# Corrections to Debussy's Sonate pour Flûte, Alto, & Harpe Third Movement: Final

by Carl Swanson

This is the third and last article on the Sonate pour Flûte, Alto, et Harpe by Debussy, and covers the corrections to the third movement, as well as information on the various editions that currently exist and the sources from which they were drawn.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to Martha Moor and Judy Ross, both harpists with formidable knowledge of theory as well as eagle eyes, for their help in bringing this project to completion. I also want to thank Elizabeth Huntley for her enormous contribution as well. Her editorial skills were instrumental in shaping this project, and brought clarity and consistency to these articles.

N the previous article concerning the second movement, I wrote about the importance of Pierre Jamet (1893-1991), who coached the Sonate with Debussy himself and performed it in concert at the invitation of the composer, the only harpist to my knowledge to have done this. One of the most significant pieces of information to come out of Jamet's contact with Debussy, and until now never before published, concerns the beginning of the third movement.

When Jamet and his trio played the third movement at Debussy's apartment, Debussy stopped him because he was not satisfied with the way the harp sounded in the opening passage. Jamet tried various ways of playing the pattern, and when he played it as shown in the figure below, Debussy was delighted.



The first fifteen measures of the third movement can and should be played as Jamet indicated.

Debussy explained to Jamet that the opening of this movement was an imitation of a tambourin, a French folk instrument on which the player plays a recorder (flûte à bec) with the left hand and, with his right, beats on a drum slung with a strap in the crook of his bent left arm. The recorder has three holes and is capable of producing twenty notes. The drum has a snare (une chanterelle) that gives it a raucous, almost continuous sound. Music for the tambourin was typically fast and rhythmic. Numerous composers wrote pieces called tambourins, the most famous being by Rameau and Gossec. If you go to YouTube and type in Tambourin de Provence, there are a series of videos explaining the tambourin and showing it being played.

Debussy composed this sonata soon after the start of World War I (the Great War) and was incensed by the conflict and the assault on his homeland. On the title page of the *Sonate*, under his name, are the words "Musicien Français." He initiated the habit of identifying himself as French at the outbreak of the war, and the imitation of a popular French folk instrument is most likely a personal tribute to his beloved France.

#### Sources and Editions

In this, the final article on the *Sonate*, we will examine the various editions that have been published since the piece went into the public domain, and the sources from which they were drawn. The autograph manuscript in the National Library of France (written in Debussy's hand, signed and dated by the

composer, and the source for these articles), will be referred to as MS 991, its catalogue number in the library.

Numerous difficulties present themselves when attempting to research Debussy's music. For one thing, during much of his own lifetime, Debussy did not have the reputation and respect that his name conjures now. He was one of a number of composers who were struggling to get their pieces published and performed, and when compared to the others of his generation (Chausson, Massenet, d'Indy, Pierné, Fauré, to name a few) he was completely apart and misunderstood by both the general public and the critics. His Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune dates from 1894, and whenever it was performed, was panned by nine out of ten critics. One critic commented it was like listening to the wind blowing through the trees, another that it lacked the holy trinity of good composition: melody, harmony, and rhythm. It was only around 1902, with performances of his opera Pelléas et Mélisande at the Opéra Comique, that things began to turn around, and then only incrementally. The small group of Debussy supporters who attended performances of Pelléas grew in size with each performance. But even after that, with the first performances of La Mer, the critics had a field day tearing his style apart. It was even worse outside of France. The musicians of the Berlin Philharmonic, to cite just one case, openly snickered and played out of tune when they performed his compositions for the first time.

