

Analysis of the Writing Characteristics of the Title Music, Using “Scenes of Childhood” and “Children’s Garden” as Examples

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In European thought and culture, there exists a group of passionate artists who are fascinated by the intention, passion, and richness of artistic expression. They strive to establish connections between different art forms. Musicians not only attempt to represent masterpieces through the language of music but also aim to convey subjective experiences of emotions and personal imagination to listeners by adding titles to their musical works. This study examines two pieces, “Scenes of Childhood” and “Children’s Garden”, and analyzes the different approaches employed by the composers in portraying similar content.

Keywords: scenes of childhood, children’s corner, title music

Introduction

The piano suite “Scenes of Childhood” was composed in 1838 and comprised 13 small pieces, each with its own title. Together, these pieces form a cohesive whole (Lambton, 2010). This suite is not only a nostalgic reflection of childhood joys shared with Clara, encompassing play, and the mundane aspects of life, but also a love letter to Clara. It is replete with memories of Schumann and Clara’s own childhood.

“The Children’s Garden”, a piano suite composed in 1908, represents a masterpiece of Debussy’s mature impressionistic style. It was inspired by Russian composer Mussorgsky’s Suite from the Nursery, which consists of six small pieces that narrate the story of Debussy and his daughter through six framed images (Mixdorf, 2016). The title page of the score reads “With a father’s apologies, for my dear Jojo”. Jojo is the affectionate name given to Debussy’s daughter Claude Emma, who was only five years old at the time. Debussy immersed himself in the intuitive world of children, participating in his daughter’s play and observing the influences children exhibit in response to their surroundings (Naomitsu et al., 2017). Thus, the piece “Children’s Garden” is not merely a depiction of children or a composition intended for children to play, but a reflection of Debussy’s enduring childlike spirit.

Comparison and Analysis of Different Writing Techniques With the Same Content

When describing scenes of play, Schumann wrote two remarkably cheerful pieces, namely, “Hide and Seek” and “Ride the Wooden Horse”. Each piece possesses a distinct character, with “Hide and Seek” employing skipping rhythms throughout, while “Ride the Pony” incorporates syncopated rhythms and a sense of childlike whimsy. In Debussy’s play scene, he presents a gait dance performed by black puppets, reminiscent of black jazz music, characterized by jazz syncopations.

“Hide and Seek” is a 2/4-time signature piece featuring lively and cheerful tones. The section consists of two identical four-bar phrases in the key of B minor, utilizing skipping notations and emphasizing strong notation, as depicted in Figure 1.

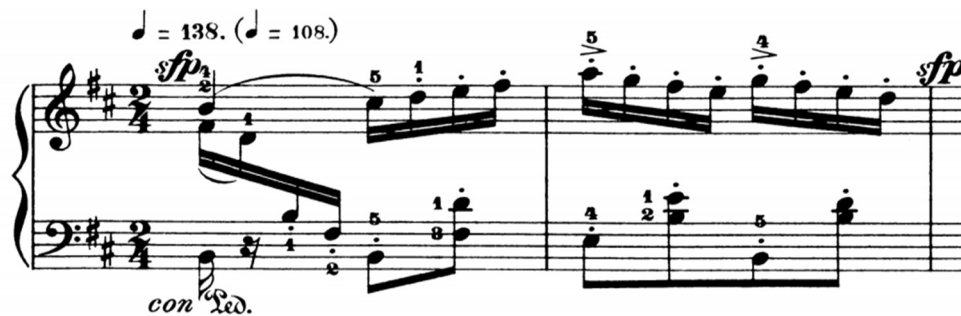


Figure 1. Bars 1-2 of “Hide and Seek”.

This notation vividly captures the joy experienced by children while playing hide-and-seek, evoking a sense of playful jumping. The 16th-note runs aptly simulate a child’s pursuit during a chase. The middle section, also comprising two four-bar phrases, transitions to G major, representing the climax of the piece. Two bars after the second phrase, the music modulates to the seventh chord of the B minor key, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Bars 15-16 of “Hide and Seek”.

The recapitulation is initiated by the seventh chord in B minor, faithfully reproducing the preceding passage and concluding on the primary chord in B minor.

“Ride the Wooden Horse” is a playful trio, employing three voices, each characterized by syncopated rhythms. The tune exudes cheerfulness and wit, vividly depicting the joy of a child riding a wooden horse and the rocking motion of the horse. The high voice in right-hand features syncopated rhythm, while the middle and low voices in the left hand complete the syncopated rhythm, as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Bars 1-2 of “Ride the Wooden Horse”.

The middle section serves as an expansive passage and represents the climax of the piece. Over eight bars, the music transitions through various keys, beginning in F major, passing through D minor and ending in the C major key. The piece then moves into a recapitulation section, transitioning to C major and concluding on the primary chord.

“The Puppet Gait Dance” vividly portrays a swaying black doll’s movement through the extensive use of syncopated rhythms, providing a graphically engaging and interesting representation (Kang, 2020). This complex three-part work opens with a single triad in the exposition section, featuring three phrases in E-flat major, with a theme that is reiterated and developed throughout, as depicted in Figure 4.

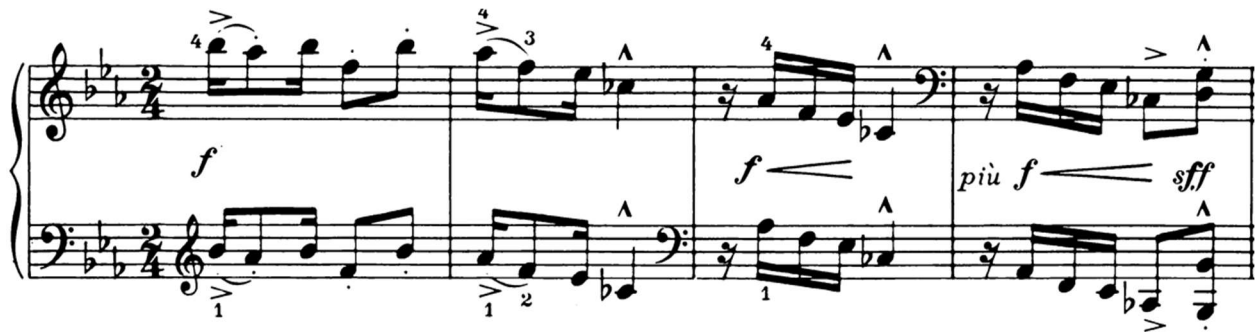


Figure 4. Bars 1-4 of “The Puppet Gait Dance”.

The middle section shifts to G-flat major, comprising two phrases that culminate in the genus chord. The recapitulation section reintroduces the initial movement in the E-flat major, concluding with an unresolved ending before transitioning back to the middle section in the G-flat major. The middle part of the piece takes the form of an interpolation, with Bars 47-60 in Part I employing numerous ornaments and small skipping notes. In Bars 61-91 of Part II, a syncopated rhythmic pattern is added to the thematic melody, enhancing the music’s vibrancy. The recapitulation section reproduces the exposition, concluding with the dominant chord in the E-flat major.

Conclusion

Schumann’s music is characterized by a rich imagination and a delicate portrayal of emotions, conveyed through song-like melodies, varied rhythms, and intricate accompanying patterns. Debussy’s work, on the other hand, evokes a sense of mystery and transcendence. Influenced by Impressionist painting, Debussy’s piano compositions are incredibly visual, easily eliciting associations with paintings. Whether capturing close-up or distant scenes, his music vividly presents these images before the listener’s eyes.

References

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