



**ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND DRAMA**

# **Interpretational solutions for harp in Debussy's Dance Sacrée et Profane**

**Roberta Mascia**

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Author: *Roberta Mascia*

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Supervisor: *Maria Bania*

Examiner: *Joel Eriksson*

## **ABSTRACT**

Key words: harp technique, interpretation *Dance Sacrée et Profane*, Pierre Jamet harpist

In this thesis I investigate how to interpret the harp part of *Danse Sacrée et Profane* by Claude Debussy with special focus on the different technical solutions for bars 8-12 and bars 143-150. *Danse Sacrée et Profane* is one of the most important pieces for harp and it is often requested in auditions. One question is what different techniques and solutions there are for bars 8-12. I also discuss the different technical solutions for the bars 143-150 that I have found. I have collected seven different versions of this problematic section and studied, recorded and discussed them. Finally, I have made my own version. I also discuss how Debussy intended the harp part of this piece to be played: which type of harp was this piece composed for? Why is this type of harp not used for this piece anymore? As material I have used literature based on Debussy's life and works; articles from *The American Harp Journal*, and the score of the piece edited by Durandin Paris, 1904.

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## Bibliography

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

In my thesis I discuss one of the most important pieces for harp, and a piece that is often requested in auditions: *Danse Sacrée et Profane*. I choose this topic because I am studying and practicing for auditions and this piece is the key Concerto in the first round.

Partly because this piece was composed for a different type of harp than is used now, there are technical issues which many harpists have addressed

In the thesis, I discuss which harp this piece was composed for and why this type of harp is not used anymore. Concerning the interpretation, I have focussed on two topics. The first is that I wanted to find out about the different techniques available for bars 8-12 and which one is nearer to Debussy's idea. The second is the technically troublesome of bars 143-150 of *Dances* which has generated a number of different versions by famous harpists. These bars contain one of the most technically demanding pedal sequences in the harp literature.

I collected seven different versions of bars 143-150 of *Danse Profane* and I have explored which version of this problematic part is for me easier, faster and safe to play on an unfamiliar harp, thus most suited for me. I did practice each of them at least 5 times a day for one week. In addition, I made for each version a video recording of myself. Finally, I made my own version of bars 143-150 which I also recorded on video.

To find out the answer to my question of which harp this piece was written for, I studied the literature about harps during the period and literature based on Debussy's life and works. I also asked harpists during Masterclasses or auditions what they knew about Debussy and the modern harps.

In this work I also used articles from *The American Harp Journal* by Carl Swanson and Susanne L. Moulton-Gertig. These articles contained detailed analysis about harp scores and three different versions of bars 143-150 of *Danse Profane*. I read a book by Mirella Vita and Cristina Ghidotti: *In Arpeggi- Storie della Storia dell'Arpa* about Debussy's life. Information about the harp and its history I found in the online dictionaries Grove Music Online and and Italian encyclopaedia: *Enciclopedia dei Ragazzi*.

In the community of harpists, Assia Cunego helped me by sending the version of bars 143-150 she uses to play and some other she did practice during the years and my friend and harpist Liv Dahren gave me the version she uses to play, written by Marisa Robles.

## 2. ACHILLE-CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Claude Debussy was born in a poor family on August 22, 1862, in Saint –Germain-en-Laye, France, the oldest of five children.<sup>1</sup> Debussy showed an early affinity for the piano and he began taking lessons at the age of 7. By the age 10 or 11 he had entered the Paris Conservatory.

In 1880 Nadežda von Meck, the aristocratic patron of Pyotr I. ŠCajkovskij, hired him as pianist. In the wake of von Meck Debussy travelled, visiting many cities including Venice, Florence, Vienna and Moscow. In 1884 he won the Prix de Rome which guaranteed a stay at the Villa Medici in Rome. Here he composed, among other things, *Printemps for female choir and orchestra* (1887), a song inspired by the famous painting by Sandro Botticelli, *The Spring*. Back in Paris, Debussy attended musical and literary circles of the capital, he set to music poems by the great French poets such as Paul Verlaine and Charles Baudelaire. In Germany, in Bayreuth, he attended the works of Richard Wagner, a musician admired by writers and Symbolist artists. He was also attracted by the new sounds of the Indonesians gamelan orchestra of percussion instruments, which he heard at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1889.

