory quadrille (Tab4.214), and as harmonic support in the appearances of the Doll and the Soldier.

Major seconds, perfect fourths and the tritone, which are drawn from the intervallic content of the two principal trichords, dominate the surface of the work. As a reflection of the dream-reality duality on a much smaller scale, harmonic seconds, in referencing Stravinsky’s *Petrushka*, are suggestive of the grotesque world of puppets. While Debussy was generally fond

³⁵ Although Polichinelle is a stock commedia dell’arte character, in *La Boîte* he is a representative and part of a larger group of Polichinelles who battle against the soldiers.

of inserting a major second into a triadic sonority for the sake of color, here the interval goes beyond coloristic function to become a prominent element in the ballet, most noticeably as material for Polichinelle's leitmotif (Fig. 2.17a). The dissonance of harmonic major seconds suggests his unpleasant character, distorted figure, and also his dual nature. Polichinelle is both an inanimate object (a toy) and a living being, a diabolical creature inviting pity.

The perfect fourth, meanwhile, carries positive connotations. As the melodic span of the Toy-box motive it is associated with the safety of its interior (Fig. 2.10). In the jolly melody at the arrival of the goose-keeper (Tab3.103-106) it recalls festive village bells. In the context of the set class [025] that accompanies the heroes, it serves as the contrasting counterpart to the tritone of [026]. In the organum-like texture near the end of the second table (Tab2.252-256) it establishes a sense of relief at the Soldier's recovery.

Fig. 2.10: *La Boîte*, Prel.1-2. Perfect fourth in the melodic outline of the Toy-box motive.



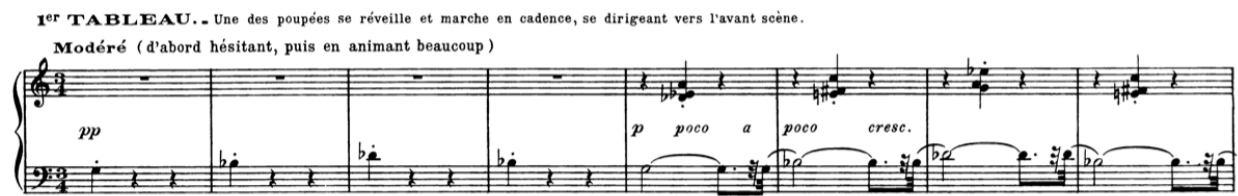
The tritone retains its traditional role as a symbol of evil, malice and fear. It is found primarily in sections based on octatonic and whole-tone collections, in which it figures prominently: in conjunction with Polichinelle's appearances, and various presentations of the toys and their world.

The Collections

Despite their shared elements and naturally occurring points of contact between the various collections, Debussy systematically uses whole-tone, octatonic and diatonic collections to set apart individual characters. Polichinelle is assigned whole-tone scales (both WT0 and WT1), along with segments in B major tonality (“Pan! Qu’est-ce qu’est là? C’est Polichinelle” [Fig. 2.16]), a semitone away from that of the Doll and the Soldier (Bb major). At the end of the battle scene, Polichinelle's B major theme appears in the tonality of the heroes (Bb), indicating his defeat. "Twenty years later" it is in the key of A, portraying both musical and psychological descent, while maintaining separation from the tonality of the heroes who at this point inhabit B major. Throughout the piece, the themes of the Soldier and the Doll are confined to major scales. The Soldier remaining true to his character never strays from the original key of Bb major. The Doll's theme, while always keeping to the major mode, changes key centers in response to the script. Her wavering in her choice of lover is reflected by an excursion to Db (enharmonic respelling of Polichinelle's C#) when she arrogantly throws the flower at the Soldier and joins Polichinelle (Tab1.404). In the flirtation scene (Fig. 2.7), her hopefulness in the relationship with Polichinelle takes her from the original Bb to C -- and thus closer to Polichinelle's C#. Lastly, her unsuccessful attempt at singing twenty years later is set in Eb major, the higher register capturing her broken falsetto.

The greater doll population and the world of the toy-box are represented by octatonic collections. These are featured at the outset, where the two chordal statements answering the toy-box motive generate Oct_{1,2} (Tab1.7-12, 28-32). Several measures later, the entrance of various toy-box inhabitants at the start of the first Tableau produces Oct_{0,1}. (Fig. 2.11)

Fig. 2.11: *La Boîte* Tab1.1-8. Oct_{0,1} at the entrance of the dolls.



The pentatonic collection provides material for the wistful Shepherd's tune, and carries association with the idyllic (as when the Doll asks Polichinelle for an engagement ring, Tab2.55). Here, the pentatonicism is not suggestive of the Far East, but rather of the Scottish plains.³⁶

II. Leitmotifs

Debussy's complex relationship to Wagner has been documented and commented on extensively.³⁷ *La Boîte*, composed during the centenary year of Wagner's birth, reflects his influence primarily in the extensive use of leitmotifs. Debussy took the idea so far as to grant a rose, representing the order of Rose St. Croix, a leitmotif of its own and to prominently feature it on the opening page. The variety of sources and inspirations behind different leitmotifs supports the image of Debussy as an eclectic who soaked up a gamut of influences, that, as the composer himself explained, turned into a series of mosaic touches "mysteriously linked together by means

³⁶ Debussy was influenced by Scottish pentatonicism long before the World Exposition of 1889. Jeremy Day-O'Connell, "Debussy, Pentatonicism and the Tonal Tradition," *Music Theory Spectrum* 31 (2009): 230.

³⁷ See especially: Robin Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London, UK: Eulenburg Books, 1979).

of an instinctive clairvoyance.”³⁸ Only the leitmotifs for the main characters are so in the true sense of the word, in that they reappear throughout the work and reflect character change or lack thereof. The others are simply there to musically mark the appearance of various minor characters.

The Toy-box

The Toy-box melody consists of tetrachord [0235], a subset of both Dorian mode and the octatonic collection, which evokes a folk-like character, an aspect further emphasized by the ornamentation at the repeat of the basic motive. This particular tetrachord, characteristic of Russian folk music and ubiquitous in the works of Stravinsky, is also, interestingly enough, one that Stravinsky claims to have heard in a dream.³⁹ The restatement of the opening phrase with its characteristic ornamentation has drawn comparison to the opening of *The Rite of Spring*,⁴⁰ the four-hand version of which Debussy played with Stravinsky in June of 1912. As Mark DeVoto points out, a similar melody would appear two years later in the third movement of the Sonata for flute, viola and harp, one of many examples of Debussy’s recycling.⁴¹

³⁸ Claude Debussy, “Monsieur Croche: The Dilletante Hater,” in *Three Classics in the Aesthetics of Music* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), 19-20.

³⁹ David Smyth, “Stravinsky’s Second Crisis: Reading the Early Serial Sketches,” *Perspectives of New Music* 37/2 (1999): 117-146, especially 121.

⁴⁰ Hsing-Yin Ko, “Evocations from Childhood: Stylistic Influences and Musical Quotations in Claude Debussy’s *Children’s Corner* and *La Boîte à Joujou*” (D.M.A. diss., University of North Texas, 2011), 30-31.

⁴¹ Mark DeVoto, *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality: Essays on His Music* (Hillsdale, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 2004), 37-8.

Fig. 2.12: *La Boîte*, Prel.1-2. The Toy-box leitmotif.



Fig. 2.13a: *La Boîte*, Prel.21-27. Doll's waltz.

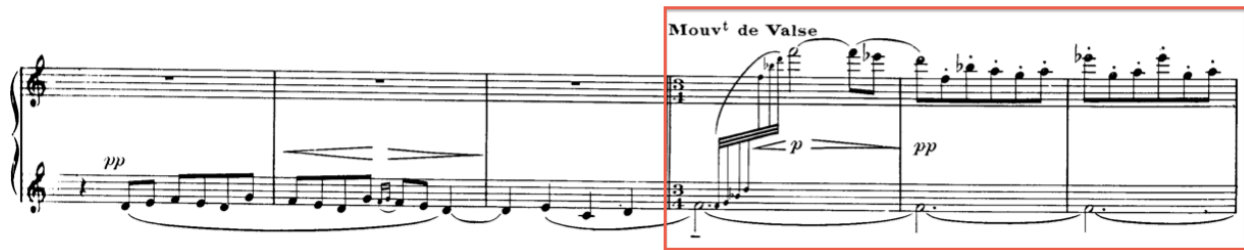


Fig. 2.13b: Satie, *Fantasie-Valse*, mm. 1-4.

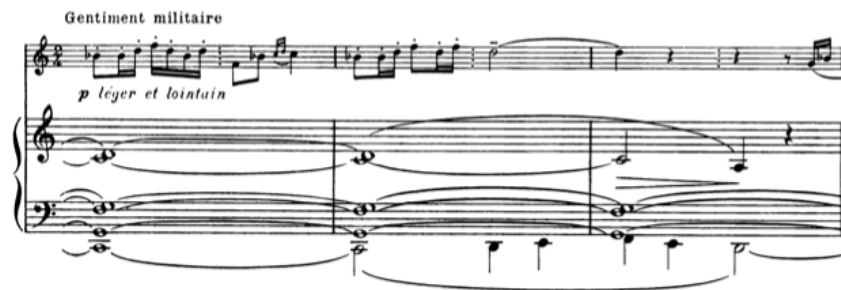


The hemiola bar emphasizes set class [026], which connotes uncertainty and suggests her dilemma in her choice of mate. The stasis on the dominant (F) bass in the first statement of the motive is also indicative of the lack of resolve in her choice of mate (Fig. 2.13a). In comparison to the leitmotif for the Soldier, which remains in the key of Bb throughout the ballet, the Doll's theme changes tonalities in several appearances, though the ending of the solo dance (Tab1.328) on a high tonic Bb foreshadows her final decision. Her wavering in her choice of lover is reflected by an excursion to Db (enharmonic respelling of Polichinelle's C#) when she arrogantly throws the flower at the Soldier and joins Polichinelle (Tab1.404). In the flirtation scene (Fig. 2.7), her hopefulness in the relationship with Polichinelle takes her from the original Bb to C, and thus closer to Polichinelle's C#. Lastly, her unsuccessful attempt at singing twenty years later is set in Eb major, the higher register capturing her broken falsetto.

The Soldier

The Soldier leitmotif first appears in the Prelude over the resonating bass C (Fig. 2.14). Marked *léger et lointain* (light and distant), this is a bright, triadic, bugle-call-inspired melody in 2/4 meter. The rhythmic pattern emphasizes the martial character of this motive. Its tonality of B-flat major, superimposed over the resonating low C, highlights the major-second tension that is present throughout the work.

Fig. 2.14: *La Boîte*, Prel.39-41. The Soldier leitmotif.



The call is heard in rhythmic augmentation and in octave bass doublings when the now-aged Soldier is introduced in the final tableau (Tab4.170). The sixteenth-note triplet figure added in the final measures of the ballet is typical of a military farewell call (Fig. 2.15).

Fig. 2.15: *La Boîte*, Epil.14-18. Military farewell call at the conclusion of the ballet.



Polichinelle

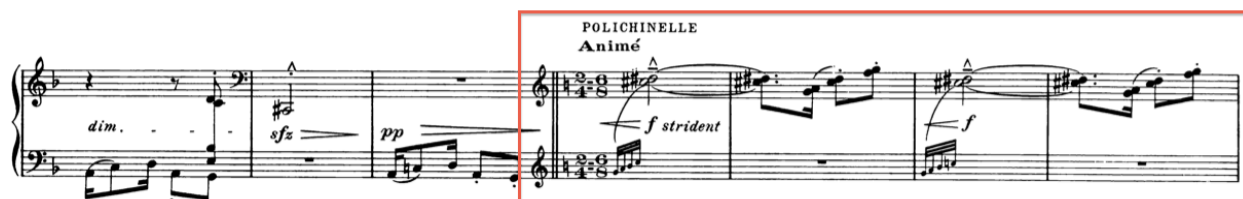
The character of Polichinelle is associated with four melodies, one of which is a popular children's song "Pan! Qu'est-ce qu'est là? C'est Polichinelle," (Fig. 2.16), a motive that reappears at the start of the fourth tableau. Section III of this chapter offers further discussion of on the sources of various leitmotifs.

Fig. 2.16: *La Boîte*, Tab1.160-163. Quotation of "Pan! Qu'est-ce qu'est là? C'est Polichinelle."



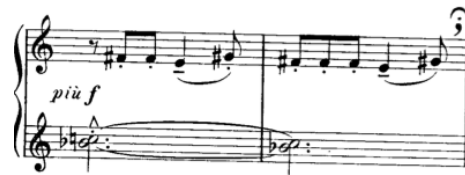
The second Polichinelle motive is drawn from the whole-tone collection (Tab1.149-152) and presents a dotted rhythm that is, throughout the ballet, synonymous with the presence of Polichinelle. It consists of a leaping figure featuring major seconds a tritone apart, and it opens Polichinelle's solo dance in the first tableau (Fig. 2.17a). At the close of the second tableau, its dotted rhythm is combined with "Pan! Qu'est-ce qu'est là? "

Fig. 2.17a: *La Boîte*, Tab1.149-154. Polichinelle's leaping leitmotif.



This motive is answered by a double-neighbor segment around F# (F#-E-G) (Tab1.153-154).

Fig. 2.17b. *La Boîte*, Tab1.153-154. Polichinelle's double-neighbor leitmotif.



The double-neighbor melody first appears in the Prelude (Prel.34), when Polichinelle enters the scene with other dolls.

Fig. 2.18: *La Boîte*, Prel.32-37. First appearance of Polichinelle's double-neighbor melody (F-Eb-G-F in the bass).



The double-neighbor segment of the principal motive serves as the source material for the fourth melody associated with Polichinelle. This melody is marked by repeated pitches representing his insistent attempts at wooing the Doll (Fig. 2.19).



The Elephant

The arrival of the toy elephant is announced by heavy quarter notes, which imitate its lumbering gait. Debussy uses material from his unpublished prelude *Toomai des Éléphants* (completed by Robert Orledge in 2010)⁴³ and his own imitation of an “old Hindu chant that to this day, serves to tame elephants.” According to Debussy, the chant is “constructed on the scale of ‘5-in-the-morning’ and is obligatorily in 5/4.”⁴⁴ Although Debussy’s melody matches no known raga, it is likely inspired by his encounter in May 1913, with Inayat Khan, a North Indian classical musician and the founder of the Sufi order in the West.⁴⁵ The chant primarily uses half-steps in its imitation of the Eastern scales and unfolds in a manner typical of a raga, where notes are added to the original motive one by one, thus modifying the color. While a typical raga would be accompanied by perfect fifths or fourths,⁴⁶ here the drone consists of a major second and a tritone, keeping in line with the basic structural elements of the movement. The accompaniment also draws comparison with “Jimbo’s Lullaby.” Mark DeVoto groups the “Old Hindu Chant” with a number of similar melodies drawn from *Khamma, Jeux, La mer, Première*

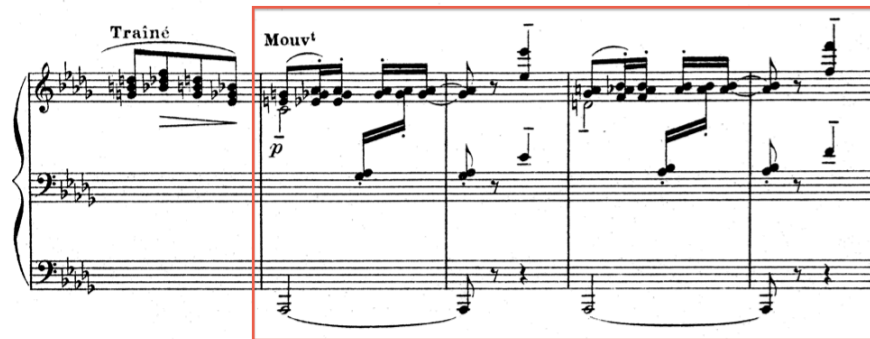
⁴³ Claude Debussy, “Toomai des Éléphants,” from *Claude Debussy: Piano Music Vol. 1*, Michael Korstick (piano), SCM Hänssler 093.290.000, 2012, compact disc.

⁴⁴ “Vieux chant hindou qui sert de nos jours encore, à apprivoiser les éléphants. Il est construit sur la gamme de ‘5h du matin’, et, obligatoirement, en 5/4.” Debussy, *La Boîte à joujoux* (Paris: Durand, 1913), 7.

⁴⁵ Andrew Gerstle, *Recovering the Orient* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), 68-9.

⁴⁶ Gerstle, 60.

Fig. 2.21b: Debussy, *Préludes*, book II, “Général Lavine,” mm. 223-227.



Arlequin

The music of Arlequin’s dance mirrors his elastic, mutable and mischievous character. His trademark physical agility is reflected in the jumps, quick runs, and a lack of commitment to a particular tonal center or collection. The rhythm emphasizing the second beat, preceded by short note and a rest, is reminiscent of “Arlequin” from Schumann’s *Carnaval*.

Fig. 2.22a: *La Boîte*, Tab1.94-97. Arlequin’s dance, a musical portrayal of his capricious nature.



Fig. 2.22b: Schumann, *Carnaval*, “Arlequin,” mm.1-8.



The English Soldier

The first four measures of this leitmotif are a direct transposition of the opening of *Le petit nègre*. The remainder of the phrase is similar to “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” (*Children’s Corner* suite). The combination of material referencing both *Le petit nègre* and “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” is not surprising, as Debussy likely considered these two pieces interchangeable. *Le petit nègre* was conceived as the last piece of the *Children’s Corner* suite, but was later replaced by “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” and published separately. Both pieces are examples of cakewalk, which is danced to ragtime, and both represent Golliwog, a popular rag doll included in Chouchou’s toy-collection. Although essentially an American character, Golliwog was also associated with England where it was first introduced as a literary character, manufactured as a toy and where it achieved its first commercial success.

Fig. 2.23: *La Boîte*, Tab1.122-129. Cakewalk music drawn from *Le petit nègre* and “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” marks the entrance of the English Soldier.



The Negro

This chromatic melody uses the dotted rhythm typical of a cakewalk, which is danced to ragtime and is an example of African-American music that was becoming highly popular in Europe at this time.

