

Debussy and Ravel's String Quartet: An Analysis

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Abstract

Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel are known as two most prominent composers in the Impressionism era. They lived in the same period, shared similar backgrounds and influences, resulting similar ideas, colors, and nuances that lead to same categorization as Impressionist composers. Nevertheless, their musical language is relatively different.

Both Debussy and Ravel composed one String Quartet, almost one after another. Furthermore, Ravel took the form of Debussy's String Quartet and used it as a model for his own String Quartet. Thus, this piece magnified their very own specialties as opposed to how close and similar these composition are. A brief analysis of the String Quartet leads to deeper understanding about their personal compositional method, the harmonic progression, the form of the piece, and how they create different colors and nuances from the instruments.

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Introduction

France is the birthplace of the art movement called Impressionism, which started and developed in the 19th century. The word Impressionism originates from Monet's famous work, *Impression, Sunrise (Impression, soleil levant)*¹. Impressionism is a style of French painting with special technique: blurred outlines, capturing the essence of the subject rather than its details, avoiding sharp contours. In the late 19th century, Impressionism was also applied in music, which emphasized the atmosphere and the 'picture' of the music, rather than a few clear melodic lines with accompaniment. Big chords combinations (chords of 9th, 11th, and 13th instead of triads and chords of 7th), exotic scales, the use of the modes, and extreme chromaticism are the common technical features of the musical Impressionism.

Claude-Achille Debussy (1862-1918) and Joseph-Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) have always been known as the most influential composers during this period. Both lived in Paris and were educated in the Paris Conservatory, and thus shared a lot of common influences and experiences. Young Ravel always looked up to Debussy, who in turn took interest in Ravel. Debussy influenced Ravel tremendously, as well as the other way around in some ways, but later there have always been questions about their relationship and rivalry.

Many works by Ravel are reminiscent of Debussy, and the other way around. They both composed 'watery' music, vales or waltzes, and many other works with similar elements and features. Furthermore, some of them even have the exact same title, capturing the same object or nuance. One of these works is their famous string quartets, which have similar elements, features, and form.

The String Quartet by Ravel (1903) reflected and reminded us of the String Quartet by Debussy (1893). Ravel took the form and features of Debussy's String Quartet, and used them as a template for his own String Quartet, which might seem like plagiarism². However, these two compositions are still very personal in the

¹ H.W. Janson & Anthony F. Janson, *History of Art* 6th ed., (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2001) p. 710.

² Mark DeVoto, *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality: Essays on his music, Dimension & Diversity, No. 4* (New York: Pendragon Press, 2004) p. 191.

compositional technique and both stand as important works in the chamber music repertoire.

Debussy and Ravel's music is quite similar in many ways, though as the work of two separate composers, there are some differences. Their string quartets, examples of their respective specialties, are ideal compositions to study in order to discover more about these similarities and differences. Focusing on the first movement, comparing and contrasting how they used the harmony, modes, scales, tonalities, and other musical features. This analysis will attempt to see how personal each composition is: how the composers used similar features and forms yet very different, as well as how deep Debussy's influence on Ravel was during this period.

The String Quartets

Claude Debussy started composing his String Quartet in 1892 and finished it in August 1893. During this period, he also worked on huge compositions such as *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, *Three Scenes au Crépuscule* for orchestra, and *Proses Lyriques* for voice and piano. The String Quartet in G minor Op.10 was intended to be the first one of two, but for some reason he neglected the idea of a second string quartet. Peculiarly, out of all the compositions he composed, it is the only composition that was given an Opus number and key designation. This composition marks one of his most important early works, and also in the chamber music repertoire nowadays.

According to some evidence about the progress of the work, Debussy composed the first three movements without obvious arduousness. Only in the last movement, he admitted to having difficulties: "I think I can finally show you the last movement of the quartet, which has made me really miserable!" he wrote to his colleague, André Poniatowski in August 1893.³ Not so long after, the Quartet was premiered in Paris, on 29 December 1893, at Société nationale de musique, performed by Ysaye Quartet, to mixed reactions. "This pizzicato effect [in the second movement] disturbed and shocked the audience with its novelty. However, the quartet proved successful after subsequent performances for the ordinary public..."⁴

³ Michael Jameson, *String Quartet, L.85 (Op.10)*, <http://www.answers.com/topic/string-quartet-l-85-op-10>.

⁴ Naomi Shibatani, "*Contrasting Debussy and Ravel: A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Piano Works and Ondine*" (Houston, Texas: UMI. Copyright 2008 by ProQuest LLC.) p. 16.