But, by 1915, the year of the composition of the *Sonate*, his reputation had eclipsed that of all other composers in France. The struggle for so many years to make ends meet, to rebuff the critics, as well as his often chaotic personal life, meant that history has played fast and loose with many of his manuscripts and personal papers. One of the biggest problems is that a great deal of his output is either lost or in the hands of private collectors. The main duty of the Claude Debussy Documentation Center, housed in the same building as the Music Department of the National Library of France, is to track down as many of these papers as possible, looking at upcoming auction catalogues for anything relating to Debussy, and documenting where those items end up. Added to all

of this is the fact that Debussy frequently fussed with his compositions, often making changes as they were being printed and even after they had been published. So how does one come up with an "original" edition, when often there are several manuscripts to examine?

In June, 2014, I had the opportunity to visit the Music Department of the National Library of France and examine first hand the original copy of MS 991. For two years I had been working from the excellent photocopies sent to me by the library, but I wanted to see the original manuscript itself in the context of its preservation. What the librarian brought me was a bound volume containing all three of the completed sonatas, from the series of six that Debussy hoped to write. The first sonata, for cello and piano, and the third, for violin and piano, were the engraver's copies. The second sonata, for flute, viola, and harp, was not. (The engraver's copy is easy to identify because it is covered with pencil markings, put there by the engraver as he planned how the piece would be set.) All three sonatas are stamped C. 1924 in red on their title pages, and the librarian told me that that indicated the year each manuscript entered the Paris Conservatory library. The librarian was not able to tell me how the manuscripts got there. Were they donated, and if so, by whom? And why was the second sonata, MS 991, not the engraver's copy when the other two were? Did they arrive already bound together, or was that done by the Conservatory library? I learned from further reading that in 1933, Emma Debussy, the composer's widow, sent a bound volume of the three sonatas, all manuscripts in Debussy's own hand, to Drouot to be auctioned off. Who bought that volume? Where is it now? Did it contain the engraver's manuscript? These questions remain unanswered.

There is a manuscript in the library in Geneva, Switzerland, which apparently is not the engraver's copy. Is it the manuscript auctioned in 1933, or yet another one? The Geneva manuscript supposedly has some penciled corrections on it, but there is no explanation of how it got there, or where it fits in the chronology of these various manuscripts. To date, I have not been able to examine it.

There are sketches of the *Sonate* in the Wintertur Library, also in Switzerland, and I was able to examine photocopies of them at the Claude Debussy Documentation Center. These undoubtedly represent the first time that Debussy put pencil to paper to write the *Sonate*. The sketches are at times almost unreadable but are nevertheless intriguing to look at, since they provide a peek into the composer's mind as he thought for the first time about this work.

In examining the various sources for the *Sonate*, it is clear that Debussy changed his mind, sometimes numerous times, about certain details. In measure 8 of the first movement, for example, there is a right hand chord that is on beat 7 in the Durand edition. In MS 991 it is on beat 8. In the sketches, it is written on beat 7, then completely scratched out and rewritten on beat 8. So Debussy was trying different things right from the beginning.

The tally right now is as follows: No one can find the engraver's copy, but it certainly did exist. MS 991 is safely housed in the National Library of France, another manuscript is housed in the library at Geneva Switzerland, and sketches of the *Sonate* are in the Wintertur Library in Switzerland.

But what about a "working copy" of the manuscript, where Debussy actually composed the piece, crossing out, pasting over, and changing things as he was composing? No one seems to have located such a manuscript, and perhaps it doesn't exist. In François Lesure's biography, *Claude Debussy*, a description of the composer's working habits is provided by close friend Robert Godet, and may offer an explanation. Godet observed:

Debussy's manuscripts are a model of pure and clean writing, the most elegant in the world, without the slightest trace of erasures or scratching out. However, these are not copies, but rather originals, based on a very small number of fragmentary rough drafts. Debussy didn't begin writing until he had completely worked everything out in his head, and without any trials on an instrument. However, the mental incubation period, more often than not, was very long. His biggest piano works were written out without any tangible document to refer to, and were written as if taking dictation.

Godet adds, "For *Pélleas*, we watched him work in a calm and uniform manner, stopping only occasionally to work out in the margin a harp part for example, thus assuring its playability by an expert hand. Never has any composer wasted so little paper!"

