

CARLA CUOMO - MARIA ROSA DE LUCA
Bologna - Catania

THE TRANSPOSITION OF MUSICAL KNOWLEDGE IN INTELLECTUAL EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

This article was originally meant as a contribution to the study group on “The transmission of musical knowledge and the building of European citizenship”, led by Giuseppina La Face, in the framework of the 19th International Musicological Society congress (Rome, July 1-7, 2012). What this article presents is an example of didactic transposition aimed at the comprehension of music. The transposition therefore focuses on one of eight key competences for lifelong learning, as recommended in 2006 by the European Parliament: “cultural awareness and expression”.¹ The in-depth understanding of our culture, and the sense of belonging it creates, can promote a more conscious use of our heritage, and encourage participation in cultural life. It nourishes our aesthetic sensibility, also through our personal engagement in art. It encourages openness towards diversity of cultural expression, an attitude that lies at the basis of mutual respect in a community, and hence of social inclusion. In all these ways, it contributes to the building of European citizenship.

To give an example of how music education can do its share in this process, we would like to introduce an example of didactic transposition designed for students of Senior High Schools, including the ones that offer musical instrument classes.

CARLA CUOMO – *Listening to and performing music with competence*

Building European citizenship in the age of complexity entails that the transmission of musical knowledge be aimed at “shaping” a critical mind, one that is able to problematize and discern. It pays to educate towards comprehension. When approaching this need, musicologists should ask themselves ‘what’ to transmit and ‘how’ in order to foster the understanding of music.

¹ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe of December 18th 2006, on key competences for lifelong learning, Official Journal of the European Union L 394/10 (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_394/l_39420061230en00100018.pdf).

This is precisely the basis of Didactics as the science of ‘transposing’ expert knowledge to school knowledge.²

Concerning ‘what’ to teach, we should select content that helps develop conceptual networks among the various branches of knowledge, if we want students to receive a serious cultural education. The following proposal focuses on Debussy’s *La cathédrale engloutie* from the first volume of his piano *Préludes* (1910). This piece allows us to capture some of the key aspects of art music at the dawn of the 20th century, as related to the transition between Impressionism and Symbolism in European culture.

Concerning ‘how’ to transmit content, we need to transpose the so-called *savoir savant* to *savoir à enseigner*, which means we have to adapt specialist knowledge to the didactic system (teacher – pupil – knowledge), taking into account the educational needs of students.³ In Music didactics this is done with the help of three main “transpositional practices”:⁴ listening didactics, production didactics (performance, improvisation, composition), and the didactics of music history.⁵ On a methodological level, these three practices stand in a relationship of continuity, forming an uninterrupted circuit between knowing and doing,⁶ between historical-critical and technical-practical aspects. A circular relationship between these items, and their integration, promotes musical competence.⁷

² Cf. B. MARTINI, *Didattiche disciplinari. Aspetti teorici e metodologici*, Bologna, Pitagora, 2000, in particular pp. 39-55; EAD., *La trasposizione didattica: concetto-chiave della didattica della musica*, in B. MARTINI - C. CUOMO - M. R. DE LUCA, *Trasposizione didattica del sapere musicale: aspetti di contenuto e di metodo*, in *La musica tra conoscere e fare*, ed. by G. La Face Bianconi and A. Scalfaro, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2011, pp. 123-156: 123-129.

³ This notion is described in Y. CHEVALLARD, *La transposition didactique*, Grenoble, La Pensée Sauvage, 1985 (enlarged ed. 1991). It was also analysed in its relationship with General didactics and Disciplinary didactics in MARTINI, *Didattiche disciplinari* cit. (see in particular the scheme on p. 49).

⁴ MARTINI, *La trasposizione didattica* cit.

⁵ MARTINI - CUOMO - DE LUCA, *Trasposizione didattica del sapere musicale* cit. The example presented here focuses on all three practices, although the part about production only takes into account music performance. The first part, written by me – *Listening to and performing music with competence* –, deals with the continuity between listening and music performance didactics; the second part, by Maria Rosa De Luca – *«Understanding by investigating»: how to educate students in historical-musical research* –, builds on the continuity between listening didactics and music history didactics.

⁶ *La musica tra conoscere e fare* cit.

⁷ The thesis that there is a relationship of continuity, or circularity, in the sense of a mutual integration, between listening didactics and production didactics (not yet including the relationship with music history didactics, which was analysed more in-depth in subsequent studies) was put forward in C. CUOMO, *Didattica dell’ascolto e didattica della produzione musicale: ipotesi di continuità*, in *Musikalische Bildung. Erfahrungen und*

Before explaining this idea, I would like to make some clarifications.

On a general pedagogical and didactic level, competence can be defined as the coordination of knowledge, ability and mental disposition, which allows humans to tackle, master and solve problems. In this perspective, competence is the ability to mobilize all of one's resources in various settings, for the purpose of adapting to the environment. Competence in its turn generates further knowledge and abilities.⁸

On the level of music pedagogy and didactics, competence can be defined as the integration between 'thinking music' (i.e. mastering musical knowledge from a historical-critical and theoretical-musical point of view), and 'thinking in

Reflexionen / Educazione musicale. Esperienze e riflessioni, ed. by F. Comploi, Brixen/Bressanone, Weger, pp. 61-74. The article proposes a vision of didactics that centres on workshop activities, research and reflection. The focus on three transpositional practices, instead of two, was explained later in MARTINI - CUOMO - DE LUCA, *Trasposizione didattica del sapere musicale* cit.

⁸ As Massimo Baldacci explains, «nella nozione di competenza è presente sia un aspetto "esterno", la prestazione efficace, sia un aspetto "interno", la padronanza delle componenti mentali dell'esecuzione. Inoltre, viene superata la distinzione tra "conoscenza dichiarativa" e "conoscenza procedurale", poiché una competenza è simultaneamente un *sapere* e un *saper fare*, come pure quella tra "cognizione" e "metacognizione", perché un'autentica padronanza non si limita a una codifica meramente procedurale dell'esecuzione, ma implica una qualche forma di rappresentazione, anche se non necessariamente di carattere verbale» [the notion of competence involves both an "external" aspect, the successful performance, and an "internal" aspect, the mastery of the mental factors that are at play in performance. It also overcomes the distinction between "declarative knowledge" and "procedural knowledge", because being competent simultaneously means *knowing* and *knowing how to do*, and it also overcomes the distinction between "cognition" and "metacognition" – because true mastery is not limited to a mere procedural codification of performance, but implies some form of representation, even though not necessarily of a verbal nature] (M. BALDACCI, *La struttura logica del curriculum tra obiettivi, competenze e finalità*, in *Indicazioni per il curriculum*, ed. by G. Domenici and F. Frabboni, Trent, Erickson, 2007, pp. 57-68: 59-60). Competence therefore has a complex nature, a "molar" nature to be more precise (*ibid.*, p. 60), and can therefore be placed at a higher level in the curriculum, among those skills that are acquired over a long-term period (at the lower level we have the skills that are acquired over a short-term, i.e. the domain-bound knowledge), that is, the skills that imply «la strutturazione di abitudini mentali e attitudini, che possono riguardare i diversi ambiti disciplinari ..., o possedere un carattere maggiormente trasversale» [the structuring of mental habits and attitudes, which can pertain to different disciplinary domains ..., or have a more across-the-board nature] (ID., *Curricolo e competenze*, Milan, Mondadori, 2010, p. 20). Seen from this perspective, it is evident that the European notion of 'key competence' has an even broader, across-the-board character.

music' (i.e. developing mental habits on a linguistic-communicative and technical-procedural level).