The String Quartet itself contains four traditional string quartet movements, a fast first movement in a free sonata form (*Animé et très décidé*), a lively dark scherzo with pizzicato effects (*Assez vif et bien rythmé*), a beautiful, calming, and lyrical slow movement (*Andantino, doucement expressif*), and an energetic and passionate final movement, ending in G major (*Très modéré*). This string quartet is also cyclically designed; some themes, motives, or whole sections from the earlier movement came up in the later movements, giving the listeners an impression of a unified composition. As can be seen, the opening motive of the first movement appears, surprisingly, in the later movements a couple of times. The cyclic style that Debussy adopted for this string quartet is influenced by Cesar Franck's style:

It is known that Debussy came to a few of Franck's classes at the Conservatoire, but, for whatever reasons, did not stay in them and did not become his pupil. Nevertheless Debussy admired Franck's music, praising the D-minor Symphony on several occasions, and would hardly have been unaware of Franck's abundant reliance on cyclic thematic structure. Debussy's String Quartet of 1893, close as it is to Franck's in overall form, perhaps shows the greatest kinship to the classical chamber-music tradition among Debussy's major works.⁵

Another strong influence was the Javanese gamelan effect that is exposed in the second movement. He first heard a complete Javanese gamelan orchestra played by skilled native musicians in Exposition Universelle, or Paris World Exposition, in 1889. The Javanese gamelan orchestra produced a series of soft effects and rhythm that Debussy became attached to later.

There are various opinions about to whom this piece was dedicated. In an essay called "Debussy and Ravel," Mark DeVoto wrote that Debussy dedicated the String Quartet to Ernest Chausson, a close colleague of his during that time. Other sources say that Debussy was about to dedicate his String Quartet to Chausson but changed his mind, presumably because of Chausson's personal reservations. Another possible dedication was to a violinist, Eugene Ysaye, and his quartet, who premiered the work. Unfortunately, not a single dedication exists, neither written in the manuscript nor the scores.

⁵ DeVoto, *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality: Essays on his music, Dimension & Diversity, No. 4*, p. 7-8.

Ten years later (1902-1903) Ravel worked on his only string quartet. This string quartet, similar like Debussy, also marks his first important chamber music work. The String Quartet in F major was firstly an entry in a competition at the Conservatory, which was Ravel's third and final chance. He finished the first movement in January 1903, and submitted it only to be rejected by the professors and received by frustrated critics. He was expelled from the Conservatoire and he never again set foot in the Conservatory. The result was no better when he tried out the famous *Prix de Rome*, a competition with art scholarship as the prize awarded by the French government at that time, with this string quartet.

In spite of this depressing period, he finished the other three movements in April 1903, and it was premiered on 5th of March 1904 by the Heymann Quartet. The premiere evoked varied reactions:

Pierre Lalo observed that “in its harmonies and successions of chords, in its sonority and form, in all the elements which it contains and in all the sensations which it evokes, it offers an incredible resemblance with the music of M. Debussy.” On the other hand, Jean Marnold, writing in the *mercure de France*, praised the new work, and boldly asserted that “one should remember the name of Maurice Ravel. He is one of the masters of tomorrow.”⁶

The String Quartet in F major is dedicated to Gabriel Fauré, whom he respected a lot as his principal teacher. According to an essay in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, Fauré could easily have composed the first eight bars of the first movement.⁷ Though Fauré was normally supportive of Ravel, he was not very fond of this composition, especially the last movement, which he thought was too short and badly balanced.⁸

Ravel's String Quartet contains four 'classic' movements, similar to Debussy's. A clear sonata form first movement (Allegro Moderato-Très doux), a playful scherzo with pizzicato features (Assez vif-Très rythmé), lyrical slow movement (Très Lent), and an agitated finale (Vif et agité) ends the quartet with fireworks. This string quartet is also cyclically composed.

⁶ Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel, Man and Musician* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991) p. 39-40.

⁷ Deborah Mawer, *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 99.

⁸ Orenstein, *Ravel, Man and Musician*, p.39-40.

As aforementioned, Ravel's String Quartet was debated almost immediately after the first performance. There was especially an avid debate about the similarities between it and Debussy's Premier Quatuor. The cyclic style, the use of pizzicato in the second movement as well as the effect of Javanese gamelan, the intervallic relationships, the extreme modulation: all of these elements are obvious enough to remind the listeners of Debussy's composition⁹.