Fig. 2.24: *La Boîte*, Tabl.191-194. The Negro cakewalk leitmotif presented in the bass.



The Sailor

This material captures the energy and acrobatics associated with a typical sailors' dance. It is a musical illustration of the kicks and leaps featured in the choreography of the dance.

Fig. 2.25: *La Boîte*, Tabl.380-383. The Sailor leitmotif, a musical illustration of the leaping choreography.



III. Quotations and Allusions

Aiming to be “straightforward and even ‘amusing’,”⁴⁸ Debussy relies heavily on quotations and allusions, which are used with great imagination and humor. They are drawn from:

- a) children’s, folk and popular songs
- b) pieces from the Western Classical canon
- c) military calls
- d) Debussy’s own works

While the use of quotation and borrowing is common in Debussy’s music, it is rarely found in such abundance in one place, making *La Boîte* a strikingly forward-looking work, suggestive of postmodern pluralism.⁴⁹ The use of musical quotation or musical recycling is a clever technique for a work that happens in a dream, as dreams typically produce fragmentary recollections of real-life events. A quotation can also be seen as the musical equivalent of a *lazzo* --a stock joke, catch phrase or an improvised sentence or gesture used by the *Commedia dell’arte* actors and easily recognized by their audience. Many of the folk and popular references in *La Boîte* are not recognizable to modern audiences, especially outside France, and many of them are chosen to affirm the French identity of the music. I will use the term ‘quotation’ to refer to borrowed material regardless of whether the material is presented in the original key.

⁴⁸ Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 177.

⁴⁹ Kenneth Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

A. Children's, Folk, and Popular Songs

1. "Pan! Qu'est-ce qu'est là? C'est Polichinelle."

In featuring this children's tune as one of Polichinelle's leitmotifs, Debussy makes a most expected and clear choice, as the title of the song translates to "Hark! Who's there? It's Polichinelle."

Fig. 2.26a: "Pan! Qu'est-ce qu'est là? C'est Polichinelle."



Fig. 2.26b: *La Boîte*, Tabl.160-163. Quotation of "Pan! Qu'est-ce qu'est là? C'est Polichinelle."



As discussed previously, this tune appears in A major at the beginning of the fourth tableau, indicating Polichinelle's defeat (see Chapter 2, *The Collections*).

2. “Il était une bergère.”

A desolate country landscape is introduced with the children’s song “Il était une bergère” (“There was a shepherdess”). Although the original tune is set in major, Debussy chooses B minor to better suit the bleak, post-battle setting. He uses this tune to foreshadow the events of the tableau. A French audience would be familiar with the text, which speaks of a shepherdess who guards her sheep (the Doll buys some sheep in the following scene) and in the end falls in love with a pastor.

Fig. 2.27a: “Il était une bergère.”



Fig. 2.27b: *La Boîte*, Tab3.1-4. Quotation of “Il était une bergère.”



The original version in major returns as the Doll and Soldier embrace and begin a new life together (Tab3.137-145).

3. “Do, do, l’enfant do.”

Appropriately, this famous French lullaby is quoted in the bass (in augmentation), as the Toy-box continues its slumber.

Fig. 2.28a: “Do, do, l’enfant do.”



Fig. 2.28b: *La Boîte*, Prel.33-41. Quotation of “Do, do, l’enfant do” in the bass line.

Two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system is marked "Mouv." and "Berceur et doux". It features a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a more complex, rhythmic line. A red arrow points to a specific note in the bass staff. The second system is marked "Gentiment militaire" and "p léger et lointain". It also features a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a rhythmic line.

4. “Jean-Pierre, tiens-toi bien; tu vas tomber sur le derrière.”⁵⁰

Virginia Raad identifies this tune as a folk song from Lyon.⁵¹ Debussy, however, refers to it simply as a “polka célèbre,” perhaps poking fun of the many piano pieces that appeared under this title in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A joyous dance, it is well suited for the happy ending of the ballet.

Fig. 2.29: *La Boîte*, Tab4.19-22. Quotation of “Jean-Pierre, tiens-toi bien; tu vas tomber sur le derrière.”



5. “Fanfan La Tulipe.”

This popular song was written in 1819 by the chansonnier Émile Debraux (1796-1831), after an anonymous eighteenth-century air. Although set in simple duple meter and a livelier rhythmic pattern, in pitch content it is similar to the famous French lullaby “Fais dodo, Colas mon petit frère,” the fact that further emphasizes its “Frenchness.” A self-assured seducer and peasant tricked into joining the army, the protagonist Fanfan, is a typical swashbuckler whose adventures, like those of the Soldier in *La Boîte*, end happily. Fanfan’s adventures inspired

⁵⁰ “Jean-Pierre, stand up, you are going to fall on your bottom.”

⁵¹ Virginia Raad, “Musical Quotations in Claude Debussy,” *American Music Teacher* 17 (January, 1968): 22-24.

several literary works,⁵² an 1882 operetta by Louis Varney, and Alice Guy's⁵³ 1907 silent film.

Debussy's reference not only compares the Soldier to this quintessential French hero, but also presents *La Boîte* as a work in dialogue with its times.

Fig. 2.30: *La Boîte*, Tab4.31-54. Quotation of Émile Debraux's "Fanfan La Tulipe."



⁵² These works are *Fanfan la tulipe: drame en sept actes* (1859) by Paul Meurice and George Sand, and *Fanfan-la-Tulipe: roman tiré de la pièce de Paul Meurice* (1898) by Edmond Lepelletier.

⁵³ Alice Guy (1873-1968) was the first female director active in Paris and the United States (New Jersey) between 1898 and 1920. She is credited with over 1000 films.

B. Pieces from the Western Classical Canon.

1. “Choeur des Brigands” (Choir of the Brigands), from Jacques Offenbach’s operetta, *Les Brigands*.

A reference to this tune, well known in France since the operetta’s premiere in 1869, occurs in the *giga* at the end of the first Tableau (Tab1.348) where it is coupled with rhythms reminiscent of “Les Collines d’Anacapri” (*Préludes* for piano, Book 1). The text of the chorus (“Two by two, three by three, sometimes four by four, they arrive marching in the shadow”) perfectly corresponds to the action in *La Boîte*, where the circle of dancing toys is joined by a new character each time it passes in front of the coulisses. Additionally, this musical reference, a tune sung by marching soldiers, anticipates the looming conflict between the toy soldiers and Polichinelles.

Fig. 2.31a: Offenbach, *Les Brigands*, Act 1, “Choeur des Brigands,” mm. 66-72.

CHOEUR.

Soprani. Deux par deux ou bien par

Tenori. Un second groupe arrive. Deux par deux ou bien par

Bassi. Deux par deux ou bien par

Cl. *f* *p* *Quat.* *f* *p* *Quat.* *f* *p*

2e Cl. *Cor.* *p* *Quat.* *f* *p*

trois Quatre par qua-tre quelque - fois Ils ar-rivent marchant dans

trois Quatre par qua-tre quelque - fois Ils ar-rivent marchant dans

trois Quatre par qua-tre quelque - fois Ils ar-rivent marchant dans

Hautb. *f* *p* *Quat.* *f* *p* *Quat.* *f* *p*

Triang. *f* *p* *Quat.* *f* *p* *Quat.* *f* *p*

G^e Caisse *f* *p* *Quat.* *f* *p* *Quat.* *f* *p*

Fig. 2.31b: *La Boîte*, Tabl. 344-350. Melody inspired by Offenbach’s “Choeur des Brigands.”

Ronde générale (Vif et gai)

f léger *dim.* *p*

2. “Gloire immortelle de nos aïeux” (“Immortal Glory to Our Forefathers”) from Gounod’s *Faust*.

This melody is heard in the second tableau (Tab2. 82 and Tab2.96), where it adds all the necessary pomp and circumstance, as well as humor, setting the scene for the ensuing battle.

The quoted excerpt corresponds to the following text: “Immortal Glory to Our Forefathers, Let us be loyal and die like them.”

Fig. 2.32a: Gounod, *Faust*, “Gloire immortelle de nos aïeux” (Act IV, Soldier’s Chorus, March)

The image shows a musical score for the "Gloire immortelle de nos aïeux" march from Gounod's *Faust*. The score is for a vocal chorus (ХОРЪ. СОРО.) and piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are for Tenors (Тенора.), Basses (Басы.), and Basses (Басси.). The lyrics are in Russian, French, and English. The piano part is marked *f* (forte) and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

ХОРЪ. СОРО.

Тенора.
Тенора. *f* По - ди - ны сла - ву не по - сра - мимъ, за то по
Gloire im - mor - tel - le De nos aï - eux, — Sois nous fi -
Oh glo - ria cin - ta d'al - lor, d'al - lor, — Non hai ri -

Басы.
Басы. *f* По - ди - ны сла - ву не по - сра - мимъ, за то по
Gloire im - mor - tel - le De nos aï - eux, — Sois nous fi -
Oh glo - ria cin - ta d'al - lor, d'al - lor, — Non hai ri -

Басси.
Басси. *f* По - ди - ны сла - ву не по - сра - мимъ, за то по
Gloire im - mor - tel - le De nos aï - eux, — Sois nous fi -
Oh glo - ria cin - ta d'al - lor, d'al - lor, — Non hai ri -

Fig. 2.33b: *La Boîte*, Tab2.80-85. Quotation of Gounod’s “Gloire immortelle de nos aïeux” accompanies the marching soldiers.

The image shows a musical score for the "Gloire immortelle de nos aïeux" march from Gounod's *Faust*, specifically the piano accompaniment for marching soldiers. The score is marked *pp* (pianissimo) and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. A red circle highlights a specific melodic line in the piano part, with the instruction "sempre pp la mélodie doucement en dehors".

Entrée des soldats.

En animant

sempre pp la mélodie doucement en dehors

3. “The Wedding March” from Mendelssohn’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* appears at the transition to the “*Vingt ans après*” episode where it marks the heroes’ nuptials.

Fig. 2.33a. Mendelssohn, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, op.61, “The Wedding March,” mm. 1-8.

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, op. 61 Nr. 4

Allegro vivace.

Flauti.

Oboi.

Clarinetti in C.

Fagotti.

Corni in G.

3 Trombe in C.

Tromboni Alto.
Tenore.

Trombone Basso.

Ophicleide.

Timpani in C.G.

Piatti.

Violino I.

Violino II.

Viola.

Violoncello.

Basso.

Allegro vivace.

Fig. 2.33b: *La Boîte*, Tab3.155-159. Quotation of Mendelssohn’s “The Wedding March.”

p un peu en dehors

sempre pp

simile

p

4. Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz*, No. 1.

A chromatically rising line referencing Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz* (Tab1.38) accompanies the entrance of the toys in the first tableau. The dolls drag other toys to the scene, all of which dance the joyous *giga* at the close of the tableau. A similar scene is portrayed in *Mephisto Waltz*. When passing by a village wedding feast, Mephistopheles persuades Faust to join the party. At the end, as will be the case with the protagonist of *La Boîte*, Faust, waltzes away into the woods with a village beauty.

Fig. 2.34a. Liszt, *Mephisto Waltz* No. 1, mm. 67-82.



Fig. 2.34b: *La Boîte*, Tab1.38–42. *Mephisto Waltz* reference.



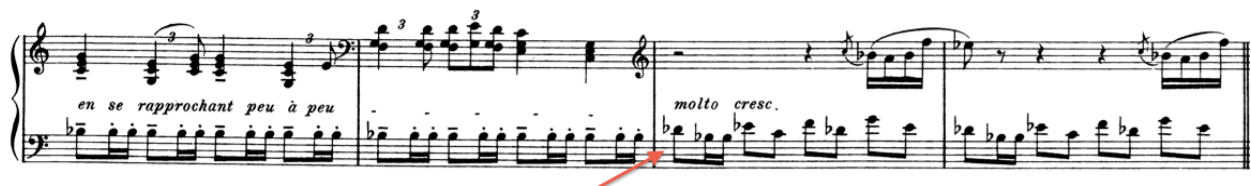
In addition to the direct quotations listed above, there are two passages in *La Boîte*, which invite comparison with sections from Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*:

5. “Dance of the Adolescents,” from Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Allusion to Stravinsky's “Dance of the Adolescents” occurs in the ostinato bass pattern at Tab3.162, as the young couple walks off into a new life, and more specifically, their future “Twenty Years After”.

Fig. 2.35a: Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring*, “Dance of the Adolescents,” mm. 62-66.



Fig. 2.35b: *La Boîte*, Tab3.160-163. Accompaniment referencing similar patterns in *The Rite of Spring*.



6. “The Old Castle” from Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

The hurdy-gurdy air at Tab3.42 bears resemblance to the opening of “The Old Castle.” In addition to their shared mode and their prominent accompanying drone, the two melodies evoke similar imagery. In *La Boîte*, the air is heard amid desolate landscape featuring a ruined, old farmhouse in the background.

Fig. 2.36a: Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, “The Old Castle,” mm. 1-5.



Fig. 2.36b: *La Boîte*, Tab3.42-49. The hurdy-gurdy air reminiscent of Mussorgsky’s “The Old Castle.”



C. Military Calls

1. “Call to arms” and “Call to stand at attention”⁵⁴

These trumpet calls sound simultaneously to indicate the arrival of the Captain who is ready to command his army of toy-soldiers.

Fig. 2.37: *La Boîte*, Tab1.457–464. “Call to arms” with “Call to stand at attention” imposed above.



2. The “Lights off” trumpet call.⁵⁵

Appropriately, this call is heard in the distance as the night falls on the battlefield.

Fig. 2.38: *La Boîte*, Tab2.154-157. “Lights off” trumpet call.



⁵⁴ “Call to arms” and “Call to stand at attention” from “Les sonneries réglementaires,” Fanfare du 2^{ème} Hussards,” last modified 2008, <http://fanfare2rh.free.fr/sonneries.htm>.

⁵⁵ “Lights off” call from “Les sonneries réglementaires,” Fanfare du 2^{ème} Hussards,” last modified 2008, <http://fanfare2rh.free.fr/sonneries.htm>.

D. Debussy's works

1. *Le petit nègre* and “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” (*Children’s Corner*).

A transposition of the tune from *Le petit nègre* marks the entrance of the English soldier. The continuation of this melody also alludes to “Golliwog’s Cakewalk.” The choice of references is appropriate given that Golliwog, an African-American male rag-doll, was also associated with England where it was first popularized as a character and later as a toy, by the American-English writer and illustrator Florence Kate Upton, after the publication of her children’s book *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls and a Golliwog* (1895). Given its stylistic proximity to a march, this ragtime excerpt is a good choice for the introduction of a soldier.

Fig. 2.39a: Debussy, *Le petit nègre*, mm.1-4.



Fig. 2.39b: Debussy, *Children’s Corner*, “Golliwog’s Cakewalk,” mm. 10-14.



Fig. 2.39c: *La Boîte*, Tabl.122-137. References to *Le petit nègre* and “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” in the English Soldier’s theme.



2. “Serenade for the Doll” from *Children’s Corner*.

The flirtation scene in the second tableau between Polichinelle and the Doll features material very close to that of the “Serenade.” This quotation is a perfect companion to this wooing scene, considering that the original title of the “Serenade for the Doll” was “Sérénade à la poupée,” ‘à’ in this case indicating that the Doll (of the title) was being serenaded most likely by another toy.

Fig. 2.40a: Debussy, *Children’s Corner*, “Serenade for the Doll,” mm. 55-59.



Fig. 2.40b: *La Boîte*, Tab2.36-43. Material similar to the “Serenade for the Doll.”



3. “La soirée dans Grenade” from *Estampes*.

The harmonies and textures marked by tolling Bb’s at the end of second tableau recall tranquil nocturnal passages from the conclusion of “La soirée dans Grenade.” Both passages are in the key of F-sharp and evoke nighttime scenes.

Fig. 2.41a: Debussy, *Estampes*, “La soirée dans Grenade,” mm. 130-136.



Fig. 2.41b: *La Boîte*, Tab2.276-281. Passage reminiscent of “La soirée dans Grenade.”



4. "The Little Shepherd" from *Children's Corner*.

The Shepherd's tune (Tab3.27) is characterized by lovely arabesques. Drawing from the Eb pentatonic collection, its opening measure is rhythmically very close to that of the "Little Shepherd" (mm. 1-2). The two melodies suggest that for Debussy similar characters elicited similar musical material.

Fig. 2.42a: Debussy, *Children's Corner*, "The Little Shepherd," mm. 1- 2.

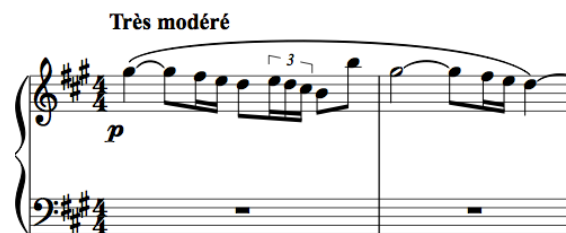


Fig. 2.42b: *La Boîte*, Tab3.27-30. The Shepherd's tune.



5. "Bruyères," from *Préludes* for piano, book I.

The musical material in the scene where the Doll buys two sheep is reminiscent of the opening of "Bruyères," with which it shares its pastoral imagery.

Fig. 2.43a: Debussy, *Préludes*, book I, “Bruyères,” mm. 1-5.



Fig. 2.43b: *La Boîte*, Tab3. 95-99. Material referencing “Bruyères.”



6. *Rêverie*.

Accompaniment to the *Ronde générale* at the end of the first tableau recalls the opening measures of Debussy’s *Rêverie* for piano (1890). The intent is to remind the listener that all the action is still taking place within the context of a dream.

Fig. 2.44a: Debussy, *Rêverie*, mm. 1-3.



Fig. 2.44b: *La Boîte*, Tab1.344-349. *Ronde générale*. Left-hand material inspired by the opening of *Réverie*.



IV. A Comparison of Piano and Orchestral Versions

Debussy orchestrated only the first 109 measures of *La Boîte*; the rest was entrusted to his long-time friend, composer, arranger and conductor André Caplet (1878-1925), who completed it in 1919, eighteen months after Debussy's death. Durand published it the following year. In his letters, Debussy makes it clear that he considered his works finished once the piano score was complete,⁵⁶ and thus a strong case can be made for the integrity of the ballet as a work for solo piano, especially considering its chamber character. Myriam Chimènes writes: “For Debussy, the essence of his work was contained in the initial draft or his piano reduction,”⁵⁷ and her study of *Jeux* reveals that timbre was integrated not at the outset, but rather at “the intermediate stage of the *préparation orchestrale*.”⁵⁸ Debussy was also known to make changes at each new stage of composition, making it difficult to predict what his own orchestral version would have been like.