Let us now consider how musical competence is achieved, through an example of didactic transposition, from music listening to music performance.

Listening didactics

Debussy opens the 20th century. His language breaks the traditional syntax of discourse and introduces a new time dimension. Paying special attention to the evocative potential of sound, his music emerges as a pre-eminently auditory phenomenon, which fully exploits the listener's perceptual possibilities. In this case, therefore, the didactics of listening cannot encourage students to look for a linear, discursive structure in the music work, to identify a beginning, a development, and an end. It has to mediate between the 'construction' and 'perception' of the piece, creating a synthesis of the defining compositional techniques and the main expressive features that come out of the listening activities.⁹

1. *Introduction to listening*

«Io cerco di vedere, attraverso le opere, i molteplici moti che le hanno fatte nascere e la vita interiore che esse contengono: tutto ciò non è forse più interessante di quel gioco che consiste nello smontarle come strani orologi?»¹⁰
[I try to see, through the works, the many impulses that gave life to them, and the inner life they contain: is this not more interesting than the play that consists in taking them apart like strange clocks?]

These words by Monsieur Croche, the imaginary character Debussy talks to in his reflections on music, could be a way to start our didactic approach, along with a short biography and profile of the composer's personality, especially emphasizing his anti-rhetorical stance as the main feature of his psychology.¹¹

⁹ The organizational pattern followed in this example, as far as didactics of listening is concerned, is divided into introduction/listening/elaboration. It owes much to the studies of Giuseppina La Face (*Le pedate di Pierrot. Comprensione musicale e didattica dell'ascolto*, in *Musikalische Bildung. Erfahrungen und Reflexionen* cit., p. 45). On listening strategies in Debussy, see A. MALVANO, *L'ascolto di Debussy. La ricezione come strumento di analisi*, Turin, EDT - De Sono, 2009, in particular pp. 16-23.

¹⁰ C. DEBUSSY, *Il signor Croche antidilettante*, anthology, It. trans. by V. Magrelli, Milan, Adelphi, 2003, p. 16 (orig. ed. *Monsieur Croche*, Paris, Les Bibliophiles Fantaisistes, Librairie Dorbon-Ainé, Nouvelle Revue Française, 1921) [original translation].

¹¹ For a biography of the composer, please refer to the bibliography in footnote 51.

We could also start (or continue) by considering the title, noting an important detail: it is placed at the end of the piece, for all *Préludes*, because it is meant to evoke an impression, whose reality content remains recognizable, but is blurred and redesigned by the memory that recreates the experience of reality in an inner image. Therefore, the *Préludes* have an epigrammatic value: each of them captures one image in music.

“The sunken cathedral” is the Celtic city of Ys, which, so the legend goes, periodically emerges from the waters of the Ocean, only to be swallowed again by it. The author divides his piece into three parts: *Profondément calme* (meas. 1-46); *Un peu moins lent* (meas. 47-71); *Au Mouv^t* (meas. 72-89).¹² In the first part we catch sight of the cathedral, although its outline dissolves into the nebulous atmosphere of the seabed. In the second part, the cathedral emerges. In the third, it gradually disappears.

The goal of this analysis is not so much to identify an image as the visual representation or mere reproduction of reality, but to understand how Debussy succeeded in musically rendering the idea of emersion and immersion into one of the favourite natural elements of his “metereography”¹³ – water, sea water in particular. The sea is the symbol of the abyss, of something that swallows and disintegrates, of a short-lived existence. Debussy’s sea is often still, stagnant¹⁴ – it is simultaneously the mirror that reflects the inner images, and the source of their contemplation.¹⁵

2. Listening

What is important is to develop a clear idea of the piece’s structure. Starting from form – the author himself divides the prelude into three parts, so students can identify the internal sections through changes in writing that become evident when listening, by applying the principle of contrast.

¹² C. DEBUSSY, *La cathédrale engloutie*, in *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy*, ed. by R. Howat, Paris, Durand-Costallat, s. I: *Œuvres pour piano*, vol. V: *Préludes. Livre I et Livre II*, pp. 42-47.

¹³ V. JANKÉLÉVITCH, *Debussy e il mistero*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1991 (orig. ed. *Debussy et le mystère*, Neuchâtel, Editions de la Baconnière, 1949).

¹⁴ In many compositions, the sea is evoked, or observed in its transformations, as in *La mer*. On the notion of ‘stagnancy’, a neologism coined by Jankélévitch (*stagnance*) see his *Debussy e il mistero* cit., in which the author describes it as a «vista istantanea e statica ... *aeternum Nunc*, cioè fuori di ogni divenire, senza relazione con il prima e con il poi» [momentary, static vision ... *aeternum Nunc*, that is, out of every becoming, without any connection with before and after] (*Ibid.*, pp. 46-49: 46) [original translation].

¹⁵ In order to examine the notion of ‘imagination’ in Debussy, see MALVANO, *L’ascolto di Debussy* cit., pp. 23-28, as well as P. ROBERTS, *Images. The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, Portland, Amadeus Press, 1996, pp. 15-44.

Even without a score, the teacher can initially lead students to identify eight sections, marked below with Roman numbers and described individually.¹⁶ Building by sections, or “panels”, is a novelty of the 20th century.

We can therefore examine each section and reflect on specific construction details. When we are finished analysing each section, it will sum up, in a few key words, what has come out of the listening session. In this case I will use two types of key words: (a) the first type refers to the specific writing features that are peculiar to a section; (b) the second type refers to the sound image as a mirror of the inner image, produced by these general writing peculiarities.

Profondément calme

I. (meas. 1-5) Students will be instructed to describe the first section, considering the notions of ‘register’, ‘duration’ and ‘sound space’. Two long chords (whole notes) in opposing registers open the piece. They resound for two measures, while the bass notes move in intervals of fifth. The two chords mark respectively the bottom and the surface, and because they have the same length and intensity, they form a single “sound band”.¹⁷ Within this band there is an intermediate level, created by moving chords (quarter notes: meas. 1, 3, 5), obtained by layering parallel fourths and fifths on top of each other. The effect is an atmosphere of «dans une brume doucement sonore». Time is static, and everything is «profondément calme». The writing creates a sound image of depth and stagnancy. In the higher notes of the first three chords of the r.h.¹⁸ (D-E-B, meas. 1, 3, 5) we can barely recognize a three-note motif in Dorian mode, which is heard in other sections as well.

With the two long opening chords, Debussy creates the bottom and the surface of the sea, the first sound band, within which many things happen. The bass notes (meas. 2 and 4), progressing by fifths, evoke the resonance of the

¹⁶ Actually we can identify six to ten sections, depending on the listener’s auditory scheme (see *infra*, footnote 19). If we agree with the partition suggested in this article, then it will be clear that it is up to the teacher to train students to identify the eight sections.