In the nineties Debussy was deeply attracted to the symbolism, the literary movement of the late nineteenth century attentive to the most mysterious aspects of reality, the dimension of dreams, and the musicality of the word. An example of this approach is the *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* for orchestra (1894), inspired by a poem by the French poet Stephane Mallarme. The song evokes the feelings of a faun, who on a hot afternoon, indulges in fantasies of love. The mysterious atmosphere of the dream of the poem by Mallarmé is interpreted by Debussy with a new musical language.

### 2.1 DEBUSSY AND IMPRESSIONISM

Debussy was fascinated by changes of light, by the vibrations of colour, everything that moves and fluctuates.<sup>2</sup> He used this to express two of his great loves: the sea and dance. The first was even an obsession, a totalizing sentiment, as reflected by many of his letters; we can say that it was the water in itself, in all its forms that had attracted a so magical and mystery tour. He loved the dance; works such as his ballets *Khamma* (1911), and *Jeux* (1913), are among the most

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1 This section is based on *Enciclopedia dei ragazzi*, s.v. “Debussy”, by Antonietta Pozzi, Treccani, 2005, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/claude-debussy\\_%28Enciclopedia-dei-ragazzi%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/claude-debussy_%28Enciclopedia-dei-ragazzi%29/)

2 This section is based on Cristina Ghidotti and Mirella Vita, *In Arpeggi-Storie della Storia dell’Arpa* (Editor Pizzicato, 2007), 39/44.

fascinating, modern and innovative pieces of their author. The other great love of Debussy was Spain that must have seemed a land of sea and colours, perfumes and exaltation of the senses; land of dances which is reminiscent in the slightly exotic character of *Dance Profane*, whose second theme is a Spanish melody which would be subsequently used in two of his preludes: *La Sérénade Interrompue* and *La puerta del Vino*.

## 2.2 DANSE SACRÉE et PROFANE

*Danse sacrée et Profane* were commissioned in 1903 as a test piece for the Brussels Conservatory and it was finished in the spring 1904.<sup>3</sup> The *Dances* had their concert première on 6 November 1904 on the Concerts Colonne is attributed to Lucille Wurmser- Delcourt the first performance with the chromatic harp. Debussy was inspired by a piano piece of the Portuguese composer and conductor Francisco de Lacerna when he wrote the *Danse sacrée*. *Danse profane* shares a melody with *La Sérénade interrompue* from the *Preludes for Piano*, and is coloured by the influence of Spanish dance and techniques of melodic embellishment. The *Dances* are close to major works such as *Estampes*, *Images*, and *La mer* with all the harmonic elements and timbre of Debussy.

The two dances emerge into one another without apparent interruption: they seem to integrate each other in a hug strange and indistinct, almost a photographic image and its negative.<sup>4</sup> The *Sacrée* and the *Profane* is languidly intertwined, as often the case in the art of Debussy, as will happen in *Martirio di San Sebastiano*, from 1913. It is this particularly common sensibility that in all Debussy's production often seems to emerge unconscious by the author, without any moral judgment. The *Dances* find their unity in the sense of the mystery that is the real deep connection to all the work of Debussy. The sense of something beyond, we cannot see, we cannot hear, but maybe we can guess. A "something" that can be dark and glorious, as in *La Mer* cold and disturbing, as in *Jeux* sensual and terrible, as in *L'Isle joyeuse* suspended motion of dancer, a broken hand, a veil that rises not, anguish not said. It is the great modernity of Debussy.

