

IMPRESSIONISM : A PARALLEL VIEW OF THE PAINTING AND THE
MUSIC OF THE PERIOD.

E.A. WHITTLE

POST-GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN MUSEOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF AFRIKAANS AND DUTCH CULTURAL HISTORY

FACULTY OF ARTS

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PREAMBLE :

Throughout the history of the arts, it has been possible to trace parallel movements in the main artistic disciplines of pictorial art, sculpture, music, poetry and literature. The Renaissance, post-Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Impressionist and post-Impressionist schools, among others, can be clearly detected, and the factors influencing their development and progress in each discipline can be identified. Perhaps the most striking parallel is to be found between Impressionist art and music, which is the subject of this thesis. In the subsequent pages the Impressionist schools of art and music will be discussed, with reference to their development and evolution and to the common factors which led to their formation. Details are given of the chief most influential protagonists, and reference is made to their individual techniques and their major works.

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BACKGROUND:

The term impressionism derives from the painting by Monet entitled "Impression : Sunrise", painted in 1872 at Le Havre. In this work both water and sky are seen to merge into each other, creating a seemingly formless "impression" of these two elements which appear to shroud a rising sun. The main period of impressionism in painting dates from 1870 to 1880 in the main, which was long before the equivalent movement had arisen in music.

The Impressionists, both painters and musicians, were chiefly preoccupied with the portrayal of the different sensations of light, believing according to theorists of the period, that the realistic rendering of objects was far less important than the opportunity provided by the sun on the water, or on the snow, and the juxtapositioning of the seven colours of the colour spectrum. They were concerned with textures, and this in turn gave rise to their search for colours in shadows, and consequently led to their ability to see a picture not merely as an image, but also as a composition of volumes and surfaces. While there was no conscious imitation of the Impressionist painters by musical composers, the new ideas and conceptions became common to both music and painting. The term impressionism was probably first applied to music in 1882 when Renoir referred to Wagner of "the impressions in music". It is possible that Renoir was referring specifically to Wagner's "Forest Murmurs" from ("Siegfried", Act II), as

well as to the works of other French composers. "Forest Murmurs" was a true evocation of nature in music, and it is almost certain that this piece influenced Debussy in 1893 in his "L'Après-midi d'un faune". The Journal Officiel in 1887 criticised the "vague Impressionism" of Debussy's music, and the term was once more associated with his music when a concert of his works was presented at the Libre Esthetique gallery in 1894, which took place amidst an exhibition of works by Renoir, Sisley, Gauguin, and others.

Impressionism in music and painting show resemblances also in their choice of subject matter. For example, the works of artists such as Renoir and Monet both painted moving scenes of reflections in water. These reflections are of images reversed, and reach depths that are of course largely unfathomable, giving rise to the sense of the unknown, the unexplored, through the fragmentation of colour. Renoir's "The Boat" of 1867 is an example of this concept. The Impressionist technique is used to explore this to unusual advantage. Monet's "Sail boats at Argenteuil" of 1873, is another water piece which is far brighter in tone and bolder in approach. In comparison, the water pieces of Debussy which are felt to convey the spirit of Impressionism are "En bateau" of 1889, "Sirenes" of the same year, and "Reflets dans l'eau" of 1905. It must also be understood that the Impressionists were less preoccupied with the density and solidity of the world around them than with the constant movement of surfaces and colours. This is important in that an Impressionist work may depict a moment in time, but it must also convey this very

idea, or concept through a sense of movement-about-to-take-place, closely related to the central theme of Impressionism ie. light.

Impressionist technique and aesthetic were rooted in the essential concepts of the functions of light and colour, which in turn can be traced in origin to the discovery of physics, the science of optics and the break-down of the colour spectrum. A true Impressionist work is a composition of coloured patches with all the colour split up into tiny dabs and dashes of paint, which may cause the surface to appear to shimmer or pulsate with apparent movement (later led to Pointillism). The qualities of colour, light, and air were of prime importance, and the definition of shape or volume were at all times secondary. An example of this can be seen in Manet's "Gare St Lazare", where the real subject matter is not the train itself, but the changing effects of sunlight streaming through the glass roof of the station at the same time mingling with the clouds of steam and the shadowy and ethereal forms of people and objects mixed up in the mist. This explains why the Impressionists were so preoccupied with and drawn to scenes of mist, fog, haze, and also to snow and water, with their ever-changing surfaces, which lent themselves so well to the sense of the unexplained, the mysterious, and the world of dreams. The Impressionists' idea of a dream-world linked them unmistakably to their contemporaries in the literary world.

The impact of these ideas on the Symbolist school of writers

resulted in their consequent vagueness and imprecision, and their exploration of the fields of fantasy and dreams. Music offered a perfect analogy for the elusiveness of the poetic experience, and the music of Wagner provided a vehicle for this analogy. True Impressionism in music, however, as mentioned previously, was only evident in the work of the composer, Claude Debussy, the first Impressionist work in music being "Prelude a l' Apres-midi d'un Faune", which only appeared some twenty years after the painting "Impression-Sunrise". This meant that at the time when Debussy was producing Impressionist compositions the school of Impressionism was of course firmly established and enjoyed official acceptance and academic respectability. It had therefore long since ceased to be a vital force. Debussy's work was nevertheless unmistakably inspired by the spirit of Impressionism translated into music for the first time. There is also evidence that he drew on the poetry of Poe, and the work of Turner for inspiration. Turner, the first artist to paint the sea in an Impressionistic manner, was associated closely with "La Mer". Similarly, Whistler was associated with the beginnings of "Nocturnes".