Example 1.1



Fig. 1.1 Debussy's String Quartet first movement bar 14-16



Fig. 1.2 Ravel's String Quartet first movement bar 24-26

All of these similarities made the quartet almost judged as plagiarism and Ravel was heavily claimed as Debussy's imitator. On the other hand, Debussy had a different opinion about this and supported Ravel's String Quartet. Debussy's positive gesture towards Ravel came to light in a letter in 1905: "[I]n the name of the gods of music and in my own, do not touch a single note you have written in your Quartet."¹⁰

⁹ DeVoto, *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality: Essays on his music, Dimension & Diversity, No. 4*, p. 191.

¹⁰ Roland Manuel, *Maurice Ravel* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972) p. 36

In Naomi Shibatani’s essay about Debussy and Ravel, she explains that Ravel had also borrowed from other composers and was not afraid to admit it. He even believed that in order to learn as a composer, one should learn by imitating good role models. He would make marks in his own compositions verifying the inspiration. For Ravel, Debussy was an inspiration for many of his earlier works.¹¹

In spite of how similar these compositions are, they are still very personal: the harmony, the melody lines, and the way they use each instrument which produces its own color. In the next chapter, a closer approach of each string quartet will be explained more thoroughly, concentrating on the form and the harmonic progression of the first movement.

The Analysis and Comparison

After analyzing thoroughly the first movements of both string quartets, I found many interesting similar and also different things.

1. The Form

The first movements of both string quartets are acknowledged in sonata form.

1.1 Debussy’s first movement

In spite of some professional analysis that I have read and studied, when my teacher, Hróðmar I. Sigurbjörnsson, and I analyzed the first movement, we did not agree immediately that the form is sonata form. The length of each theme is not always traditional and the beginning of each new theme is not always noticeable. Only in the recapitulation part the themes become clearer and more conservative.

Below is a table showing the first movement.

Exposition		Development		Recapitulation	
1.1	Bar 1-12	D.1.1 or 1.1 ³	Bar 75-78	R.1.1 or 1.1 ⁷	Bar 138-146
Br.	Bar 13-25	1.1 ⁴	Bar 79-87	Br.2.0	Bar 147-148
1.1 ¹	Bar 26-31	2.1 ¹	Bar 88-96	Br.2.1	Bar 149-160
1.2	Bar 32-38	2.1 ²	Bar 97-102	R.1.2	Bar 161-170

¹¹ Shibatani, “*Contrasting Debussy and Ravel: A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Piano Works and Ondine*”, p. 18

				or 2.1. ⁵	
1.3	Bar 39-50	2.1 ³	Bar 103-110	R.1.3	Bar 171-174
1.4	Bar 51-59	2.1 ⁴	Bar 111-117	R.1.2 ¹	Bar 175-180
MC	Bar 60	Br	Bar 118-119	Coda 1.0	Bar 181-182
2.0	Bar 61-62	1.1 ⁵	Bar 120-131	Coda	Bar 183-194
2.1	Bar 63-66	1.1 ⁶	Bar 132-137		
2.0 ¹	Bar 67-70				
2.1 ¹	Bar 71-74				

Table 1.1 Debussy's String Quartet's first movement

The first theme (1.1), lasts for twelve bars, 4+8 (instead of eight, 4+4). This first theme is very much unison for the first four bars. This first theme is followed immediately by the bridge, where the first violin and cello alternating the main line and the other instruments give such an atmosphere with moving sixteenth notes in minor mode and later chromatic scale. A developed 1.1 theme (1.1¹) come in bar 26, with exactly the same line for the first violin like 1.1. The only difference is the changes in the lines of violin 2, viola, and cello.

The 1.2 appears in bar 32, still, similar to the very first theme's motive and unison, only in different keys and resolve differently. Bar 39 marks the 1.3, where now something quite different comes in. The main line is played by the first violin and viola in octaves, where the second violin and cello again, giving some nuance with triplets. 1.4 comes in bar 51, with first violin and viola still playing the main line in octaves, while the second violin and cello keep the lines going with overtone scales until the Medial Caesura (or middle point) appears in bar 60, which can also be written 1.1². Bars 61-62, my teacher and I agree to mark as a preparation for the second theme (2.0) which comes in bar 63. 2.0 is relatively short, with first violin, second violin, and viola holding the chord and the cello playing the very first theme in different keys, giving a dark and mysterious atmosphere.

