

Characteristics Of Ravel's Style In *String Quartet in F*

General

- Lots of small sections
 - 2 – 7 bars
 - Consecutive sections often use a different scale or mode
- Use of distant key signatures (e.g. Am => Gb Major)
- Changes between 2/4, 3/4, and 5/4 time signatures
- Use of extremes of instrumental register
- Use of scales or modes different from those used in the harmony

Melody

- Not four bar phrases
- Long or short
 - Short: Claude Debussy - *Syrinx* for solo flute
 - Long: Flute Solo from Maurice Ravel - *Daphnis Et Chloé* (Orchestral Suite No. 2 bars 178 – 181)
- Melodies made from small motives stuck together
- Melodies placed in different instruments, not always Violin I
- Created from different modes or scales
 - Pentatonic
 - Octatonic
 - Church Modes
 - Phrygian, Dorian, Lydian etc.
- The modes or scales in the melody are not always directly related to the harmony
- When melodies return they are often unchanged, except for transposition

Harmony

- Parallel harmony often used
 - see Claude Debussy - *Piano Preludes, Book I, X (...La cathédrale engloutie)*
- Use of extended harmonies:
 - 7ths, 9ths, 11ths, 13ths
 - used to colour chords
- Harmonic Ambiguity
 - Often it is not clear how to analyze/classify a particular chord
- Sometimes tonal chord sequences serve as the basis for the chords
- Tritone substitution

Timbre

String techniques used:

- Sul Tasto / “sur la touche” - bowing over the fingerboard
- Sul Ponticello – bowing near the bridge
- Double Stops
 - often in fifths
- Arpeggios
- Tremolo
 - single string tremolo
 - 2-string tremolo

Instrumentation

- Splitting up of melody between different instruments
 - Violin 1 does not always have the main melody
- Chord voicing is often not in the conventional order (i.e. Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello)
- Melody is sometimes doubled an octave or two octaves below

Recommended Listening

Maurice Ravel – *String Quartet in F*
(the other movements)

Claude Debussy – *String Quartet*
(useful as another good example of string quartet writing in this style)

Claude Debussy - *Piano Preludes, Book I, X (...La cathédrale engloutie)*
(a good example of modal writing and parallel harmony)

Claude Debussy - *Syrinx* for solo flute
(useful for looking at ways of building melodies from small motivic fragments)

Maurice Ravel - *Daphnis Et Chloé* (Orchestral Suite No. 2 bars 178 – 181, flute solo)
(a good example of lyrical, rhapsodic melody writing)

Maurice Ravel – *Introduction Et Allegro*
(A piece written around the same period and which shares similar stylistic characteristics)

Claude Debussy - *Prélude à L'Après-midi d'un faune*
(a piece which was very influential upon Ravel's style)

Scores and recordings for all of these pieces can be found for free on www.imslp.org and many recordings are on youtube.