Debussy's music illustrates similar preoccupations to those found in the work of the Impressionist painters, ie. those that were essentially Romantic in nature and origin. (Impressionism is very much an offshoot of Romanticism, both in the musical compositions and the paintings of the period). Debussy said "My desire is to reproduce what I hear", while the artists of the same school desired to reproduce what they

saw. Debussy craved for freedom, spontaneity, naturalness, which were the same cravings experienced by the painters who sought the freedom of the outdoors to achieve their ideals.

Debussy was obsessed with intimacy of feeling and impact, and it was through this that he found a way to making the changes in the musical syntax that he felt impelled to make. He tried to invest music with the power of communicating something of the inner content of a sensation, ie. that which is actually perceived by the listener (or onlooker) other than the outward shape, ie. what the listener or onlooker thinks that he perceives. He maintained that "There is too much writing of music. Too much importance attached to the formula, the craft". His ambition was to make his music sound like a continuous improvisation, and thereby avoid a purely intellectual response or reaction. He wished to achieve realistic qualities in his music, and saw no reason to impose any restrictions on music. His fashioning of his musical textures from the reflexes of fluid sound-shapes all contributed to the opening of whole uncharted areas of sensibility and emotion which had previously been unavailable and unrealised in music. This was his supreme achievement and fully justified him being called the first musical Impressionist.

He used music to create atmosphere, and to suggest and express in perhaps elusive or vague terms these subtleties and variations of nuance which had previously been the exclusive property of the poets and the painters. He also claimed that music, being an art that existed in space and not in time,

more closely approximated the Impressionist ideal than painting, for in painting the play of light could only be depicted in a static manner, while music could convey the idea of the ever-changing movement far more effectively, if not more effortlessly. Many of his pieces are in practice, the counterparts of the works of the Impressionist painters in that there is no real movement - they are "static fixations of the fleeting moment" ie. "frozen" in a moment in time.

THE BEGINNINGS OF IMPRESSIONISM - IN PAINTING:

The Realist movement of the 1840's through 1850's unexpectedly and suddenly gave rise to the first complete artistic revolution since the days of the early Renaissance, and to the first universal style to originate in France since the rise of the Gothic in the 12th Century. The new style was almost immediately known as Impressionism, and though it only lasted about 15 years, it paved the way, and dictated in many ways almost every artistic manifestation that has taken place since. Many of the consequences are in fact still apparent in contemporary art, more than a hundred years later.

Ghiberti and his colleagues said that "nothing is seen without light", and was aware of the role of light in establishing the existence of objects and determining their forms and colours. This factor had interestingly enough been observed long before by the ancient Greeks, but had never occurred to the Renaissance artists, and that light may also have functioned

in the opposite way to deform, denature, or to dissolve objects.

Some clues to the development of the style can be traced to the impact of certain experiences and perhaps friendships between leading members of the group, and in their various letters and writings. Also worthy of consideration is the socio-political and cultural climate of the mid-19th Century, which affected different artists in different ways, for example, the communications that were possible at the time by way of the cafe life, and also through the writings of literary friends and enemies.

Many of the ideas and practices employed and transformed by the Impressionists were, as has already been mentioned, known and documented ideas. It is interesting to note that even the Neo-classical painters, for example, Michallon and de Valenciennes (who influenced Corot), had been known to make outdoor studies during their careers. De Valenciennes wrote a treatise on perspective which Pissarro was later to recommend to his son.

A more direct and concrete heritage was given to the Impressionists by forerunners and advisors, amongst whom were artists of the calibre of Constable, Delacroix, Corot, Courbet, Jongkind, Manet. Many of the ideas and attitudes adopted by the Impressionists were of course derived from the Romantic school, which had come to be known as a major change in European thought and feeling, and involved ideologies that

were both enduring and complex in nature. The Romanticists rejected painting that was overworked or formal, and this fitted in well with their notion of the artist being always at odds with the accepted, one who was continually exploring the untried and the unknown. Their ideas on nature were definitely strongly influenced by one of the central themes of Romanticism.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's cult of the spiritual revival that was to be found in the quietness and peacefulness of nature had already altered man's response to nature, and in the 1860's, which were the formative years for Monet and his friends, there was a reaction to the idea of Romantic self-projection, and the sometimes unreasonable notions that had been accepted in the previous two decades. Monet often referred to his "constant commerce with the outside world", and it was his wish that he could be fused with nature, a concept that had previously been unheard of in the previous century. The Impressionists used nature to signify the outside world, in an attempt to especially differentiate between the town and the country. Use of the term was wont to imply that there was maybe a link between the outside world and the soul of man, an idea that had been expressed by the major writers of the 19th Century - Wordsworth and Coleridge. This feeling was made more real and acceptable by the dramatic industrialisation of the period. As towns and cities began to grow, people tried to escape from them, especially the younger and poorer poets and painters, who found the cities both fascinating and restricting. The Impressionists were

inspired by these emotions and ideas, and this was clearly evident in their landscapes and city-scapes, which were a combination of their own observations of the ordinary habits of life around them and the ideas of the period. Outdoor life developed along hedonistic lines, and consequently the boating and picnic scenes depicted by artists like Renoir and Monet were actually scenes generated from everyday life.