The *Dance Sacrée*, close in spirit to *Night*, and works as *Sirenes* (1901), is distinguished by modalism, that permeates and exploits the special chordal sonorities obtained with the harp, forming those "melodies harmonies" that so much have in the music of the French author, especially the use that he makes of the piano. In fact, the atmosphere of this work is to run the mind to one of his most famous preludes: *La Cathédrale engloutie*, which is a good example of

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Ghidotti and Vita, *In Arpeggi-Storie della Storia dell'Arpa* .39/44

4

This section and next are based on Federico Bindi, "Le due danze di Debussy, decantazione poetica del suo spirito" *I Venerdì al dal Verme*, May 3, 2002, 5, transl. by me, [http://web.tiscali.it/rinascenze/giornalino/venerdi\\_5.pdf](http://web.tiscali.it/rinascenze/giornalino/venerdi_5.pdf)

how the melody of Debussy is closely linked to color and Harmony, the light variations that it produces.

## 2.3 DEBUSSY AND HARPS

In this section I address which harp was this piece composed for and why is this type of harp not used for this piece anymore.

The first one creating a chromatic harp without pedals was Gustave Lyon. The chromatic harp has two rows of strings which intersect without touching. In 1897 Gustave Lyon of the Pleyel firm patented his model for chromatic harp without pedals. Along with the creation of this instrument, Lyon recognized the need for a marketing strategy if the new harp were to survive and become a viable alternative and rival to the firmly-ensconced pedal harp.<sup>5</sup> He would create a demand for the chromatic harp by commissioning works specifically composed for the instrument. Having devised a marketing plan that fashioned a demand that was self-generated, Lyon needed only to turn toward the composers who, with the promise of financial rewards, would eagerly provide the needed repertoire to sell his product. Debussy wanted to experiment with the resources of the braided chromatic harp without pedals and also because Debussy's continuing financial woes being a matter of historical record, it is not surprising that he was amenable to accepting a commission from Lyon, which culminated in the composition of the *Sacred and Profane Dances for Chromatic harp and string Orchestra*.

Because Debussy did not like the weak sound of the chromatic harp, a few years later came the diatonic version of *Dances* which was premiered by the harpist Pierre Jamet.

Pierre Jamet (21 April 1893- 17 June 1991), was professor of harp at the Conservatoire de Paris from 1948 to 1963.<sup>6</sup> He premiered the second version of the *Dances*. Soon the chromatic harp was abandoned, mostly because of its unwieldy size and the inordinate amount of time required to tune before practicing or performing.<sup>7</sup>

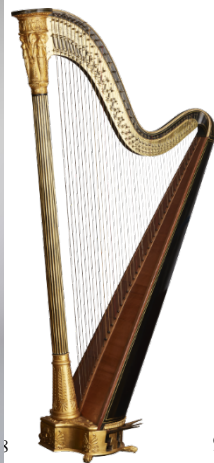
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<sup>5</sup> This section is based on *Grove Music Online* "The Pleyel harp and other later experimental harps" by Hannelore Devaere, accessed January 20, 2001, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000045738>

<sup>6</sup> *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Pierre Jamet", last modified July 24, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre\\_Jamet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Jamet)

<sup>7</sup> This section is based on *Grove Music Online* "The Pleyel harp and other later experimental harps" by Hannelore Devaere, accessed January 20, 2001, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000045738>





The first picture above is a chromatic harp without pedals. I never had the possibility to play on this harp but many harpists say that on this type of harp, the execution of pieces with modulations is easy and the modulations are possible to do immediately still if there are more modulations, but the layout of the strings complicates the fingering and execution of simple steps, such as chords or glissandi.

The second picture is the diatonic harp with seven pedals, one for each of the seven notes, and only one row of strings. Each pedal has three movement positions, flat, natural and sharp. The right foot plays four pedals and the left foot three pedals and the pedals must be used in order to play pieces with modulations. During the execution the pedals must be moved to execute changes of modulation.

For the composer it is important to know that many modulations in two or three beats may be complicated if the pedals to move are more than two at the same time for each foot.

The technique of fingers playing on two different planes appeared to present a problem to some, or at least produced a fair amount of criticism. Critics of the instrument and Debussy also use to complain asserted that the tone of the chromatic harp was weakened by the increased number of strings attached to the metal pin plate placed under the soundboard. The chromatic harp has 78 cross strings in the center; on the right of the player there is the diatonic scale in C major on the left all related semitones. As harpist I have been told that this harp has the natural value of holding the tuning better than the pedal harp because the strings are not compressed by the wheels.