¹⁷ The idea of a ‘sound band’, which I can recognize in the writing of this Prelude, is a typical trait of Debussy’s language, especially in the organization of harmonic structures. Stefan Jarocinski, in his *Debussy. Impressionismo e simbolismo* (Fiesole, Discanto, 1980; orig. ed. *Debussy. Impressionnisme et symbolisme*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1970), provides several descriptions of the procedures used by the composer to create this ‘sound band’ effect: he uses the rapid movement of chords, which “blurs” their harmonic meaning (p. 161), or works on polychronicity (p. 164); he also separates melody from harmony, thus moving towards a linear interpretation of it (p. 167); and he isolates verticality from harmony, so that the vertical structures blend within the same sound layer (p. 169).

¹⁸ Henceforth ‘r.h.’ stands for ‘right hand’ and ‘l.h.’ for ‘left hand’.

dark, unfathomable bottom of the sea. The chords, mobile in their verticality, symbolize the spires of the old cathedral, and their movement in fourths and fifths reminds us of the *organa* by Magister Leoninus or Perotinus.

Key words: (a) SOUND BANDS; (b) DEPTH and STAGNANCY.

II. (meas. 6-13) The sound space remains dilated, but a melody appears. The moving chords reach a middle-high register where an E resounds in long notes (whole notes), doubled at the octave and repeated (meas. 5-6), so as to obtain an effect of bell tolling. The E marks a sound level, underneath which we find the melody, in a softer sound, long notes (half-notes: from meas. 7), based on the same interval relations as the already heard three-note motif, which now begins from C # (meas. 7-12), and in pentatonic mode.

In this section, as in a *déjà-vu*, the tolling evokes the bell of an old cathedral, calling devotees to the office, while we hear a *cantus firmus* typical of archaic French polyphony.

Key words: (a) TOLLING; (b) DÉJÀ-VU.

III. (meas. 14-15) We come back to the image of depth and stagnancy: the melody dissolves, and the moving chords (meas. 14-15) reappear, slow and even. But in the still, unmoving water, a new image is reflected, which gradually takes shape in the following section.

Key words: (a) SOUND BANDS; (b) DEPTH and STAGNANCY.

IV. (meas. 16-21) When listening to this section we should focus first of all on the bass line, in order to emphasize its different pace. An ostinato of triplets in *pp* in the l.h. (meas. 16 ff.) breaks the static atmosphere of the previous sections. The triplets have a spiralling, undulating movement. The chords in the r.h., layered on the ostinato, are now harmonically filled by the thirds, and they too have an undulating movement. The harmony returns, for a while, to its traditional function, with the B major (meas. 16 onwards) and E ♭ major (meas. 19) keys, the latter with an added second and sixth. The right hand also reproduces the three-note motif (F # - G # - D #, in B major; B ♭ - C - F in E ♭ major). The brightness of the two keys and the rhythmic and dynamic crescendo (from meas. 20: «Augmentez progressivement») lead to the piece's climax.

The writing of this section can be described as fluctuating, not unlike the waves of the sea, since the ascending-descending movement of the triplets is associated with the perception of the high-low polarity, which is the source of a primary synaesthesia in space-time symbolism.¹⁹ The triplets in the l.h. thus create the illusion of the sea's movement, from calm to increasingly rough

¹⁹ The listener indeed transposes to the musical structure the sensory-motor structures that underlie the kinetic quality of music, and of spatial-temporal processes in general (see C. CANO, *La musica nel cinema*, Rome, Gremese, 2002).

(meas. 16-21) and «peu à peu sortant de la brume» lets us glimpse traces of what is submerged in the abyss.

Key words: (a) FLUCTUATING MOVEMENT and CRESCENDO; (b) BRIGHTNESS.

V. (meas. 22-46)²⁰ Here the writing becomes increasingly chordal and the sound intensity reaches a peak. In the G major key, three powerful chords, based on the already mentioned motif, which we have identified in sections I-II, and now centring around the notes G-A-D, begin to sing a true song, with a slight counterpoint between the two hands (meas. 22-27). The response to this is a choral built on the massive C major chords, again on the three-note motif, in *ff* and a homorhythmic texture, over a long C pedal (meas. 22-27), to be played «sonore sans dureté».

In the fullness of its sound, the choral symbolizes the emersion of the cathedral (meas. 28-41). Yet the tension-release mechanism determined by the dominant-tonic relationship (G-C), which harks back to classical logic, is only interesting to Debussy as an archetypal force, which he evokes only to contradict it. Indeed, the «incolore Do maggiore» [colourless C major] in Debussy is also «la tonalità dell'inesistenza»,²¹ [the key of inexistence] which confirms the idea that the cathedral is the metaphor of a past that is no more, although he captures it in the instant when it is most evident. The emersion, then, simultaneously marks the beginning of disintegration. Thus the sound volume immediately decreases in the transition (meas. 42-46). Here the second major chords layered on top of each other in the r.h. evoke the vibrant, metallic sound of bells, and their long duration again leads to stasis, to the suspension of time, the sinking of the cathedral into the abyss, reinforced by the sinking of the bass (from meas. 41 to meas. 46: C - B \flat - A \flat \cong G \sharp).

Key words: (a) CHORAL; (b) EMERSION and IMMERSION.

Un peu moins lent

VI. (meas. 47-71) The already heard *cantus firmus* reappears, this time in the low register (meas. 47-52). The whole section is tonally ambiguous (E major or C \sharp minor) and suggests an elaboration of the original idea for the piece – harmonically, by reaching new regions, and melodically, by reintroducing the three-note motif, melodically, harmonically and dynamically expanded (meas. 52 ff.). In the following measures (53-71), the combination of register and dynamics creates sound bands, which at first rise in pitch until they reach a peak (meas. 59-61) and then return to the low register. Parallel to this, the

²⁰ This section could also be broken down to three parts: meas. 22-27, meas. 28-39, meas. 40-46.

²¹ JANKÉLÉVITCH, *Debussy e il mistero* cit., p. 60.

sound volume first increases and then dissolves. Debussy himself prescribes «Dans une expression allant grandissant». The three-note chord that closes the dissolving in a very low register and in *p* (meas. 68-69) is built on three notes, separated by the same interval distance as the *cantus firmus* motif (here: F# - G# - C). It is followed by an ostinato of quavers in quadruplets and in *pp*, a sort of tremolo, which provides a link to the following section.

The gradual movement of the sound bands – rising and descending, intensifying and dissolving, has a “wave” shape. After the sinking of the cathedral, the movement turns into a surge, not only of waves, but also of emotions and memories, while the three-note chord in the low register, evoking the *cantus firmus*, marks the return of depth and stagnancy after the rhythmic and dynamic dissolving.

Key words: (a) “WAVE-SHAPED” SOUND BANDS; (b) EMERSION and IMMERSION; DISSOLVING.

Au Mouv^t

VII. (meas. 72-83) It helps to examine the relationships between register, dynamics and pace in order to understand the timbre effects. The l.h. requires a touch that is «flottant et sourd», since the quavers, which suggest the movement of a wave – only calmer – become one single sound entity as a result of the author’s continuing prescription of an identical pattern with pedal effect. On these sounds the chords return with the choral motif, albeit in *pp* and in the low register, and with them returns the building of a sound depth effect.