#### Public Domain

Sometime in the 1990s the *Sonate* went into the public domain, allowing anyone to publish any version of the *Sonate* they wished, or to copy anyone else's version. At no point in my research did I scour the earth looking for every possible edition of the Sonate, and I therefore don't know how many companies now publish the piece. In general, most other editions, especially the bargain basement cheap ones, are simply photocopies of the Durand. However, there are four editions that are currently available which are all based on some version of these manuscripts, and are worth examining here to note their similarities and differences.

EDITIONS DURAND: This is the one that has been available since the work was created and was the only one available until the piece went into the public domain. It is based on a version of the manuscript that so far no one has been able to locate, leaving a number of unanswered questions. How close a copy of the engraver's manuscript is it? Are there mistakes? Probably. Were things added by the engraver that were not in the manuscript? Again, probably. Did Debussy make changes to the manuscript or the galleys? Probably. In the Durand edition, the individual flute and viola parts often do not match the full score exactly, and this alone throws into question the accuracy of the engraving.

HENLE EDITIONS: This is a German music publisher that came out with a version of the *Sonate* in 2012, put together by its editor, Peter Jost. Henle calls it an Urtext edition (*Urtext* is German for "original text"). Knowing that there have been at least three existing manuscripts of the *Sonate*, each slightly different, I was curious as to what Jost did, and so examined the Henle edition. I found the following:

In the text that accompanies the piece, Jost acknowledges the existence of these three manuscripts and the sketches, and says that his edition is drawn from all of these sources. He then goes on to explain that, in the Henle edition, the harp part is an exact copy of the Durand (apparently taking it on faith that the Durand is an exact copy of the engravers manuscript, with no mistakes). The flute and viola parts are taken from MS 991 and the Geneva manuscript, but there is no explanation of why he used these two manuscripts, or what he took from each one. There is, in the same text, a very long list, almost two pages, cataloguing all the markings that Debussy put into one or another of these three manuscripts which Jost did not put in the Henle edition. He offers no explanation as to why he chose not to include them.

The format of each entry is the same. The very first entry, for example, reads:

"Harp, first measure decrescendo, only in MS 991."

First, if Debussy put this in one of the manuscripts, then why isn't it in an "urtext edition?" But more importantly, Jost leaves out a critical piece of information, neglecting to tell us where in the measure the *decrescendo* is. Which beats or notes does it cover? His entire list is written the same way, and lacks the same critical information in virtually every entry. So what is the purpose of this list? To whom could it possibly be useful? Jost also informs us in his text that he altered some of Debussy's tempo indications, changing Debussy's *au mouvt* to *Tempo I*, for example. Again, how does this edition qualify as an "urtext?"

PETERS EDITIONS, LEIPZIG: After my first article appeared in *The American Harp Journal* (Winter 2013, Vol. 24, No. 2), I received an email from an American woman who has lived in Germany for many years. She told me that when she first moved to what was then East Germany, she could only get a copy of the *Sonate* published by Peters. She told me that she had gone through her Peters Edition with my list of corrections, and found that Peters already had many, but not all of the corrections. The Peters edition was published in 1970, when the *Sonate* was still under

copyright. But being in a Communist country that did not recognize copyright, Peters had flutist Erich List and harpist Margarete Kluvetasch study MS 991 at the National Library of France and make a new Peters edition. Like the Henle, it is based on more than one source, in this case the 1916 Durand edition and MS 991. Also, it is the only one of the four editions discussed here that has pedal markings (in both American and German systems) and fingerings. I doubt that it was available outside of the Communist countries until the piece went into the public domain, since it would have been illegal.