The first times I went through this movement, I always thought that this was where the development part started. But, after analysing the movement and looking at it as a whole, it is clear that this is the second theme, which came as a surprise. 2.1 is four bars long, and Debussy slips the (2.0) into bars 67-68 as a small bridge just like before, and again, the second theme comes in bar 69 in a different key. Bar 75 marks

the real development part which he starts with the same first theme motive and unison (D.1.1 or 1.1³)

Fig.1.3 Debussy String Quartet first movement bars 75-79



Debussy develops the first theme which is played by the first violin, and has the second violin and viola play moving chords while the cello maintains the pedal point in bars 79-87 or 1.1⁴. From bar 83 to 87, all the instruments alternate the lines and take turns in maintaining the chords. In bar 88, Debussy uses the second theme as the main line (2.1¹), first played by the first violin and later the cello, with similar ‘accompaniment’ as before, yet he resolves it differently.

2.1² appears in bar 97, with the cello playing the main second theme lines for five bars. Again, he resolves this differently than before (bars 101-102), with unison motive and in bar 103, again the second theme motive is played by the first violin with similar accompaniments like before but in a different key (2.1³). Debussy continues with this second theme and modulates it in bar 111 which is also 2.1⁴, where this time it lasts for only two bars and continues with another unison theme. Bars 118-119 is clearly a bridge to the next motive which starts in bar 120 (2.2 or 1.1⁵).

The 2.2 is marked by pedal point played by the cello, and he slips the first theme motive in the viola part two times until bar 131 (1.1+21) where he fills more of the moving chords with triplets and has the first violin play the first and the second themes, alternating every bar. Bars 136-137 are again a unison bridge to recapitulation.

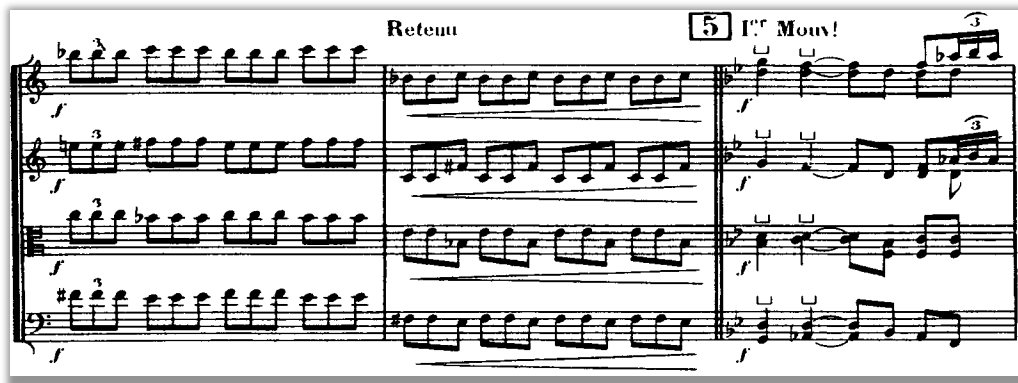


Fig.1.4. Debussy's String Quartet bars 136-138.

The recapitulation starts in bar 138 with the first theme motive with more chords added and slightly different chords progressions in between (R.1.1 or 1.1⁷). This theme is followed by the bridge, which is a different bridge than the one in the exposition part; bars 147-148 are a short preparation (Br. 2.0) to the main bridge which starts in bar 149 (Br. 2.1), where the main line alternates between the cello and the first violin, while the others fill it with moving triplets as the nuance, as well as the modulator.

The second motive appears in bar 161 (R.1.2 or 2.1⁵), played by the second violin which is also joined by the viola two bars later while the first violin and the cello doing broken chords or arpeggio, giving a strong sense of key. Bars 171-174 (R.1.3) with first and second violin alternate calming triplets, which also function as a little closing of the section. Again, in bar 175 (R.1.2¹) a much quieter atmosphere comes in where the melody is just played by the first violin and the cello is giving a strong sense of chord. Bars 181-182, are the last short preparation for the coda section, which starts in bar 183 until the end of the movement, bar 194.

As can be seen, the form of the first movement becomes much clearer in the recapitulation part, just like the traditional sonata form. The length of each theme also becomes more traditional and predictable (four or eight bars) in the later part of development and continues in the recapitulation. I agree that this is sonata form, but more in a free and elusive way. Debussy is an expert in expanding the theme and developing it into the succeeding motives and themes. A couple of times it also appears that he mixes both the first and the second themes together. Everything is done smoothly and all seems natural, such a masterpiece by a genius.

1.2 Ravel's first movement

After looking at the complicated form of Debussy's String Quartet, going through Ravel's String Quartet is very simple and clear. He is very strict about the form, obeys very much the tradition, as opposed to Debussy, who is very 'liberal.' The String Quartet's first movement was not very difficult to analyze.