⁵⁶ Mathew Brown, *Debussy Redux* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 73.

⁵⁷ Myriam Chimènes, “The Definition of Timbre in the Process of Composition of *Jeux*,” in *Debussy Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-25, especially 8.

⁵⁸ *Préparation orchestrale* is the intermediate orchestral draft written after the piano score and before the full orchestration.

Debussy also exhibited a “flexible attitude”⁵⁹ toward arrangements and transcriptions, and, as Matthew Brown points out, preserved his music in different versions: “He treated his works in much the same ways that photographers treat their pictures; just as the latter are able to develop a particular negative in black and white, in sepia, or in color, so he was able to realize his scores in terms of different instrumental palettes.”⁶⁰ Brown compares this practice to the “series paintings” by Monet, in which the artist painted the same object in different lighting and atmospheric conditions. Famous examples of this are the thirty canvases that depict the Rouen Cathedral (1892-1893).

Between 1908 and 1912,⁶¹ Debussy delegated much arranging and orchestrating to Caplet, including the two-piano arrangements of *La Mer* and *Nocturnes*, and both two-piano and four-hand versions of *Images*. Caplet was fully familiar with Debussy’s style when he orchestrated *Children’s Corner*, *Le martyr de Saint Sébastien*, *Ariettes oubliées*, “Pagodes” from *Estampes*, and “Clair de Lune” from *Suite bergamasque*. In his preparations of Debussy’s music, Caplet is known to have worked both from the piano scores and Debussy’s *préparation orchestrale*, as well as the full scores, depending on the assignment.⁶²

According to Arthur Honegger, by 1925, Caplet’s orchestration of *La Boîte à Joujoux* was well known and admired; Honegger described it as “one of ingenuity and incomparable grace.”⁶³ Durand shared this opinion, writing that the orchestration was completed “with such mastery that

⁵⁹ Brown, 73.

⁶⁰ Brown, 73.

⁶¹ The existing collection of the Debussy-Caplet correspondence is limited to the years 1908 through 1914. Debussy’s letter to Robert Godet, dated September 4, 1916, however, indicates that Caplet had written to Debussy during the war, when Caplet was serving in the French army. After Debussy’s death, in addition to orchestrating *La Boîte*, Caplet also reorchestrated Debussy’s own orchestral version of “Le Jet d’eau” from *Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire* (1889).

⁶² Brown, 72.

⁶³ Arthur Honegger, “Theatres de Musique,” *Musique & Theatre* 7, June 15, 1925.

it is impossible for the most alert musician to perceive the join.”⁶⁴ Thus, Caplet’s orchestration certainly offers one possible, well-informed rendition, allowing the pianist to create a varied and colorful sonic universe in the mind’s ear, and present a more nuanced performance. The ability to evoke orchestral timbres on a percussive instrument characterized Debussy’s own playing, as evident in this contemporary account by the Swiss composer and conductor, Gustave Doret: “By what extraordinary gifts was he able to reproduce at the keyboard the colors of the orchestra, with the most perfect balance, even to the instrumental nuances? In its subtlety and profound sensibility it seemed to be the perfect interpretation.”⁶⁵ In seeking a similar result, the following pages offer a study of the orchestral score as would be most useful to a pianist preparing a performance of *La Boîte*. The following section focuses primarily on musical considerations and interpretative possibilities, issues of dynamics and articulation, and differences in content and notation.

The orchestral version is scored for: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 1 English horn, 2 Bb–clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 French horns, 2 trumpets, harp, piano, strings, and percussion (timpani, cymbals, triangle, tambourine, bass drum, and rattle). The piano is featured prominently and is employed primarily as means of adding clarity and rhythmic incisiveness. It is often used in combination with other percussion instruments. Thus, in a solo performance, the sections involving piano should stand apart for their crisp, articulate and energetic sound and be performed accordingly.

The piano is also entrusted with most of the appearances of the Soldier motive. In order to evoke military music (associated with bright brass and sharp percussion), these passages

⁶⁴ Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theater* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 179.

⁶⁵ David Cox, *Debussy Orchestral Music* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), 12. Referring to Debussy’s performance of *L’Après-midi d’un Faune*.

should be presented with precision and focus. The piano is paired at times with Polichinelle material, a combination most likely inspired by Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, as well as the instrument's mechanical nature. The piano timbre can be identified closely with the robotic doll movement, and is associated with other leitmotifs, as well (the General, the English soldier).

While the piano tends to bring aural focus to the mechanical, rhythmic, and percussive sections, the more lyrical ones are mostly entrusted to woodwinds and at times, brass. Given that the ability to crescendo and decrescendo on single notes produces greater linearity, woodwinds are capable of creating better illusion of *legato*. Thus, the pianist must search for a similar effect (both in tone and speed) in the passages where it would more fully reveal their inherent beauty (e.g. the Shepherd's tune, “Il était une bergère”). Both of these tunes evoke an expansive landscape and a sense of space, but may require a somewhat faster tempo on an instrument whose sound decays more quickly. There are several whole- and half-note passages that demand sustained intensity. A typical example is a passage like the right-hand material in Tab2.247 (Fig. 2.45).

Fig. 2.45: *La Boîte*, Tab2.246-249. Longer rhythmic values in the right hand demanding sustained intensity well suited to woodwinds.



Another instance is the bass line of the Prelude, which is far more audible in the orchestral version. Given its middle register and the fact that it is also the augmentation of the original Toy-box motive, the key attack in the solo piano rendition should be such as to ensure it is heard and

lasting. This can be helped with careful pedal use and extra emphasis at each pitch change. Carrying the sound in the mind's ear is essential and will at the very least, give hint of its shimmer. The orchestral score reinforces the sustained notes of the Prelude with pizzicato strings and percussive attack of the piano.

The orchestration also reveals the nuances that define a character's nature. The instrumentation of celesta and triangle for the Doll's motive conjures music-box sounds, along with a sense of delicacy, fragility and spark. The brass instruments evoke pomp and circumstance, military music and celebrations. They produce a snarling effect at the entrance of Polichinelle (Tab1.149) and at his reappearance at Tab1.180. The horns and bassoons add mystery (Tab1.168) and warn of danger (as at the arrival of the agent who disperses the dolls, Tab1.505). The bassoon adds a comic touch to the Policeman's motive (Tab1. 211), and at the end of the English Soldier's theme (*Sfz* in Tab1.147).

The orchestration changes the relative dynamics and this should be taken into consideration by the solo pianist, primarily as a means of contrast and for the sake of dramatic effect. The *crescendos* and *fortes* are quite a bit more at moments where the orchestra is playing *tutti* or where both woodwinds and strings are playing together. Examples include Tab1.358 (a *tutti* entrance compared to the two previous ones of the same melody), Tab1.69-76, Tab1.140-41, and Tab3.19. Conversely, softer dynamics can be distinguished by differences in color. An example is the *più piano* section at Tab1.536, which Caplet labels *ppp* and *sur la touche*.

Change in instrumentation shifts emphasis to different parts of the score, as in the bassoon entrance in Tab1.201 and Tab1.205.

Fig. 2.46. *La Boîte*, Tab1.199-205. Piano score with marked bassoon entrances.



Different instruments also vary repeated cells or phrases. A good example is the passing of the Doll motive between the woodwinds and celesta in the *Danse de la poupée*, or the English Soldier's theme, which is first played by piccolo and piano, then violas and bassoons. Other instances occur in the Polka (Tab3.182-194), and in Tab3.100-102 and Tab2.190-191.

The orchestration also clarifies the counterpoint, as in the bassoon entrance at Tab2.22 or Tab3.95. In measures 44 and 45 of the Prelude (Fig. 2.47a), the full score emphasizes the descending chromatic thirds with octave doublings in high register, which allow continuation just steps away from where the soldier's motif left off, thus creating a longer line. This connection is not as apparent in the piano score (Fig. 2.47b).

Fig. 2.47a: *La Boîte*, Prel.43-45. Piano and violins share the same register in the orchestral version, clarifying the continuation of the melody.

The image shows a musical score for measures 43-45 of the Prelude from *La Boîte*. The score is for piano and violins. The piano part is marked 'Piano' and the violin part is marked '1ers arco Div.' and '2ds pizz.'. The dynamics are 'p' and 'molto dim.'.

Fig. 2.47b. *La Boîte*, Prel.43-45. Registral separation of the piano and violin melodies in the piano solo version.



At the same time, individual musical cells of certain passages like the entrance of the Elephant are made more interesting and clear. The opening three bars of its entrance (Tab1.80–82) first feature low strings and bassoons, then high strings, clarinets and bassoons, and lastly a rude interruption by low strings and bassoons. Material at Tab1.83–84 goes on to provide further contrast by having the horns complete the phrase. The *crescendo* in Tab1.80, played by the low strings and bassoons, is in the following measure answered primarily by a changed timbre (clarinet and strings). In the piano score, there is no such indication, although the dynamic markings (a *crescendo* from *forte* in Tab1.80, followed by a *subito mezzoforte* in Tab1.81) suggest some separation.

The orchestral version is also helpful in clarifying and presenting a variety of articulations. Where the piano version will feature *portato*, the orchestral score will ask for either *portato* or *pizzicato* or both. In Tab3.54-67 of the piano score, the accompaniment is marked *portato*, while the orchestral version features *pizzicato* downbeat in the bass. This propels the music forward and the result is a quicker and lighter movement in the *portato* line, as well:

Fig. 2.48a: *La Boîte*, Tab3.50-55. Piano solo version with *portato* marking in the accompaniment.

The musical score for the piano solo version of *La Boîte*, Tab3.50-55, is shown. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Mouv.' and the dynamics are 'p doux et monotone' and 'pp légèrement soutenu'. A red arrow points to the 'pp légèrement soutenu' marking.

Fig. 2.48b: *La Boîte*, Tab3.50-55. Orchestral version with *pizzicato* downbeat in the bass part.

The musical score for the orchestral version of *La Boîte*, Tab3.50-55, is shown. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Mouv.' and the dynamics are 'p doux et monotone' and 'pp'. A red arrow points to the 'pizz.' marking.

Additionally, in sections marked *staccato* in the solo version, it would be wise to consider whether these are marked *pizzicato* or *staccato* in the orchestral score, as the intent and effect change drastically (see Tab3. 93 [*pizz.* and *staccato*] vs. Tab3. 73 [*staccato*], or Tab1. 1-12 [*pizz.*]).

Fig. 2.49: *La Boîte*, Tab3. 73-74. Right and left hand are assigned different articulation markings in the orchestral version: repeated C's are marked *staccato* and the triads *pizzicato*.



In the orchestral version of this passage, the right-hand chords are marked and played *pizzicato*, while the left-hand C's are played *staccato* by the bassoon. Measure 18 in the orchestral score of the Prelude features *portato* on the last two eighth notes, which adds a charming detail to an otherwise *legato* line, while emphasizing [025], one of the principal harmonies. In Tab4.43, Caplet emphasizes the chromatically descending bass line by presenting it *legato* in the horn part.

A few differences exist in the content of the piano and the orchestral version. One difference is the tempo marking at the transition to the Epilogue. In the piano score it is marked “♩ = ♩” and in the orchestral version “♩ = ♩.” In Debussy's autograph for piano solo, the first of the quarter notes in the tempo marking is blurred, and it is possible he attempted to make a correction with a squiggly line characteristic of his half notes (where the top and bottom halves of the oval are detached). Since the Epilogue is the reprise of the opening scene, it would seem that the orchestral tempo marking is the intended one, and the one in the piano score a mistake. Another discrepancy appears in the last two measures of the Prelude, where, in the orchestral score, celesta and piano play material that does not appear in the solo piano version. Additionally, measures Prel.43 and Prel.44 of the orchestral score feature the Toy-box melody

rendered simultaneously (in the violins) with the continuation of the Soldier's motive. This is missing from the solo piano version. The same is true of Tab1.18-20, where the piano score is missing the violin material (the chromatic line from C to D#). The orchestral version features grace notes and trills in the "Mephisto Waltz" section (Tab1.100-102), which are not found in the piano score. These are good examples of the changes Debussy was apt to make when going from version to another.

Additionally there are changes made by Caplet. In Tab4.26 he inserts a quick sextuplet run leading to the restatement of the tune. A few measures later, effective use of cymbals, triangles and tambourine, enhances the "joyous and bright" (*joyeux et éclatant*) character of the passage. Finally, different dynamic markings appear in Tab3.79 (one long *decrescendo* [piano version] vs. two shorter *decrescendos* for each four-note group [orchestral version] and in Tab1.536 (*ppp* [orchestral version] vs. *più p* [piano version]). In Tab4.13, Caplet adds a timpani roll on bass F's, which could be adopted by the pianist in the solo presentation. In Tab3.109, the bass F's are sustained by the horns, suggesting possible use of finger pedaling in the solo version. In such situations, the decision is left to the performer.

All of the above considerations help our understanding of the score and create interpretative possibilities, with the goal of bringing to light the variety and colors, as well as the full dramatic effect of this work. The great number of recordings of both the piano and orchestral versions, some of which feature a narrator, attests to the fact that both are successful on their own terms (Appendix A and B). In comparing them, argument can be made that some parts of the music are better characterized by the piano and others by the orchestra (for example, many of the melodies of the third tableau invite the warmth, color and flexibility of strings and woodwinds, while Polichinelle's leitmotifs, the low and heavy quarter notes that mark the

entrance of the Elephant, the “Mephisto Waltz” dance, and the battle scene require brilliancy, incisiveness and clarity of the piano.) More generally, the orchestral version, in my mind, suggests a grander staging and a dance in the tradition of Romantic ballet. The piano solo version is better suited to a performance featuring more experimental choreography or marionettes, and is the one that also lends itself to presentation in non-traditional venues.

Although Caplet’s orchestration is the standard one, there also exists a more recent (1998) arrangement by musicologist Meirion Bowen who disagrees with Caplet’s choice of instrumental solos and considers Caplet’s version ill suited for the ballet’s intimate character. Bowen’s own arrangement, which features a narrator, is limited to a smaller group of 15 players, and it does not include piano. The result is warm and utterly transparent music, in which, as would be expected, some of the incisiveness and brilliance normally provided by the piano is lost. The suppleness of Bowen’s arrangement, which is achieved by emphasizing woodwinds and strings and assigning piano material to the harp, makes it better suited for a ballet rather than a marionette production.

CHAPTER 3 – *Beyond the Toy-box*

Viewing *La Boîte* as a product of the various trends and artistic movements shaping Parisian and European culture in the early 1900s, the following chapter considers the political and artistic climate that gave rise to it. It examines the work's complex web of inspiration as a way of identifying and highlighting Debussy's influences and sources, as well as his philosophical and artistic beliefs.

1. *Commedia dell'arte and Marionette Theater*

Elements of *Commedia dell'arte* permeate much of Debussy's oeuvre,⁶⁶ including *La Boîte*. This is not surprising, considering that most of Debussy's output falls within the three decades (1890-1920) during which this low-brow street entertainment, which first entered French high art through Molière, reached its peak artistic influence. Thus, in Hellé's story we find characters corresponding to those of *commedia* – the Doll (Columbine), the Soldier (Pierrot),⁶⁷ Polichinelle, Harlequin, Sailor, Captain -- and a plot that mirrors the love intrigues typical of *commedia*. *La Boîte*'s happy ending (i.e. marriage and progeny), however, perpetually escapes *commedia* characters, who are, in their illegitimacy, incompatible with the traditional bourgeois ideal of happiness.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Debussy's *Commedia dell'arte*-inspired pieces include *Suite Bergamasque* (1889), song settings of Verlaine's "Pantomime" (1882) and Banville's "Pierrot" (1881), both from *Quatre chansons de jeunesse*, *Masques* for piano (1904), the Cello Sonata (1915), the Violin Sonata (1917), and *Préludes* for piano, especially the "Sérénade Interrompue" (1910).

⁶⁷ Even though the doll population of *La Boîte* includes a Pierrot as a minor character as noted in the scenic directions, the Soldier's role as a love-struck dreamer corresponds to the one traditionally assigned to Pierrot.

⁶⁸ *Commedia* was considered 'illegitimate' entertainment for a number of reasons: it was improvised and not written down as was the case with 'legitimate' literary works; it was

At the turn of the twentieth century, much of the artistic discourse regarding music and drama took place largely in the shadow of Wagner, and for the artists of the period, adopting elements of commedia was a way of responding to the solemnity of his works. The feelings against the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and Germanic influence in general, only intensified with the approach of World War, and Hellé and Debussy might have also looked to commedia as a way of aligning their works with the Latin tradition (in addition to creating other overtly patriotic works).⁶⁹ In *The Triumph of Pierrot*, Martin Green and John Swan note that Wagner had become “too institutional, too imposing, too ceremonial,” that “it did not explore the critical *activity* of the modern mind.”⁷⁰ Modernists were interested in the “brittleness of mood, its promise of change, its instability, its artificiality.”⁷¹ This preference for the composite translates musically in *La Boîte* into a mosaic-like structure, and a patchwork of different melodies and quotations. The popular and folk references serve a double function by retaining the most important element of commedia: the presence of popular music and entertainment atmosphere.

Debussy wrote *La Boîte* as a pantomime for child dancers or marionettes. From his interviews on the subject of ballet,⁷² it is clear that he wished to avoid the formality and

performed in unlicensed or provisional theaters; its satirical social commentary was seen as subversive, and its slapstick comedy as vulgar. Additionally, commedia characters, who more often than not, are madly in love, are not associated with matrimony and parenthood. Thus, according to Victorian values, they do not represent the “ideal human group,” and are not seen as deserving of happiness. Martin Green and John Swan, *The Triumph of Pierrot* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1986), 2-10.