CARL FISCHER MUSIC: After the article on the first movement corrections appeared in the Harp Journal last year, Carl Fischer Music published my edition of the Sonate, which is based solely on MS 991 and includes all of the corrections in these three articles. The edition exactly copies MS 991, the only changes being corrections to the occasional oversights and errors that Debussy himself made when writing out the music. All of Debussy's indications are written exactly how and where he wrote them. Nothing has been added: no pedals, no fingerings, and no musical indications. In addition, the individual flute and viola parts exactly match the full score. Also, there is a page of footnotes that point out note discrepancies between the Durand edition and MS 991, allowing performers to decide for themselves which version they wish to play in those places. Carl Fischer Music kept the same page layout and same rehearsal numbers as the Durand, and added measure numbers at the beginning of each line.

#### Conclusion

It is clear that the manuscript used by Durand to publish the *Sonate* was not MS 991. Until we can find the engraver's manuscript, we will never know how different it is, or how accurately Durand copied it. So what is the significance of MS 991? Peter Jost says that, based on his research, it is the first version that Debussy wrote and submitted to Durand. If that is the case, then why didn't Durand engrave that one?

What I do know is that MS 991 contains much more musical information than the Durand edition, and it is much more precisely written. In MS 991, Debussy tells us exactly where every nuance and tempo change begins and ends. Whether it is the first of the manuscripts or not, it is the one that most accurately and completely reflects his musical thought. Debussy apparently had Raphael Martinot, harpist at the Opéra Comique, look the piece over, which explains the little m.g. under three notes in measure 282 in the third movement. It may be that Martinot advised changing some of the notes, particularly in the second movement, to make the harp part more playable, and that these changes were made either to the engraver's manuscript or to the galleys as the piece was being published. Without the engraver's manuscript, we can only guess.

I don't know that any one manuscript can be called the definitive version, but I believe that MS 991 is the most complete and precise of all the manuscripts. I don't believe that picking and choosing various elements from the different manuscripts, as the Henle and Peters editions do, is true to Debussy's intentions. Doing so, in fact, creates a version of the *Sonate* that Debussy never wrote.

If I assume that the Durand edition is an exact copy of the engraver's manuscript, with no mistakes (an act of faith if ever there was one!) then I have to say that the musical indications in MS 991 are not only more complete, but also make more sense musically. In this, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the composition of the *Sonate*, I would like to think that we can now play this wonderful piece with all of the information that Debussy intended us to have.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

In 2014, Carl Fischer published the original manuscript edition of Debussy's Sonate pour flûte, alto et harpe, researched and prepared by Carl Swanson. Boston based harp builder and restorer Carl Swanson is a regular contributor to The American Harp Journal, as well as a frequent lecturer at AHS conferences.

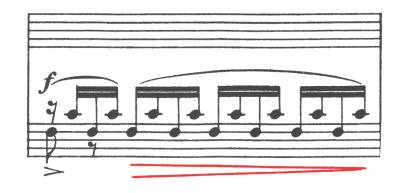
## Example 87 ▶

Page 24, lines 1 & 2, (measures 2 and 4) VIOLA: the note in measure 4 is a D flat, not E flat! In measures 2 & 4 the dynamic marking is *sffz*.



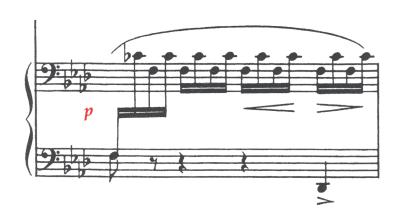
## Example 88 ▶

Page 24, line 2, measure 2 (measure 5) HARP: There is a decrescendo under beats 2, 3, and 4 (like the previous measures).



## Example 89 ▶

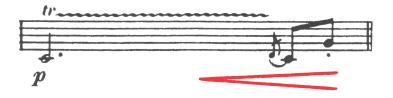
Page 25, line 2, measure 1 (3 before rehearsal 16) HARP: There is a *p* at the beginning of the measure.



#### Example 90 ▶

Page 25, line2, measure 3 (1 before rehearsal 16) FLUTE & VIOLA: The crescendo starts on beat 3, not beat 2 (the flute and viola parts are correct).