It is this type of writing that symbolizes the idea of the sunken cathedral. The author’s caption, «Comme un écho de la phrase entendue précédemment», conveys the sense of reverberation, mirroring, of this section with respect to the previous one.

Key words: (a) DULL, FLOATING SOUND; (b) REVERBERATION.

VIII. The caption «Dans la sonorité du début», placed intentionally over a pattern that mimics that of the introduction of the sound bands (meas. 1-5), reopens the sound space and comes back to the “colourless” C major (see sec. V), the symbols of inexistence and the return to the evocation of depth. It is the abyss, where everything is born and everything ends (like the unconscious).

Key words: (a) SOUND BANDS; (b) DEPTH and STAGNANCY.

3. *Reworking*

This stage recapitulates the main aspects of the piece, and places it in a wider context.

We could sum up the piece’s peculiar compositional aspects in three points, which must be grasped in order to develop a listening competence:

1. the “panel” compositional technique, working with juxtaposition and layering;

2. the pentatonic nature of the *melos* and of the harmonic parameter;
3. timbre as a structural element.

The element of continuity throughout the prelude is the three-note motif. These notes are based on the fourth and fifth relations underlying the harmonic successions, which carry a symbolical value in that they refer back to the functions of attraction and repulsion of Western tonal music. The idea of building by panels, which Debussy borrowed from Mussorgsky, does not entail vagueness or indefiniteness, since the piece is clearly based on a strict conception of form. Here the constructive logic does not work by derivation, unlike in classical syntax (a connection generates another), and no longer views music in an exclusively two-dimensional way (horizontality=melody; verticality=harmony). It raises timbre to the status of co-creator of the work, just like melody, harmony, and rhythm, building by juxtaposition and layering.

The music of Debussy, then, can be described as symbolist not because it hints at a transcendent truth through the use of an allegorical set of symbols, but because (in the words of Jankélévitch) it confronts us with the mystery, with what cannot be explained and posits itself as what it is – existence.²² His music aims at a “phenomenology of immediacy”, in that it captures every single sensation and impression in a suspended instant, in a still moment.²³ The result is a conception of time as a «susseguirsi di “flussi” istantanei»²⁴ [succession of instant “fluxes”] that is very close to Bergson’s idea of stream of consciousness,²⁵ a conception of space as the coexistence of sound events that are simply juxtaposed, not necessarily connected, since Debussy does not care about the categories of near and far, presence and absence.²⁶

²² JANKÉLÉVITCH, *Debussy e il mistero* cit.

²³ ID., *Prefazione*, in JAROCINSKI, *Debussy. Impressionismo e simbolismo* cit., pp. VI-XV: XIV.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. XIV.

²⁵ JAROCINSKI, *Debussy. Impressionismo e simbolismo* cit., p. 23. This author views Bergsonism as the link between impressionism and symbolism in Debussy.

²⁶ These notions are drawn from JANKÉLÉVITCH, *Debussy e il mistero* cit. In the substantial bibliography on Debussy, I personally maintain that the most fruitful approach to the composer’s aesthetics and his creative mechanisms is the one started by Jankélévitch and Jarocinski. Their analyses, which are all the more masterful as their language is powerful, never set out to dissect the work dryly, but always keep beauty alive, and help capture it, since their analytic criteria are modelled on the same language as the musical language of Debussy. The pages that Jarocinski (see *Debussy. Impressionismo e simbolismo* cit., pp. 157-189) devotes to the sound innovation of Debussy are an example of this.

La cathédrale engloutie shows all these features, and as such the piece is helpful in understanding the music of the French composer within the cultural climate of his time.²⁷

From listening didactics to performance didactics

At this stage, teachers will be able to connect listening to performance if they encourage students to do a *critical exercise* in reflective and metacognitive thought, which means an exercise in competence.²⁸

Concerning performance, the reflective level is activated as early as the listening didactics stage, which provides students with a cultural frame of mind, improving their ability to ‘think *the music*’ of Debussy, and hence be able to perform it, because it allows to appropriate the sophisticated devices of his language. It is also useful to feed the musical thought of students by making them listen to great performances. It must be noted that Debussy is among the first musicians who left us documents of his piano performance style, especially piano roll recordings of his compositions (including this prelude), memoirs, letters and magazine articles. We also have many historical recordings of pianists who knew Debussy personally, or performed his works during his lifetime.²⁹

At the listening stage I have explained that the musical writing is based on “sound images” obtained through a variety of expressive means, by extending the scale of sound values, through new combinations of duration and intensity relationships that produce unique timbre effects, by de-functionalizing harmony and through the use of timbre in the melodic parts.

²⁷ In order to add to our knowledge in this direction, it will be necessary to complement the lessons with a historical-musical analysis, as illustrated by Maria Rosa De Luca in the second part of this article.

²⁸ I have worked on this notion in *L'esecuzione come esercizio critico*, «Pedagogia più Didattica», no. 3, October 2008, pp. 129-134 (Eng. trans., *Learning Performance through Critical Exercise*, paper read at the international MERYC conference - European Network of Music Educators and Researches of Young Children, Bologna, July 22-25, in *Proceedings of the 4th Conference of the MERYC*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2009, pp. 519-525).

²⁹ On these aspects, please refer to C. TIMBRELL, *Debussy in Performance*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. by S. Tresize, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 259-277, which also contains references to editions of Debussy's recordings of this prelude. See also: *Debussy in Performance*, ed. by R. J. Briscoe, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999, and *ibid.* R. LANGHAM SMITH, *Debussy on Performance: Sound and Unsound Ideals*, pp. 3-27; as well as: R. HOWAT, *Debussy's Piano Music: Sources and Performances*, in *Debussy Studies*, ed. by R. Langham Smith, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 78-107. Among the most authoritative performances, it is essential to listen to Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli's, who recorded the first book of *Préludes* in the 1970s.

Constantly mediating between reading the score and listening to great performances, the reflective thought must be gradually directed towards analysing the resources of the piano as an instrument, sound colour, the acoustic effects of harmony, the performance indications by the author himself, in order to progressively form linguistic-communicative and technical-procedural habits that enhance the ability to ‘think *in* music’. The piano style of Debussy is demanding, and contains several performance problems.³⁰ Also, in order to guide the performance activity, it will be necessary to mediate between the construction and the perception of the piece.

In the case of this Prelude, there are two main virtuoso elements, although not in the least ostentatious, on which the teacher will build the didactics of competent performance:

1. the formation of a specific ear, i.e. the ability to perceive the resonance effects of harmonic sounds – which Debussy creates through frequent harmonization by fourths and fifths – and the pentatonic nature of the *melos*, which enhances especially the timbre effects;
2. the highly differentiated touch needed to perform the piece, especially to achieve the effects the composer wants to obtain at minimum dynamic levels, on the threshold of audibility.