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8 Harp by Pleyel, Wolff, Lyon & Cie, early 20th century, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cross-strung\\_harp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cross-strung_harp)

9 Harp in Harfe-Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg-1995.245, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedal\\_harp#/media/File:Harfe-Museum\\_f%C3%BCr\\_Kunst\\_und\\_Gewerbe\\_Hamburg-1995.245.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedal_harp#/media/File:Harfe-Museum_f%C3%BCr_Kunst_und_Gewerbe_Hamburg-1995.245.png)

Moulton-Gertig considers Debussy a shrewd businessman, although the *Dances* reflect the Impressionist style but he wrote this piece in a fashion that allowed the music to be transferred to the pedal harp.<sup>10</sup>

### **3. HOW DID DEBUSSY WANT THE FIRST PAGE, BARS 8-10 OF DANCE SACRÉE ET PROFANE PLAYED?**

The harpist Carl Swanson writes,

Sometimes playing everything exactly as printed on the page with metronome, the result will be the mirroring that what we harpists all know and love. The opening measures of *Danse Sacrée* are problematic. At first glance these measures appear to be nothing more than a series of chords but where is the melody? Is it the lowest note or the highest? Does each arpeggiated chord start on the beat and continue after, or does each chord anticipate the beat?<sup>11</sup>

Carl Swanson is Pierre Jamet's student and he has first-hand information from Jamet about how to study and practice the *Dances*. In an article posed by Carl Swanson, he writes about three types of technique that you must have mastered. The first is the ability to place a chord or individual note at the moment it is played. The second is the ability to place in sequence, placing only one note at a time beyond the one you are playing. The third is the ability to play at least two dynamic levels in one hand simultaneously in either the left or right hand. In the same article Swanson discuss about how was studying the *Dances* with Pierre Jamet, he made also a film about the technique that Pierre Jamet suggest to the harpists, but unfortunately, I couldn't find it.

During one lesson Pierre Jamet explained what happened when Debussy called him to perform the *Dances* on the diatonic harp. He learned it in 5 days and at the rehearsal, Debussy immediately stopped Jamet, because the first three chords in bar 8-10 were too loud.<sup>12</sup> Jamet says that Debussy did not want the chords rolled, but he did not want them flat either, it was something in between, but something closer to flat than rolled. Debussy wanted a certain emphasis of the melodic phrase by the left hand and felt that the right hand, very rapidly arpeggiated, should be a reflection and sonorous prolongation of the left hand.

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This section is based on Susanne L. Moulton-Gertig, "A choice or a bitter fruit: Contemporary criticism of the *Dances* by Debussy" *The American Harp Journal*, (1992) p 28-29

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This section is based on Carl Swanson, "Debussy and his *Dances*: How did he want the first page played?" *The American Harp Journal*, v,17, no, 4(Fall,2000) p,37-44

<sup>12</sup> Swanson, Debussy and his *Dances*: How did he want the first page played? *The American Harp Journal*, p,37-44

According to Pierre Jamet the impulse to roll the chords is just too strong, so there are a Four step process that harpists could use to practice bar 8 provided by Carl Swanson.

Music example 1, bars 8-12 from Durand, 1904. Plate D. F.6419

“STEP ONE:

When you study them for the first time, start by playing all the chords from bar 8 to the end of the page completely flat, with no arpeggiation. Important here is to touch the strings at the moment they are played, and to make sure that all of the notes of each chord sound equally.

STEP TWO:

Play only the lowest note of the left hand and the highest note of the right hand and play these two notes together. Bring out the lower note slightly and concentrate on shaping the phrases.

Music example 2, bars 8-12

STEP THREE:

Instead of playing the two outer notes together, play the top note slightly after but as close as possible to the bottom note. The lower note should be played on the beat.