## Example 91 ▲

Page 25, line 3, measures 1 and 2 (rehearsal 16 and 1 after rehearsal 16)

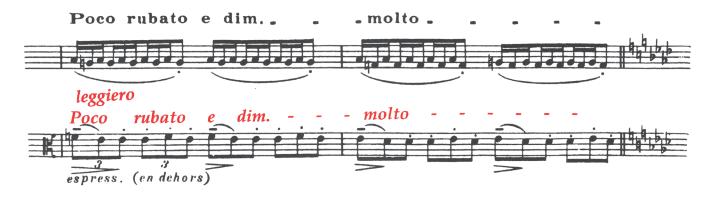
HARP: There is a mf instead of a sf on beat 4 of both measures. There is no marcato in the first measure.

## Example 92 ▶

Page 25, line 3, measure 3 (3 after rehearsal 16)

FLUTE: The G natural on the third beat is not tied to the G on beat 1 of the following measure.





# Example 93 ▲

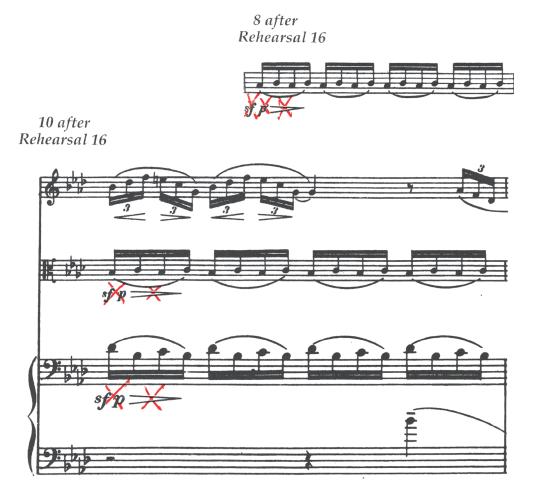
Page 26, line 1, measure 2 and 3 (5 and 6 after rehearsal 16)

FLUTE: At 5 after rehearsal 16 *leggiero* is written at the beginning of the measure.

VIOLA: *Poco rubato e dim.* is stretched out over both measures. (The viola part is wrong; the full score is correct.)

## Example 94 ▶

Page 26, line 2, measure 2 and line 3, measure 1 (8 and 10 after rehearsal 16) VIOLA: There is no sf p and no decrescendo in either of these measures. HARP: at 10 after rehearsal 16: There is no sf p and no decrescendo in this measure.



## Example 95 ▶

Page 26, line 2, measure 3 (9 after rehearsal 16)

FLUTE: There is an accent (>) on the F sharp.



## Example 96 ▶

Page 27, line 1, measure 3 (4 before rehearsal 17)

FLUTE: There is a *decrescendo* under the last 2 tied notes (D). (The flute part is correct.)



## Example 97 ▶

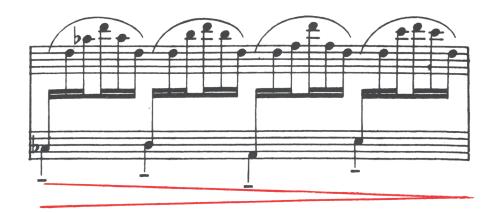
Page 27, line 2, measure 2 (2 before rehearsal 17) VIOLA: There is a dashed line after dim. to p on beat 1 of the following measure. (The viola part is wrong; the full score is correct.) HARP: The dynamic marking is sfz.



## Example 98 ►

Page 27, line 3, measure 2 (2 after rehearsal 17)

HARP: There is a long *decrescendo* covering the whole measure.



#### Example 99 ▶

Page 28, line 1, measure 1 (3 after rehearsal 17)

VIOLA: The dynamic marking at the beginning of the measure is *mf*, not *sf*.