Painters had developed a bond with nature, and this was often based on genuine curiosity and a desire for accuracy, which was common to many painters. Constable had believed that painting should be scientifically accurate and precise, and this had led him to make numerous studies of the sky, and he actually marked each with the time of the day, and the direction of the wind. Turner had actually been known to strap himself to the mast of a ship in bad weather in order to experience the nature of a storm.

Towards the middle of the century there was a growing interest in science. It became apparent that the "beautiful" was being replaced by the "true", and this was being practised by many of the artists of the period. The impact of science was, naturally, in the field of optical research, especially in the areas of colour and the structure of light. The scientist Eugene Chevreul carried out a considerable amount of research in the area of colour harmonies, including the area of "negative after-images". Monet, Pissarro, and Seurat all had first-hand knowledge of his work, and were strongly influenced by it. His theory of optical mixture eventually

led to the Impressionist practice of tingeing shadows with colours complementary to the colour of the object casting the shadow. This in turn led to the juxtapositioning of colours on the canvas for the eye to fuse at a distance, and so produce colours of a higher degree of intensity than was possible to produce on the palette. With the aid of these discoveries the Impressionists were able to juxtapose complementary colours and, when used in large enough areas, these colours intensified each other, and when used in small areas, they neutralised each other. Optical discoveries also led to the development of the camera, and photography had a tremendous effect on the painting of the mid-19th century. There is also evidence that actual photographs were used by certain artists as a basis for their paintings.

The painter and art historian, Eugene Fromentin, blamed photography for a decline in moral spirituality which became apparent, and he also felt that certain works lacked the "fantasies of the imagination" and the "mysteries of the palette". Fromentin had the work of Manet in mind when he referred to works being too clear, too explicit, and that they were crude. Photography had complicated the issue of the illusionistic representation of reality, and had succeeded in showing artists an "objective" picture of reality, causing some to create an even more fastidious representation, while releasing others from making representations of the real world, and so enabling them to attempt a more personal rendering of nature, as portrayed by the Impressionists. Their method was based on the translation into paint of the

individual painter's optical perceptions, which was beyond the reach of the camera. In addition, the artist was also free to explore problems relating to actual painting itself. The subtleties of lighting were also considered to be destroyed by photography, and once delicate reflected lights in shadows and gradated halftones, were replaced by an exaggeration of lights and darks which gave dramatic, simplified areas of strong tonal contrast. Three-dimensional forms were flattened into broad, tonal shapes, and these were used by artists like Degas and Manet to depict a more simplified impression of the world. Examples of this can be seen in Manet's "Luncheon on the Grass" (1863). Even though photography paved the way for a more naturalistic vision of light than that found in chiaroscuro painting, it still presented form in terms of strong tonal lights and darks. The landscape works of Manet and Degas show a move away from tonal handling.

The pre-Impressionist works of Monet and Renoir in the 1860's had already given hints of the developments to come. In Monet's "Women in the Garden" and Renoir's "Lise with a Parasol" shadows are filled with reflected light and cool blue-violet hues picked up from the sky, in sharp contrast with the warmth of the sunlight. Manet's group of friends were able to join together for regular meetings with other artists and literary figures for exchange of ideas. It was at this time that many artists began to discuss and consider the idea of independent group shows, which would provide an alternative venue to the official salon. This idea came into

being in 1874, when a critic first coined the phrase, "Impressionism".

It was among the independent artists that the new concept was consciously adopted, and consequently this placed them in direct opposition to the ideals laid down by the Academy. Among these artists were Charles Gleyre and Thomas Couture. Gleyre's pupils included Monet, Sisley, and Bazille, in the early 1860's. He was known to encourage his students to make outdoor studies whenever possible, and communicated an admiration for landscape painting, and an appreciation of craftsmanship, which proved to be particularly relevant in the case of Renoir.

Couture's most famous pupil was Edouard Manet, who remained with his teacher and absorbed his unconventional attitudes to light, shade, handling, and immediacy. Couture encouraged his students to work rapidly and to "keep the first vivid impression". He was often known to suppress detail and halftones in the interests of direct spontaneity. His brushwork was lively, his colours thick and confident, and his forms were often reduced to broad masses outlined in strong contour. Another influential figure in the challenge to the Academy was Eugene Delacroix, who was also regarded as an independent artist. Delacroix saw himself as attempting to fuse with new life and energy a tired classical tradition. Conservatives, however, saw him as an innovator, and younger artists were inspired by his expressive colour and bold brushwork. The visible sign of the brush became the mark of

the Impressionist artist's individuality, which at once signified originality and uniqueness. His example was most important in the development of the Impressionist movement.