STEP FOUR:

Play all of the notes of each chord but keep the same rhythmic distance between the lowest and the highest notes. Start each chord on the beat and bring out the lowest note slightly, which is the primary melody note. The effect will be that of a slight shimmer to each chord, without the feeling that it is arpeggiated.”<sup>13</sup>

When I studied this part, I started from the very beginning. Before starting with the first Step I practiced each single chord only with the right hand, alternating the first and second fingers together, first and third, first and fourth, second and third, third and fourth. I used the same technique for both hands and that is what I usually do when I have to work on chords flat or arpeggiato. After I started to use Pierre Jamet’s tips, it took two weeks to get from step three to four and sounding the slight shimmer. That Debussy defined at the rehearsal with Pierre Jamet. In conclusion after practicing with this steps in one chord you play the lowest with the left hand and the highest with the right hand on beat and the notes in between like a quick arpeggio.

## **4.SOLUTIONS FOR THE PEDALING IN DEBUSSY’S DANCE *SACRÉE et PROFANE*, BARS 143-150**

### **4.1 The problem**

The main problem in page seven is the tricky pedal passages from bar 143- 150. It has semiquavers in the right hand really fast and in the same time around 25 pedals change in 8 bars. After the piece was composed many harpists have addressed these issues. For this reason, harpists made and still makes versions of bars 143-150. Even harder is when you are not familiar with the harp. Usually in audition and competition you have to borrow the instrument and you have only 30 minutes to practice with the harp and getting familiar. I collected seven different versions, practiced for one week and then recorded and discussed them.

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Swanson,” How did he want the first page played?” *The American Harp Journal*, p,37-44

Assia Cunego is a famous harpist and founder of Harp Academy School in Germany and harpist in Tallinn Symphonic Orchestra. In an email message where I asked if she had any other information about the *Dances*.<sup>14</sup>

The image displays two systems of a musical score. The first system, starting at measure 143, is titled "Animes" and features a harp part with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a vocal line with a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking. The second system, starting at measure 147, is titled "Retenu" and includes harp, voice, alto, violin, and cello parts. The harp part in the second system has a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *più p* (pianissimo) marking. The vocal line in the second system has a *pizz.* (pizzicato) marking and a *più p* marking. The violin and cello parts also have a *pizz.* marking and a *più p* marking. The word "Retenu" is written above the vocal line in the second system.

<sup>14</sup> Assia Cunego, email message to author, October 10, 2016

## 4.2 Renié's versions

Almost as soon as the piece was written and performed, the harpist and composer Henriette Renié (18 September 1875- 1 March 1956), teacher at the Ecole Normale de Musique, writer of the *Harp Method*, transcribed three different versions, many harpists say that probably she made more than three, but unfortunately, I could not find them. Renié was a skilled composer herself and not averse to changing notes when needed in transcribing for harp, not only to make the piece more playable, but also to sound better. Her first version of page seven, the one that got printed, and the first of many she would do, sticks precisely to the notes that Debussy wrote. Geraldine Ruegg who studied with Renié before and after World War II, and who translated Renié's monumental *Méthode* into English, told that at the time that Renié was transcribing the *Dances* for pedal harp, there was a woman's shoe in fashion which had a rather high thick heel and a blunt toe. Renié, wearing those shoes, found that by turning her right foot sideways, she could move both the E and G pedals together from flat to natural with no danger of touching the F pedal. So, her original intent in this version was for the player to move two pedals with one foot, using one motion, not two. She even bracketed the two pedals to indicate this but didn't explain it anywhere. But there were problems, Renié must have heard complaints from other harpists, as well as from her students. Also, she may have discovered in her own performances that the first solution was not that reliable. For some harpist is possible moving two pedals in one motion because of the feet size but it's not comfortable and quite risky in an audition or competition.

Renié's first solution (the printed version)

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system shows the right hand (RH) and left hand (LH) staves. The RH part features a melodic line with a fermata over the final note. The LH part provides harmonic support with chords. Chords are indicated as follows:  $F_4$ ,  $C_4$ ,  $A_b$ ,  $D_4$ ,  $E_b$ ,  $G_b$ ,  $A_b$ ,  $C_4$ , and a bracketed section containing  $G_4$  *dim.*,  $E_b$ ,  $D_4$ ,  $C_b$ ,  $A_b$ , and  $D_4$ . The second system continues the melodic and bass lines with chords  $E_b$ ,  $G_b$ ,  $A_b$ ,  $G_4$ ,  $A_b$ ,  $B_4$ , and  $C_4$ . Pedal markings are present at the bottom of the first system.