These two aspects correspond respectively to points 2 and 3 explained in the reworking stage of listening, and they also form the didactic goals for competent performance. In order to make the following didactic example more concise, I will not enter into detail for each section from the point of view of performance, but will limit myself to a couple of hints about the first five sections.³¹

In sections I and III, the organization of writing in sound bands, and the idea of depth and stagnancy, are obtained through differences in touch, weight, and the use of the sustain pedal between long chords (whole notes) and moving chords (crotchets) (meas. 1, 3, 5, 14-15 as well as 84-85). In particular, the long chords must be played by putting weight on the hand, forearm and shoulder, with a soft yet clear sound that has to reverberate through the pedal: these chords have to evoke the image of the bottom and surface of a sound. The moving quarter-note chords must have a more muted sound, so as to achieve the acoustic effect of a middle sound band. The upper part of the r.h. has to be played by applying greater pressure with the fifth finger, so as to highlight the three-note motif. There must be no dynamic difference between

³⁰ The answers to these problems can be found in the works themselves, as shown by Elie Robert Schmitz, who knew the composer personally (see E. R. SCHMITZ, *Il pianoforte di Claude Debussy*, Milan, Martello, 1952, p. 39; orig. ed. *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*, New York, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950).

³¹ Please see also the specific bibliography, listed in footnote 29 of this article.

these chords, which must be played consistently «sans nuances» (meas. 14). What is important is the contrast in tempo, which has to be calm to obtain the stagnancy effect, and fluid in the moving chords, in order not to disperse the resonance effect of the long chords, which is sustained anyway by the low register sounds, progressing by fourths and fifths in the middle measures (meas. 2, 4, 13).³² A careful use of the pedal and *pp* should create a background that is «brumoso dolcemente sonoro» [foggy and gently resonant].

Against this background, in section II, the bell tolling clearly emerges (meas. 6 ff.) along with the evocation of a *cantus firmus*. The timbre of the melody, with an octave doubling in the middle-high register, makes us understand that the tolling has to be more resonant than the *cantus firmus*, and must therefore be achieved with a *poggiato* sound, although the dynamics remains in *pp*, a sound that must also be «doux et fluide». To continue the “background” effect, the old melody has to be more muted; although it reaches higher than the E of the tolling, it has to sound more distant, so as to evoke the feeling of something that already happened in the past, a *déjà-vu* experience.

In sections IV and V, the performer’s ability lies in synchronising the dynamic and rhythmic crescendo, which is evident from the writing, without accelerating anxiously (a frequent mistake even in accomplished performers). Here, again, the sound bands must be clearly differentiated – Debussy himself makes this idea clearer by using the indications «*p marqué*» on the whole note chords (meas. 17-18) as well as on the quarter note in the bass (meas. 19) and *pp* on the rest – keeping the sound soft and floating at the beginning (meas. 16-19) but always «sans presser» (meas. 20 ff.). The chords in *ff* in the passage that symbolizes the emersion require a sound that is «sans dureté», to be obtained through the weight of the bust, as well as of the hand, forearm and shoulder.

The work done so far pertains to the cognitive level. The educational process of musical competence also requires some work on meta-cognitive thought. The latter is activated through processes of control, i.e. by learning to map out a performance project, coming up with possible strategies to solve problems, reorganizing performance according to your technical-motor abilities, with the aim of improving them, and evaluating results stage by stage.³³

Students can thus arrive at a competent performance, seen as both the ability to consciously render the piece’s meaning, and the ability to process what they have learnt on their own.

³² About the performance problems relating to tempo in this Prelude, deriving from the peculiar relationships between meter and rhythm, see HOWAT, *Debussy’s Piano Music: Sources and Performances* cit.

³³ For reasons of space, I refer the reader to the explanation of a Schumann piece contained in CUOMO, *L’esecuzione come esercizio critico* cit.

MARIA ROSA DE LUCA – «*Understanding by investigating*»: *how to educate students in historical-musical research*

Formulating new methodological models that are specifically aimed at intellectual education – i.e. the “shaping” of a critical mind, one that is able to problematize, and hence to discern – requires that Music History, too, redefine its contents and teaching methods, targeting them at the acquisition of competences rather than notions, at learning how to control the procedures and models for processing knowledge, rather than passively acquiring it.³⁴ Hence the need that the teaching of Music History be rethought in a scientific perspective even for non-specialists – so that students may benefit from an intellectual education that gets them involved with the process of scientific investigation. This means teaching them to do a reconstruction work that presupposes a critical approach.³⁵

Music History cannot be reduced to the mere transmission of information about music facts, chronologically ordered. Rather, it should lead students to develop a historical sensibility when approaching music in its many genres and functions.³⁶ In this perspective, Music History contributes to shape a civil and cultural identity in the student, because it promotes access to a substantial part of the human heritage, not only music works but also techniques, styles, genres, forms, etc.³⁷ This can only happen if the student transposes the “lived” culture (i.e. absorbed through the practice of listening to, or playing, music) to an intellectual reconstruction.

Juts like any transposing practice, the didactics of music history involves content selection, i.e. a reflection on ‘what’ to teach. It also involves transposing these contents, which means thinking about ‘how’ to teach. As far as the ‘thing’ is concerned, we need to reflect about the peculiar nature of Music History, which is the history of an art form, and therefore requires a double examination of its own objects, of the musical works, whose historical connections it describes. These objects are characterized by an aesthetic “presentiality”, and therefore, as “aesthetic objects”, they are part of the present and only secondarily constitute past sources.³⁸ On a pedagogic-didactic level,

³⁴ On this topic see A. CHEGAI - P. RUSSO, *La didattica della Storia della musica*, «Il Saggiatore musicale», XV, 2008, pp. 269-279.

³⁵ H. H. EGGBRECHT, *La scienza come insegnamento*, «Il Saggiatore musicale», XII, 2005, pp. 231-237: 233.

³⁶ L. BIANCONI, *La musica al plurale*, in *Musica Ricerca e Didattica. Profili culturali e competenza musicale*, ed. by A. Nuzzaci and G. Pagannone, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia, 2008, pp. 23-32.

³⁷ C. DAHLHAUS, *Che significa e a qual fine si studia la storia della musica?*, «Il Saggiatore musicale», XII, 2005, p. 219-230: 220.

³⁸ Cf. C. DAHLHAUS, *Fondamenti di storiografia musicale*, Fiesole, Discanto, 1980,

we must select contents that are «estheticamente ed epistemologicamente rilevanti, tali da promuovere lo sviluppo della mente e del carattere della persona»³⁹ [aesthetically and epistemologically relevant, so as to promote the development of the mind and character of the person].

As for the ‘how’ of teaching, an effective transposition of historical-musical content should appropriate the principles of specialist work in such a way as to guide students through the procedures of historical research. The latter applies the so-called “circular” or “helical” method, which involves searching the past for answers to questions that arise in the present. In the following paragraphs, the questions will be reformulated after examining sources and historical data, with the aim of arriving at comprehension in the sense of hermeneutic action (*Verstehen*), that is, «comprendere indagando»⁴⁰ [understanding while investigating].

How can a student learn to consult a music source for the purpose of reconstructing the historical meaning of the work?