⁶⁹ Debussy’s patriotic compositions include *Berceuse héroïque* (1914), *Noël des enfants qui n’ont plus de maisons* (1914), *En blanc et noir* (1915), and *Ode à la France* (1917). Hellé’s include the book *Alphabet de la Grande Guerre 1914-1916* (1915), and his toy collections *Tommy Fuzbuz* (1914-16), *Jeu de l’alphabet de guerre* (1916), and *Soldats alliés* (1917).

⁷⁰ Martin Green and John Swan, *The Triumph of Pierrot* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1986), 13.

⁷¹ Green and Swan, 18.

⁷² Stephanie Jordan, “Debussy, the Dance and the *Faune*,” in *Debussy in Performance*, ed. James Briscoe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 119-135, especially 125.

predictability of conventional ballet choreography, preferring instead the improvised movement of children and marionettes. (Another reason was the fear of choreography like the one Nijinsky's created for *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, an issue that shall be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.) In doing so, Debussy compensated for one missing element of commedia in this work: that of improvisation. The use of marionettes was a natural extension of the ballet's commedia character, as both commedia and puppetry are arts dependent on mime and improvisation. They are largely independent of written word, with text improvised on the basis of particular stereotypes. Additionally, both art forms, which have shared repertoire and characters since the eighteenth century, feature parody, and provide a space where folk and high culture mix.⁷³

Although marionette operas have a long tradition dating back to the Baroque and include works by Gluck and Haydn, marionettes achieved new prominence with Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, dominating artistic activity at the beginning of the twentieth century. Harold Segel writes that "no period in the history of European stage ever found as much creative relevance in the puppet figure as modernism and the avant-garde."⁷⁴ The puppets were timely symbols of human powerlessness, the desire to break free of human world and control, as well as the looming age of machinery. In *La Boîte* we see the puppets leaving behind the safety of the box to confront the joys, sorrows and dangers of life.

The Paris of Debussy's time offered much in terms of cabaret culture, which included marionette plays and shadow puppetry. At clubs like Le Chat Noir, *chansons* and shadow puppet

⁷³ Henryk Jurkovsky, *A History of European Puppetry*, Vol. 2 (Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), 174-75.

⁷⁴ Harold B. Segel, *Pinocchio's Progeny* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 75.

shows were the biggest audience draw.⁷⁵ Shadow plays featured live piano accompaniments, and it is likely that Debussy, who was fascinated by shadow plays in Henri Rivière's shows at Le Chat Noir, provided accompaniment for some. Rivière's shows were particularly ambitious, creating film-like effects with colored glass panels on which scenes and characters were painted, as well as using lighting experiments that placed figures at different distances from the screen.⁷⁶ The commedia characters with their unique and colorful costumes were well suited to such presentation. As a result, the puppet theater became "the last resting place of the Commedia dell'arte."⁷⁷ In addition to cabaret shows, several theaters dedicated exclusively to shadow puppetry (*les ombres chinoises*) and marionette plays also existed in Paris at the time, including Le Petit-Théâtre, La Boîte à musique, and Le Théâtre des ombres lyriques du Lyon d'Or.⁷⁸

On the subject of puppetry, Debussy seemed particularly influenced by the views of the Belgian Symbolist poet and playwright Maurice Maeterlinck, upon whose novel, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the composer based his only finished opera. In the 1880's, Maeterlinck had written three plays for actors playing marionettes.⁷⁹ Maeterlinck saw the puppet as a vehicle for direct representation of the author's vision, without the intermediate and usurping element of the actor/dancer's personality and body.⁸⁰ Keeping in line with the Symbolist aesthetic, Maeterlinck's own works replaced external action with a focus on inner drama, minimizing all movement and preserving an ominous, dream-like mood, as the audience was led to delve into

⁷⁵ Segel, 66.

⁷⁶ Segel, 67.

⁷⁷ Segel, 40.

⁷⁸ Petit-Théâtre was located in Galerie Vivienne, La Boîte à musique on Boulevard Clichy, and Théâtre des ombres lyriques du Lyon d'Or at the hotel Lyon d'Or hotel on Rue de la Sourdière.

⁷⁹ Published in 1894, the three plays are: *Intérieur*, *La Mort de Tintagiles*, and *Alladine et Palomides*.

⁸⁰ Scott Cutler Shershow, *Puppets and "Popular" Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 192.

the mysteries of the human soul. Often, there was little dialogue, the speech was deliberate and repetitive and silence was dominant (as in *Pelléas*). Like in *La Boîte*, the setting of Maeterlinck's dramas was often the night, and the human was presented as a puppet of higher forces unknown to her.⁸¹ Maeterlinck's efforts brought the marionette to the foreground, and created a move away from theatrical realism. A work like *La Boîte* is in this respect a product of this movement, representing the ideal described by Anatole France⁸² in his essay "Hrotswitha aux marionnettes":

The marionettes respond exactly to my idea of the theater . . . I should like a dramatic representation to recall, in some degree, so that it may truly remain a game, a box of Nuremburg toys, a Noah's ark, or a set of clockwork figures. But I should further desire these artless images to be symbols; I should like these simple forms to be animated by magic; I want them to be enchanted toys. This may seem a curious taste; still, it must be remembered that Shakespeare and Sophocles satisfy it well enough.⁸³

With *La Boîte* Debussy's answered his call.

2. Debussy and Dance

In the first two decades of the 20th century, ballet was gaining in importance as a sophisticated and independent art form, thus drawing the attention of serious composers.⁸⁴

Debussy's comments regarding Stravinsky's *Firebird* reflect the changing attitude toward ballet music: while Debussy found the score less than perfect, he felt that "in many ways it is very fine

⁸¹ Segel, 50.

⁸² Anatole France (1844-1924), Nobel-prize winning writer and Debussy's neighbor at 5 Villa Saïd in Paris.

⁸³ "Les marionnettes répondent exactement à l'idée que je me fais du théâtre, et je confesse que cette idée est particulière. Je voudrais qu'une représentation dramatique rappelât en quelque chose, pour rester véritablement un jeu, les boîtes de Nuremberg, les arches de Noé et les tableaux à horloge. Mais je voudrais aussi que ces images naïves fussent des symboles, qu'une magie animât ces formes simples et que ce fût enfin des joujoux enchantés. Ce goût semble bizarre; pourtant, il faut considérer que Shakespeare et Sophocle le contentent assez bien." Harold B. Segel, *Pinocchio's Progeny* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 81.

⁸⁴ Stephanie Jordan, "Debussy, the Dance and the *Faune*," in *Debussy in Performance* edited by James Briscoe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 119-135, esp. 121.

because the music is not subservient to the dancing.”⁸⁵ This shift in perception was helped in part by the Symbolist view that the dancer, much like the puppet in this respect, personified “the marriage of concrete form and divine Idea, with no mediation of reason,”⁸⁶ thus allowing for more immediate and direct presentation of the author’s idea.

Debussy’s planned several ballet projects, most of which followed difficult paths or were never realized. There were talks of *Orfée* with Paul Valéry and *Daphnis and Chloë* with Pierre Louÿs, for which no music was written. For *Masques et bergamasques*, a Ballets Russes production, Debussy only wrote the scenario. Other unfinished projects include *No-ja-li* (1914) on a libretto by Feure and *Crimen amoris*, later renamed *Fêtes galantes* (1912-15) based on texts by Paul Verlaine.⁸⁷ Of the three completed projects, *Khamma* (1911) was a particularly frustrating experience for the composer. He disliked the plot, had a falling out with dancer Maud Allan who commissioned it, and in the end failed to meet the deadline. In 1913, he completed the other two: *Jeux* (a *poème dansé*) set to a scenario by Diaghilev and Nijinsky, and *La Boîte*.

Debussy had similarly difficult experiences with the interpretation of his ballets, and his views on dance in general were in large part a reaction to Nijinsky’s choreography of both the *L’après-midi d’un faune* and *Jeux*. Nijinsky choreography espoused the newest trends of the period, inspired by the theories of Émile-Jacques Dalcroze, a man considered by Debussy as “one of music’s worst enemies!”⁸⁸ Dalcroze explored ways of teaching rhythm through movement, of understanding and manifesting it physically. Debussy, however, was dismayed at seeing the counts visualized in the choreography, writing that such metric choreography

⁸⁵ “Ça n’est pas parfait, mais par certains côtés c’est tout de même très bien, parce que, la musique n’y est pas la servante docile de la danse.” Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1300.

⁸⁶ Stephanie Jordan, “Debussy, the Dance and the *Faune*,” in *Debussy in Performance* ed. James Briscoe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 119-135, esp. 128.

⁸⁷ Jordan, 121.

⁸⁸ Jordan, 133.

“trampled” his rhythms. Debussy described Nijinsky’s choreography for *L’après-midi d’un faune* as “a grievous disappointment”⁸⁹: he disliked what he perceived as a lack of connection between the movement and the music, and was particularly annoyed by Nijinsky’s modernist aesthetic, which featured movements that were angular, severe, and austere. Debussy commented on the discrepancy between “a sinuous, soothing, flexible musical line on the one hand, and on the other a performance whose characters move like those on Greek or Etruscan vases, ungracefully, rigidly, as though their gestures were constricted by the laws of plane geometry . . . So profound a dissonance can know no resolution.”⁹⁰

Debussy’s apparent ambivalence in terms of exact performance of *La Boîte*, favoring either marionettes and children dancers, and his rejection of formulaic ballet steps and the Dalcrozian novelties popular at the time, may also suggest a preference for a style yet to come: only a few years later, in 1917, the futurist artist Giacomo Balla would stage *Feu d’artifice*, set to music by Stravinsky, as a “ballet without dancers,” using cloth-covered geometrical shapes dancing in the shadows generated by switching lights on and off.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Mathew Brown, *Debussy Redux* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 129.

⁹⁰ “. . . une musique ondoyante et berceuse, où abondent des lignes courbes, et une action scénique où les personnages se meuvent, pareils à ceux de certains vases antiques, grecs ou étrusques, sans grâce ni souplesse, comme si leurs gestes étaient réglés par des lois de géométrie pure ?... Une “dissonance” atroce, sans résolution possible!” Stephanie Jordan, “Debussy, the Dance and the *Faune*,” in *Debussy in Performance* ed. James Briscoe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 119-135, esp. 126.

⁹¹ “Two masterpieces of Italian Futurism re-imagined for the digital era,” Istituto Italiano di Cultura, last modified August 26, 2010, http://www.iicbelgrado.esteri.it/IIC_Washington/webform/SchedaEvento.aspx?id=275.

3. *The Universe of the Child*

Debussy shared the Romantics' nostalgic and sentimentalized notion of childhood, described by Jean-Yves Tadié thus: "Childhood, it is a presence that feels and sees without understanding, and that forever accumulates its savings account of sadnesses and joys, of trust and anguish."⁹² His embrace of this state of being, and his attempts to capture in music its naiveté and innocence reveal Debussy as a composer still tied to aesthetic of the nineteenth century, a time when the idea of childhood as a separate and unique experience first gained widespread acceptance.⁹³ The Romantics' interest in childhood shifted the artistic focus toward the promise of rejuvenation and a return to innocence (in the Romantic view, innocence and purity were exemplified both by the child and by Nature). The child, a being free of corruption, disguise and deception, was seen by the artists of the period as being in perfect harmony with its essence. As Rilke writes, "child's realm precedes the formation of consciousness" and thus its "essential unity" remains undisrupted.⁹⁴

During the nineteenth century, literature focusing on fantasy, humor and wit began to appear as an alternative to the didactic material generally written for young readers. Some of the most famous literary works for children were written during the latter part of the century, and include such classics as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1883), Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* (1881), Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* (1876), and Jules Verne's *Journey to the Center of the*

⁹² "L'enfance, c'est une présence qui sent et voit sans comprendre, et qui emmagasine pour toujours son compte d'épargne fait de douleurs et de joies, de confiance et d'angoisse." Jean-Yves Tadié, *Le songe musical: Claude Debussy* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 23.

⁹³ Jean Jacques Rousseau's book *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762) was one of the first literary works to formulate the Romantic attitude toward children and childhood. Shown as distinct beings, rather than small adults, children became a frequent subject of Romantic paintings, especially in the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792).

⁹⁴ Harold B. Segel, *Pinocchio's Progeny* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 46.

Earth (1864), *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) and *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873). *La Boîte* comes from the tradition of stories about sentient toys. Among examples of this genre are Louise Aulnay's *Memoires d'une poupée* (1838), E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Nutcracker* (1845) and Hans Christian Andersen's *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* (1848).

The exploration of childhood as an idealized period and the celebration of the innocence that it embodies began in the nineteenth century. The first masterful repertoire to reflect this interest is Schumann's *Kinderszenen*. This fascination with childhood in music continued into the twentieth century, and is reflected in works like Debussy's *Children's Corner*, Fauré's *Dolly Suite*, and Ravel's *Enfant et les sortilèges*. Given what we know of it,⁹⁵ Debussy's own childhood was not a happy one, and the composer preferred not to speak about it. His work on *La Boîte* was inspired instead by his love for his only child, Emma-Claude, nicknamed Chouchou, aged 7 at the time of the composition of *La Boîte*, and Debussy looked to her playfulness and imagination for inspiration while working on the score, writing to Durand that "he was extracting secrets from Chouchou's dolls."⁹⁶

The end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century also saw the creation of a separate domestic sphere, a place in the home dedicated exclusively to the child. At this time, several exhibitions showcasing design for children's rooms were held in England and Germany.⁹⁷ In France, Hellé was one of the pioneers in the industry of children's furniture, making his contribution by designing several themed rooms. The rooms featured toys, furniture, décor, and wallpaper. His first room for children was shown at the Salon d'automne in 1910.

⁹⁵ Marcel Dietschy and Edward Lockspeiser, "The Family and Childhood of Debussy," *The Musical Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (July, 1960): 301-314.

⁹⁶ Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 177.

⁹⁷ Béatrice Michielsen, *Drôles de Jouets! André Hellé ou l'art de l'enfance* (Ville de Poissy: Éditions Mare & Martin, 2012), 36.

Later he created a *Chambre L'Arche de Noé* (Noah's Ark Room) (1911), a *Chambre de Cendrillon* (Cinderella's Room) (1913), and a *Chambre de jeux* (Room of Games) (1919). Hellé's work and interests kept him in the realm of the child for most of his life. In his memoir *Souvenirs d'un petit garçon*, he writes: "It is sad to abandon things one likes and to be obliged to like others which have nothing to say to you . . . just because one has reached a certain age."⁹⁸ As is the case with *La Boîte*, his stories and illustrations⁹⁹ have appealed to a dual audience of children and adults, and part of their greatness lies in their ability to simultaneously address both.

4. Nationalism and the First World War

According to Debussy, *La Boîte* was "conceived in a true French spirit,"¹⁰⁰ a reference to the balance, clarity, wit, and elegance of its musical language, elements that Debussy associated with the French style.¹⁰¹ This statement also suggests that Debussy's final ballet was also a response to the Russian dominance of the Parisian ballet culture and a culmination of the French struggle against Germanic influence in general, and Wagner in particular, that characterized the period of uneasy peace between 1871 and 1914.¹⁰² In its musical language and aesthetic

⁹⁸ "C'est malheureux d'abandonner des choses qui vous plaisent et d'être obligé d'en aimer d'autres qui ne vous dissent rien du tout... parce que'on a l'âge de raison." Michielsen, 13.

⁹⁹ Hellé illustrated over 40 books for children. For a complete listing, see Michielsen, 74.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 179.

¹⁰¹ Chapter 2 provides a detailed analysis of *La Boîte*'s musical language.

¹⁰² Much has been written on the topic of French attempts to combat Germanic influence in the period following the Franco-Prussian war. The crushing defeat in 1870 during which France lost Alsace-Lorraine fostered a growing animosity and longing for revenge among the French. The victory helped Germans assume the cultural high ground, while the adoption of German music particularly symphonic music in France was interpreted as a cultural defeat and a way of combatting the light-heartedness and 'insignificance' of French works (such as Offenbach's operettas). In 1871, Société nationale de Musique was formed to further the cause of French music, and would later split of over the issue of promoting foreign (German) music. For more information on this topic and the role of Société nationale, see Damien Ehrhardt, "La guerre

concerns, *La Boîte* continues Debussy's legacy as a French composer, and is a precursor to the compositions with a clear nationalist agenda.¹⁰³

Debussy's patriotic zeal, which at times bordered on xenophobia, is well documented, particularly in his writings featuring "Monsieur Croche."¹⁰⁴ In 1913, he complained that there were too many Russians in Paris,¹⁰⁵ a reflection of both his own insecurity and his dislike of foreign influence. To Pierné he wrote that he "fell pray to the 'Grand Saison,' which makes Paris uninhabitable, unless one is Italian, Russian or Iroquois."¹⁰⁶ When urging Stravinsky to remain true to his heritage he wrote: "Be with all your strength a great Russian artist. It is so wonderful to be attached to one's soil like the humblest of peasants."¹⁰⁷ This is how Debussy saw himself: attached to his native soil, signing his last works as "musician français."¹⁰⁸

Composing in "a true French spirit," a visually inspired style, free of foreign influence and arbitrary compositional rules, preoccupied Debussy throughout his career. Although he had admired Wagner for some time and always appreciated many aspects of his works, he detested his dominating influence on French music. This was the case, in fact, of all foreign influence:

franco-prussienne, la fondation de la Société nationale de Musique et l'appropriation de la musique allemande," Academia.edu (accessed June 12, 2014) and Michael Strasser, "The Société Nationale and Its Adversaries: *L'Invasion germanique* in the 1870s," *19th-Century Music* 24, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 225-251.

¹⁰³ Debussy's patriotic works include *Berceuse heroïque* (1914), *Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons* (1914), *En blanc et noir* (1915), and *Ode à la France* (1917).

¹⁰⁴ While a music critic for *La Revue Blanche*, Debussy wrote numerous articles on music and life in the form of conversations with the imaginary character he called M. Croche. Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

¹⁰⁵ Edward Lockspeiser, "New Letters of Debussy," *The Musical Times* 97, no. 1362 (Aug., 1956): 404-406, especially 405.

¹⁰⁶ Claude Debussy, *Correspondance (1872-1918)*, eds. François Lésure and Denis Herlin (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005), 1623.

¹⁰⁷ "Soyez de toutes vos forces, un grand artiste russe! C'est si beau, d'être de son pays, d'être attaché à sa terre comme le plus humble des paysans!" Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1952.