Music example 4. Renié first solution from Swanson, “That page! Solutions to the pedal nightmare in Debussy’s Dances”<sup>15</sup>

Renié’s second solution, like the first, keeps all of the notes, while eliminating that awful two pedals with one foot on one beat dance. Here she substitutes F-flat for the dreaded E-natural and does in fact achieve her goal of having no more than one pedal at a time in each foot. But at full tempo, there are just too many pedals, particularly the right foot is all over the place at lightning speed and if one pedal is missed, the whole thing collapses. So Renié searched again for a way to make this passage more playable.

Renié’s second solution

Music example 5. Renié second solution, from Swanson, “That page!” p.27

In her third solution, Renié leaves out two notes in the sixth bar passage and both times it is the same note, a G-flat. The pedals have been simplified, but not by much. However, the alteration to the rhythm by twice changing a four-note group to a triplet really damages the passage musically.

<sup>15</sup>This section is based on Carl Swanson, on “That page! Solutions to the pedal nightmare in Debussy’s Dances” *The American Harp Journal* p21 (2), 26-29,(2007)

### Renie's third solution

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece, identified as Renie's third solution. It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a treble staff and a bass staff. The first system begins with a forte (f) dynamic and a piano introduction marked with a fermata and a '+' sign. The treble staff features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and slurs. The bass staff provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines. Chord symbols are written above the bass staff: Fb, Cb, Ab, Db, Eb, Ab, Cb, Fb, Ab, Cb, Df. A 'dim.' (diminuendo) marking is present above the final measures of the first system. The second system continues the piece with similar rhythmic complexity and harmonic support. Chord symbols for the second system include Ab, Cb, Eb, Ab, Bb, and Ab. The score is written in a key signature of one flat (Bb major/Cb minor).

Music example 6. Renie first solution, from Swanson, "That page!" p.27

For me, none of Renie's versions are suitable and they are really complicated. I observed that they are really difficult to read even if you play slowly because of complicated hand positions. It never comes correctly, any time I do practice there is some notes missing, especially in the second version because it is higher the number of pedal changes. In the videos you can see how I am struggling with the notes, they did not come correct in the practicing week and neither in the videos. Some notes are missing or there are noisy changes of pedals. The third one I think is far from the intention of Debussy because the triplet replaces the semiquavers.

The first version has 23 pedal changes, the second one 27 and the third one 22.

**Videos: n 1, n 2 and n 3**

### 4.3 Jamet's version

Pierre Jamet made his own version. Swanson writes about it;

This solution substitutes a C-natural for the first E-flat and leaves out the second E-flat altogether. But at full tempo, you simply cannot hear these changes. There is never more than one pedal for a beat in either foot, but more importantly, the two pedals used by each foot are right next to each other. Neither foot must do lightning fast swing across other pedals. The simplicity of the pedalling minimized the change of a wrong pedal and virtually assures a successful performance every time,



allowing the harpist to focus on playing the passage cleanly and creating the energy Debussy wanted.<sup>16</sup>

### Jamet's solution

The image shows a musical score for a piano accompaniment, titled "Jamet's solution". It consists of two systems of music. The first system has a treble clef staff with a complex, rapid melodic line and a bass clef staff with a simpler accompaniment. Chords are indicated above the treble staff: F $\flat$  D $\flat$  (first measure), A $\flat$  B $\flat$  (second measure), G $\flat$  C $\sharp$  (third measure), A $\flat$  B $\flat$  (fourth measure), G $\flat$  C $\sharp$  (fifth measure, marked *dim.*), and A $\flat$  B $\flat$  (sixth measure). The second system continues the melodic line in the treble staff and the accompaniment in the bass staff, with chords G $\flat$  C $\sharp$  and A $\flat$  B $\flat$  indicated above the treble staff. Dynamics like *f* and *pp* are also present.