Corot was also an important figure who frequently taught the younger artists, including some of the leading Impressionists - Pissarro, Morisot, and others. He was also influential in the use of immediacy in painting, and also advocated the importance of retaining the first impression of the subject matter. His maxim was "... Never lose the first impression which has moved you". Corot, however, did not break completely with the Academy, but used to advantage and adapted the opaque shadows taught by his teachers to represent most truthfully the delicate nuances of tonal value that he perceived in nature and sought to portray in his work. He did many experimental outdoor studies, and concentrated on the overall effect of natural light and shade, choosing distant objects so that excessive detail should not detract from this general effect. He added white to all his colours to heighten luminosity, in an attempt to bring them closer to the natural outdoor lighting effects.

Impressionist artists worked out of doors from start to finish, and were fascinated by transformations brought about by light on natural objects, surfaces, and atmospheric spaces. They discovered that colour was not the property of the object itself, but of the moment of perception of light, and so changed constantly according to the time of day, and

with changes in atmospheric density.

The Impressionists were the first to render the full intensity of natural light and the glow of natural colours, and we are in debt to them for a brilliant new vision of the world around us.

As the artist Paul Signac said "... the entire surface of the (Impressionist) painting glows with sunlight ; the air circulates, light embraces, caresses and irradiates forms ; it penetrates everywhere, even into the shadows which it illuminates." The Impressionists tried to capture light, perceived in a flash, too quick to permit detail, and to judge contours, assess elements, weight, and densities. Claude Monet, the leader of the movement, referred to this as "instantaneity".

It is interesting to note that there seems to be a school of thought that favours the idea that one of the main factors that contributed to the formation of Impressionism has much to do with the spectacle of Haussmann's "Paris", which had taken shape around them, with the endless perspectives of straight avenues and curving boulevards, all with similar, if not identical, architectural structures. Buildings, trees, landscapes, people, the sky, all became part of the "impression", and endless mass of colour which changed according to changes in light, moisture, quantity of smoke, which was present in the air. No forms were clear, and all the elements appeared to be reduced to particles of more or less the same size.

The most noteworthy aspect of the rise of Impressionism was that it emerged unscathed after the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), and it also survived the siege and devastation that followed, as well as the repressed Commune of 1871. The Impressionist painters, who had left the city during the war, returned as if nothing had happened, and responded by producing more dazzling colours, and by illustrating more intensified perceptions of the devastated city and its immediate surroundings.

THE INFLUENCE OF LANDSCAPE PAINTING

As more and more technical difficulties developed in chiaroscuro painting, the traditional studio set-up was gradually replaced by the move towards new environments. The rise of landscape painting was an important factor in this regard, as artists became more committed to the depiction of accurate outdoor scenes and lighting. At first artists still tended to see the contrasts of the outdoors as the same as those found in their studios, and consequently all storms, sunsets, dawns, and forest scenes all appeared to be completed in the studio in terms of dramatic lights and darks that one would expect to be the result of work completed in a studio. However, Corot set the example for the younger artists of the period with his works of scenes with pale lighting and luminous shadows. As a result of this more artists began to complete their work out of doors, in an attempt to retain the unity of natural lighting and the impact of the first "impression".

Painters became increasingly determined to capture and retain the quality of light, and this in turn brought with it a freeing of artistic vision, which stimulated artists to study brighter and lighter daylight scenery.

One of the main problems encountered in studio painted landscapes was the creation of a convincing unified lighting effect, especially in those landscapes that contained figures. The background lighting was usually quite distinct from that of the figures, which were usually executed from models in the studio, with the aid of the controlled lights and darks of the indoor studio. Figures painted out of doors were subject to natural light, and the gradations from light to shade were much softer and the shadows more diffused, and were filled with reflected light from the sky. For example, in Manet's "Luncheon on the grass", studio lighting was abandoned, but there is still evidence of the stark contrasts of interior light. In this work Manet used a direct, frontal light which fell directly onto the figures, blocking out all evidence of halftones, and reduced shadows to striking black contours. This type of lighting was similar to that used in contemporary photography, and produced broad, flat blocks of light and dark when used indoors. In the 1870's the Impressionists experimented with this full-face light, and in their hands tonal contrasts were suppressed, because shadows all tended to fall behind the objects illustrated.

THE INFLUENCE OF JAPANESE PRINTS : ON PAINTING

Japanese woodcut colour prints were immensely popular in

France in the 1860's, at the same time offering alternatives to conventional European painting. The flat areas of bright colour rather than modelling both implied and denied form through the use of skillful contour, and by using overlapping planes of colour. Single-point perspective had never been developed by Japanese artists, who rather suggested space by placing one object behind another. Unusual and high viewpoints were used, which often looked down on a scene, and apparently emphasised a decorative flatness of form and space by tipping the scene closer to the surface, so to speak. This device was used by avant-garde artists of the 1860's onwards, which gave their work a spatial and compositional flatness which seemed to complement the loading of their paint surfaces.

The nature of Japanese prints was a mass of sensual line and blocks of bright colour, weaving patterns across the surface, causing the eye to wander across it, and not to focus on any central point. A similar result could be seen in photography, and both provided an interesting and much-needed alternative to prevailing Academic conventions. The photograph, although in theory not much different to the human eye, produced a far different picture. Within a given field of vision the camera's lens records every object in the field with equal clarity. Human vision is of course more selective, and apart from the central point of focus, all other objects are largely blurred. This in turn led to the increased interest in the creation of an overall focus of attention in their work. "Snapshot" photography also

influenced artists like Degas - moving figures, frozen in action, became a feature of the painting of the time, the randomly and cut-off figures giving an air of immediacy. In this way artists found a means to depict busy city life, with the sensation of a glimpse of the uninterrupted field of activity, a scene from daily life frozen in time.

