

Table 1. Gamelan Influence in Debussy's Music

Ratings: 1=no gamelan influence 4=strong gamelan influence

Date	Title	Ostinato	Functional vs. Static Harmony	Symmetrical Form/Key Relationship	Pentatonic/ Whole Tone Scale	Gamelan Timbre	Layered Texture	Overall	
1880	Danse bohémienne	1	1	1 Functional	1 A-B-A i-I-i	1	1	1	
1890	Arabesque 1	1	1	1 Functional/ modal	1 A-B-A-Coda I-IV-I	1 Diatonic	1 occasional	2 1	
1890	Arabesque 2	1	2	1 Functional	1 A-B-A-Coda I-IV ~ I	1 Diatonic	3 Soft Staccato w/ ped.	3 2	
1890	Rêverie	1	3	1-2 Functional	1 ABA I ~ I	1	1	2 2	
1896-1901	Pour le piano Prelude	1	4 like cycles @ beginning	4 many aug. chords	3 ABBAABBACoda Themes always reappear in original key	4 Whole tone scales & other	4 Shimmering trills soft stacc.	4 2-3 layers common	4
1896-1901	Pour le piano Sarabande	1	1	1 modal	2 A B A g#-c# c#-E-f# g#-c#	1 modal	3 soft stacc. 2nds Par. 5ths low "gongs"	1	1
1903	Pagodes	4	4	4 static- pentatonic	3 A-B-A-Coda (according to themes)	4 pentatonic	4 2nds soft stacc. Gongs High fast arpeggios	4 Layers more similar to actual gamelan, with low=slow and higher=faster	4 Pagodes has several gamelan effects not found in any of the other pieces
1904	L'isle joyeuse	1	4 very important structurally	4 static--e.g., pedal A lasts thru 1st 6 pages	4 abcdabebcbcbcea (by theme)	4 Whole tone & other	3 2nds Low gongs	4	4

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Chronology

1887 May have heard individual gamelan instruments

1889 Heard small Javanese gamelan (10-15 instruments)

1900 Heard larger Javanese gamelan (~40 instruments)

Debussy's reaction

But my poor friend! Do you remember the Javanese music, able to express every shade of meaning, even unmentionable shades . . . which make our tonic and dominant seem like ghosts, for use by naughty little children? (1895)

Thus Javanese music obeys laws of counterpoint which make Palestrina seem like child's play. And if one listens to it without being prejudiced by one's European ears, one will find a percussive charm that forces one to admit that our own music is not much more than a barbarous kind of noise more fit for a traveling circus. (1913)

. . . Javanese rhapsodies, which instead of confining themselves in a traditional form, develop according to the fantasy of countless arabesques. (1910)

Summary: Formal freedom, timbre ("percussive charm"), free (non-functional) harmony, layered texture.

Kiyoshi Tamagawa's 5 criteria for Gamelan influence on Debussy's music

1. Titles suggestive of the orient or exoticism
2. Passages or formal structures built around ostinato
3. Pitch materials, motives or scales suggestive of gamelan.
4. Timbres and tone colors evocative of the gamelan.
5. Textures reminiscent of layered gamelan texture.

When all or most of these are present, it is a strong indication of gamelan influence.

Tamagawa suggests that these 5 factors increase greatly in Debussy's music after about 1890.

Table 2. Summary of All Piano Works Through 1903

Ratings: 1=no gamelan influence (according to the five criteria); 4=definite gamelan influence

Rating	Date	Title
1	1880	Danse bohémienne
1	1890	Arabesque 1
1	1890	Arabesque 2
2	1890	Rêverie
1	1890?	Mazurka
2	1890	Tarantelle Styrienne
3	1890	Ballade slave
1	1890	Valse romantique
	1890, rev. 1905	Suite Bergamasque
1		Prelude
2		Menuet
2-3		Clair del lune
2		Passepiéd
2	1892	Nocturne
	1894	Images (oubliées)
1		Lent
1		Sarabande
4		Quelques aspects . . .
	1896-1901	Pour le piano
4		Prelude
1		Sarabande
4		Toccata
3	1903	D'un cahier d'esquisses
	1903	Estampes
4		Pagodes
3		La soirée dans Grenade
3		Jardins sous la pluie