



CONTEXT

- 1911 ballet version (for orchestra and with new material) of a suite for piano duet (1908-10) based on five fairy tales by Charles Perrault.
- Ballet version based on 'Sleeping Beauty', though Ravel provides no precise links between the 'prelude' and the fairy stories, with this opening piece being more of a musical 'once upon a time'.



Texture

- 1-7: Homophonic opening leads to element of counterpoint with (stretto) imitation in Horns (6-7). [Cf. 14-15 & 35-41]
- 8-13: Texture enriched; contrapuntal writing in wind & xylo; strings provide rich chordal backdrop as extra layer*.
- 16-19: Three ideas presented simultaneously – fanfare**, *Pavane/Petit Poucet* themes and sliding chromatic harmonies.
- 20-34: More linear; melodic imitation a feature, giving the impression of contra-puntal writing***.
- 42-50: As for 8-13 but antiphonal horn calls provide additional strand.

Melody

- Use of melody is diverse, with thematic material taken from each of the original suite's five movements.
- Opening fanfare is an example of a 'triadically thickened' melodic line.
- There are more motivic in bars 8-13.
- Two discrete melodies combined in 16-19.
- Linear writing in 20-31 emphasises the intensely melodic aspect of this section.
- Use of fragmented horn fanfares (39→) both complements and matches the mosaic of birdsong motifs in WW & xylo.

Harmonic language

- 1-7: Mostly triadic (initially in parallel) with occasional 7th chords; G mixolydian mode gives way to darker G dorian.
- 8-13: Essentially based on a single octatonic chord.
- 14-16: Atmosphere darkens; previous modal fanfares now almost octatonic – just one 'rogue' note (B).
- 19-34: Fundamentally modal; some initial chromatic touches (e.g. 21); some V→I progressions in evidence (19⁴-20, 23⁴-24).
- E aeolian established in 25-34; bars 32-4 are pentatonic.
- 35-37: Fanfares now fully octatonic.

Tonality

'Prelude' mostly alternates between modal and octatonic passages, with opening fanfare motifs gradually transformed from simple ('innocent') modality to full-blown ('evil') octatonicism:

G mixolydian (1)→G dorian (5) → octatonic (Coll.3) (8) →mixture of modal & octatonic (14)→ E aeolian (20) → octatonic (Coll.1) (34)

- * The combination of various rhythmic motifs here (against a static harmonic backdrop) gives the section a sense of metric freedom, perhaps also adding a feeling of mystery or magic to the section.
- ** For convenience, the parallel triads from *Le Jardin Féerique* and the following (imitative) horn calls will be referred to simply as 'fanfare' material in this brief résumé.
- *** Fragments of *Laideronnette, impératrice des Pagodes* are also alluded to in this section.

