

Inspired by Paris

Saturday 16 February 2013

Debussy and the birth of modern music



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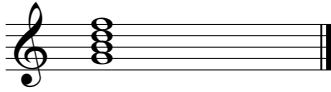
*Some of the musical examples for this talk may be found on the
OUDCE's open educational resources website:*

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Debussy and the birth of modern music

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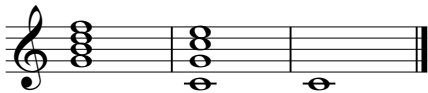
This chord is known as a **dominant 7th**



In classical harmony it creates the expectation that a certain chord will follow it, creating a chord progression that is known as a **perfect cadence**.



The perfect cadence is a very important element in establishing the tonal centre of a passage of music.



Tonal centre is C



Tonal centre is E



Tonal centre is D flat

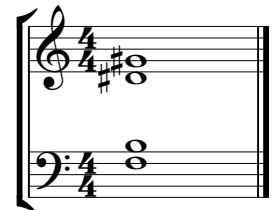
In the latter part of the 19th century and the early 20th centuries composers were exploring more complex harmonies and were also starting to look upon the tonal implications of the dominant 7th as a sort of tyranny. How to free harmony from its tonal implications?

Wagner: *Tristan und Isolde*



The "Tristan" chord

The "Tristan" chord came to take on an iconic significance for many composers in this period, including Debussy.



Another inspiration to Debussy was his encounter with the music of Mussorgsky, a composer who was truly a law unto himself.

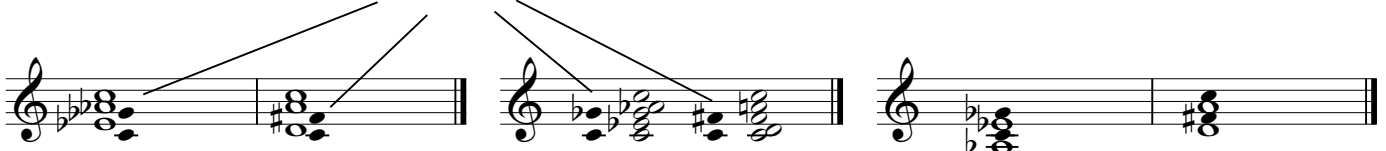
Mussorgsky: *Boris Godunov* - Act 1, scene 2 - Outside the Kremlin

Moderato ♩ = 92



These bass chords are identical - simply different "spellings" of the same sound. Each chord consists of the notes C (doubled at the octave) and G flat / F sharp. This chord is known as a **tritone**.

Tritone



This *tritone* is common to both the chords in this passage. Each chord is a dominant 7th but neither of these dominant 7ths proceeds towards the normal outcome of classical harmony.

Debussy: *Arabesque* no. 1 - examples

Ex. 1

Ex. 2

Ex. 2a

Debussy uses two parts of this chord.

F# dominant 7th

and

This chord is another version of the Tristan chord.

Debussy: *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* - ending

107 $\text{♩} = 50$

Flute *pp*

Flutes *pp*

Horn in F *pp*

Horns in F *pp*

Antique Cymbals *ppp*

Harps 1 + 2 *p* *pp*

Violin I *ppp* *pp*

Contrabass *ppp* *pizz.*

Contrabass *ppp* *pizz.*

"Tristan" chord "Tristan" chord

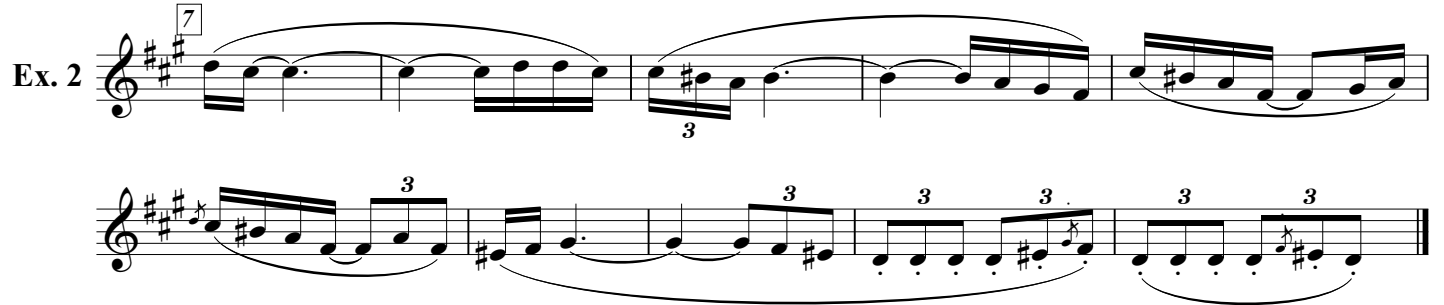
Debussy: *La Soirée dans Grenade* - the Moorish scale