Many artists began to avoid the use of a central point of focus in their work, and depicted scenes that did not have any specific point of interest, and this consequently led to the confusion and bewilderment of both the public and critics alike. There were very few who understood the aims of the style, and critics urged the independent artists to return to the conventionality and security of the Academic style. This new, and unknown combination of an even and uniform focus, an overall loading of the paint surface, and the flattened pictorial space did little for the understanding of the pictorial intention of the artist. An excellent example of this can be seen in Degas' "Chrysanthemums" of 1858-65.

MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUE : IN PAINTING

In the early days of the Academy, painting techniques were simply picked up from the painter in whose studio a student worked. As the preparation of painting materials was gradually removed from the responsibility of the student and was taken over by professionals and specialists, students no longer needed to acquire this knowledge, and this left

artists with virtually no practical knowledge of their materials. Soon the basic components and properties of this side of their trade was lost. More problems were encountered in the 19 century with the introduction of mass-produced artists' materials, which transformed their "tools" beyond all recognition. There were naturally different schools of thought with regard to how detrimental this was to the quality of painting, ie. if artists no longer had any knowledge of their materials, how would they then be able to detect frauds, or even good materials from bad. Many artists soon used whatever was available, and some even used the cheapest on the market.

Couture, however, believed that the artists themselves were more to blame than the materials - he felt that modern materials should not be considered inferior to the old-fashioned materials, and he also considered that the best paints to use were those of the simplest composition, and that too much complicated preparation went into production to the detriment of the colours themselves. He advocated that better painting was a result of better painting methods, and not of better materials.

From the mid-18th century artists had understood that the old methods of paint preparation had been lost to them as a result of closely guarded secrets among the specialists in the trade. This came about as a result of the volumes of "Secreti" - books containing the various chemical recipes which originated from medieval times, and also

from later periods. These books were, however, produced to spread the information, and not to conceal it. This meant that the techniques had not been lost as a result of secrecy, but purely through the artists' lack of training in this field. Soon production became exclusively the responsibility of the traders, who apparently felt less inclined to the preservation of pictures than they did towards the making of profits. This was the cause of the deterioration that was evident in many of the 18th century works.

From the mid-17th century until the 18th century, the trade in artists materials was associated with the trades of pharmacy and grocery. It was only towards the end of the 18th century that "colourmen" began to emerge as independent professionals. Most of the earlier traders had concentrated on a certain area, ie. watercolours and varnishes, for example, and often purchased their raw materials from different manufacturers. Still, they all offered a basic range of items to the artist, ie. frames, brushes, supports, paper, easels, paints, etc. even though these items were made by other manufacturers. Many of the traders soon moved into other specialised areas, for example, rented out pictures for students to copy. Another example is that of the Durand-Ruel family, who were originally paper retailers, and in time became the most important dealers in Impressionist paintings. Another reason for the loss of knowledge of materials was that the artists of the period were struggling to enter and be accepted into the bourgeois social class of the time. The stigma attached to the

"craftsman" was something that they desired to shake off, and so they tended to avoid the "craft" of material preparation. Also, the independent artists tended to link craftsmanship as such with the finishing processes of Academic painting for some unexplained reason. In this way, craftsmanship came to be seen as a restraining procedure on the artists' personal expression and degrees of creativity. There were those who agreed and disagreed with this - the feeling was on the one hand that craftsmanship was necessary for the careful building up of a solid paint layer, the basis for a good picture, and there were those who disagreed with this idea. Academic painting followed the rules of careful underpainting, while at the same time urging hasty execution. This was because students were often rushed for time, and had to meet deadlines, but naturally haste was completely incompatible with the reworked, multi-layered finishing techniques that were insisted upon by the Academy. Slow drying of each layer was of major importance for durability and could not be hastened. The result was a paint layer which was particularly sensitive and prone to damage because of the different and numerous chemical reactions that were involved. The independents, and their contemporaries the Impressionists were all decidedly against the reworking of layers, and advocated scenes that were finished quickly out of doors. They were at the same time insisting on the importance of permanency in their works. As a result, from the 1850's onwards, the rapid, sketch-like technique was used increasingly, and of course aided

the accurate recording of the effects of nature and the outdoors. This technique both allowed the artists to express their own creativity, and appeared to be better suited to the modern materials available on the market. Some artists, like Manet, attempted to compromise between the old and the new methods, and tried to use traditional methods while also attempting to capture immediacy and spontaneity in his work. These experiments eventually resulted in the techniques of Impressionism.

THE BEGINNINGS OF IMPRESSIONISM : IN MUSIC

There have been Impressionist traits in the music of all the ages, for example, the Elizabethan keyboard music, and in Bach's cantatas, and also in Beethoven's "Pastoral Symphony", but it is convenient to pinpoint the earliest recognisable traits of leanings towards Impressionism in the music of Chopin, not only because he was a great harmonic innovator (the history of Impressionist music is to a large extent concerned with the development of harmony), but also because his thinking influenced the ultimate formulation of the Impressionist ideal, and conditioned its sensibility.

