

Claude DEBUSSY

CENTENARY EDITION 2018

*Claude Debussy*

ÉTUDES BOOK II

*dédiées à la mémoire de  
Frédéric Chopin*

VII POUR LES DEGRÉS

CHROMATIQUES



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## VII *pour les degrés chromatiques*

— for chromatic intervals — is evidently a study in this close-woven scale and displays a virtuosity in both composition and pianism. The LH is responsible for the unique repeated short melody and there is plenty of playful and creepy apian accompaniment.

Three years before his death in 1918, and in spite of failing health and the anguish of World War I, these 12 studies in two books were the last significant piano pieces to be written by Debussy — intense, ingenious and unorthodox. Edward Lockspeiser observed that the Études are “perhaps the greatest of his piano works...representing a summary of the composer’s entire pianistic creation.”

At the same time he was working on a new edition of the Chopin studies, and these are dedicated appropriately to the memory of Chopin, being similar in scope — challenging technical problems skilfully hidden in pieces of harmonic innovation and sensual charm. In a letter to his editor, he added that these

works will ultimately prepare pianists and help them realise that the wealth of piano music demands formidable hands.

Debussy revolutionised the meaning of pianistic sound and how we listen to music, defining our perception of his surreal world.

He was also a sensitive pianist, enriching the

tradition of Chopin and advancing the integral soul of the sustaining pedal; he apparently played with penetrating softness and a flexible, caressing depth of touch, creating extraordinary expressive power.

Here is a witty extract from Debussy’s own introduction to his fingering-free etudes:

*“Absence of fingering is an excellent exercise, negating musicians’ perverse desire to*

*completely dismiss the composer’s (and editor’s), and thereby vindicating words of eternal wisdom: ‘If you want something done well, do it yourself’. Let us devise our own fingering!”*

In this edition just three studies have been initially selected as being possibly the most approachable.

# Pour les degrés chromatiques

Scherzando, animato assai

First system of musical notation. It consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The time signature is 4/4. The piece begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The right hand features a chromatic scale starting on G4, moving up and then down, with fingerings 1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1. The left hand plays a simple accompaniment. Dynamics include *m.s.* (mezzo-soprano) and *m.d.* (mezzo-forte).

Second system of musical notation, continuing the piece. It maintains the 4/4 time signature and *pp* dynamic. The right hand continues the chromatic scale with fingerings 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1. The left hand accompaniment remains consistent.

Third system of musical notation. The right hand continues the chromatic scale with fingerings 1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1. The left hand accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern.

Fourth system of musical notation. The right hand continues the chromatic scale with fingerings 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4. The left hand accompaniment continues. The dynamic changes to *f* (forte).

Fifth system of musical notation. The right hand continues the chromatic scale with fingerings 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4. The left hand accompaniment continues. The dynamic remains *f*.

*sempre leggerissimo*

6 *pp*  
dolce espressivo (un peu en dehors)

7

8 *pp*

9 *pp*

Musical score for measures 10-11. The upper staff features a complex melodic line with triplets and slurs, including fingering numbers 5, 3, 3, 4, 3, 2, 4. The lower staff provides harmonic support with chords and slurs.

Musical score for measures 11-12. Measure 11 is marked *rinforzando*. The upper staff continues the melodic line with slurs and fingering numbers 5, 3, 5, 4, 3. The lower staff features sustained chords and slurs.

Musical score for measures 12-13. Measure 12 is marked *p*. The upper staff has a melodic line with slurs and fingering numbers 1, 3, 4, 5, 3, 1, 2, 1. The lower staff has a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and fingering numbers 5, 1.

Musical score for measure 13. The upper staff is marked *pp subito* and contains a dense, repetitive melodic pattern. The lower staff has a sustained chord with a slur.

Musical score for measures 14-15. The right hand features a continuous eighth-note pattern. The left hand has a bass line with chords and a fermata over measures 14 and 15. A dynamic marking of *pp* is present at the end of measure 15.

Musical score for measures 16-17. The right hand continues with eighth-note patterns. The left hand has a bass line with chords and a fermata over measures 16 and 17. A dynamic marking of *pp* is present at the end of measure 17.

Musical score for measures 18-19. The right hand continues with eighth-note patterns. The left hand has a bass line with chords and a fermata over measures 18 and 19. A dynamic marking of *pp* is present at the end of measure 19.