Music example 7. Jamet's version, from Swanson, "That page!", p.28

When practicing Pierre Jamet's version, I did not feel comfortable. There are not many pedals to change but the solution he chooses for the right hand makes it really hard to memorize. In the video 4 which I made after one week of practicing it is evident that I am still not sure about notes and pedals.

### Video n 4

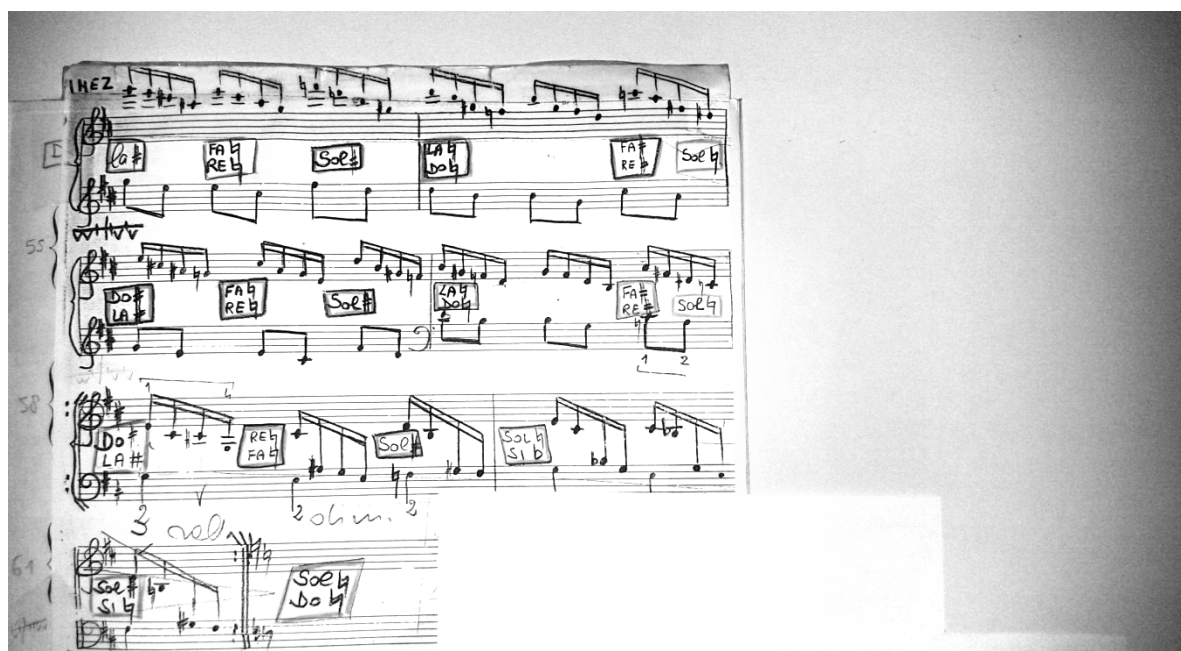
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This section chapter is based on Carl Swanson, on "That page! Solutions to the pedal nightmare in Debussy's Dances" *The American Harp Journal* p 21 (2), 26-29, (2007).

#### 4.4 Mirella Vita's Version

Mirella Vita (Torino 1919- Milano 2012) was a Harpist, performer, teacher and researcher who devoted her long career to the discovery and disclosure of the repertoire of his instrument, especially the Italian, with publications, reviews, catalogue and historical research.<sup>17</sup>



Music example 8. Mirella Vita's version, Assia Cunego, email message to author, October 10, 2016

<sup>17</sup> Enciclopedia delle donne, s.v. "Mirella Vita" <http://www.enciclopediaelledonne.it/biografie/mirella-vita/>

From bar 143-150, Assia Cunego played the version by Mirella Vita.<sup>18</sup>

I have practiced this version since I first played the *Dances* because it is really simple to read and memorize but it had many pedal changes and still I am not comfortable to play with another type of harp if I have only half hour to practice on it. In total there are 28 pedal changes.