Exposition		Development		Recapitulation	
1.1	Bar 1-8	D.1.1	Bar 84-91	R.1.1	Bar 129-136
1.2	Bar 9-16	D.1.1 ¹	Bar 92-98	R.1.2	Bar 137-144
1.1 ¹	Bar 17-20	Br.	Bar 99-101	R.1.3	Bar 145-148
Br.1.0	Bar 21-23	D.1.2	Bar 102-113	Br.2.0	Bar 149-151
Br.1.1	Bar 24-26	D.1.3	Bar 114-118	Br.2.1	Bar 152-154
Br. 1.2	Bar 27	D.1.4	Bar 119-128	Br.2.2	Bar 155
Br.1.1	Bar 28-30			Br.2.1	Bar 156-158
1.2 ⁺	Bar 31-34			2.2 ⁺	Bar 159-166
Br. 1.2	Bar 35-38			Br.2.3	Bar 167-170
Br.1.3	Bar 39-43			MC	Bar 172-183
MC	Bar 44-54			R.2.1	Bar 184-197
2.1	Bar 55-68			Coda	Bar 198-213
L.1.1	Bar 69-73				
L.1.2	Bar 74-76				
L.1.1	Bar 77-79				
L.1.2	Bar 80-83				

Table 1.2 Ravel's String Quartet's first movement

The first theme (E1.1) of the String Quartet in F major is simply eight bars (4+4). The first violin plays the magical opening, the very first theme, while the second violin, viola, and cello are responsible for the chord progressions. E1.2 comes in bar 9, with the line alternating intensely between the first and second violin until bar 16. E1.1¹ comes in bar 17, a little bit differently developed than the first theme. Br. 1.0, or the preparation for the bridge part comes in bar 21 and lasts for three bars.

Bar 24 marks where the bridge actually starts, with the main line in the first violin, pedal point in cello, and fast moving sixteenth note on the second violin and viola. Oddly, this bridge theme is only a three bars theme (1,5+1,5), so that Br.1.2 is marked

in bar 27. Again, Br. 1.1 appears in bars 28-30, with the theme now presented by the viola and then switches to second violin.

Fig.1.5. Ravel's String Quartet bars 24-32.

The extension of Br.1.2 or 1.2⁺ comes next in bars 31-34, leading to, again, Br. 1.2 in bars 35-38 with intense chord progressions in the second violin, viola, and cello. Br.1.3 interrupts the lines quickly in bars 39-43, dominated by fast sixteenth notes. The Medial Caesura, or the middle point, comes next, in bars 44-54, leading into the second theme. This part is also a developed theme from Br. 1.2.

The second theme (2.1) in bar 55 is played by first violin and viola in octave, while the second violin and pizzicato in the cello gave the nuance. It continues up to bar 68, where in bar 63, the line is switched to second violin. All of these lead up to the closing section which starts in bar 69, which contains two motives. The first motive (L.1.1) from bars 69-73, and the second one (L1.2) is exactly the same line as the first motive (E1.1) but treated a little bit differently. L1.1 comes again in bar 77, and L1.2 in bars 80-83. In this whole closing section, the cello maintains the pedal point of each harmonic progression. Another interesting thing in this closing section is how Ravel slips the first motive (E.1.1) in the second violin and viola lines.

The development part starts in bar 84 with some effects from the second violin and viola, continued by first and second violin a bar later, when the viola comes in with the main line (D.1.1).



Fig.1.6 Ravel's String Quartet bars 84-90

In bar 92 (D.1.1¹), the line is played by first violin and cello in octaves up to bar 98. The next three bars, I concluded as a bridge to the next development motive, (D.1.2) which starts in bar 102-113, switching lines in between all the instruments and, of course, modulating. Bar 114 (D.1.3) is a mixture of the themes in the main line, played by the first violin, while the others have intense chord progressions, which lead to the climax of the piece in bar 119 (D.1.4). This climax marks the end of the development part.

The recapitulation part is similar to the exposition part. Ravel uses many of the same features and atmosphere as in the exposition part, except the harmonic progression. It starts in bar 129 (R.1.1), where the first theme comes, but is resolved and modulated differently. R.1.2 comes in bar 137, exactly the same motive as in the exposition part, except the keys. R.1.3 comes next in bars 145-149.