Musical score for measures 20-21. The right hand continues with eighth-note patterns. The left hand has a bass line with chords and a fermata over measures 20 and 21. A dynamic marking of *pp* is present at the end of measure 21.

19  $4/4$  *mf* *p* *dolce, un poco marcato*

20 *p*

21 *p* *p*

22 *p* *più p*

*sempre leggerissimo*

23 *pp*

24

25 *p un poco più sonore*

26 *poco rinforzato*

*pp sempre leggerissimo*

27

28

29

30

27 *p*

28

This system contains measures 27 and 28. Measure 27 features a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with chromatic movement, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving bass lines.

28 *p* *p*

29

This system contains measures 28 and 29. Measure 28 continues with piano (*p*) dynamics and includes complex fingering such as triplets and quintuplets. Measure 29 also maintains the piano (*p*) dynamic and features similar complex rhythmic patterns.

29 *p* *p*

30

This system contains measures 29 and 30. Measure 29 continues with piano (*p*) dynamics and complex fingering. Measure 30 begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes the instruction *acuto* (accents).

30 *f* *acuto* *f* *sfz* *f* *sfz* *f* *Sva*

31

This system contains measures 30 and 31. Measure 30 features a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes the instruction *acuto* (accents). Measure 31 continues with a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes *sfz* (sforzando) markings. The system concludes with a *Sva* (Sustained) marking and a fermata.



Measures 35-36. The piece is in piano (*p*). The right hand features a complex melodic line with many beamed eighth notes and slurs. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with chords and single notes. Measure 35 starts with a piano dynamic marking. The key signature has two flats.

Measures 36-37. The piano dynamic (*p*) continues. The right hand continues with intricate melodic patterns. The left hand has some rests and then re-enters with chords. Measure 36 includes a fermata over a chord. Measure 37 has a piano (*pp*) dynamic marking. The key signature remains two flats.

Measures 37-38. The piano (*pp*) dynamic is maintained. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and fingerings (1, 2, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4). The left hand has a bass line with slurs and fingerings (1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4). Measure 37 includes a fermata. The key signature has two flats.

Measures 38-39. The piano (*pp*) dynamic continues. The right hand features a melodic line with slurs and fingerings (1, 2, 5, 1, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4). The left hand has a bass line with slurs and fingerings (1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4). Measure 38 includes a fermata. The key signature has two flats.

39

40

*lontain*

*pp*

41

2

43 *più pp*

44

*smorzando*

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## Appendix

### Comments, afterthoughts & vocabulary

As an interpreter-performer I often have to ask myself why a composer has chosen a particular time or key signature and sometimes the answer is not at all obvious. Now that we have the tools with which to “re-arrange” the music otherwise, my position as an editor becomes much more interesting. When these pieces were first written I like to think that the composer did not necessarily consider all the options, (at the time they had so much else to think about) and I doubt whether a colleague, editor or proofreader would have had the temerity to question a composer’s wishes. However, in retrospect I like to think that these now aged composers are approvingly viewing my modifications from above and giving the nod to my humble efforts.

In fact in this piece, I have altered very little apart from the usual suggestions for swapping hands and a dramatic decision to publish it in 4/4 rather than 2/4. This was done for clarity, as barlines tend to restrain the music and make it more difficult to perceive constantly varying phrase lengths. I believe that Schnabel once said that he would like to publish Beethoven without any barlines at all!

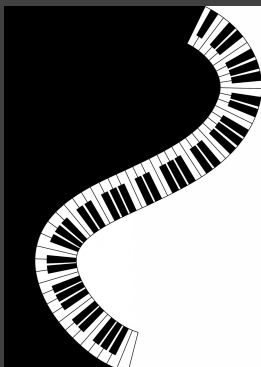
In spite of Debussy’s witty introduction I have suggested some fingering: *“Absence of fingering is an excellent exercise, negating musicians’ perverse desire to completely dismiss the composer’s (and editor’s), and thereby vindicating words of eternal wisdom: ‘If you want something done well, do it yourself’”. Let us seek our own fingering!*

The composer indicated metronome speeds very rarely and he once wrote: *“as a rose which might only last for one morning, a metronome speed might only work for one bar.”* It is true that this study demands nimble fingers and some speed, but it is often played far too fast to enjoy its subtle soft expression and playfulness.

- **35** Debussy writes *pp* — the following diminuendo becoming somewhat challenging.

**Duration: 3’**

un peu en dehors    a little in relief  
lointain    distant



**D E B U S S Y**

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