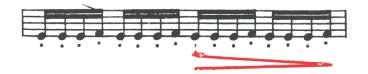


#### Example 100 ▶

Page 28, line 1, measure 2 (4 after rehearsal 17)

VIOLA: The *decrescendo* starts on beat 3.

HARP: There should be a decrescendo under each pair of 16th notes, like the previous measure. This is in addition to the *decrescendo* under the last 2 beats.





## Example 101 ►

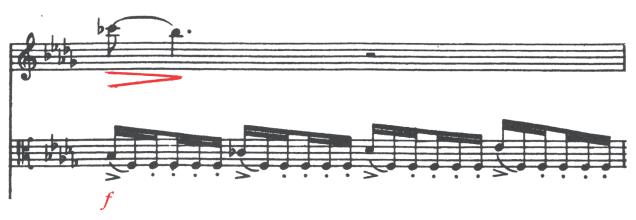
Page 28, line 2, measure 2 (5 before rehearsal 18) FLUTE: There are 2 short *crescendos* under the first half of beats 3 and 4.



#### Example 102 ▶

Page 28, line 2, measure 3 (4 before rehearsal 18) VIOLA: There is no *mf staccato* in this measure (it's already in the previous measure).





#### Example 103 A

Page 28, line 3, measure 1 (3 before rehearsal 18)

FLUTE: The *decrescendo* is under both notes (the flute part is correct).

VIOLA: There is an f at the beginning of the measure.

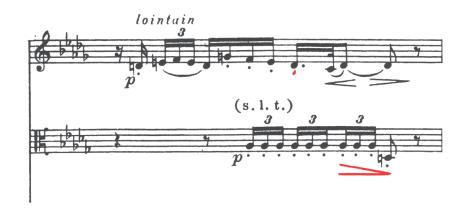
#### Example 104 ▶

Page 29, line 2, measure 1 (3 after rehearsal 18)

FLUTE: There is a *staccato* on the

D natural on beat 3.

VIOLA: The *decrescendo* should encompass the entire last triplet and the D natural.



## Example 105 ►

Page 29, line 2, measure 2 (4 after rehearsal 18) VIOLA: The dynamic indication on beat 2 is f, not piu f. On beat 4 it is mf.



#### Example 106 ▶

Page 29, line 2, measure 3 (5 after rehearsal 18) VIOLA: There is a dashed line after dim. to the p on beat 1 of the following measure.



#### Example 107 ►

Page 29, line 3, measure 2 (7 before rehearsal 19) FLUTE: There is a staccato on beat 1.

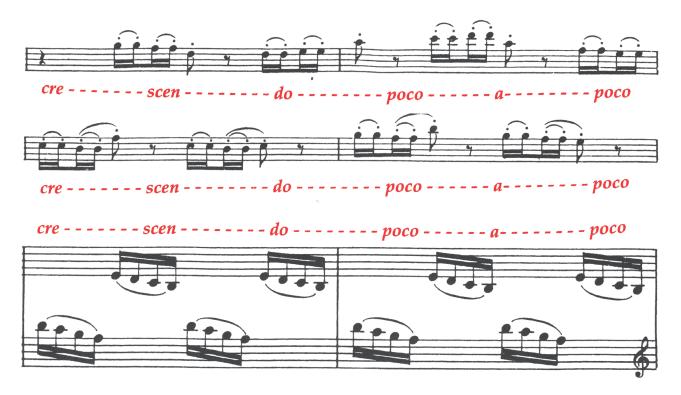




#### Example 108 ▲

Page 30, lines 2 and 3 (1 through 6 after rehearsal 19)

FLUTE: All of the notes are *staccato*. (The flute part is wrong; the full score is correct).