¹⁰⁸ When writing to Stravinsky about staying true to his roots, Debussy was also hoping to steer him away from Germanic, especially Schoenbergian, influence.

“For several years, we have conformed to the influences in which the North¹⁰⁹ conspired with the Byzantium to stifle our Latin genius, made of grace and clarity.”¹¹⁰ Thus, Debussy saw Hellé’s use of *commedia dell’arte* characters, as a way of not only keeping in line with the trends of the time, but also aligning his work with the Latin tradition. The mutability, flexibility, and playfulness of the *commedia* were the very same traits that also appealed to Molière, when this Italian form of street art was given new life in France and became a part of its own tradition.

Debussy, like Satie, looked to reinvent French music through an entirely different approach one that Satie described as follows:

I explained to Debussy at that time the need a Frenchman has to free himself from the Wagnerian venture, which didn’t respond to our national aspirations. I also pointed out that I was in no way anti-Wagnerian but that we should have music of our own—if possible without any Sauerkraut. Why could we not use the means that Claude Monet, Cézanne, Toulouse-Lautrec and others had made known? Why could we not transpose these means into music?¹¹¹

That Debussy took Satie’s words to heart, and considered composition in terms of visual art, is apparent in his letter to Hellé where he writes about *La Boîte*: “My music doesn’t have the nice simplicity of contour as do your drawings. Pardon me in good faith.”¹¹² The visual inspiration, along with the mosaic structure of *La Boîte* and a lack of interest in strict motivic development,

¹⁰⁹ In this context “North” refers to Germany.

¹¹⁰ “Depuis quelques années nous obéissons à des influences où le Nord se concerte avec Byzance pour étoffer notre génie latin, fait de grâce et de clarté.” Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1622.

¹¹¹ “J’expliquais à Debussy le besoin pour nous Français de se dégager de l’aventure Wagner, laquelle ne répondait pas à mes aspirations naturelles. Et lui faisais-je remarquer que je n’étais nullement anti-wagnérien, mais que nous devons avoir une musique à nous – sans choucroute si possible. Pourquoi ne pas se servir des moyens représentatives que nous exposaient Claude Monet, Cézanne, Toulouse-Lautrec etc.? Pourquoi ne pas transposer musicalement ces moyens?” *A Mammal’s Notebook: Collected Writings of Erik Satie*, ed. Ornella Volta, trans. Anthony Melville (London: Atlas Press, 1996), 122.

¹¹² “Ma musique n’a pas la jolie simplicité de contours qu’ont vos dessins! Pardonnez-lui en faveur de sa bonne volonté.” Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1651.

keep it in line with the French aesthetic. In *La Boîte* Debussy aspired against grandeur, typical of the German operatic and symphonic works from the late nineteenth century. He refused to have the ballet produced at Opéra-Comique, where it was “typical of our times . . . to produce grand designs out of nothing at all.”¹¹³

The war catapulted Debussy’s nationalistic feelings to new levels, affecting him not only as a Frenchman, but also as a human being. Deeply shaken by the events of war, which had paralyzing effects on his creativity, and unable to enlist, he described himself in a letter to Durand, as “nothing more than a wretched atom hurled around by this terrible cataclysm.”¹¹⁴ Thus, André Hellé’s story of a war inside a toy-box resonated with Debussy. As Watkins correctly points out, “For all the toy-box origins of the work, in the context of the time, the work must surely have seemed less a reflection of Debussy’s interest in the world of children per se than in the subtle parallels between the child, the puppet and the adult and their shared helplessness to act in an increasingly menacing world.”¹¹⁵

5. The Influence of Stravinsky and Satie

Although Debussy absorbed a gamut of influences throughout his career, it was the works of Stravinsky and Satie that left the most prominent mark on *La Boîte*.

¹¹³ “Ils portent, d’ailleurs, la marque de notre époque où l’on fait de agrandissement avec rien du tout!” Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1744.

¹¹⁴ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1843.

¹¹⁵ Glenn Watkins, *Proof Through the Night: Music and the Great War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 114.

Debussy first met Stravinsky on June 25, 1910, following the Paris premiere of *The Firebird*. Although at the time, Stravinsky, aged 28, knew little of Debussy's music,¹¹⁶ Debussy's reputation as a rebel who challenged traditional approaches to composition had won him admiration from younger composers, including Stravinsky. As for Debussy, *The Firebird* was the first work by the young Russian that he heard. Debussy recognized Stravinsky's genius, impressed both by his pianism and his orchestrations.¹¹⁷ Debussy seemed particularly fond of Stravinsky's work when it approached his own musical style,¹¹⁸ as in the *tour de passé* section of *Petrushka*, which, according to Debussy, had "an orchestral infallibility that I have found only in Parsifal."¹¹⁹ The sincerity of Debussy's admiration is confirmed, however, by the fact that he consulted Stravinsky when orchestrating *Jeux*.¹²⁰

The many letters exchanged between 1911 and 1915, stand as a testimony of their friendship,¹²¹ but Debussy's notes to his other colleagues and friends, also reveal his frustration with and jealousy toward Stravinsky.¹²² Feelings of envy began to develop in 1913 following the wild reception of the *Rite of Spring*, just a few nights after the unremarkable premiere event of *Jeux*. Debussy had a mixed reaction toward the *Rite*. He began to see Stravinsky's talents as a

¹¹⁶ Stravinsky had heard Siloti conduct *Nocturnes* and *L'après midi d'un faune* in Russia. Noble, 22.

¹¹⁷ "Il y a une jeune musicien russe, Igor Stravinsky, qui a le génie instinctif de la couleur et du rythme. Je suis sûr que lui et sa musique vous plairaient infiniment." Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1470.

¹¹⁸ Brown, *Debussy Redux*, 2.

¹¹⁹ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1503.

¹²⁰ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1555.

¹²¹ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1462, 1503, 1543, 1554, 1561, 1571, 1604, 1610, 1655, 1687, 1694, 1946, and 1952.

¹²² "C'est la musique sauvage avec tout le confort moderne." Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1609. In another letter to Robert Godet, Debussy refers to Stravinsky as a spoiled child ('enfant gâté'), Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1964-65.

threat,¹²³ but he also admitted that parts of *Rite* were haunting him.¹²⁴ I would argue that the dreamy Toy-box motive in *La Boîte* recalls the bassoon solo from the *Rite of Spring* (complete with the characteristic grace notes),¹²⁵ while the transition to the fourth tableau is inspired by the “Dance of the Adolescents” (Fig. 2.12, 2.35a and 2.35b.).

Of the three Stravinsky ballets written before Debussy’s death, it was *Petrushka* (1911) that left the strongest and most favorable impression on Debussy.¹²⁶ He later wrote to Stravinsky that his daughter Chouchou had even composed her own fantasy on *Petrushka*, one “to make the tigers howl.”¹²⁷ It is likely that in *La Boîte*, which shares a similar storyline, Debussy aimed at creating his own, French analogue to *Petrushka*. Hellé’s principal characters have their counterparts in *Petrushka*: Petrushka/Soldier, Ballerina/Doll, Moor/Polichinelle. Both works are set in four tableaux with the opening and final sections acting as a frame: in *La Boîte* these are the scenes of the sleeping Toy-box, while in *Petrushka*, the first and last tableaux are set in the world of humans, in contrast to the second and third tableaux which belong to that of the puppets. Neither work was intended as a traditional ballet: *Petrushka* was conceived as an instrumental piece, and the ballet itself prominently featured mime rather than classical choreography. Additionally, both works question what is real and what is not, as Petrushka’s ghost has the final laugh, and *La Boîte*’s Soldier makes his final salute before the curtain. In fact, Hellé’s toys are “just like people,”¹²⁸ while Petrushka the puppet, ends up being more human than his master.

¹²³ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1609.

¹²⁴ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1554.

¹²⁵ Igor Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring*, mm. 1-4.

¹²⁶ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1503.

¹²⁷ “Et que votre amie, Chouchou a composé une fantaisie sur Pétrouchka à faire hurler les tigres.” Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1554.

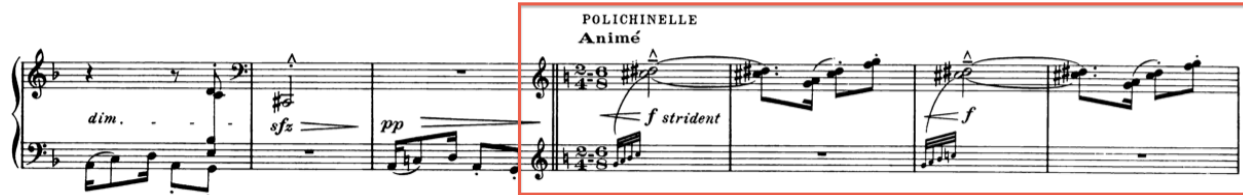
¹²⁸ Claude Debussy, *La Boîte à joujoux* (Paris: Durand et fils, 1913).

La Boîte and *Petrushka* prominently feature the piano,¹²⁹ and require an extensive percussion section, which is used to great effect.¹³⁰ Both incorporate folk and popular tunes,¹³¹ use modes, and rely heavily on the use of the tritone and major and minor seconds (a common feature in the motives of both *Petrushka* (pitch-class set [01]) and *Polichinelle* ([02])).

Fig. 3.1a: Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (“Chez Pétroushka” from *Trois mouvements de Pétroushka*), mm. 28-29. Petrushka’s motive.



Fig. 3.1b: *La Boîte*, Tabl.146-152. Polichinelle’s leitmotif.



In both ballets, the Doll/Ballerina dances a waltz, while the Soldier and Petrushka are associated with the sound of the trumpet. The harmonic language of both works includes the use of the octatonic collections. The influence of the ‘Petrushka chord’ (F#-major triad superimposed over

¹²⁹ *Petrushka* was conceived as a *Konzertstück* for piano and orchestra.

¹³⁰ In *Petrushka*, the drumrolls serve to provide transitions between the scenes.

¹³¹ For a complete listing of folk tunes featured in *La Boîte*, see Chapter 2. For a list of folk tunes found in *Petrushka*, see Frederick W. Sternfeld, “Some Russian Folk Songs in Stravinsky's *Pétroushka*,” *Notes* 2, no. 2 (March, 1945): 95-107.

C-major triad) is evident in the overall design of *La Boîte*.¹³² Debussy, however, goes beyond the concrete use of the chord. Since the F# major triad consists only of black keys, and C major of white keys, Debussy applies its black/white dichotomy more generally to represent opposing or incompatible worlds and characters, which are musically always kept a semi-tone apart.

Examples of this include the flirtation scene between the Doll and Polichinelle (Chapter 2, Fig. 2.6), which contrasts Polichinelle's insistent C#'s with the C major of the Doll's responses, and the portrayal of the battle, with the opposing parties (left- and right-hand material) a semitone apart. (Chapter 2, Fig. 2.7).

Jeremy Noble accurately describes the friendship between Stravinsky and Debussy as that of two great composers who admired and paid homage to each other.¹³³ Whatever similarities exist in their works, their styles are distinct and do not lend themselves to obvious comparisons.¹³⁴ They do, however, seem to acknowledge their mutual influence in their dedications. After Stravinsky dedicated his cantata *Zvezdoliki (Le roi des étoiles)*¹³⁵ to Debussy in 1912, Debussy dedicated the final movement of *En blanc et noir* (1915) "to my friend, Igor Stravinsky."

¹³² For a detailed analysis, see Chapter 2, especially Table 1.

¹³³ Noble, 25.

¹³⁴ There are similarities between Stravinsky's *Fireworks* (fantasy for orchestra) and Debussy's prelude "Feux d'artifice," and the beginning of Stravinsky's opera *The Nightingale*, which is inspired by the opening of Debussy's "Nuages" (from *Trois Nocturnes*). For a more detailed analysis, see Noble, 22.

¹³⁵ Debussy found this work extraordinary, but doubted it would soon find its audience. Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1655.

Debussy and Satie shared a twenty-five-year friendship, developed and sustained through the weekly gatherings at the Debussy household.¹³⁶ Proof of their friendship lies in the mutual dedications (Debussy's *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* dedicated to Satie, and Satie's *Trois Sonneries de la Rose Croix* dedicated to Debussy),¹³⁷ and the fact that Debussy's only example of orchestrating another composer's work is his arrangement of Satie's *Gymnopédies*, by which Satie gained his first hearing at the Société nationale in 1897. Debussy seemed to have been intrigued by Satie's unusual behavior and took inspiration from his unconventional ideas. Satie often misunderstood as a result of his eccentric behavior, appreciated the support of a recognized musical figure. Though it inspired them in different ways, both composers shared an interest in the world of children.¹³⁸ Debussy was a devoted father, and Satie is known to have enjoyed the family atmosphere at the Debussy household, often volunteering his time to babysit Chouchou.¹³⁹

Robert Orledge, who has chronicled the friendship of the two composers, writes that the two mainly exchanged ideas, rather than techniques, each keeping to his own style and path, thus minimizing apparent reciprocal influence.¹⁴⁰ Even so, some chronological comparisons, suggest that Satie's techniques likely had quite an impact on the works of his younger contemporaries, including Debussy. Debussy held Satie in the highest esteem: "Satie, you never had greater

¹³⁶ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1402.

¹³⁷ Although Debussy's interest in the occult has not been thoroughly investigated, Satie's choice of the dedicated piece is interesting, and may point to Debussy's involvement with the Order of Rose St. Croix, of which Satie was a member. Debussy took great care with the visual presentation of the score for *La Boîte*, demanding that a red rose, which happens to be the symbol of the Rosicrucian order (whose leitmotif is a *pianississimo* followed by a *decrescendo*), be presented on the first page as one of the characters.

¹³⁸ Robert Orledge, "Debussy and Satie," in *Debussy Studies*, ed. Richard Langham Smith (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 158-59.

¹³⁹ Robert Orledge, "Debussy and Satie," in *Debussy Studies*, ed. Richard Langham Smith (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 159.

¹⁴⁰ Orledge, 178.

admirers than Ravel and myself; many of your early works had a great influence on our writing. Your *Prélude de La porte héroïque du ciel* was to us a revelation, so original, so different from that Wagnerian atmosphere which has surrounded us in late years.”¹⁴¹ Some examples of Satie’s influence include a preference for chant-like melodies,¹⁴² the use of quartal chords moving by steps (a technique known as ‘planing’), and a systematic use of unresolved sevenths and ninths. Satie went even further than Debussy by basically writing atonal, non-metric and formless works (except for his *Three Pieces in the Form of a Pear*),¹⁴³ which often contained irreverent and funny remarks for the performers.

Debussy’s and Satie’s works from 1913 and 1914, including *La Boîte*, invite closer comparison, serving as a testament of their friendship in the year 1913. It was during this period that both composers wrote child-themed pieces; Debussy wrote *La Boîte* and Satie three sets of children’s pieces: *L’enfance de Ko-Quo*, *Trois nouvelles enfantines* and *Menus propos enfantines*, *Enfantillages pittoresques*, and *Peccadilles importunes*. It is difficult not to associate the humor, simplicity, as well as directness of writing and appeal so typical of Satie’s works, with *La Boîte*, which has many of the same attributes. Debussy’s final ballet and Satie’s humoristic piano suites, written between 1913 and 1917, also exhibit a particular fondness for collage technique. By using popular tunes, and mixing concert and cabaret spheres, these works

¹⁴¹ “Satie, tu n’as jamais eu de plus grands admirateurs que Ravel et moi; nombres de tes oeuvres de jeunesse ont eu une grande influence sur notre écriture. Ton fut pour nous une révélation, si original, si différent de cette atmosphère wagnérienne qui nous avait envahi.” Vladimir Golschmann, “Golschmann Remembers Satie,” *Musical America*, Aug. 22, 1972: 11-12, especially 11.

¹⁴² Chant melodies are narrow in range and mostly feature motion by steps. First trained by a local organist, Satie studied and retained a life-long interest in medieval chant and organum.

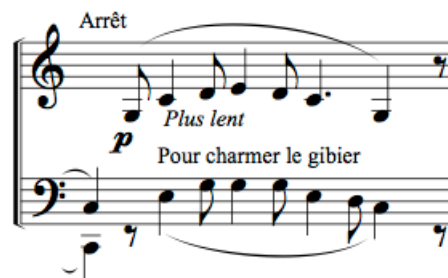
¹⁴³ *Trois morceaux en forme de poire* (1903) was Satie’s response to Debussy’s criticism that his works lacked musical form. Robert Orledge, “Rethinking the Relationship between Words and Music for the Twentieth Century: The Strange Case of Erik Satie,” in *Words and Music*, ed. John Williamson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005): 161-189, especially 172.

were designed with greater popular appeal in mind (and in the case of *La Boîte*, for an audience young and old). In 1913, Satie and Debussy both used melodies from Gounod's *Faust* ("Gloire immortelle de nos aïeux" in *La Boîte*¹⁴⁴ and "Ronde du veau d'or" in "Chez le marchand d'or" from Satie's *Vieux séquins et vieilles cuirasses* [1913]),¹⁴⁵ and they even quoted the same tune: the folk song "Il était une bergère," found in the third tableau of *La Boîte* and in Satie's "De Podophthalma" from *Embryons desséchés* (1913).

Fig. 3.2a: *La Boîte*, Tab3.1-4. Quotation of "Il était une bergère," set in minor.



Fig. 3.2b: Satie, *Embryons desséchés*, "De Podophthalma," line 7. Quotation of "Il était une bergère."



Debussy used Satie's *Fantasie-Valse* (1886) as the inspiration for the Doll's motive (see Chapter 2, Fig. 2.12a and 2.12b). In addition, the passage marking Polichinelle's exit in the second

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 2, Fig. 2.33.

