

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of Study

In Western music, Impressionism was a movement among various composers during the late 19<sup>th</sup> until early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their music focuses on the moods and atmosphere rather than detailed images/objects. Composers were labeled as Impressionists by analogy to Impressionist painters who use starkly contrasting colors, the light effect on an object, blurry foreground and background, etc., to make the observer focus their attention on the overall impression. As stated by Burkholder et. al., the most prominent feature in musical Impressionism is the use of timbre, which can be achieved through orchestration, harmonic usage (ambiguous tonality, extended harmony, parallel motion, free treatment of dissonance, use of modes and exotic scales), extra-musicality, and evocative titles, for example, *Reflets dans l'eau* (Reflections on the Water) by Debussy.<sup>1</sup>

Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel are two leading figures in Impressionism, though Debussy rejected this label. Debussy's Impressionist works typically evoke a mood, feeling, and atmosphere by creating musical images through motives, harmony, exotic scales (e.g., whole-tone scale), instrumental timbre, extended chords (9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>), parallel motion, extreme chromaticism, and heavy use of piano pedaling.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 9th ed. (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 791.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 791–92; 796.

Arguably, the Impressionism technique can already be found in several works of Franz Liszt during the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romantic movement. One of them is his work *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este*. Liszt influenced composers in the early 20th century, especially Debussy and Ravel, and he also anticipated the Impressionism style of those two composers.<sup>3</sup> The usage of the modal, whole-tone, pedal effects, and various coloristic devices by Liszt is quite impactful on Debussy through several works composed by Liszt, including *Harmonies du soir* (Transcendental Etude No. 11), *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este*, and *Nuages gris*.<sup>4</sup> *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* is associated with the impressionistic water music, later influenced French Impressionist particularly Debussy and Ravel. This piece contains mainly double note tremolo, 32<sup>nd</sup> notes, major 9<sup>th</sup>, and left-hand trills.<sup>5</sup>

Debussy had an encounter with Liszt, as implied in the book sources.<sup>6</sup> Liszt composed many works with tonal expansion and strong dissonance in his last period. He has indeed performed in front of Debussy; among them were *Nuages gris*, *La Lugubre Gondola*, *Bagatelle sans tonalite*, *Au bord d'une Source* and transcription from Schubert's *Ave Maria*, which Debussy certainly owed his musical revelation and said these are the revolutionary works on Liszt. Debussy was impressed with Liszt's performance; he was inspired by Liszt's pedaling technique 'as a form of

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<sup>3</sup> James Deaville, "Liszt and the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt*, ed. Kenneth Hamilton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 43.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Saffle, *The Music of Franz Liszt, Stylistic Development and Cultural Synthesis* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2018), chap. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Arnold, "Piano Music: 1861 - 1886," in *The Liszt Companion*, ed. Ben Arnold (London: Greenwood Press, 2002), 142.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, vol. 1: 1862-1902 (London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 83.

breathing'.<sup>7</sup> Baker also pointed out that Liszt's performance suggested the possibility of developing piano techniques for the impressionistic effects of Debussy. If he did not hear Liszt play *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este*, he certainly came to know it before writing *Reflets dans l'eau*.<sup>8</sup>

The term "Impressionism" was indeed popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este*, the author has found the musical elements which associated to Impressionism. Impressionism was later developed by Debussy consistently until his later works. However, it is less exposed how Liszt's *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* influences Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau* through their impressionistic elements, which both works are about water. Several research mostly explains the comparison between Liszt's *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* to Ravel's *Jeux d'eau* and the Impressionism connection between Debussy and Ravel. Therefore, the author chose to do this research, evaluating both pieces through their impressionistic elements.

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Frederick Jensen, *Debussy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 32; Jocelyn Ho, "Debussy and Late-Romantic Performing Practices: The Piano Rolls of 1912," in *Debussy's Resonance*, ed. François de Médicis and Steven Huebner (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2018), 514.

<sup>8</sup> James M. Baker, "Liszt's Late Piano Works: Larger Forms," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt*, ed. Kenneth Hamilton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 142.

## 1.2. Research Question

How does *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* by Liszt influence *Reflets dans l'eau* by Debussy in terms of impressionistic elements?

## 1.3. Purpose of Study

To evaluate the influence on Liszt's *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* to Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau* through their impressionistic elements.

## 1.4. Scopes of Research

1. This research focuses on evaluating the influence of Liszt's *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* and Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau* through their impressionistic elements, which include harmony, form and structure, melodic lines, rhythmic pattern, pedaling technique, and depiction of an image/object.
2. The author does the analysis based on Musica Budapest Edition for *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* and Durand Edition for *Reflets dans l'eau*.

## 1.5. Benefits of Research

### 1.5.1. Practical Benefits

1. **Guidance for performers.** This research helps to enhance performance techniques and artistic expression by understanding the impressionistic elements and musical language Liszt and Debussy employ. Performers

obtain a deeper understanding of impressionistic styles, such as evoking mood, atmosphere, and imagery. Besides that, the performers also learned the technical approaches by Liszt and Debussy and enhanced communication with the audience about the emotional and narrative depth of the music.

2. **Interpretative development.** This research develops the understanding of musical impressionism, allowing the performers to incorporate stylistic elements such as tone color, fluidity, harmonic language, etc., into their playing. In addition to those stylistic elements, the performers can expand their expressive vocabulary with an emphasis on mood and atmosphere and deliver emotionally compelling interpretations.

#### 1.5.2. Theoretical Benefits

1. **Contribution to musicological studies.** This research develops the academic understanding of the stylistic transitions from Romanticism to Impressionism, focusing on the important roles of Liszt's compositional techniques in influencing Debussy's musical languages.
2. **Deepening the understanding of Impressionism.** This research can provide an understanding of the development of Impressionism in music after exploring Liszt's influence on Debussy. It can also serve as a reference for future scholars and educators analyzing the evolution of musical styles and compositional ideas.

## 1.6. Research Structure

1. Chapter I explains the background of the study and why the author chose to do the research about the influence of Liszt's *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* and Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau* through their impressionistic elements. This chapter also includes the research question, the purpose of the study, and the scope of the research.
2. Chapter II explains the theoretical framework of this study. In the beginning, the author discusses the overview of *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* and *Reflets dans l'eau*. The Impressionism concept includes its origin, Impressionism in music, and its musical elements. Subchapter Liszt and Impressionism explain the stylistic development of Liszt in the early to middle period and later period. The last subchapter, Debussy and Impressionism, explains the stylistic development of Debussy in Impressionism.
3. Chapter III explains the research concept, procedure, variables, literature review, and hypothesis.
4. Chapter IV explains the descriptive analysis of Liszt's *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este* and Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau*, the comparison of both works in terms of impressionistic elements, and how Liszt influences Debussy.
5. Chapter V explains the conclusions of this research and the recommendations for further research.