

Ravel, who transcribed *Danse* for orchestra as an act of homage after the composer's death. Since its first publication, the original piano work has been widely recorded.

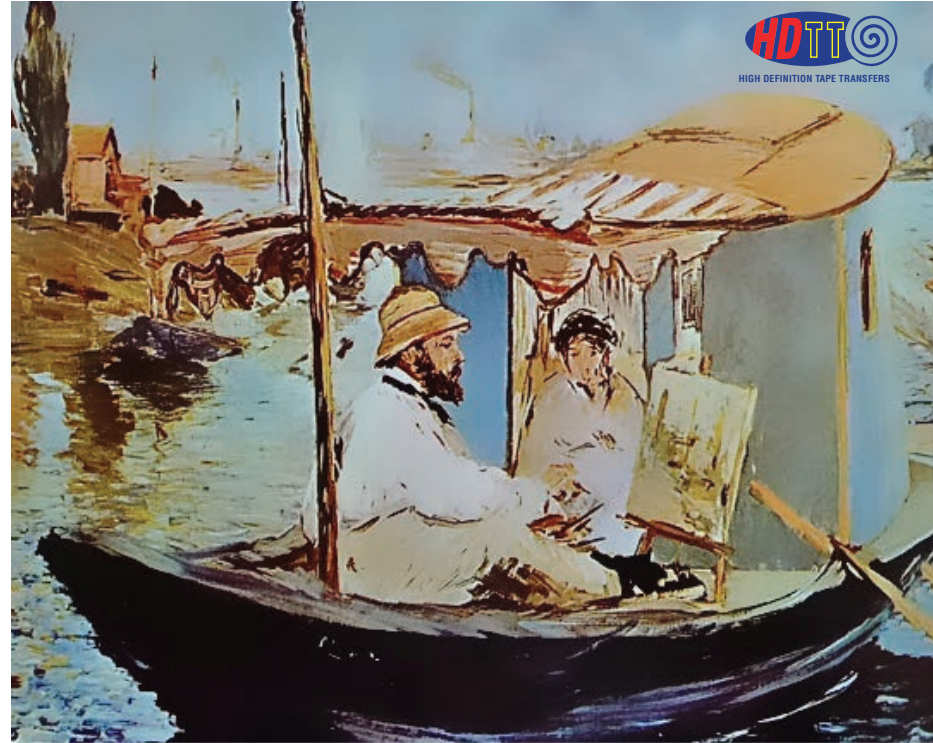
Dukas' final significant work, the 20-minute ballet *La Péri* (subtitled "Poème dansé") was written for dancer N. Truhanova and was premiered by her on a program that also included dances to Schmitt's *La tragédie de Salomé*, d'Indy's *Istar*, and Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (here retitled *Adélaïde*). *La Péri* fit perfectly in this company, with its dreamy manipulation of two exotic themes in an orchestration Dukas intended to resemble "a kind of translucent, dazzling enamel." This is Dukas' most Impressionistic score, with the primary themes used as vehicles for explorations of mood and timbre. The orchestra can make a powerful noise in the work's many passionate sections, but at least half the score is given over to quiet washes of strings and delicate swirls of woodwinds, with Middle Eastern flavor provided by a few extra percussion instruments, notably the tambourine. In the story, which is based on an ancient Persian legend, Iskender (Alexander the Great) at last finds the Flower of Immortality in the hand of a sleeping Péri, or fairy. Iskender snatches the flower, which distresses the now wide-awake Péri; without it, she cannot serve Ormuzd, the god of light. Iskender becomes aroused by the Péri, who performs a seductive dance while the Flower of Immortality causes Iskender's face to glow red with desire. Realizing himself unworthy, he willingly hands back the flower; with it, the Péri rises into the light while Iskender recedes into the shadows and, presumably, death. The score begins with a regal, questing brass fanfare in ternary form, a piece written, and often played, separately. The dance music itself falls into three parts. The first opens with shimmering strings and mysterious horn calls, leading to variations on Iskender's sinuous, ever surging-and-receding theme. A mysterious transition leads to the second part, the Péri's dance, which is really a set of variations on her own more ecstatic theme. Dukas then developed the two themes together, eventually bringing them to a shattering climax. The final part is a brief epilog in which the Péri's theme, now dreamy and increasingly distant, mingles for the last time with Iskender's, which is now much calmer and broader than it initially was. The music dies away into the muted horn calls of the beginning.