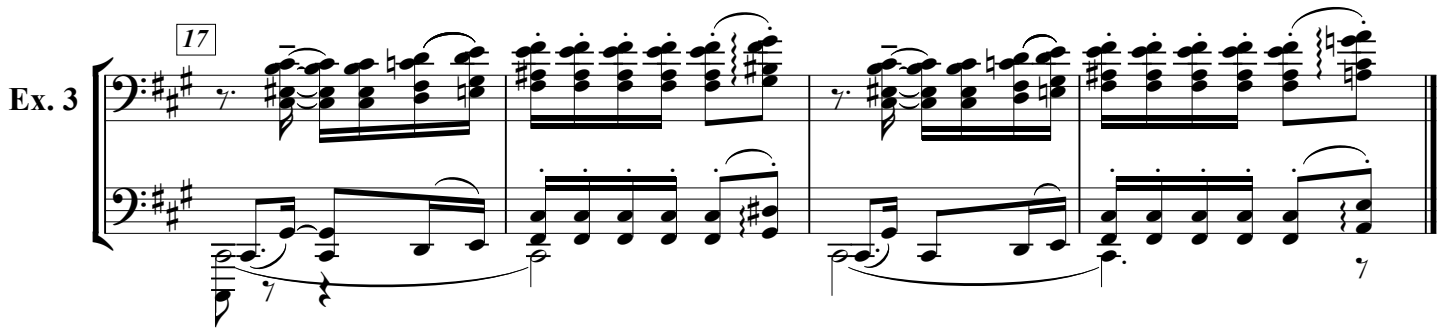
Fl. $\text{C} \ \text{D} \ \text{E} \ \text{F}\# \ \text{G} \ \text{A} \ \text{B} \ \text{C}$

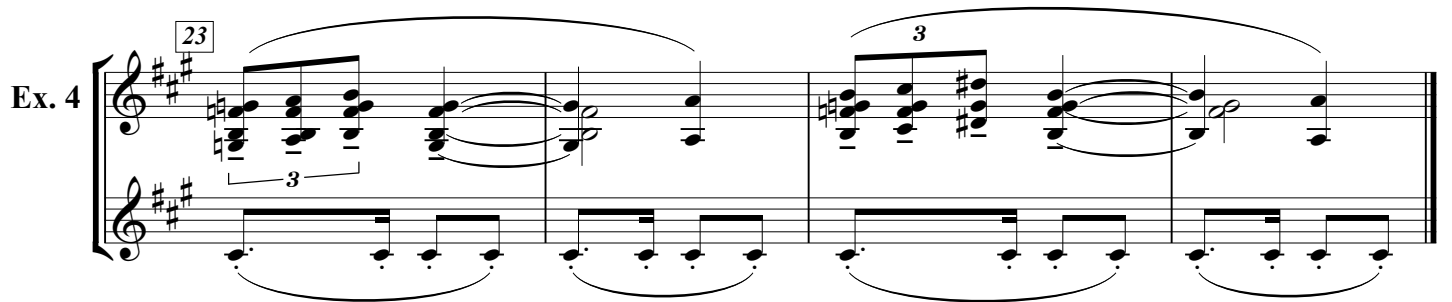
The scale that Debussy employs in this piece resembles the harmonic minor scale but with the 4th degree of the scale sharpened.

Debussy: *La Soirée dans Grenade* - themes

Ex. 1 

Ex. 2 

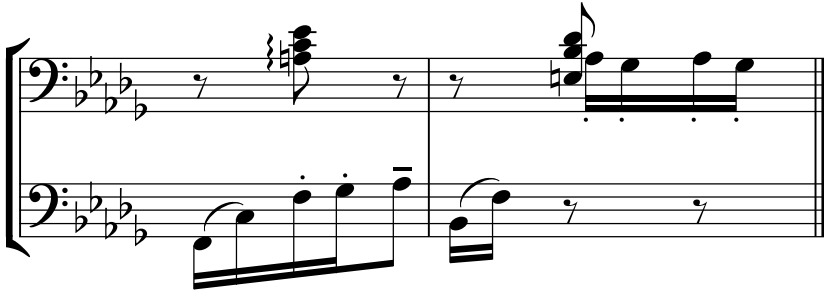
Ex. 3 

Ex. 4 

Ex. 5 

Ex. 6 

Debussy - *La sérénade interrompue* - themes



1st attempt



2nd attempt



3rd attempt



4th attempt