The process began with Chopin's "Rondo a la Mazur" - for melody he looked to various folk music, and in this piece he included the Lydian sharp fourth of folk music, for both the piano and orchestra. Another Impressionist trait was the inclusion of the bare fifth, which he also incorporated into the piece. And last, but far from least,

was the passage consisting of four ascending diminished-seventh chords, one resolving into another on a different degree of the scale, ie. the parallel chord technique that Debussy was later to use so much with high-numbered discords. With regard to the diminished seventh chord, it had been used by Chopin's predecessors, but he treated it more imaginatively than those before him had done. There is a particularly good and descriptive example in his "La ci da vern la mano", which has been described as "a prism breaking up white light into glittering rainbow particles". As Chopin experimented with the side-slipping of diminished chords, the thought must have occurred to him that the procedure could just as easily be applied to the other chords, or so-called dissonances, whose natural freedom of movement had been stifled and held rigidly by all the complex rules controlling preparation and resolution. Chopin began to agitate in his work for revision of these rules, and from the side-slipping of diminished sevenths he progressed to a similar treatment of dominant sevenths in the F minor Ballade, in the A minor Mazurka, and noticeably in the C minor Mazurka. By eliminating the square-cut sequential repetition in the melody, the metric stability, one was left with Debussyist Impressionist harmony. It was however, not Chopin's intention to call to account the supremacy of melody, or to seriously damage or misuse symmetry of rhythm. Chopin's other important contribution to the development of Impressionist harmony was his frequent use of added-note chords. From an early stage he had the habit of encrusting an underlay of simple and basic diatonic chords with rich

ornamentation in the form of suspensions, anticipations and passing notes. From these beginnings it was a short step to using the heavily embellished chords in their own right. One of the most popular chords in the world, the added sixth, comes from Impressionist harmony, and this is indicated on many occasions in Chopin's work. An added ninth is included in the A minor Etude, and at the end of the 23rd Prelude the seventh partial is left quite unresolved. This was the ambiguity that the Impressionists loved, and tried to cultivate, and Chopin exploited the phenomenon.

For the Impressionist Debussy, Chopin was the earliest piano composer for whose work he expressed the most admiration, the reason being more than likely the nature of Chopin's approach to the question of piano sonority, and his exploitation of the atmospheric potential of the pedals. This was one of the earliest manifestations of concern with timbre, which was so common in the Impressionist music. The earliest example is probably to be seen in Field's "Nocturnes", an Impressionist pre-occupation, especially in the seventh, with the suggestion of chimes and dependence on the silvery tone, and the special pedal effects which were obtained from the early 19th century pianos (it is said that the artist Whistler borrowed the ideas from Chopin). Chopin raised the nocturne to a higher level of expressive eloquence through still more reverie, and poetic feeling, which was already evident in Field's "Nocturnes". It was chiefly this poetic feeling, made easier to express on the piano because of the piano's adaptability through

which the fully-developed Impressionist style eventually emerged. Chopin was no doubt the greatest pre-Impressionist of his day, and in whose work musical harmony and timbre first developed to the extent that they played a role for their own sakes. The composer, Liszt, fell into the same category as Chopin as regards their work and intentions. Liszt was firstly a pianist, and in his piano compositions he continued the tradition of Chopin, always opening up fresh resources. Much of his later orchestral music was based on piano experimentation, and it appears very likely that his harmonic experiments were the result of keyboard experimentation, which was also the case with Debussy.

Liszt's earliest work, which falls somewhere between Chopin and Impressionism, is the Transcendental Studies "Feux Follets", an example of Impressionism before Debussy. The title itself suggests the Impressionist idea - a play of fast moving particles of light. A fair amount of interest lies not only in the melody, but also in the finely-judged ornamental figuration which fluctuates constantly between the whole tones and the semi-tones. The texture is kaleidoscopic, and the closing bars give the impression of that which dissolves in a constantly moving sea of light. The "Feux Follets" is recognised as being one of Liszt's greatest piano achievements, and one which set the trend for all the Impressionist water-pieces that were to follow. It was certainly to later influence Debussy in "La Mer".

Chopin and Liszt appeared to sense the wider range of expression which could be brought about through the development of harmony and timbre, and Liszt associated these ideas and concepts with the sounds of natural phenomena that he found at his disposal, and this eventually led to the Impressionist style of music.

One of the first composers to employ Impressionist techniques, ie. impressionistically and not in the abstract, and on a large scale, was the musician, Grieg. He attempted to express in music the essence or mood of his country, Norway, and this led him to develop many concepts of harmony and timbre which suggested what was to follow. He loved the folk music of Norway, and also tried to do justice to the beauty of his country. Applications of Impressionism can be found in his small piano pieces, as he was essentially a minaturist, and left larger scale works to composers like Debussy and Delius.

In his 'Lyric pieces' the familiar evocations of Impressionist pastoral solitude are evident - especially in pieces like "Peace in the woods", and "Bellringing", which is probably the best example of pre-Debussian Impressionism.