Again, like the exposition part, the next three bars (149-151) are the short preparation to the bridge part (Br.2.0). Bar 152 marks the real bridge (Br.2.1), Br.2.2 comes in bar 155 and Br.2.1 comes again in bars 156-158. Another extension of

Br.2.2 starts in bars 159-166, leading to Br.2.3 that appeared in bars 167-170. Another Medial Caesura comes in bars 172-183, in a different key, but is resolved differently, leading to exactly the same second theme (R.2.1) as the one in the exposition, up to bar 190, then again, it is resolved differently, going to the closing section or coda, which starts in bar 198 to the very end of the movement, bar 213.

2. The Tonalities and Harmonic Progressions

2.1 Debussy's first movement

Debussy opens the movement with phrygian mode in G minor, which lasts for the first twelve bars. The bridge that follows the first theme clearly gives a sense of G minor scale, until bar 17, where the cello takes over the melody in B flat mixolydian mode for four bars, and switches back to G phrygian mode, accompanied by chromatic scale played by first violin and viola. He changes to F major (IV/IV) in bar 24 and 25, as the preparation for the developed first theme (1.1¹).

Although the 1.1¹ has the same melodic line as the very first theme, Debussy changes the harmony of second violin, viola, and cello. Instead of the predictable G minor chords, the E flat major chord appears for two bars and G flat major in two bars, before going back to E flat major for another two bars.

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's String Quartet, first movement, bars 25-31. The score is arranged in two systems of four staves each, representing the four string parts: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The first system (bars 25-28) features a complex texture with rapid sixteenth-note passages in the upper strings and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the lower strings. Dynamic markings include 'dim.', 'più dim.', and 'p'. The second system (bars 29-31) continues the texture, with the lower strings playing a more active role. The key signature is one flat (F major or D minor), and the time signature is 3/4.

Fig.2.1. Debussy's String Quartet first movement bars 25 -31

In bar 32, the 1.2 comes in G minor, flows to full diminished fourth chord, and then to C flat mixolydian mode, preparing the 1.3 which comes in bar 39 in B flat in phrygian mode and lasts for the whole section. A surprising C major overtone scales appears in bar 51, or 1.4, leading to C mixolydian mode after two bars, and finally to B major, alternating with C major chord every beat starting in bar 55 until bar 58, where the B major becomes conclusive.

The preparation for the second theme or 2.0 is in F sharp minor, clearly brought out by the cello, and continues through the second theme (2.1) until bar 66. Another 2.0 comes right after 2.1 in bar 67, which appears in G minor up to the middle part of the second 2.1, where he emphasizes C major chord with seventh (V/f or V/III/d) leading to the development part which is in D minor.

The beginning of the development part gives an impression of F major, though it is actually in D minor. For the next few bars, Debussy maintains the D minor atmosphere by pedal point on the minor fifth chord which is played by cello and chords played by the second violin, while the viola has a moving chromatic line up to bar 83, where the d minor chord can be heard clearly. Bar 88 marks the surprising modulation to B flat major, which continues for four bars, until bar 92 where it changes to V⁹ of D minor (A major chord), also for four bars.

Fig.2.3. Debussy's String Quartet bars 88-93.

A whole tone scale in F major appears in bar 97, clearly played by the cello for a traditional four bars motive, yet Debussy expands this cello line for another two bars (bars 101-102), and smoothly changes the harmony of the other instruments to ii/F sharp major, or G sharp minor, as a preparation for the upcoming theme, which is in F sharp major.