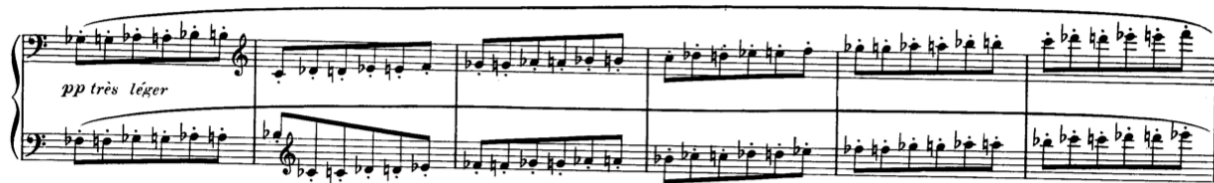
¹⁴⁵ See Belva Hare, "The Uses and Aesthetics of Musical Borrowing in Erik Satie's Humorous Piano Suites, 1913-1917" (PhD diss. University of Texas at Austin, 2005), 145-46.

tableau of *La Boîte* is almost identical to the line 6 of Satie's "Españana" (chronology suggests it was probably borrowed by Satie). "Españana" comes from the collection *Croquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois* (1913), and according to Robert Orledge, the "gros bonhomme en bois" ("big wooden fellow") most likely refers to Debussy.¹⁴⁶ Like *La Boîte*, "Españana" is dedicated to Chouchou.

Fig. 3.3a: Satie, *Croquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois*, "Españana," line 7.



Fig. 3.3b: *La Boîte*, Tab2.216-221. A passage similar to line 7 of Satie's "Españana."



Another example of cross-fertilization from this period is the use of children's song "Nous n'irons plus au bois." The tune appears in Satie's "Regrets des enfermés" from *Chapitres tournés en tous sens* (1913), and was used by Debussy in four pieces: the song "La Belle au bois dormant" (1890), the third piece from the piano suite *Images oubliées* (1894), "Jardins sous la pluie" from *Estampes* (1903), and "Ronde de printemps" (1909) from orchestral *Images*. "Regrets des enfermés" contains passages similar to Debussy's "Nuages" (from *Nocturnes*

¹⁴⁶ Robert Orledge, "Debussy, Satie and the summer of 1913," *Cahiers Debussy* 26 (2002): 31-45, esp. 34-35.

(1899)) and piano suite *Pour le piano* (1901). Satie also paid homage to Debussy in his “Le bain en mer” from *Sports et divertissements* (1914) where he referenced Debussy’s *Reverie* (1890).¹⁴⁷

Fig. 3.4: Satie, *Chapitres tournés en tous sens*, “Regrets des enfermés,” line 6. Quotation of “Nous n’irons plus au bois.”



¹⁴⁷ For additional examples of mutual influence, see Robert Orledge, “Debussy, Satie and the summer of 1913,” *Cahiers Debussy* 26 (2002): 31-45.

CHAPTER 4 – *Staging La Boîte: Reception and Performance History*

The Early Years

Debussy described *La Boîte* as a pantomime, a term used in nineteenth-century France to refer to entertainment without spoken dialogue.¹⁴⁸ He originally envisioned a performance with marionettes, writing to Durand that, “only marionettes would be able to convey the meaning of the text and the expression of the music.”¹⁴⁹ Hellé himself preferred a version danced by children, something to which Debussy agreed when writing to Durand on May 19, 1914.¹⁵⁰ Debussy insisted, however, that instead of the traditional ballet steps, only “natural movements”¹⁵¹ be used, thus avoiding any “pose” and “useless acrobatics.”¹⁵² Hellé had a different vision, and in an interview with Maurice Foulon in July 1914, he described his own views of *La Boîte* as follows:

It is necessary that my interpreters – in whose intelligence I otherwise have full confidence – abandon entirely the character in which they dance traditional ballets, to which our work [*La Boîte*] has no relation... This is essentially a rhythmic thing – but in a sense different from that of the ordinary ballet figures. It is necessary that the movements and gestures be borrowed [...] from that jerky, abrupt, and mechanical automatism, typical of puppet gestures... No flexibility, something schematic and dry, which only retains, stripped down and systematized, the essential movements of the body... Russian art of choreography, triumphant today, has already brought us this angular character of gestures that I am asking for.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Robert Orledge writes that Debussy also referred to *Khamma* as a pantomime, and further asserts that others had called the earlier *L’après-midi d’un faune* one, too. Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theater* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 178.

¹⁴⁹ “À mon avis, des marionettes auront, seules, l’intelligence du texte et l’expression de la musique.” Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1678.

¹⁵⁰ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1812.

¹⁵¹ “[I]l n’y a pas besoin d’un maître de ballet, puisque, le plus souvent, ce sont des mouvements et non les Pas de ballets habituels.” Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1812.

¹⁵² “[J]’ai essayé d’être clair, et même ‘amusant’, sans pose, et sans inutiles acrobaties.” Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1662.

¹⁵³ “Il faudrait que mes interprètes – en l’intelligence dequels j’ai d’ailleurs pleine confiance – abandonnent entièrement le caractère dans lequel ils dansent les habituels ballets avec lesquels

Hellé had also left a *mise-en-scene*, which was published by Durand in 1913 (Appendix A). In it, he details the stage set up, but makes no mention as to whether the characters were to be dancers, children or puppets.¹⁵⁴

According to an announcement in the press¹⁵⁵, the first performance of *La Boîte* was initially planned for the Jacques Rouché's Théâtre des Arts, where Hellé had in 1912 created the scenery for *1912*, a Gignoux & Mueller revue.¹⁵⁶ In 1914, however, Pierre-Barthélemy Gheusi,¹⁵⁷ at that time director of the Opéra-Comique, requested that *La Boîte* be performed in that theater. Although Debussy at first objected to having such an intimate entertainment presented in a grand hall,¹⁵⁸ he did eventually accept the proposition. In a letter to Durand, dated May 19, 1914, Debussy put his acceptance in writing, requesting that there be one theater director and that the scenery and costumes be done by Hellé. It is possible that Hellé suggested to

notre oeuvre n'a aucun rapport... Il s'agit pourtant d'une chose essentiellement rythmique – mais en un sens différent de ce que sont ordinairement les figures de ballet. Il faudrait que leurs gestes fussent empreints d'un bout à l'autre, de cet automatisme saccade et mécanique qu'ont les gestes des pantins. Pas de souplesse, quelque chose de schématique et de sec qui garde seulement, dépouillés et systematizes, les mouvements essentiels du corps... L'art choréographique des Russes, aujourd'hui triomphant, nous a déjà apporté, remarquez-le, ce caractère anguleux des gestes que je demande." Maurice Foulon, "André Hellé nous parle de la *Boîte à Joujoux*," unidentified journal (July 6, 1914), *8-RO-2934 "Programmes et articles de presse sur *La Boîte à Joujoux*, musique de Claude Debussy," Bibliothèque nationale de France Research Collections (Richelieu).

¹⁵⁴ For a full translation of Hellé's *mise en scene*, see Appendix A.

¹⁵⁵ As advertised in "*La Boîte à Joujoux*, un nouveau ballet de M. Debussy," *Comœdia*, October 3, 1913. *8-RO-2934 "Programmes et articles de presse sur *La Boîte à Joujoux*, musique de Claude Debussy," Bibliothèque nationale de France Research Collections (Richelieu).

¹⁵⁶ At the beginning of the 20th century, writer Charles Mueller and artist Régis Gignoux revived the revue genre, of which their satire titled *1912* is a well-known example. Pierre Crabos, *La Forêt des Cippes: Théâtre Classique: Chronique de la scène en 1912* (Paris: Nabu Press, 2011), 133-135.

¹⁵⁷ Pierre-Barthélemy Gheusi (1865-1943) was a theater director, librettist, journalist and writer. He served as the director of the Opéra-Comique from 1914 to 1918 and 1932 to 1936.

¹⁵⁸ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1744.

Debussy that the stage of the Opéra-Comique could be reduced using a frame (a *passe-partout*), thus making it more suitable for a chamber entertainment.¹⁵⁹

These plans were put aside with the start of the World War I. A letter from March 12, 1915, however, indicates that Durand had at the time asked Debussy's permission for a possible private performance.¹⁶⁰ Although most sources still list the Théâtre Lyrique de Vaudeville production in 1919 as the world premiere of *La Boîte*, recent research by Béatrice Michielsen,¹⁶¹ Pilar Castro Kiltz¹⁶² and Simon Morrison,¹⁶³ reveals a remarkable early performance history, one that precedes the first production in France and spans several countries and two continents.

It is safe to assume that the performance mentioned in the 1915 letter referred to an event that might take place outside of Paris, as Debussy asks Durand if in fact it might not be better to wait for an eventual performance in the city.¹⁶⁴ Most likely the event in question refers to a puppet show presented on March 24, 1915, at the residence of conductor Guido Carlo Visconti in Milan, on which occasion the ballet was presented in the version for solo piano, with sets by the artist Vincenzo Constantini (1881-1957), and puppets modeled after "Peko".¹⁶⁵ The surviving

¹⁵⁹ As Hellé explained, "La largeur un peu imposante de la scène de l'Opéra-Comique sera réduite par un cadre placé à l'avant-scène: une sorte de 'passe-partout'." Maurice Foulon, "André Hellé nous parle de la *Boîte à Joujoux*," unidentified journal (July 6, 1914), *8-RO-2934 "Programmes et articles de presse sur *La Boîte à Joujoux*, musique de Claude Debussy," Bibliothèque nationale de France Research Collections (Richelieu).

¹⁶⁰ "On pourrait en effet autoriser la représentation privée de la *Boîte à Joujoux*... n'êtes-vous pas d'avis, néanmoins, qu'il serait préférable d'attendre ce qu'en donnera la réalisation éventuelle à Paris?" Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1880.

¹⁶¹ Béatrice Michielsen "La Boîte à joujoux, Russie 1917-1918," Les Amis d'André Hellé, <http://amisdhelle.blogspot.com/2011/09/la-boite-joujoux-russie-1917-1918.html>.

¹⁶² Pilar Castro Kiltz, "*La Boîte à Joujoux*: An Evolving Production History" (Senior Thesis, Princeton University, 2010).

¹⁶³ Simon Morrison, "Debussy's Toy Stories," *Journal of Musicology* 30 No.3 (Summer 2013): 424-59.

¹⁶⁴ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1880.

¹⁶⁵ It is not clear what "modellati da Peko" refers to, but Castro Kiltz suggests that Peko might be a type of a wax puppet. Castro Kiltz, 53.

watercolor program is preserved at the Performing Arts Research Collections of the New York Public Library.¹⁶⁶

The following year, in December 1916, *La Boîte* reached North America and was performed in New York's Lower East Side at the Neighborhood Playhouse, part of the Henry Street Settlement.¹⁶⁷ Simon Morrison suggests that the score likely reached New York through the French cabaret singer Yvette Guilbert (1865-1944) who might have sent it to her friends, sisters Alice and Irene Lewisohn,¹⁶⁸ directors of the Neighborhood Playhouse. This performance featured solo piano with children dancers aged 8-12. It was directed by Blanche Talmud and Irene Lewisohn, both of whom also choreographed it. A detailed scenario of this production is preserved in the New York Public Library;¹⁶⁹ it expands on Hellé's original, and includes some changes: a joyful run to the garden in lieu of the anxious scattering at the end of the first Tableau, and three curtain-closure points, the first of which differs from the original tableaux (the curtain closes after the scene with the Doll and Polichinelle in Tab2.78).

One year later, in December 1917, the first orchestral production of *La Boîte* took place in Moscow. By that time, Debussy was on his deathbed and the orchestration remained

¹⁶⁶ *MGZR "La Boîte à joujoux clippings," New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Research Collections. The program states: "This composition by Claude Debussy was performed for the first time in Italy by Guido Visconti in his house the night of 24 March 1915. For the figuration of the stage the puppets were modeled after 'Peko', the painted scenes by Vincenzo Constantini."

¹⁶⁷ Humanitarian and author, Lillian Wald (1867-1940), founded The Henry Street Settlement in 1893 as a community center to aid poor children and families. The Neighborhood Playhouse (1915-1927) was a community theater established by dancer, actor and philanthropist, Irene Lewisohn (1892-1944) and her sister, actress Alice Lewisohn (1883-1972). By 1920, it housed a professional acting company, and presented new and experimental plays.

¹⁶⁸ Irene Lewisohn (1892-1944) founded both the Neighborhood House as well as the Museum of Costume Art (now part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art).

¹⁶⁹ There are several typed copies of the scenario, some with hand-written changes. The instructions are detailed and specify movement on the stage. MGZMD 104 "Neighborhood Playhouse Scenarios, 1914-1931," New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Research Collections.

incomplete. Henri Forterre (1882-1958), a French-Russian composer working at the State Moscow Chamber Theater, took it upon himself to complete his own orchestration of *La Boîte*,¹⁷⁰ which was then presented in Moscow on December 21, 1917, under the Russian title, *Yashchik s igrushkami* (Box with Toys). Little documentation survived subsequent wars and the Russian Revolution, and thus the exact location of the first performance remains unknown. The score was procured either by Forterre,¹⁷¹ or through Forterre's boss at the Chamber Theater, Aleksandr Tairov, who travelled to Paris in 1914. Tairov's wife, dancer Alisa Koonen, played the role of the Doll at the Russian premiere. The production featured adult dancers/actors and children, and was revived in December 1918 at the Red Rooster at Kaznetskiy Most in Moscow.¹⁷² According to programs preserved at the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, additional performances by Tairov's Chamber Theatre took place at another venue, Bolshaya Nikitskaya, on January 8, 10, 12, and 14, 1919.¹⁷³ The Moscow productions were choreographed by Mikhail Mordkin (1880-1944) in a modern style featuring mime and angled gestures, in which the dancer resembled an automaton. The visual design by Boris Ferdinandov (1889-1958) attempted to blur the line between the real and imagined by having three-dimensional props (rather than thin cutouts). These were featured along with dancers who mimicked two-

¹⁷⁰ There is no evidence to indicate that this orchestration was sanctioned by Debussy or Durand.

¹⁷¹ Not much has been written about the life of Henri Forterre. Although he composed several chamber and piano works earlier in his career, he is best remembered as the composer, arranger and bookkeeper for the Kamerny Theater in Moscow where he worked from 1915 until 1920. After returning to France, he spent his life in cabaret and French cinema. It is likely that Forterre knew Debussy, as Durand had published Forterre's orchestration of Debussy's piano prelude "Danseuses de Delphes" in 1910. Additionally, an article from 1920 refers to Forterre as "a close friend of Debussy." "Debussy's 'Box of Toys': As Mimed at the Kamerny Theater, Moscow," *Christian Science Monitor* (October 16, 1920), 12.

¹⁷² Kaznetskiy Most was one of the venues utilized by Tairov's Chamber Theater, which experienced several closings and re-openings between 1917 and 1919, and relocated multiple times. Morrison, 439.

¹⁷³ Morrison, 440.

dimensional movement (as if moving on a depthless stage). In a review from April 1919, Russian Symbolist composer Mikhail Kuzmin (1872-1936) noted the effective performance by Alisa Koonen, who played the Doll, but found the choreography in conflict with Debussy's music: "This is simple, pure, naïve, poetic music, devoid of stylization and the automatic."¹⁷⁴ He described Forterre's orchestration as "coarse and monotonous... orchestrated just like Rimsky-Korsakov."¹⁷⁵

After the Moscow premiere, *La Boîte* was produced at the Schweizerisches Marionnetten-Theater in Zürich. The ten Zürich performances, with piano and puppets, took place between May and August 1918, and were authorized by Durand.¹⁷⁶ The puppets were designed by the Swiss artist, Otto Morach (1887-1973).¹⁷⁷

The next two performances took place in San Francisco on February 21 and 22, 1919.¹⁷⁸ Like the New York production, these performances featured children, most likely accompanied by piano. Several stands that appear in the surviving photo of the performance¹⁷⁹ cast some doubt as to whether an orchestra was involved, but it is unlikely that Forterre's orchestration had by then reached San Francisco.

That same year, having quit the Opéra-Comique in 1918, Pierre-Barthélemy Gheusi took *La Boîte* to Théâtre Lyrique du Vaudeville in Paris, where it received its French premiere on December 10, 1919. The production, directed by Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht, featured André

¹⁷⁴ Mikhail Kuzmin, "Yashchik s igrushkami," *Zhizn' i iskustvo* 108 (April 1, 1919): 3. Quoted in Morrison, 445.

¹⁷⁵ Kuzmin: 3. Quoted in Morrison, 445.

¹⁷⁶ Morrison, 434.

¹⁷⁷ For a photo of Morach's puppets, see Henryk Jurkovsky, *A History of European Puppetry*, Vol. 2 (Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), 53.

¹⁷⁸ Lawrence Estavan, "The French Theatre in San Francisco," San Francisco Theater Research, http://www.archive.org/stream/sanfranciscothea19389sanf/sanfranciscothea19389sanf_djvu.txt

¹⁷⁹ Castro Kiltz, 68.

Caplet's newly completed orchestration, scenery and costumes by Hellé, and choreography by Robert Quinault.¹⁸⁰ In an article for *L'Opinion*, Henry Bidou (1873-1943) wrote about the Paris premiere:

The ballet...is all virtuosity, amusement, fantasy. The décor is painted ingenuously... Charming music accompanies this little drama full of love and adventures. It is done in the spirit of "musical pictures" in which Debussy excels, and where he makes the orchestra spring forth a thousand short, colored themes which come and disappear like rockets: popular songs, classic airs, trumpet calls, dances...¹⁸¹

Composer and critic Gaston Carraud called *La Boîte* "a masterpiece," but found the production "a bit bare."¹⁸² Music critic, Charles Tenroc, disliked the presentation, calling it "childish nonsense, and describing the dance as "three leaps" followed by the exit.¹⁸³ Jean Bernier remarked on the "scenic, nimble [and] chaste" music.¹⁸⁴

Shortly after the premiere of *La Boîte*, Théâtre Lyrique went out of business. The second performance in France, then took place in June 1921, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, with Rolf de Maré's Ballets Suédois.¹⁸⁵ It is likely that Ingelbrecht, who had conducted the Paris

¹⁸⁰ Robert Quinault (1887-1973) worked as a choreographer in various venues, including Opéra-Comique, Folies-Bergère, and Broadway's Ziegfeld Follies.

¹⁸¹ "Le ballet...est tout virtuosité, amusement, fantasie. Le décor est peint avec candeur...Un musique charmant accompagne ce petit drama si rempli d'amour et d'aventures. Elle est dans l'esprit de ces "tableaux musicaux" où Debussy excelle, et ou il fait jaillir de l'orchestre mille themes courts et colorés qui partent et s'eteignent comme des fusées: chants populaires, airs classiques, sonneries de clarion, danses..." Henry Bidou, "Musique," *L'Opinion*, December 20, 1919.