For didactic purposes, it can be helpful to transpose the historiographical method to a workshop setting, in which students are guided in the “building” of history: how to find sources, compare documents, check the facts and organize ideas, and reflect on the musical and aesthetic debates of the past and present.⁴¹ All this should happen in a workshop setting, so that students may actively develop a historical competence.⁴² This also meets the pedagogic requirement that the educational potential of a discipline should lie in the learner’s acquisition of a specific form of thought and action. Therefore, reproducing in a classroom setting the way in which music history builds itself, i.e. the historiographical method, or the musical variety of it, means creating a privileged context for the acquisition of historical-musical knowledge, and giving a significant contribution to the comprehension of music.⁴³

p. 5 (orig. ed. *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte*, Köln, Hans Gerig, 1977). On the power of music to “presentify” the past, to make it alive and present, see L. BIANCONI, *Superstizioni pedagogico-musicali. La storia desaparecida*, in *La musica tra conoscere e fare* cit., p. 31.

³⁹ LA FACE BIANCONI, *Le pedate di Pierrot* cit., p. 41.

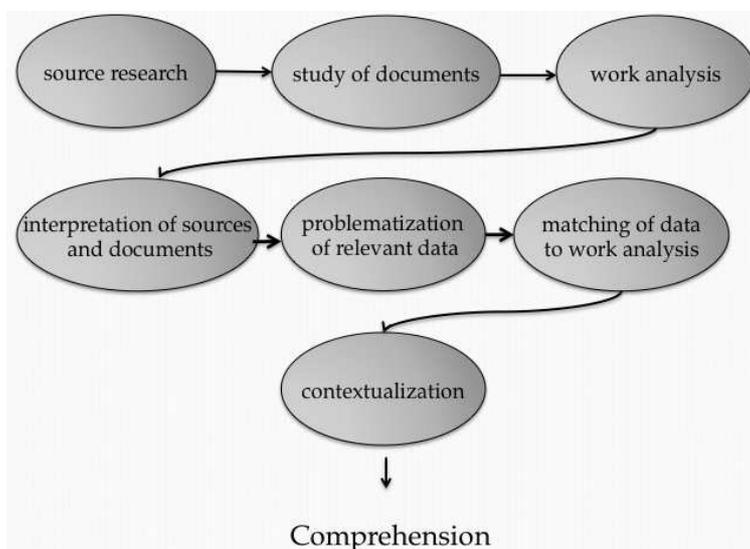
⁴⁰ DAHLHAUS, *Fondamenti di storiografia musicale* cit., p. 4.

⁴¹ Cf. EGGBRECHT, *La scienza come insegnamento* cit., p. 233.

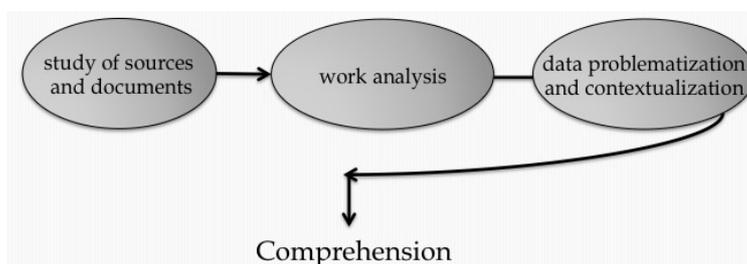
⁴² On the building of competence and, in this perspective, on the workshop as a “strategy” to train learners in the methodology of research, see M. BALDACCI, *Ripensare il curricolo*, Rome, Carocci, 2008, pp. 129-138 (in particular the paragraph entitled *Il laboratorio come strategia educativa e didattica*); ID., *Curricolo e competenze* cit., pp. 18-24 (paragraph 2.3); see also L. DOZZA, *Il laboratorio come contesto di co-costruzione di specifiche intelligenze*, in *Educazione musicale e Formazione*, ed. by G. La Face Bianconi and F. Frabboni, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2008, pp. 427-445.

⁴³ Cf. MARTINI, *La trasposizione didattica* cit., p. 128.

The investigation procedure for a professional historian divides into seven stages:



A possible, successful didactic transposition of this process, appropriately simplified, could be divided into three parts as follows:



In this three-part scheme, the analysis of the work coincides with the listening didactics stage – a clear example of continuity, through integration, between the various transposition practices: listening didactics, production didactics (performance, composition, improvisation), music history didactics.⁴⁴

On the level of methodology, this means that in an ideal musical didactic approach based on the continuity between these three practices, teachers can start from listening didactics and subsequently connect to music history

⁴⁴ About the continuity between performance didactics and listening didactics, see CUOMO, *Didattica dell'ascolto e didattica della produzione musicale* cit., pp. 61-74; EAD., *L'esecuzione come esercizio critico* cit.; on the integration of the three transposition practices, see MARTINI - CUOMO - DE LUCA, *Trasposizione didattica del sapere musicale* cit.

didactics or, vice versa, start from music history didactics, with listening didactics as its central part, and only subsequently introduce production didactics. However, the latter will be all the more effective if it is connected to the other two practices.

The following is a possible example of historical-musical didactic transposition based on Debussy's prelude *La cathédrale engloutie*.

1. Study of sources and documents

The process of building history begins with finding, selecting and classifying sources. Students need first of all to be able to develop a correct notion of 'source', of its function, and of its specific use. Therefore, starting from the distinction between direct and indirect sources,⁴⁵ it must be emphasized that sources are at the origin of any historical investigation; they are traces from the past that acquire the status of sources when the historian consults them, and draws information from them. In selecting the sources, teachers will have to transpose their expert knowledge while keeping in mind the educational goals to be reached, in relation to the cognitive operations that can be performed on them, and the types of conceptualization and problematization they lead to, and lend themselves to.

An example of didactic transposition in music history based on Debussy's piece, could focus on three direct sources (*a, b, c*) and one indirect source (*d*):

a) the print score of the prelude *La cathédrale engloutie*, extracted from the first volume of the *Préludes* (Paris, Durand, 1910); it is the first edition of the collection, formed by 12 preludes, which Claude Debussy composed between December 7th 1909 and January 5th 1910;⁴⁶

b) one letter from the vast correspondence of Debussy; I suggest examining the one addressed to André Poniowski of February 1893,⁴⁷ in which Debussy describes, clearly and without ambiguity, the symbolist structure underlying his aesthetic conception;

⁴⁵ By *direct* sources we mean those that stand in a close relationship, also in terms of chronology, with the object of investigation, and therefore put us in direct touch with the past; by *indirect* sources we mean those based on reconstructions and interpretations by others (see M. R. DE LUCA, *Un approccio didattico alla costruzione del sapere storico-musicale*, in *La musica tra conoscere e fare* cit., p. 147).

⁴⁶ Cf. C. DEBUSSY, *Préludes*, in *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy* cit., p. 159 ff.

⁴⁷ Cf. C. DEBUSSY, *Correspondance (1872-1918)*, ed. by F. Lesure and D. Herlin, Paris, Gallimard, 2005, pp. 113-117. André Poniowski (1864-1955), a businessman from a noble family of Polish origin, was a friend of Debussy's, and a regular at literary and art circles in Paris, such as the ones led by Mallarmé and Degas (*ivi*, p. 2278).

c) an article Debussy published in 1913 on the «Revue musicale», the journal of Société Musicale Indépendante, in which he discusses the role and functions of music in the cultural scene of his time;⁴⁸

d) a short *récit* by Gustave Flaubert about his trip to Brittany (1847); this short story helps contextualize the work in the domain of literature,⁴⁹ since it contains a hint to the legend of the city of Ys, which lies at the basis of *La cathédrale engloutie*.