Wagner was the first to look towards a stronger bond between music and the other arts. He felt that music, and the other arts all gave expression to their creators' personal inner vision and feeling, and that they should all be more or less on the same level. He realised that music was still at a

fairly early or primitive stage of development, and he set to work to bridge the gap. He attempted to reach the 'total' art experience, ie. he mixed all the arts together in his operas, for example, poetry, mime, music, and decor.

THE INFLUENCE OF JAPANESE ART : ON MUSIC

The work of the Japanese artists, Katsushika Hokusai and Ando Hiroshige had a profound influence on Impressionism. As has been mentioned previously, these artists experimented with prints of landscapes, endeavouring to achieve different effects of light through the use of patterns, or blocks of colour.

Similarities were also found between the work of Turner and Hiroshige.

The Impressionist composer, Debussy, was undoubtedly influenced by these works and effects created, so much so that he even requested a reproduction of Hokusai's print "The hollow of the wave off Kanagawa" be used on the cover of his composition "La Mer". Hokusai was fairly well-established in France at the time, and his works were quite well-known to the public. The above-mentioned print, one of his best, was described as "colourations which seem to have been absorbed by the paper, by its faded harmony, its discreet polychromy". Colourations "absorbed by the paper" are suggestive of some of the water colour effects to be found in Debussy's piano works. Apparently by comparison with his

other works, Debussy's "La Mer" is said to have a firmer strength of design, and that this may well have been a direct influence of the work of Hokusai and Hiroshige. Their work was bold, clear-cut, definite, and had no hidden 'shadows'. As Gauguin wrote in 1888 : "Look at the Japanese who draws so admirably and you will see there life in the open air and in the sun, without shadows".

TECHNIQUE : IN MUSIC

As previously stated, Impressionist music was mainly concerned with harmony and the study thereof. Modern harmonic theory is based on the simple arithmetical relationship of concordant intervals established by Pythagorus, and on the modulatory colouring among the unequal intervals of the scale of meantone, and also on the rationalisations of these conflicting systems in terms of tuning, which is called equal temperament. Harmonic theory is therefore made up of three mutually exclusive sound systems, which are treated as one. Harmony survived as a system of rationalisations, and dissonance lost dramatic relativity, because all music became heavily dissonant. This was the state of music at the **start** of the 20th century.

Debussy and others exposed the theoretical impasse of music at the start of the 20th century, by dispensing with the traditional harmonic formulas. Harmony and timbre were regarded as the principal means whereby atmosphere could be invoked. In order to understand this it is necessary to examine

Debussy's melodic reforms, the emancipation of which he sought through returning to the roots of folk-song and plainsong. Plainsong offered the use of the old church modes with their eccentricities of interval sequence, and from folk-song he gained his liking for the pentatonic scales which later influenced his harmonic thinking to a great extent. The oriental effects, ie. arabesques and elusive scale functions also came to light for the first time in Western music. One of Debussy's most significant achievements was the raising of the status of harmony to one higher than that of melody. He conceived chords as self-sufficient entities, released from subservience to a melodic line, instigating the principle of "non-functional harmony" - a harmony which existed in its own right, and could stand on its own when called to do so. There was also a revolutionary approach to timbre or texture. Even though Impressionism was concerned with beauty of sound, it also had to take into consideration the quality of that sound, and the physical means whereby it was produced. Piano and orchestral sound became ends in themselves, whereas before they had merely been the means to an end. Debussy also reorientated the process of orchestration - each instrument had its own part to play, which was akin to the pointillist technique in painting.

Preoccupations that were common to most, and certainly to most of the Impressionist painters, were the ideas of nature in romantic and scenic environments - for example, sunlight, mist, autumn leaves, winter scenes, rivers, water, sunrise,

sunset, moonlight, etc. Distance was also important, the confused and hazy far-away scenes, murmurs of distant voices, bells, echoes, reverberations, were all put to use to create the effects that the artists wished to achieve. Dreams were also commonly used, forgotten memories leading to visions and often fantasies created by the artist. Scenes were usually pastoral, but were also urban, metropolitan, or even oriental in nature - the oriental being more emphasized in music than in painting. Impressionist music fell into two categories : the dreamlike mood, which was basically static, and secondly, the mosaic-like synthesis of impressions which were basically dynamic.

THE IMPRESSIONIST PAINTERS AND THEIR WORKS :

In order to have a clear understanding of the aims and the achievements of the Impressionists, it is necessary to take a close look at the works of the pre-Impressionists, the Impressionists themselves, and the post-Impressionists. In so doing, one is able to trace the events and developments from the period of Realism through post-Impressionism.

PRE - IMPRESSIONISM : 1860-1870 :

GUSTAVE COURBET :

Courbet was influential in painting mainly during the revolution of 1848. He came from a farming background in the south-east of France. His father owned land and vineyards,

and the family also owned both their farm home and a smarter bourgeois townhouse. Owing to the fact that his family was fortunate enough to be moving upwards on the social scale of the period, he had the advantage of being able to see both points of view in respect of the social class distinction more or less simultaneously. For example, in his first major work "Burial at Ornans" (1849-50), he depicted his father in a bourgeois role and attire, and in a later work "Peasants of Flagey returning from the fair" (1850-55), he again uses his father, who now appears in a peasant's smock and hat. He sought, through his work, to depict the differences between the different social classes in France, and it became apparent from the treatment of his subject matter that his sympathies lay with the peasant classes. He used ordinary people in ordinary everyday scenes and made no attempt at idealisation of any subject matter. For this reason he had great difficulty in finding acceptance with the Salon, and fortunately he gained exemption in 1849 with "After dinner at Ornans". Once this work had been accepted for exhibition he had no trouble in having other works accepted.