¹⁸² "C'était un chef-d'œuvre...l'œuvrette paraît un peu maigre, un peu nue." Gaston Carraud, "La Semaine musicale," *Le Ménestrel* 81, no. 10 (December 19, 1919): 91.

¹⁸³ Charles Tenroc, "Théâtre-Lyrique (Vaudeville): L'Enfant prodigue – La Demoiselle élue - La Boîte à Joujoux – Le Barbiér de Séville," *Le Courrier musical* (January 1, 1920). Quoted in Morisson, 434.

¹⁸⁴ Jean Bernier, "Au Théâtre-Lyrique: L'Enfant prodigue – La Demoiselle élue - La Boîte à Joujoux de Claude Debussy," *Comœdia illustré* (January 5, 1920). Quoted in Morisson, 434.

¹⁸⁵ Rolf de Maré (1888-1964) was a Swedish art collector and the founder of both Ballets Suédois and the world's first Museum of Dance in Paris. The Ballets Suédois was the rival company of the Ballets Russes, active primarily between 1920 and 1925, and known for

premiere and shortly after found a new position conducting the Ballets Suédois, was instrumental in making *La Boîte* a part of the Ballets Suédois' repertory. The performance was choreographed by Jean Börlin¹⁸⁶ and featured costumes and sets by Hellé. Between 1921 and 1926, Ballets Suédois would perform *La Boîte* (also presented under its Swedish title, *Leksakslådan*), at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and on their European and American tour,¹⁸⁷ a total of 280 times.

Letters exchanged between choreographer Jean Börlin and Hellé in the early months of 1921¹⁸⁸ show Hellé's concern with retaining the simplicity of the original visual design for *La Boîte*, one inspired by his watercolors from the first edition of the score. Over time, however, Hellé changed his preferences, moving toward a more abstract, cubist style. He constructed new sets, which featured geometric designs marked by sharper angles and the absence of thickness.

Some critics praised Börlin-Hellé production for its "exploitation of cubist painting."¹⁸⁹ Others detested the choreography, which, like in other presentations involving adults, featured new angular, robot-like movements.¹⁹⁰ There were objections to the costumes as well, which covered the body and added heaviness. Nevertheless, many reviewers were impressed by the

presentations that fused dance, music, décor and costumes. Again I say that this last part also describes the BR. Find a way to say how BS was different. For a comparison of the aesthetics of the Ballets Russes and the Ballets Suédois, see Lynn Garafola, "Rivals for the New: Ballets Suedois and Ballets Russes," in *Paris Modern: The Swedish Ballet, 1920-1925*, edited by Nancy Van Norman Baer (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1995), 66-85.

¹⁸⁶ Jean Börlin (1893-1930) was the protégé of Michail Fokine and the principal dancer and, later, choreographer for the Ballets Suédois.

¹⁸⁷ The tour included several performances in the United Kingdom (London, Brighton, Hull, Newcastle, and Glasgow) in the fall of 1922, as well as visits to New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania (1923), resorts in France and Switzerland, Oslo, Stockholm, and smaller towns in Italy, including Turin. Morrison, 449.

¹⁸⁸ Morrison, 447.

¹⁸⁹ Morrison, 449.

¹⁹⁰ Morrison, 450.

Ballets Suédois' production, calling it "a little masterpiece."¹⁹¹ One critic noted, "it all seems so ridiculously easy...except to those who have attempted to write such music."¹⁹² After the performance in London (one of the cities on the Ballets Suédois' 1922 tour), the ballet was described as "brilliant".¹⁹³

The Ballets Suédois' productions are preserved mostly in photographs and reviews. Several excerpts from Börlin's notes¹⁹⁴ are all that remain of the choreography for *La Boîte*. The notes include the steps for Harlequin's dance and Pierrot's dance, as well as those for the Polka in the fourth Tableau. There are mentions of Mikhail Fokine (who choreographed Stravinsky's *Petrushka*) and Vaslav Nijinsky (choreographer of *L'après-midi d'un faune*), which suggest likely dance references to these, as well. Many of the scenes featured processions in pairs and the overall choreography was a combination of poses, ballets steps and pantomime. The production also featured a Russian squat dance, assigned to the Doll and the Sailor in *Ronde générale* at Tableau 1, measure 364.¹⁹⁵

In the fall of 1925, the new cubist version of *La Boîte* was produced at the Opéra-Comique in Paris with choreography by Mme Virar. A review by Arthur Honegger¹⁹⁶ sums up the general criticism and reception of the times:

Hellé's subject was a happy find, and, like all happy finds, has had deplorable consequences. Since *La Boîte à Joujoux*, there has not been one revue where one doesn't see the female dancer stiffen her arms and move them in jerky gestures, while her

¹⁹¹ Bengt Hager, *The Swedish Ballet* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1997), 120. Quoted in Castro Kiltz, 40.

¹⁹² Pitts Sanborn, "The Swedish Ballet," *Shadowland* 5, no. 4 (December 1921): 66. Quoted in Castro Kiltz, 41.

¹⁹³ Harry J. Robinson, "Facing the Footlights," *The Ballroom* (November 1922). Quoted in Castro Kiltz, 42.

¹⁹⁴ Jean Börlin's notes (*koreografiska anteckningar*) are preserved at the Stockholm Dance Museum. Morrison, 452.

¹⁹⁵ Morrison, 453. A surviving photograph confirms the insertion of the Russian squat dance.

¹⁹⁶ Arthur Honegger (1882-1955) was a Swiss composer and a member of *Les Six*.

partner, dressed as a soldier, pretends to have wooden legs. This has become a tradition, and it is a pity, as never again do we find the tender melancholy that characterizes Hellé's work. His costumes and sets are charming, full of colors and amusing details. I believe it is unnecessary to mention again the celebrated score. A. Caplet's orchestration displays unequalled grace and ingenuity. The corps de ballet of the Opéra Comique, considerably augmented, left a strong impression, as well as the choreography by Mme Virar, the new maitresse de ballet.¹⁹⁷

Additional performances

Following the initial productions, *La Boîte* continued to be staged in Europe and the United States. Presented in a variety of ways, under different regimes and for different audiences, it graced a myriad of international stages.

In February 1927, the 1916 Neighborhood House production (featuring children dancers and piano) was revived in New York.¹⁹⁸ After the Neighborhood House's closure later that year, *La Boîte* found a new home at the Henry Street Settlement, this time in a presentation by the puppeteer Dorothy Zakonick.¹⁹⁹ In December 1937, as part of the benefit for the New York Orthopedic Dispensary and Hospital, a group of women "actively interested in the children's ballet *La Boîte à Joux*," organized a performance at the Waldorf Astoria hotel.²⁰⁰ Records from the Detroit Institute of the Arts list a number of performances from 1955 by George

¹⁹⁷ "Le sujet d'Hellé était une trouvaille heureuse, puisque toutes les trouvailles heureuses ont une répercussion déplorable. Depuis *La Boîte à Joux*, il n'est pas une revue où l'on ne voie subitement la danseuse raidir les bras et les mouvoir en gestes saccadés, tandis que son partenaire, habillé en soldat, fait semblant d'avoir des jambes de bois. Cela est devenu une tradition, et c'est bien ennuyeux, car jamais nous ne retrouvons la tendresse un peu mélancolique qui se dégage de l'oeuvre de Hellé. Ses costumes et décors sont charmants, si frais de couleur et pleins de détails amusants. Je crois inutile de revenir sur la partition célèbre et admirée. L'orchestration de A. Caplet est d'une ingéniosité et d'une grâce incomparable. Le corps de ballet de l'Opéra Comique, augmenté considérablement, a fait une excellente impression ainsi que la chorégraphie de Mme Virar, nouvelle maitresse de ballet." (My translation)
Arthur Honegger, "Theatres de Musique," *Musique et Theatre* 7 (June 15, 1925).

¹⁹⁸ Castro Kiltz, 77.

¹⁹⁹ Castro Kiltz, 60.

²⁰⁰ Castro Kiltz, 79.

Latshaw's puppets²⁰¹ presented by the Detroit Puppet Theater. These productions were done with orchestral accompaniment (most certainly in Caplet's orchestration), and did not feature original characters.²⁰²

On the other side of the Atlantic, *La Boîte* was seen in a revival in Moscow in 1933. This performance featured a new jazz overture by Vadim (Vladimir) Nikolayevich Kochetov (1898-1951), a composer recognized by the Stalinist regime for incorporating USSR folklore in his works.²⁰³ The date and place for the premiere of the jazz overture are not known. Simon Morrison suggests that Kochetov's new arrangement, a burlesque-like pastiche of popular tunes featuring banjos, saxophones and xylophone, was probably intended either for a radio broadcast, or a performance at the Theater of Worker's Children, the State Central Puppet Theater, or the Moscow Choreographic School.²⁰⁴

In February 1935, the Fascist Institute of Culture and the Pro Culture of Turin, Italy, presented four puppet-and-piano performances of *La Boîte*.²⁰⁵ The Lupi brothers²⁰⁶ were responsible for the puppetry, the painter Felice Casorati (1883-1963) and his student, Paola Levi (1909-2000), for the décor. The pianist was Federico Buffaletti (1862-1936). A review called this "a worthy show" and remarked on the "pianistic gem by Claudio Debussy, all a party of colors,

²⁰¹ A New York Times obituary described George Latshaw (1923-2006) as a "dean of American puppetry." Margalit Fox, "George Latshaw, 83 dies; Made Puppetry into an Art," *The New York Times* (December 24, 2006), http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/24/arts/24latshaw.html?_r=0, Accessed April 28, 2014.

²⁰² Castro Kiltz, 62.

²⁰³ Morrison, 455.

²⁰⁴ Morrison, 455.

²⁰⁵ Castro Kiltz, 60.

²⁰⁶ In the world of puppetry, the Lupi family is recognized as one of the oldest and most prominent, going back to the middle of 18th century. In the first decades of the 19th century the Lupi brothers were active primarily in the S. Martino Theatre in Turin, one of the first permanent marionette theaters. "Characters/Puppeteers," Castello dei Burattini, last modified in 2006, http://www.castellodeiburattini.it/cgi-bin/allegati/pages/ine5HTs22B_24.pdf.

rhythm and dream.”²⁰⁷ In addition to the quality of its music, the ballet’s focus on national pride, and its story of peasants’ struggle for a better and simple life, one purged of decadence, in which men and women have clearly assigned roles (as they do in most fairy tales), made *La Boîte* acceptable to the regimes of both Fascist Italy and Communist Russia.

In early 1942, the Brzdac (Clever Child) group, based in Krakow, presented a puppet-version of *La Boîte* in this occupied city, most likely with piano accompaniment.²⁰⁸ *La Boîte* was seen again in the Netherlands during the celebrations of the Debussy centennial in 1962, with Hans Henkemans²⁰⁹ at the piano.²¹⁰ In August 1968, the South Bank Festival in London presented what would be the first shadow puppet performance of the ballet, featuring “fragile puppets in glowing colors.”²¹¹

La Boîte today

La Boîte continues to be brought to life both on the theatrical stage and in the concert hall. In concert, it is often presented as part of programming for children, paired with more light-hearted repertoire, or in the context of all-Debussy programs.²¹² Presentations including a narrator have also been common. A recent such performance took place in October 2013 in

²⁰⁷ “*La Boîte à Joujoux* di Debussy all’Istituto Fascista e all Pro Cultura di Torino,” *Il regime fascista* (February 13, 1935). Quoted in Castro Kiltz, 60.

²⁰⁸ Henryk Jurkovsky, *A History of European Puppetry*, Vol. 2 (Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), 176.

²⁰⁹ Hans Henkemans (1913-1995) was a Dutch pianist and composer, whose compositional style was influenced by Debussy and Ravel.

²¹⁰ Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theater* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 182.

²¹¹ Stephen Walsh, “South Bank Festival,” *The Observer* (August 18, 1969). Quoted in Castro Kiltz, 65.

²¹² Recent orchestral performances include concerts at the Round Top Festival in Texas in July 2010, and at the Accademia Musicale Chigiana (Siena, Italy) in July 2012. “Debussy: *La Boîte à Joujoux*, Past Concerts,” Instant Encore, <http://www.instantencore.com/work/concerts.aspx?work=5022785&PastConcerts=y>.

Chicago's *PianoForte* Studios, narrated by Ken Bleacher and accompanied by pianist Sergei Kvitko.²¹³ In 1998, musicologist Meirion Bowen created a new arrangement for narrator and a smaller chamber orchestra of fifteen players.²¹⁴ This arrangement was written as a response to Caplet's orchestration, which in Bowen's opinion, "militates against the intimate character of the piece and whose choice of instrumental solos is often inept." The narration -- which exists in two versions, one for an adult audience, one for children -- expands on the original, which was thought by Bowen to be in need of elaboration in order to be convincing. This version of *La Boîte* was first performed in 1998 at London's Wigmore Hall by the Nash Ensemble, with Diego Masson conducting and François le Roux narrating.²¹⁵

In recent years there have been several staged ballet and puppet productions, as well as new and unusual adaptations. In January 2009, the ensemble *Le Piano Ambulant*,²¹⁶ in cooperation with the festival Les nuits d'été (Savoie, France), presented a clever and inventive performance of *La Boîte* at the Cité de la musique in Paris, featuring four musicians and a cameraman/commentator. The action took place in a curiosity cabinet, which was manipulated,

²¹³ "Debussy: *La Boîte à Joujoux*: Past Concerts," Instant Encore,

<http://www.instantencore.com/work/concerts.aspx?work=5022785&PastConcerts=y>.

²¹⁴ Bowen's arrangement is written for flute, oboe, 2 clarinets, bassoon, horn, trumpet, harp, percussion (1 player on side drum, bass drum, cymbals, military drum, castanets, tambourine, glockenspiel, rattle, crotale, triangle, tam-tam), 2 violins, viola, cello and double bass. "Debussy: *La Boîte à Joujoux* (1913) New Version by Meirion Bowen (Completed in 1998)," Meirion Bowen, last modified in 1998, <http://www.meirion-bowen.com/mbdebussyeng.htm>.

²¹⁵ Bowen's new version is published by and recorded on the Tritó label (with narration in Catalan). Claude Debussy, *La Boîte à Joujoux (for children)*, Orquestra de Cadaques, conducted by Philippe Entremont, M. Casas, narrator, Tritó TD0012, 2009, compact disc.

²¹⁶ In this performance, the four members of *Le Piano Ambulant* played the flute, violin, cello, piano, glass paper, Indian organ (harmonium), kazoo, melodica (key flute), rattle (*crécelle*), Khartal cymbal, and carillon. For more information about the ensemble, see www.lepianoambulant.com.

filmed and projected live during the performance.²¹⁷ In 2010, *La Boîte* was performed at the Berlind Theater in Princeton, New Jersey. It featured Princeton University student dancers, with Caplet's orchestration and Vadim Kochetov's jazz overture, as first heard in Moscow in 1933.²¹⁸ A ballet performance was also staged at the Place des Arts in Montréal in February 2012, with Montréal Symphony (which had previously recorded the work) and the École de Ballet Supérieur du Québec, conducted by Nathan Brock.²¹⁹ The Salzburg Marionette Theater brought *La Boîte* to New York's Carnegie Hall in May 2012. In this production large and colorful puppets were maneuvered on stage by puppeteers dressed in black. Renowned pianist András Schiff accompanied. This program, which had as its theme childhood music, also included Debussy's *Children's Corner* suite and Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, and was presented nationally. The puppets were maneuvered by four members of the theater dressed in black, and Schiff also took a non-musical role: he was 'wound' like a toy and awakened by one of the puppeteers.²²⁰ Marionette productions took place in Siena and Milan, in July 2012 and April 2013,²²¹ respectively, realized by Carlo Colla & Figli Marionette Company, with Enrico Pace at the piano. These Italian productions paid homage to the work's premiere and the first ever

²¹⁷ "La Boîte à joujoux: Fantasia lumineuse," Cité de la Musique, http://content.citedelamusique.fr/pdf/note_programme/np_5694.pdf.

²¹⁸ For a detailed description of this performance see: Pilar Castro Kiltz, "*La Boîte à Joujoux*: An Evolving Production History" (Senior Thesis, Princeton University, 2010): 81-88.

²¹⁹ "Debussy: *La Boîte à Joujoux*, Past Concerts," Instant Encore, <http://www.instantencore.com/work/concerts.aspx?work=5022785&PastConcerts=y>.

²²⁰ Zachary Woolfe, "Giggles in the Concert Hall, Inspired by a Puppet Ballet," *The New York Times* (May 7, 2012): C4.

²²¹ A video recording of the performance is available online. "*La Boîte à Joujoux* – Compagnia Marionettistica Carlo Colla & Figli," video clip, Accessed April 30, 2014, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PwNDfVGvOk>.

marionette production, which took place in Milan in 1915.²²² Several performances in Miami at the Museum of Contemporary Art, in 2004 and 2012, were given by puppeteer Pablo Cano and pianist Karen Schwartz.²²³

In November 1913, in celebration of the work's centennial, *La Boîte* was presented at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in a shadow-play and piano version, featuring shadow puppeteers Caroline and Suzanne Borderies and pianist Mirna Lekić, the author of this dissertation.²²⁴ This was the first performance of the work in this form in the United States.

²²² "Ommagio a Debussy," Marionettecolla, <http://www.yasni.info/ext.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.marionettecolla.org%2Fit%2Fshow%2Fviewspettacoli%2F56&name=Jou+Joux&showads=1&lc=en-us&lg=en&rg=us&rip=us>.

²²³ For images from the production: "Pablo Cano: The Toy-box revival," Mocanomi, <https://mocanomi.org/2012/11/pablo-cano-the-toy-box-2>. Accessed on April 29, 2014.

²²⁴ Nathalie Moga, "*La Boîte à Joux* de Debussy présentée en ombres chinoises à New York," *France-Amérique* (November 18, 2013). http://www.france-amerique.com/articles/2013/11/18/la_bo_te_a_joux_de_debussy_presentee_en_ombres_chinoises_a_la_city_university_de_new_york.html, Accessed April 29, 2014.