The teacher introduces students to the sources, classifying them in order to bring attention to the informational potential of the documents. It will be best to give a few preliminary hints about Debussy himself,⁵⁰ to sketch a historiographical background against which to place the work we are about to analyse. References to the biography of the composer, the setting in which he produced his works, and the historical context in which he found himself working.⁵¹

The investigation divides into two stages: search and data collection. The two are connected since data collection depends on the search criteria. To get started, it helps to focus on a single piece of knowledge, on which to build a task. The teacher can divide the class into groups, assign each group one source to analyse, and search the document using an open query, organized by key words and identical for all, or a list of more detailed, *ad hoc* questions.⁵² The next step is to look for answers to the questions posed at the search stage, abstracting and generalizing on the information collected. These are two essential cognitive steps, which give students an active role in the process of knowledge, forming the basis for the development of critical thought.

⁴⁸ Debussy's literary production includes a vast correspondence (1892-1918) and a long series of reports, criticism pieces, and articles (1901-1915). The article cited here can be read, in the original language, in C. DEBUSSY, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, ed. by F. Lesure, Paris, Gallimard, 1971, pp. 239-243.

⁴⁹ G. FLAUBERT, *Par les champs et par les grèves*, in *Œuvres complètes de Gustave Flaubert*, VI, Paris, Conard, 1910, pp. 222 ff.

⁵⁰ See the first part of this article, by Carla Cuomo.

⁵¹ For these references, see F. LESURE, *Debussy*, Paris, Fayard, 2003; although somewhat dated, the work of J. BRISCOE, *Claude Debussy. A Guide to Research*, New York - London, Garland, 1990, and the more up-to-date bibliography, contained in the book by R. HOWAT, *The Art of French Piano Music. Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier*, New Haven - London, Yale University Press, 2009, pp. 377-388.

⁵² On group work in general, see. L. DOZZA, *Il lavoro di gruppo tra relazione e conoscenza*, Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1993; for group work in music education, see the article *La gestione del gruppo classe nell'insegnamento-apprendimento della musica*, by L. Cerrocchi (*Il gruppo classe come ambiente formativo*) and C. Cuomo (*Il gruppo classe: contesto di educazione musicale*), in *Educazione musicale e Formazione* cit., pp. 472-487 and 487-492.

For instance, using the selected sources, and with some help from the teacher, the collection work could lead to the following inferences:

– source *a*): *La cathédrale engloutie* is part of a collection comprising 24 preludes, published in two volumes, composed by Debussy between the end of 1907 and the beginning of 1909 (1st book), and from 1911 to 1913 (2nd book). Each prelude is associated with a title, which appears in brackets at the end of the composition, thereby acquiring the function of an “allusive expression” that evokes the idea at the basis of each piece. All this seems to express the principle of the symbolist aesthetic – the evocation of a symbol, that is, of an idea.⁵³ The prelude under study indeed recalls the Celtic legend of the city of Ys, the Breton city that was drowned in the sea as a divine punishment for the debauchery of its inhabitants;

– sources *b*) and *c*): Debussy’s letter to Poniatowski (1893) and the article written for «Revue musicale» (1913) allow us to outline a time frame, between the last fifteen years of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th, in which the composer came to develop his expressive language, and composed the *Préludes*. In those years he joined the ideological and artistic movement of Symbolism, which had a key role in the destiny of European art and culture, and reached its peak with Mallarmé’s *Divagations*, the theatre of Maeterlinck, and the painting of Redon and Gauguin.⁵⁴ This artistic and literary sensibility led to the notion of the work of art as a “symbol” that connects the world of ideas to that of things. In the process of understanding a work of art, music is elevated to the supreme status of «arte organizzatrice dell’immaginazione»,⁵⁵ [organizer of the imagination] since – as Debussy writes to Poniatowski (source *b*) – it leads us to «restlessly look for the Ineffable, which is the ideal of art». ⁵⁶ Twenty years on, Debussy would remain true to his aesthetic conception – in a passage from the article he wrote about the concerts of Société Musicale Indépendante of Paris (source *c*) he again states that «music is indeed the art that is closest to nature ... Although they claim to be sworn translators, painters and sculptors can only give us a rather free, and always fragmentary, interpretation of the beauty of the universe. They capture and nail down only one aspect of it, one moment of it. Only musicians have the privilege of

⁵³ See the first part of this article, by Carla Cuomo, footnote 13 in particular.

⁵⁴ Between the years 1887-1900 Debussy attended the private circles of the Paris art world, in particular the «martedì a casa di Mallarmé» [Tuesdays at Mallarmé’s]: see JAROCINSKI, *Debussy. Impressionismo e simbolismo* cit., p. 102 f.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105 f.

⁵⁶ Cf. DEBUSSY, *Correspondance (1872-1918)* cit., p. 116: «chercher sans lassitude l’Inexprimable, qui est l’idéal de tout l’art» [original translation].

capturing all the beauty of the night and day, of the earth and sky, and of recreating the atmosphere, and beating the time, of its immense palpitation»;⁵⁷ – source *d*): reading a passage from Flaubert’s *récit*, students will get familiar with the legend of the city of Ys. In 1847, during a trip to Brittany with Maxime Du Camp, Flaubert evoked, on his arrival in the city Landévennec, the legend of the mythical city of Ys (or Ker-Ys, in the Breton language). Built on an island off the shores of Brittany, and protected from the sea by an elaborate system of dams, the city was drowned in the waters due to the depravity of Drahut, the immensely beautiful daughter of the king of Ys, Gradlon. According to the legend, from time to time the sunken cathedral emerges again from the waters of the sea, and the Britons take the muted sound of its bells as an admonition on the vanity of all earthly things.

2. Work analysis

This stage coincides with listening didactics. I consider this stage in the process of building a historical-musical knowledge as a key moment in the development of historical competence. Listening didactics trains students in understanding the structural and functional-contextual aspects of the piece.⁵⁸ First of all, students listen critically to the work and reflect on it, activating cognitive processes that allow them to understand the structure and form of a music piece, so that they are able to «riferire la composizione al contesto di produzione e di fruizione, di coglierne le funzioni, intuirne le relazioni, scoprirne il “senso”»⁵⁹ [set the composition in the context of its production and reception, identify its functions, intuit its relationships, and discover its “meaning”].

In the case of the Debussy prelude:⁶⁰

1. the structure in three parts (*Profondément calme - Un peu moins lent - Au Mouvement*), which are divided into sections (or panels) marked by differences in the

⁵⁷ DEBUSSY, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits* cit., p. 239 f.: «la musique est précisément l’art qui est le plus près de la nature ... Malgré leurs prétentions de traducteurs-assermentés, les peintres et les sculpteurs ne peuvent nous donner de la beauté de l’univers qu’une interprétation assez libre et toujours fragmentaire. Ils ne saisissent et ne fixent qu’un seul de ses aspects, un seul de ses instant: seuls, les musiciens ont le privilège de capter toute la poésie de la nuit et du jour, de la terre et du ciel, d’en reconstituer l’atmosphère et d’en rythmer l’immense palpitation» [original translation].