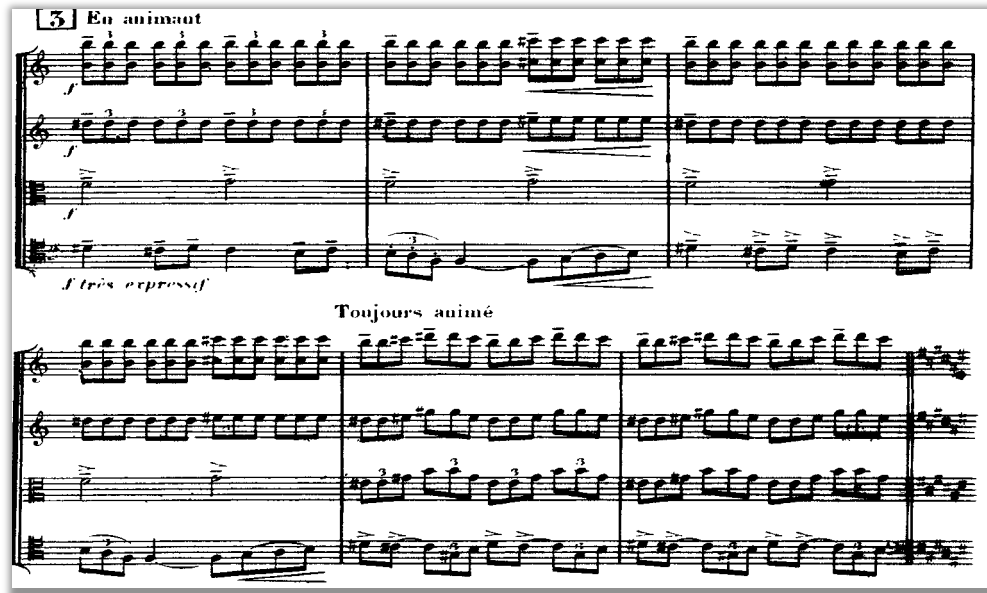


Fig.2.4. Debussy's String Quartet bars 97-102.

After eight bars of solid F sharp major, Debussy modulates to a minor using the same pattern and melody for a short while, and extends the pattern in G Phrygian mode as a bridge. Instead of maintaining the G Phrygian mode when the first theme comes in the viola line, Debussy switches the harmony into V^7 half diminished chord in d minor with pedal point in the cello line.

The next few bars are basically a bridge; the recapitulation part starts a bit later in bar 138. It is not clear in what key it is in and it is always moving, which is typical of Debussy's style. The second violin, viola, and cello move chromatically while the line in the first violin also helps the progression. All of these prepare towards the solid G minor chord in recapitulation.

The harmonic progression in the recapitulation is slightly different from the exposition, though he uses more or less similar melodies and patterns. He starts the recapitulation with G Phrygian mode chord, same as the opening in the exposition part, yet he adds some extra notes in the chord for thicker sound. Debussy then modulates this whole section little by little to the second motive in recapitulation. First, he smoothly changes to B flat major in bar 147, gives a hint of B flat minor for

two bars, moving to F sharp minor, preparing for the coming D Lydian mode which calmed down the whole movement, and also for the fact that he does not use extreme harmonic changes after this section.

Pedal point in V/g or D major is used from bar 167-170, just to maintain the atmosphere. He establishes the G minor nuance from bar 171 until the very end, using the chromatic progression for a few bars, until the coda part where the solid G minor chord closes the whole movement.

Debussy's characteristics are obvious in this piece, or at least in this movement. It is clear from his way of modulating (he uses the I-III progression a lot), changing the chords smoothly, surprising resolutions, the use of modes, and how at some points he does not give a clear sense in what key it is. I strongly think that his first and foremost concern was the atmosphere or nuance that some harmony and tonality give, rather than mapping everything beforehand. Moreover, it seems that he was very free and open to everything when he composed. That is also why his music is relatively complicated to analyse: both form and harmonic progression.

2.2 Ravel's first movement

Ravel establishes a strong nuance of F major in the very beginning for four bars. Soon in the fifth bar, he switches to A flat major, or the third scale degree (mediant) of F minor. He ends the first theme with a G minor chord, which is the second degree in F major, and uses this chord more in the next few bars, alternating with IV^{#6} every second beat until bar 16, where he ends with the V in F major (C major). Bar 17 starts again in F major and is resolved into II^{#11} or V/V with a hint of whole tone scale.

The image shows a musical score for Ravel's String Quartet, bars 19-23. It consists of four staves. The top staff has a vocal line with the lyrics "di - mi - nu - en - do". The music is marked with dynamics such as *mf*, *p*, *p₀*, and *pizz.* The score shows a complex harmonic progression with various chords and textures.

Fig.2.5. Ravel's String Quartet bars 19-23.

The bridge starts with the dominant chord of F major and continues with a lot of interesting harmonic progression. First, Ravel starts with chromatic progression in the cello line ($vi^7 - \#vi^0 - vii^{13}$) and stays in vii^{13} or E minor, for three bars. I agree with my teacher that Ravel uses it as pedal point; the dominant of a minor. The note of the first two beats in bar 31 fits into eight tone scales, which appears very often in this movement. In these bars the axis system in Tonika (Ton^0) also appears, which Ravel also uses relatively a lot in this movement.

The subdominant of axis system (sub^0) appears in bar 35, can clearly be heard by the C sharp minor chord ($\#v$) for a few bars, and then alternates with E half diminished chord. These chords also fit if we change the tonality into D minor, as a big preparation for the medial caesura, and later, the second theme, which is all in D minor. The second theme stays in D minor for a relatively long time. From bars 61-68, the indication of the IV scale degree (B flat major) becomes clearer until finally it comes in the beginning of the closing section in bar 69.