Mirna Lekić, piano

Caroline and Suzanne Borderies, shadow puppeteers

Claude Debussy's *La Boîte à Joujoux*



With works by Ali-Zadeh, Haydn, Liszt and Villa-Lobos.

NOVEMBER 25, 2013. 7:30 PM
ELEBASH RECITAL HALL – THE GRADUATE CENTER
365 FIFTH AVENUE, NYC

SPONSORED BY THE CUNY DOCTORAL STUDENTS' COUNCIL

Fig. 4.1 – Poster for the 2013 New York performance of *La Boîte à joujoux*.

Epilogue

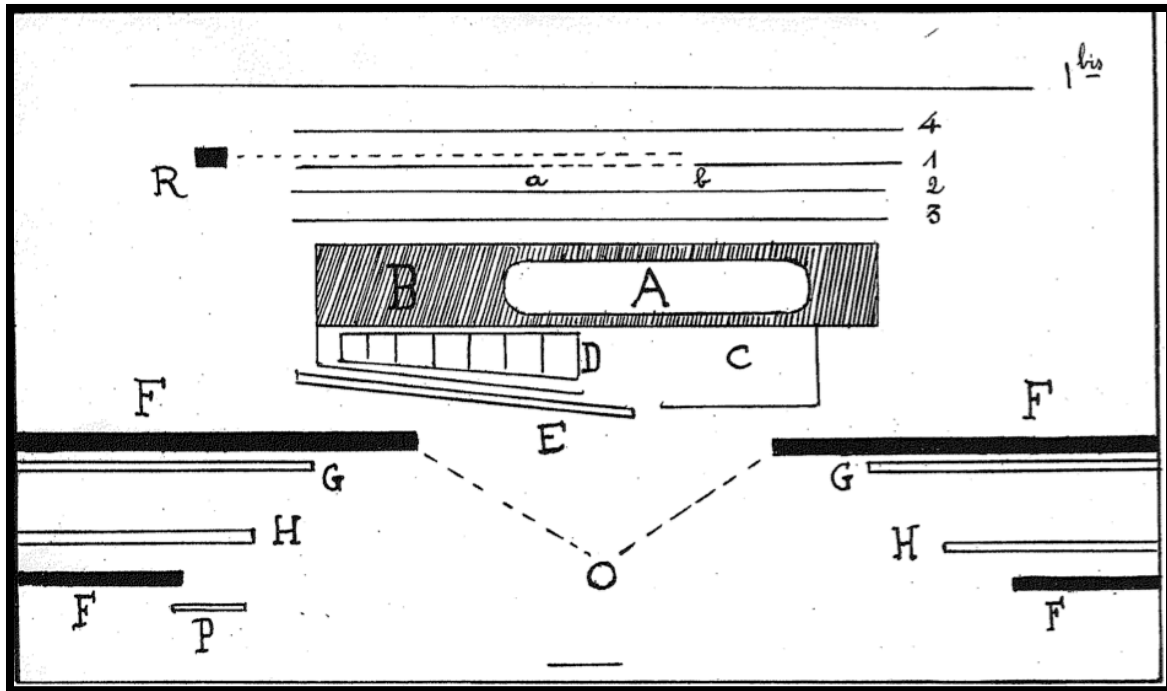
La Boîte à joujoux is a mature work that successfully distills a complexity of inspiration into direct and elegant writing. With this document, I wished to show *La Boîte* as a work worthy of a closer examination for what it tells us about Debussy's influences and sources, as well as about his philosophical and artistic beliefs; for the fascinating ways these stimuli are translated into a characteristically Debussyian language; for its importance as a document of its times; and, lastly, and perhaps most importantly, for its inherent beauty.

While I have tried to examine the full breadth of this piece, I hope that far from exhausting the subject, this document will also open new venues of exploration. Further research could take any number of directions, including in-depth theoretical studies of the individual techniques or tableaux that shed light on Debussy's compositional approach, or closer examination of the choreographies and productions, especially those not studied here. Being that this monograph sheds light on Debussy's artistic interests in the final years of his life, especially in works for theater, and suggests a path he might have taken had he lived, I would hope that future studies would consider his other compositions in this light.

It was also my intent to spur additional performances of *La Boîte*, both in concert, in its piano and orchestral versions or in new arrangements, and as a ballet, in innovative productions, including 'ballets without dancers' and those accompanied by visual media. I would hope that this monograph demonstrated that *La Boîte* belongs not only to childhood-themed programs, but could legitimately find its place within the standard concert and ballet repertoires, and be presented in conjunction and dialogue with other significant works.

Appendix A: Scenario and Stage set-up by André Hellé

Translation of *La Boîte à Joujoux: Argument et Mise en Scene de André Hellé*
(Paris: Durand, 1913).



La Boîte à joujoux

A. Box whose lid can be raised with a thread or kept at an angle using buttresses during the first and fifth *tableau*.

B. Platform of approximately 0.80 m in height, with a landing (C) and a stairway (D). The stairway is hidden by a frame (E), representing a pile of toys. The lower part of the platform is painted so as to represent the stairway of which the landing (C) would be the first step. Optionally, a bench on which the soldiers can sit could be placed under the platform. (The use of this platform will allow the audience to clearly see what is happening in and around the box, so that the characters on the box will not be hidden by those on the stage.)

F. Curtains and the proscenium, uniform in tone or decorated (the opening will be coordinated with the discoveries).

G and H. Frames representing toys.

R. Cart on which the head of the agent will be placed... the cart's course stops in the middle of the stage, in front of windows a-b.

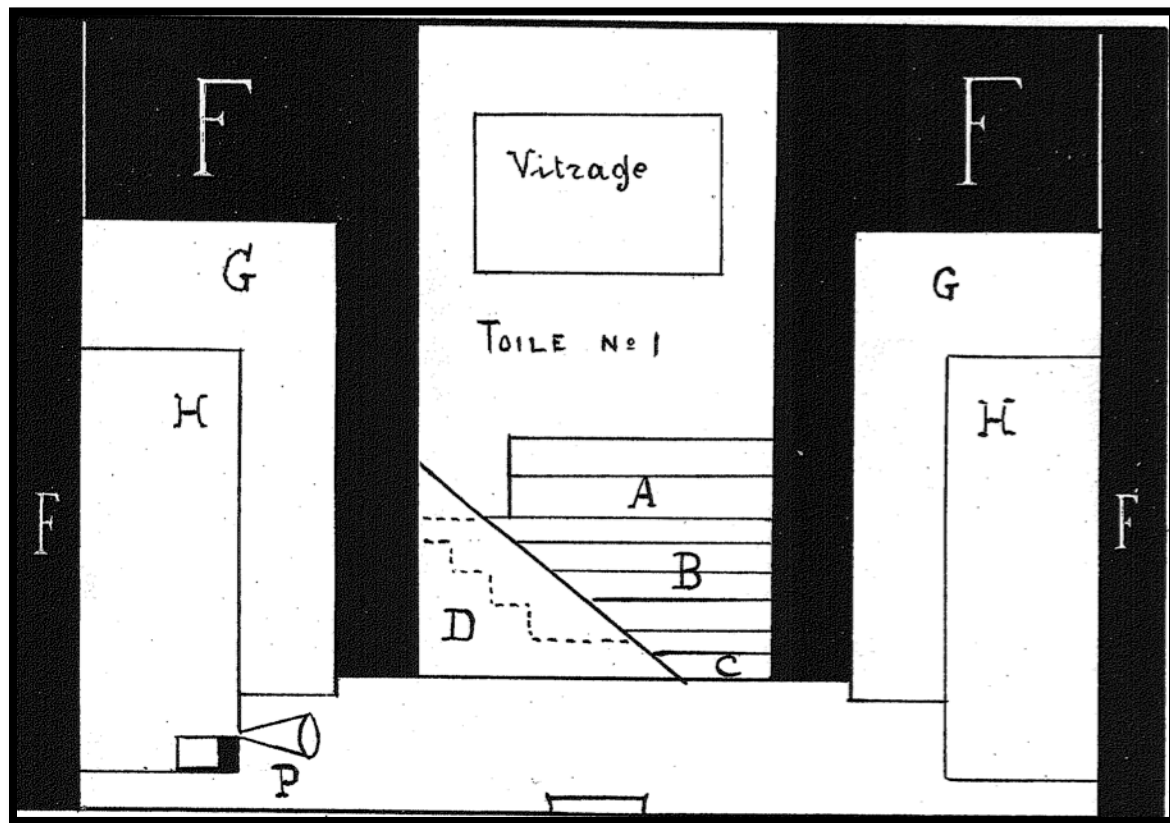
1. First tableau setup — The Toy Store. Windows 'a-b'
2. Second tableau setup — The Battle
3. Third tableau setup — The Sheep Pen For Sale
4. Fourth tableau setup — After Fortune Is Made

The background frame of the first tableau is opened in the middle. Through this opening can be seen frame 1 representing a starry sky, a lamppost, and roofs of the houses.

P. Phonograph

The director will keep in mind that:

1. It is indispensable that the ballet not be interrupted by the lowering and raising of the curtain and that the setup be changed using only the few seconds of darkness between each tableau.
2. The first tableau must return at the end of the Act as it was at the beginning.



First Tableau: The Toy Store

Before the curtain is raised, the characters are placed on stage as demanded by the action.

One of the dolls touches the switch (full light) and the phonograph. The toys start moving. The elephant and the tiger (outlines mounted on carts) come from backstage right and are pulled towards backstage left, or vice-versa.

Apparition of the soldiers: Regardless of whether the lid of the box is raised using an invisible thread, or kept ajar for the entire tableau using buttresses, the soldiers must be able to hide and appear only at the precise moments indicated in the score.

The agent's head appears behind the window: this accessory should be mounted on a pole, itself placed on a cart that will be slowly pushed until the head arrives in the center of the window, where it will remain until the end of the tableau.

The results obtained by asking a technician to make the head appear by raising it manually have never been successful.

In this first tableau, as in the following ones, the rose should be large enough so as not to go unnoticed.

Entire tableau [takes place] following the script.

Night.

Second Tableau. The Battlefield

During intervening darkness, frame no. 2 replaces frame no. 1.

Frame no. 2 will use a transparent film allowing the moon to appear at the end of the tableau, which ends in blue color.

Polichinelle and the Doll are alone on stage when the light returns at the beginning of the tableau.

Entry of the soldiers, the polichinelles, and the battle [follow], according to the script.

During the battle, the gunners can appear on the platform, which they will leave after the fight.

Remainder of the tableau according to the script.

Night.

Third Tableau. The Sheep Pen For Sale

Setup is changed during the intervening darkness. It represents a desolate plain with a run-down hovel marked with a sign: Sheep Pen For Sale – Second Hand.

Immediately following the “Air de vieille,” the shepherd appears with his sheep. After the scene of the sheep sale, he leaves on the opposite side of the stage. The geese keeper then enters with her flock, and leaves similarly after having sold two geese to the Soldier.

The cart should be devised so that it can fit, on a platform placed behind the main cutout, the cutout of one or two sheep, and one or two geese. Thus, the Soldier and the Doll can take them from the platform and keep them while the main cutouts return backstage.

Entire tableau following the script.

Night.

Fourth Tableau. After Fortune Is Made

Setup is changed during the intervening darkness.

In order to explain this tableau, it is necessary that the words “Fifty Years Later” be clearly visible to the entire audience.

The words could appear on a transparent sign, either on a frame that will be placed during the scene and lit up afterwards, or on the front of the box, where it will appear as soon as the inside of the box is lit. This would happen naturally during the setup change, when the stage is still in darkness.

This tableau will be animated with a lot of figuration. It should express a lot of animation and joy. The effect of a feast, of a “Golden Wedding,” that it should produce, can be accentuated by the use of fireworks, Chinese lanterns, etc.

When the lights return, the Doll, the Soldier, and Polichinelle are on the platform, either standing in front of, or sitting on the box. They appear older. The first two are dressed in old-fashioned

clothes, the latter with the same costume as in the previous tableaux, to which are added a small saber and a black shoulder-belt with a yellow plaque inscribed with the words “The Law.”

In the brand new little house represented on the background frame, the audience should recognize the run-down hovel from the previous tableau. The house is surrounded by buildings (living quarters, stables, barn), constituting an imposing ensemble, of which the rebuilt hovel represents the center.

The small children (this group requires between eight to twelve characters) bring flowers and dance when, suddenly, the light goes off.

Return to the first tableau – The toy store

During the setup change, all the characters from the first tableau come back to their initial place.

The light comes back and gradually increases until the end of the act.

When indicated in the score, the lid of the toy box is raised, and, in the opening, the soldier raises his head and arm and does a joyful military salute.

If the box’s lid is kept open with buttresses (that were put back in place during the setup change) the small soldier, kneeling in the box with his upper body outside, and seemingly asleep when the tableau begins, appears to wake up when indicated in the score. He looks at the toy store, smiles and salutes as indicated above.

CURTAIN

Appendix B: Selected piano recordings

Debussy, Claude. *Complete Solo Piano Music. Vol. 5*, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet (piano). Chandos 10743, 2009, compact disc.

Debussy, Claude. *Debussy for Children*. Boris Berman (piano). Ottavo 59970. 2001, compact disc.

Debussy, Claude. *Piano Music, Vol. 2*. Michael Korstick (piano). Hanssler, HAEN93300. 2013, compact disc.

Debussy, Claude. *Piano Music Vol. 3*. Noriko Ogawa (piano). BIS CD 1355. 2005, compact disc.

Debussy, Claude. *Piano Music Vol. 2*. Francois-Joel Thiollier (piano). Naxos 8553291.1996, compact disc.

Debussy, Claude. *Complete Works for Piano*. Aldo Ciccolini (piano). EMI 5738132. 2002, compact disc.

Debussy, Claude. *Complete Piano Music*. Martin Jones (piano). Nimbus NI1773. 1997, compact disc.

Debussy, Claude. *Solo Piano Music, Vol. 2* Peter Frankl (piano). VOX. 5063. 2007, compact disc.

Debussy, Claude. *La Boîte à joujoux / Modest Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition*. Jose-Eduardo Martins (piano). Rode Pomp RP021. 1994, compact disc.

Piano recordings featuring a narrator:

Debussy, Claude. *La Boîte à joujoux/J.S Bach: Concerto in D Minor*. Yvonne Lefébure (piano), Pierre Bertin (narrator). Solstice SOCD258. 2010 (recorded live 1957), compact disc.

Debussy, Claude. *La Boîte à joujoux/ Poulenc: L’histoire de Babar*. Stéphane Lemelin (piano), Kim Yaroshevska (narrator). ATMA ACD22161. 2007, compact disc.

Debussy, Claude. *The Toy Box/Francis Poulenc: The Story of Babar*. Sergei Kvitko (piano), Ken Beachler (narrator). Blue Griffin BGR219. 2011, compact disc.

Appendix C: Selected orchestral recordings

1. Debussy, Claude. *Die Spielzeugschachtel*. Kölner Rundfunkorchester. Conducted by Alfred Walter. Brigitte Fassbaender and Dirk Schortmeier, narrators. Capriccio C10827. 2008, compact disc.
2. Debussy, Claude. *Images, Prélude à l'après midi d'un faune, La Boîte à joujoux*. Orchestre du Théâtre National de l'Opéra de Paris & Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. Conducted by Ernest Ansermet and Manuel Rosenthal. Praga Digitals DSD350093. 2013, compact disc.
3. Debussy, Claude. *Orchestral Works, Vol. 5*. Orchestre National du Lyon. Conducted by Jun Märkl. Naxos 8572568. 2011, compact disc.
4. Debussy, Claude. *Dramatic Works & Ballet Music*. Union Chorale de La Tour-de-Peilz and Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. Conducted by Ernest Ansermet. Australian Eloquence ELQ4800130. 2009, compact disc.
5. Debussy, Claude. *La Boîte à joujoux* and *Printemps*. Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. Conducted by Ernest Ansermet. Naxos 981194. 2013, compact disc.
6. Debussy, Claude. *La Mer, Nocturnes, etc.* Rundfunk-Sinfonie-Orchester Leipzig. Conducted by Max Pommer. Capriccio C51132. 2003, compact disc.
7. *Le Ballet Francais: Adam, Chopin, Debussy, Delibes, Massenet*. Academy of St Martin in the Fields & Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin. Conducted by Heinz Fricke and Sir Neville Marriner. Phoenix Edition 416PHOENIX. 2009, compact disc.
8. Cluytens, André. *Noble Maître de Musique (Beethoven, Bizet, Debussy, Fauré, Franck Mozart, D'Indy, Ravel)*. Orchestre National de Radiodiffusion Française. Conducted by André Cluytens. Fab Four 233113. 2011, compact disc.
9. Cluytens, André. *A French Collection*. Orchestre National de Radiodiffusion Française and Conservatoire Concerts Society Orchestra. Conducted by André Cluytens. Testament SBT7247. 2003, compact disc.
9. Debussy, Claude. *Orchestral Works*. Luxembourg Radio Orchestra. Conducted by Louis de Froment. Documents 231566. 2008, compact disc.
10. Debussy, Claude. *Complete Works for Orchestra*. Ulster Orchestra. Conducted by Yan Pascal Tortelier. Chandos CHAN10144X. 2003, compact disc.
11. Debussy, Claude. *Orchestral Works*. Montréal Symphony Orchestra and Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. Conducted by Charles Dutoit and Ernest Ansermet. Decca E4753132. 2004, compact disc.

12. Debussy, Claude. *Orchestral Works*. Orchestre National de L'ORTF. Conducted by Jean Martinon. Brilliant Classics 92765. 2005, compact disc.
13. Debussy, Claude. *La Mer, La Boîte à joujoux, Prélude à l'après midi d'un faune*. London Symphony Orchestra. Conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas. Legacy/Sony Classical SK48231. 2002, compact disc.
14. Debussy, Claude. *The Debussy Edition*. Deutsche Grammophon 001676372. 2012, 18 compact discs.
15. Debussy, Claude and Colin Matthews. *La Mer and Three Orchestrated Pieces*. Berlin Philharmonic. Conducted by Simon Rattle. EMI Classics 58045. 2005, compact disc.
16. Debussy, Claude and Paul Dukas. *La Boîte à joujoux and Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Nouvel Orchestre Philharmonique and Basler Sinfonie Orchester. Conducted by Armin Jordan. Erato 45819. 1992, compact disc.

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