### **Video n5**

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<sup>18</sup> Assia Cunego, email message to author, October 10, 2016

### 4.5 Marisa Robles's version

Another version is by Marisa Robles, a Spanish harpist (born May 4, 1937). In 1971 she became a teacher at the Royal College of Music.



Music example 9. Marisa Robles version, Liv Dahren, email message to author, December 16, 2016

Marisa Robles's version is the simplest version that I practiced until now because of the small number of pedal changes and because it is easy to read and memorize before an audition, competition and concert. In the video I felt more comfortable and safe because I memorized it really quickly. She uses in total 23 pedal changes.

#### Video n6

## 4.6 Edward Witsenburg's version

Edward Witsenburg, 12 September 1934, is an harpist, former professor of the Mozarteum Universität in Salzburg.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for harp, consisting of three systems of music. Each system has a right-hand staff (treble clef) and a left-hand staff (bass clef). The score is annotated with various musical notations and pedal changes. The first system includes a 'Cresc.' marking and pedal changes to Bb, Cb, Bb, Cdim, and Bb. The second system includes a 'Retenu' marking and pedal changes to C#, Bb, C#, Ab, Bb, and Bb. The third system includes a 'p' marking and pedal changes to Bb, Bb, Bb, Bb, Bb, and Bb. A small inset box on the right side of the third system contains the handwritten text 'V.S.'.

Music example 10. Edward Witsenburg's version, from Assia Cunego, email message to author, October 10, 2016


His version differs from the others in the number of notes to play with the left hand which means that the harpist must give particular attention to the pressure of each single finger but it was easy to memorize the pedals. In the video I tried to create a line between the right and left hands giving particular attention to the pressure of each single finger. He uses in total 24 pedal changes.

### Video n 7

## 5. MY OWN VERSION OF DANCE SACRÉE ET PROFANE, bars 143-150

**Dancée Profane**

Roberta Mascia Debussy



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Testo di pentagramma

I choose to follow Mirella Vita's version at the beginning and then I tried to arrange the pedal sequences as easy as possible keeping the main musical line with the right hand but with some help from the left. I decided to keep the left hand similar to Marisa's version without any rhythmical variations, because for me it sounds better than the other versions. The

major technical difficulties in my version is the last two bars as you can see in the video because of the pedal changes, G and F.

## Video n 8

## 6. FINAL THOUGHTS

My purpose of this thesis was looking into different musical interpretations of this beautiful piece with special focus on the different technical solutions for bars 8-36 and bars 143-150. I looked into the different techniques and solutions there are for bars 8-36, and how Debussy is reported to have commented upon these bars. I found a way for me to play these bars that I feel is in concordance with Debussy's intention.

Since I started researching my technique improved and I feel more capable because I experimented with different ways of practicing chords. Collecting and studying several different versions of the bars 143-150 of *Dance profane* gave me a choice to perform a version suited to me and the situation where I have to perform on an unfamiliar type of harp, which made me feel surer.

I learned about the piece and about the chromatic harp and why this type of harp is not used for this piece anymore.

Unfortunately, I did not have the possibility to experiment with a chromatic harp but I can imagine what type of different practicing it would require.

This project gave me also the possibility to exercise my composition skills, it is my first time and probably I am going to keep arranging for harp instead of struggling with original scores and adapt them for an excellent performance. It has been a challenge because never before I have practiced video recording and watching it afterward. I never felt good although it helped on my self-confidence and improving my practicing

In conclusion, this research was important to me because I improved as harpist and it gave me the possibility to discover my other skills.

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Swanson, Carl. "That page! Solutions to the pedal nightmare in Debussy's Dances." *The American Harp Journal* 2 (2007): 26-29.

Swanson, Carl. "Debussy and his Dances: How did he want the first page played?" *The American Harp Journal* 4 (2000): 37-44.

### **Video Recordings:**

**Video 1 – Renié's First version**

**Video 2 – Renié's Second Version**

**Video 3- Renié's Third Version**

**Video 4 – Pierre Jamet's Version**

**Video 5 – Edward's Version**

**Video 6 –Mirella Vita 's Version**

**Video 7 – Marisa Robles's Version**

**Video 8 – My own Version**