The closing section has a very interesting and beautiful harmonic progression, which is a whole tone scale or chords stepping down; obvious in the cello line (B flat bars 69-73 – A flat bar 74-76 – G flat bar 77-79 – E bar 80-83 – D bar 84, which is also where the development part starts).

The development starts off in D minor with strong chords played by the first and second violin, while the viola has the main line and changes it elegantly to a flat minor. In bar 98, the Ton^0 appears back, indicated by enharmonic B major chords. It starts to be solid from bar 102 until 109. The next few bars have an extreme harmonic progression, marked by the eight tone scales moving up in the cello line, all building up tensely to the climax in bar 119.



Fig.2.6. Ravel String Quartet bars 117-122.

F# major/minor chords marks the climax in bar 119, also with whole tone pattern. It is called major/minor chord because of the effect given by second violin and cello which play F#- A# - C# while the first violin and viola plays A instead of A#. The whole tone pattern from F# stays until bar 128, closes the development part and leads effortlessly to the recapitulation part.

The first four bars of the recapitulation part are exactly the same as in the exposition part. Instead of going to A flat major or F minor, it goes to G major. Bar 136 chromatically moves to F minor and stays until 148. Bar 149-151 indicates the V^{+11}/V and again, with the color of whole tone scale pattern. The next four bars have exactly the same harmony with the exposition, but Ravel resolved it differently. This time, he resolves it into V/as , or E flat mixolydian.

Soon in bar 159, the sub^0 appears, indicated by E minor chord, which changes into D flat mixolydian in bar 163-171. During these bars, we can also slowly change it into F minor. Bar 172 marks the solid F minor atmosphere with the pedal point in the V (C major). Surprisingly, in bar 180 he uses exactly the same first and second violin lines, yet changes the viola and cello lines, and gives a huge harmonic difference between the recapitulation and exposition. He still maintains the pedal point in the V degree.

The second theme in the recapitulation is in F major, again with exactly the same line in the first violin, second violin, and viola; the cello has the only line which is

responsible for the huge harmonic changes. B flat major is heard clearly in bar 192, right before the closing section.

The closing section also has an interesting harmonic progression, again, using the whole tone steps down. Starting in bar 198, with C# major (#V), B Lydian in bar 204, A Lydian (III^{lyd}) in bar 207, G Lydian (II^{lyd}) in the next bar, and finally comes 'home' to F major (I^{lyd}). The beautiful ending is marked by E flat major (lowered VII) alternating with F major (I), until the second last bar (G major / II⁹) and ends on a peaceful F major.

Fig.2.6. Ravel's String Quartet bars 200-213.

This movement reflects Ravel's signature style in many ways. How he makes effortless harmonic progression, the harmonic features, the use of modes and axis system, and the form which is very traditional and clear. He also gives clear impressions of what key it is in at the moment (clearer than Debussy did), and he uses the atmosphere differently than Debussy. Sometimes, however, it occurred that he used similar harmonic progression like Debussy did (the changes from I-III). It seems

that he learned a lot from Debussy's work, but composed independently without any intention to copy Debussy's work.

Conclusion

After taking a closer look on these string quartets, I have learned more of Ravel and Debussy's personal signature styles; how distinct and unique they are as composers, though Ravel borrowed a lot from Debussy, particularly for this composition. As can be seen, Ravel took the model of Debussy's String Quartet and composed his own String Quartet based on it. However, I conclude that his own approach was to learn from Debussy, but at the same time also to establish himself as an independent composer during this period.

The fundamental difference between these two works is the individual color of each composer. Ravel uses smoother materials, always very lyrical, intimate, and pure, closer to the character of string instruments, though his main intention is the richness in impressionist colors, while Debussy uses rougher materials to create the colors, and often he captures the atmosphere better than the lyrical side. In addition, Debussy intends to write more big chords and dramatic nuances as if he writes for piano or orchestral music rather than string instruments.

Furthermore, Ravel can also be categorized as conservative in form; he was very strict in planning the form beforehand, in other words, he was somewhat predictable based on the amount of bars, where Debussy was much freer and it seems that he did not plan everything scrupulously before he composed. Their harmonic language is also very personal, though in this composition Ravel borrows some harmonic features from Debussy. Ravel also almost always gives a clear sense of the tonalities, while Debussy somewhat hides or plays more around with it.

This essay has focused only on the first movement of the string quartets, and there were still much more aspects to investigate and compare with. Although the essential differences are apparent, further analysis of Debussy and Ravel will give deeper understanding of their very own styles and approaches to music.

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