⁵⁸ See the musical comprehension model developed by Maurizio Della Casa and perfected by Giuseppina La Face: M. DELLA CASA, *Educazione musicale e curricolo*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1985 (extended repr. 2002); LA FACE BIANCONI, *Le pedate di Pierrot* cit., *passim*.

⁵⁹ LA FACE BIANCONI, *Le pedate di Pierrot* cit., p. 40.

⁶⁰ I am referring back to the notions explained by Carla Cuomo in pp. 21-25 of this article.

musical writing. The aim is to recreate the “sound image” of the cathedral, which gradually appears - emerges - disappears;

2. the creation of a sound symbolism through constructive details that have an evocative power (sound bands / depth and stagnancy effect; tolling / *déjà-vu*; fluctuating movement and crescendo / brightness; choral / emersion and immersion; “wave-like” sound bands / emersion and immersion; dissolving; floating, muted sound / reverberation);

3. research on timbre as the key element of the piece’s structure.

The next task is aimed at problematizing and contextualizing, in an even broader way, the results of the cognitive elaboration at the stages of listening and of the study of sources and documents. A critical, correct comprehension activity cannot but follow from the intersection of musical and historical competence, the latter broadened to include musicological reception at the stage of data problematization and contextualization.

3. Data problematization and contextualization

This third stage introduces the interpretation of data. In the work of a specialist, this is a creative moment, although it has a scientific basis. A professional historian does not stop at the collection of data, but interprets them on the basis of their problematization, which implies the exercise of critical thinking in its strictest sense.

Teachers can adopt different procedures: a dialogue-based lesson, seeking direct interaction with students, or more structured tests, such as the questionnaire or the written composition. Work will be aimed at cognitive processing of the data obtained at the listening didactics stage and at the stage of source and document study. Teachers can, for example, ask students in what way the prelude, *La cathédrale engloutie*, can be connected to the aesthetic canon of Symbolism. Students will be helped to associate the data from sources *b* and *c* with the stylistic peculiarities of Debussy’s prelude. This step has the purpose of arriving at a final systematization of the linguistic and historical-critical knowledge, which students have developed in the process of comprehension of the piece, and have put in a relationship with the notion of ‘sound symbolism’.

To shed greater light on the context in which the work was produced, teachers can also suggest the reading of further texts – for instance, drawing from Debussy’s vast correspondence, they can focus on one of the many letters between the French composer and his publisher Jacques Durand,⁶¹ in one of them, in particular, Debussy describes the long revision work he had carried out on some works by Chopin parallel to the composition of the

⁶¹ See DEBUSSY, *Correspondance (1872-1918)* cit.

Preludes.⁶² This shows that the internal organization (two volumes, dividing in 12 + 12 pieces) of the *Préludes* is an implicit reference to Chopin's 24 preludes op. 28,⁶³ but will also make students aware of Debussy's admiration and interest for the art of the great Polish composer. Debussy was fascinated by Chopin, and on many an occasion spoke of his immense value: he even dedicated his *Études* (1915) to "the memory of Chopin".⁶⁴ Students will have learned how to both select pieces of knowledge, and place them in a broader web of relationships, i.e. to *network* the information they have acquired during their research.⁶⁵

Work will not be finished until learners are finally guided through a process of *broader comprehension*, the stage in the comprehension process where the musical 'object' under study is inserted into a wider cognitive and cultural system, so as to reconstruct its "deeper meaning".⁶⁶ This is the perspective from which to look at the piano production of Debussy in the musical context of the early 20th century, and to analyse the way in which he worked on the sound of the piano. The peculiarities of the instrument allowed the composer to explore new expressive possibilities, by focusing in particular on register contrasts and associations between auditory figures;⁶⁷ it was through the piano that he came to those "mysterious concordances" between sound and imagination, which lie at the root of his innovative conception and perception of music.⁶⁸

Starting from this reflection, it is appropriate to expand and deepen this stage of broader comprehension in a historical-literary perspective, studying the reception context of the legend of the city of Ys at the time of Debussy. The popularity of the short story in Paris is to be attributed both to the

⁶² See Debussy's letter to Jacques Durand of January 27th, 1915 (*ibid.*, p. 1870 f.). Debussy worked on revising some works by Chopin (waltzes, ballads, impromptus, etudes and mazurkas) and on February 11th, 1915, received from Durand a payment of 500 francs (*ibid.*, no. 2).

⁶³ Howat suggests that the publishing of the first volume of *Préludes* in 1910, the year of the first centenary of Chopin's birth, may have been a secret "homage" from Debussy to the Polish musician (cf. HOWAT, *The Art of French Piano Music* cit., p. 63).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-77.

⁶⁵ On the process of networking knowledge, see G. LA FACE BIANCONI, *La linea e la rete. La costruzione della conoscenza in un Quartetto di Haydn*, in «Finché non splende in ciel notturna face». *Studi in memoria di Francesco Degrada*, ed. by C. Fertoni, Milan, LED, 2009, pp. 225-250.

⁶⁶ On the notion of 'broader comprehension', see DELLA CASA, *Educazione musicale e curriculum* cit., p. 72 ff; as well as G. LA FACE BIANCONI, *Musica e cultura a scuola*, «Il Saggiatore musicale», X, 2003, pp. 119-123; EAD., *Le pedate di Pierrot* cit., p. 40.

⁶⁷ Cf. E. LOCKSPEISER, *Debussy. La vita e l'opera* (1966), Milan, Rusconi, 1983.

⁶⁸ JANKÉLÉVITCH, *Debussy e il mistero* cit., pp. 57-62.

hegemony of Wagnerism, which focused mostly on mythological subjects of Nordic origin (the legend goes that Ys was the birthplace of Isolde, the famous heroin of *Tristan und Isolde*),⁶⁹ and to the success of a collection of short stories by writer Émile Souvestre, entitled *Le Foyer Breton. Contes et récits populaires* and published in 1858, which gives an abridged version of the legend under the title *Le conte du vieux pêcheur. Keris*.⁷⁰ The wide reception of the story of Ys is also testified by the *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* (1883) by Breton man of letters and philosopher Ernest Renan, by Guy De Maupassant's novella *La légende de Ker Ys*, which appeared on the magazine «Le Gaulois» in 1883, and by the famous oil painting by Evariste-Vital Luminais, which depicts the sinking of Drahut in the waters of the sea, exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1884. And we should not forget the three-act opera with five tableaux *Le Roy d'Ys* by Édouard Lalo, which was staged at the Opéra-Comique in 1888.

In this way, students will learn how to start an open-ended knowledge acquisition process that may unfold in different directions, and how to build their competence through a vast network of information, in which the “objects” studied constitute only some of the possible nodes.

(Translation by Elisabetta Zoni)

⁶⁹ This detail is emphasized by Roy Howat in his *Critical Notes* to C. DEBUSSY, *Préludes*, in *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy* cit., p. 162.

⁷⁰ Cf. É. SOUVESTRE, *Le récit du vieux pêcheur. Keris*, in *Le Foyer Breton. Contes et récits populaires*, I, Paris, Lévy, 1858, pp. 232-245. On Souvestre as an explorer of Breton folklore, see *Émile Souvestre (1806-1854): écrivain breton porté par l'utopie sociale*, ed. by B. Plötner - Le Lay and N. Blanchard, Brest, CRBC, 2007.