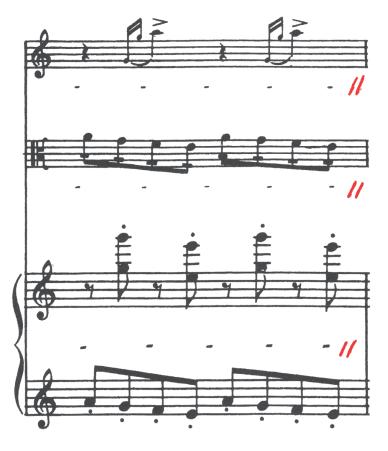
## Example 109 ▲

Page 30, line 3, measures 2 and 3 (5 and 6 after rehearsal 19)

FLUTE, VIOLA, & HARP: The *cresc. poco a poco* starts on beat one for all three instruments.

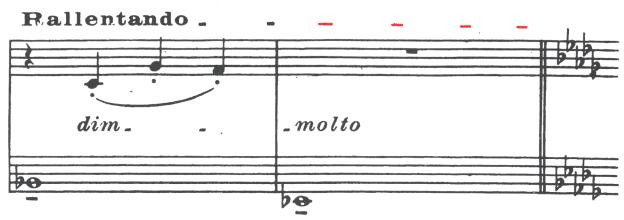
#### Example 110 ▶

Page 31, line 2, measure 1 (10 after rehearsal 19) FLUTE, VIOLA, & HARP: There is a caesura at the end of the measure. In addition, the viola part is also missing the dashed line which follows the *molto cresc*. of the previous measure.









#### Example 111 ▲

Page 31, line 3, measures 3 and 4 (2 and 1 before rehearsal 20)

VIOLA: The dashed line after *dim. e molto* continues through to the end of 1 before 20. And by the way, the "e" is extraneous!

FLUTE, VIOLA, & HARP: The dashed line after *Rallentando* extends through both measures to the beginning of *rehearsal 20*.

#### Example 112 ►

Page 32, line 1, measure 1 (rehearsal 20) VIOLA: There is (s.l.t.) at the beginning of the measure.



#### Example 113 ▶

Page 32, line 2, measure 3 (7 after rehearsal 20) FLUTE: cresc. ed accel. starts at the beginning of the measure. (The flute part is wrong; the full score is correct.)



## Example 114 ►

Page 32, line 3, measure 2 (2 before rehearsal 21) VIOLA: There are two crescendos, one under beats 1 and 2, and again under beats 3 and 4.

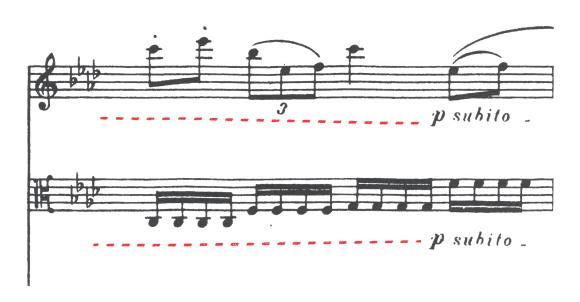




## Example 115 ▲

Page 33, line 1, measures 2 and 3 (2 and 3 after rehearsal 21)

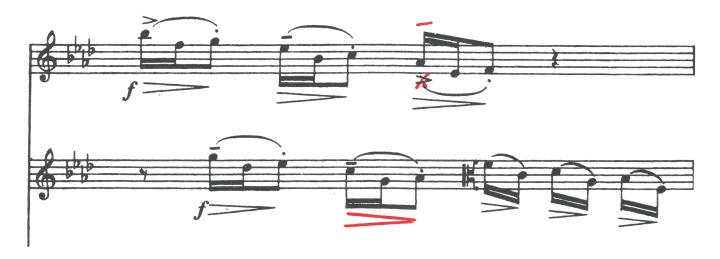
HARP: the p subito e cresc. molto starts on beat 4 of measure 2, matching the flute.



## Example 116 ▲

Page 33, line 2, measure 1 (4 after rehearsal 21)

FLUTE & VIOLA: The dashed line of the previous measure continues to the p subito (same as the harp).