**Debussy**  
**Jeux - Poeme Danse**

**Dukas**  
**La Peri**

**Debussy - Ravel**  
**Danse**

**Ernest Ansermet**  
L'Orchestre De La Suisse Romande



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Debussy wrote his last ballet and last orchestral work, *Jeux*, (or *Games* for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballet Russe, with Vaslav Nijinsky as choreographer and lead dancer. The first performance puzzled its audience, and as it took place only two weeks before the tumultuous premiere of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*, it was nearly forgotten in the uproar.

On closer inspection, *Jeux* was every bit as revolutionary and forward-looking as *Sacre* and even more daring harmonically. Debussy's most nearly atonal work, *Jeux*'s formal structure depends to an unprecedented degree on orchestral color and texture rather than pitch relationships.

In this way, it points in the direction of Anton Webern's pointillism, to the search for new sonorities from electronic instruments, and through the teaching of Olivier Messiaen, to the techniques developed by postwar composers like Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez.

The story and choreography also refused to conform to any previous expectations, and it remains unclear whether the audience found the music or the ballet the more problematic.

In Nijinsky's simple plot, boy loses tennis ball, finds two girls, forgets about the ball, and eventually wins both girls. By the end of the ballet, the three of them are kissing passionately. He made no room for fantasies, tutus and coronets, ensembles, or anything the audience might have expected to see. He showed nothing but three people in tennis outfits.

(And in 1913, men's tennis outfits were baggy long-sleeved shirts and flannel slacks. Women wore long-sleeved ankle-length dresses with petticoats. It is difficult to imagine anyone successfully either dancing or playing tennis dressed that way.)

Some people found the ballet a refreshing change. Others, apparently including Debussy himself, found it disconcerting. Debussy was so annoyed with what he saw that he left the theater to smoke a cigarette.

Even without the ballet, the music bewildered audiences. To some extent, it continues to do so. Unlike anything else he ever wrote, listeners continue to find *Jeux* a difficult work. With its predominantly scherzando mood, it continues to play games with the audience's expectations and requires repeated hearing to understand.

Appreciation of Claude Debussy's *Tarantelle styrienne* (*Danse*) is enhanced by an understanding of the significance and strengths of his early piano compositions, which were probably written in the 1880s. Often seriously underrated, their evanescent charm is colored by rich influences including playful archaism and witty neo-classicalism. Similar to short stories, these compositions must often be built on a single, succinct idea that is presented, developed, and concluded in a satisfactory manner, within a very small amount of space. For Debussy's rather rare achievement of this goal, his early piano works have been called "master-cameos, each of which is perfect in form and shape, refined to the barest essentials and yet luxuriantly rounded and complete." These youthful pieces fall under one of two distinct categories, song-like ballads or pure dance forms, and they reveal the composer's extraordinary understanding of the piano through their "symphonic" tonal colors and sensual harmonies. They were influenced by, as were all his early works, composers such as Massenet, Delibes, Chabrier, and Fauré, by the commedia dell'arte clown characters Pierrot, Harlequin, and company, and by poets such as Verlaine and Mallarmé.

*Tarantelle styrienne* was written in 1890 after Debussy returned from Villa Medici, Italy, where he had spent over two years studying as part of the requirements of the Prix de Rome, which he received in 1883. It was after his close relationship ceased with Marie-Blanche Vasnier and around the time that he became a companion to Gabrielle Dupont (aka Gaby), that this and other piano works appeared. The title shifts the traditionally Italian tarantella to Austria (Styria) and the Slavic influences that affected the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The composition was paired with *Ballade slave*; their picturesque titles were shortened in 1903, and they became known, respectively, as *Danse* and *Ballade*. Both works recall the composer's travels to Russia with Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck (early 1880s).

Considered the king of his early works, *Danse* is a robust, colorful piece with a sparkling middle section that shows a slight influence of Watteau and is permeated by the images of the commedia dell'arte. Its whirling syncopation is felt in the sprightly alternation of 6/8 patterns (like a true tarantella, not too fast) with 3/4 waltz rhythm. It contained the seed of his later compositional style, especially in the translucent, delicate tones of the dominant portion. For example, *Masques*, another underrated piano work, appeared in 1904, recalling this composition. Debussy's works were rewritten by Maurice

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- 1 Jeux - Ballet 17:00**
- 2 Danse 5:40**
- 3 Fanfare To "La Peri" 2:15**
- 4 La Peri - Poeme Danse 17:10**

Producer: James Walker    Engineer Roy Wallace  
Recorded by Decca 1958 Victoria Hall, Geneva



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