



Debussy in a Paris street at the turn of the century.

Debussy leaves the key in doubt, as he does in the first two bars of the flute melody quoted above, where he fills in the space between  $\bar{C}$  sharp and G: all the notes are included, and not just the selection which would point to a particular major or minor key. Moreover, the outline interval, a tritone, is that most inimical to the diatonic system, the 'diabolus in musica' as it was

called by medieval theorists. Debussy's way, for his third bar indicates an arpeggiated chord. But diatonic harmony is now on many, not necessarily the most important, determinant of form and function.

With regard to form, the *Prélude* is an innovation. Instead of choosing a single theme and developing it in consecutive fashion, Debussy's melody, which is hesitant, turning back on itself, is our, unassertive and so unsuitable for a traditional, orthodox manner. This flute theme, which recurs throughout the *Prélude*, though it is often embellished or split into independent phrases, does not, however, engage his primary aim: progressive development. The emphasis is on improvisation.

The spontaneity of the *Prélude*, its harmonic ambiguity and formal freedom, its fluctuating tempos and irregular rhythms, its colouring of the piece. Traditional music demanded a certain regularity and hierarchy in order that attention might be focused on a particular melodic shape, and the tempo and dynamics were the goal-directed force of the music. In Debussy's *Prélude*, in harmony and form, is correspondingly a new measurement of time.

As for colour, Debussy was a pioneer in consistent use of timbre, and a pioneer in consistent use of timbre as an essential feature of composition. More than any other (except perhaps that of Berlioz), Debussy's music, when arranged for other media: one of the versions of the *Prélude*, for instance, to flute theme of the piece is very definite, and it becomes something significant when arranged for another instrument. Acknowledging