#### Example 117 ▲

Page 33, line 3, measure 1 (7 after rehearsal 21)

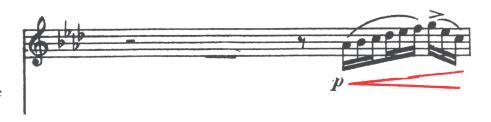
FLUTE: There is a tenuto on the A of beat 3, not an > (the flute part is correct).

VIOLA: There is a *decrescendo* on the second half of beat 2 to beat 3, like the previous group of notes. (The viola part is wrong; the full score is correct.)

## Example 118 ►

Page 34, line 1, measure 1 (4 before rehearsal 22)

FLUTE: The run has a *crescendo* to the end of the measure, unlike the previous measure.



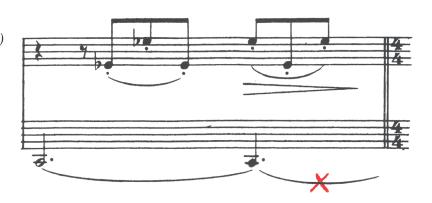
## Example 119 ▶

Page 35, line 1, measure 1 (5 after rehearsal 22) FLUTE: There is no staccato on beat 3. The crescendo does not start until beat 2. (The score is wrong; the flute part is correct.)



#### Example 120 ▶

Page 35, line 3, measure 3 (3 after rehearsal 23) HARP: The left hand A on beat 3 is not tied to the next measure.

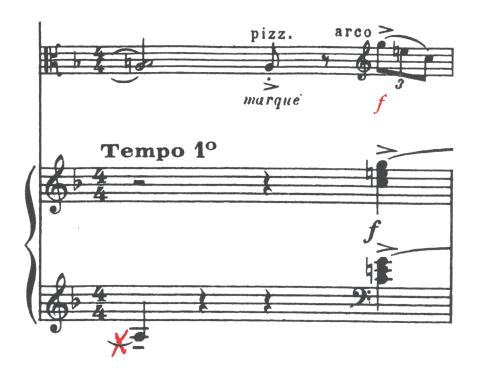


#### Example 121 ▶

Page 36, line 1, measure 1 (4 after rehearsal 23)

VIOLA: There is an *f* on beat 4 (The viola part is wrong; the full score is correct.)

HARP: The A on beat 1 is not tied from the previous measure.



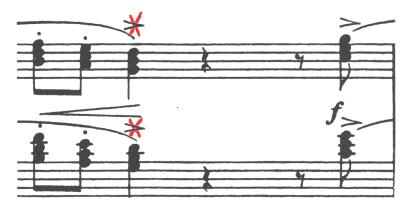
## Example 122 ►

Page 36, line 1, measure 2 (5 after rehearsal 23)

VIOLA: The last 7 notes of the measure are *staccato*, like the following measure.

HARP: The chords on beat 2 have no accent and are marked *staccato*, unlike the next measure.







# Example 123 ▲

Page 36, line 2, measure 1 (6 from the end)

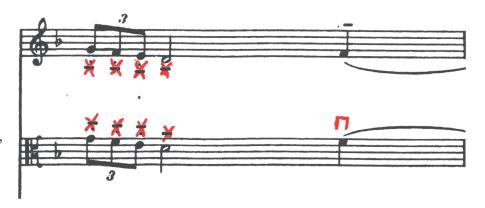
FLUTE: There is a *staccato* on beat 4.

# Example 124 ►

Page 36, line 3, measure 1 (4 before the end)

FLUTE & VIOLA: There are no *tenutos* or *staccatos* on beats 1 or 2. Did Debussy want to change the texture from the previous measure, or is this an oversight on his part? You decide.

VIOLA: there is a downbow marked on beat 4.



## Example 125 ►

Page 36, line 3, measure 2 (3 before the end) FLUTE, VIOLA, & HARP: There is no poco rit. in the manuscript.