The Realism of Courbet was directly inspired by the 17th century masters, for example, Rembrandt, and also other Dutch painters with whom he came into contact in 1846. Also influential in his development were the works of artists like Velasquez, Zurbaran and Caravaggio. He also studied the French 17th century Realists, especially the Le Nain brothers. Their works depicted the working class with its hardships and its rewards, and Courbet used these ideas together with his

own, and came up with his simple, honest, and earthy imagery. He tried to use the Realist techniques together with simple, flat formats to achieve directness and reality in his own works.

His painting technique was interesting and eclectic - he used the Old Master technique of loading his shadows with thick, dark layers of paint, and at the same time his technique was based on chiaroscuro. He worked from dark to light, using a lot of brown in the process of painting, which was reminiscent of the Old Masters and also of the studio setting. His work showed a combination of Rembrandt-type chiaroscuro, and texturally interesting and unusual handling of the paint surface - he did away with the smooth academic finish, and actually tried to create more "realistic" natural textures similar to those found in nature. Interestingly, he did not always work from a dark ground building up gradually to the lights, but also experimented with white canvases. This is evident in his "Seascape at Palavas" of 1854. This white ground was covered with a red earth ground. In the "Flagey oak" of 1864 the white ground was covered with a thin, transparent layer of warm brown, to give depth and a degree of colour harmony to the painting. In "Deer Haven", which was painted over another painting, the ground is obviously not visible, and X-ray investigations have revealed a new thick ground applied over the old painting, which probably contained lead white, as it is impenetrable by X-ray.

Courbet's surfaces are unusually deceptive, and they often give the appearance of a rugged and rough mass of paint, this being due to the broken overworking of colours. On closer

inspection one can see the mastery with which he handled his colours, ie. thin layers of brush or knife-work colour give the effect of solid texture without the bulkiness of too much paint. He used many different techniques to create his textures - he added sand to colours to create an earthy texture. In "Deer Haven" he apparently hired deer to "pose" for him, and also worked from the bodies of dead deer. Because the landscape was painted out of doors, and the deer added later in his studio, the two subjects are treated differently. He gave natural texture and substance to his rocks and foliage, most of it being painted with a stiff brush which lent itself to the texture of bushes, grasses, bark, etc. Detail was always taken care of down to the finest leaf or blade of grass, which were always treated in the most precise and careful manner. Background foliage, ie. distance, was shown as less distinct and colours were applied with rags and sponges, which gave a hazy, feathery effect and created sharp contrast with the more detailed sections of the painting. Treatment of the deer was very delicate, the brushmarks creating the texture of fur, and consequently the deer stood out from the background almost like cardboard cutouts, which accounted for their being added to a prepared landscape. He repeatedly painted this type of landscape, and eventually achieved wide acknowledgement of his talent, as well as acceptance of his controversial subject matter.

Courbet was of major importance to the younger artists of the period, but it is also important to understand that these same artists reacted strongly to his techniques of chiaroscuro

and use of browns, and consequently to his handling of light and shade.

EDCUARD MANET :

Manet was one of the major independent artists who worked to produce a new style of painting that aptly reflected the modern times - this style was later to develop into Impressionism. He was significantly influenced by photography, Japanese prints, and the work of the Old Masters, especially that of Velasquez. In his "Concert in the Tuileries" Manet actually reworked the theme of a painting in the Louvre which had been mistakenly attributed to Velasquez. Manet transferred the idea to the scenes of the Parisian society of his day, and depicted himself amongst the important literary figures of the period - in actual fact he attempted to combine the ideas of the Old Masters with his own inspiration from modern society, and events and popular imagery that he found around him. It was later said that Manet only painted fragments, and was not capable of composing a picture in its entirety. Manet, however, had rejected these very confines in an attempt to break away from the old tradition of chiaroscuro. So his work was visually fragmented or unconnected, because it lacked the unifying aspects of the effects of lighting and modelling. He tried to depict the experiences of life in a direct fashion, and it was this ideal that was not accepted by the conventions of the time. In this same picture he had sought to depict a segment or a part of life as it existed for him in the city, and he broke

all the rules because of his lack of central focus. The viewer is faced with a frieze of figures across the canvas, and it was seen as lacking any composition at the time. The composition is, on the contrary, very well organised, but it was not recognised as such. There was very little spatial recession, or depth, and no pictorial hierarchy to bring the whole to a central or main focus of action. A device borrowed from photography was the intention of the artist to keep the viewer separate from the scene through the use of cut-off, or cropped figures, and also by the lack of figures in the foreground which might "intrude" into the viewer's space. The picture was portrayed as a strip of action, which was neatly confined within its limits, an isolated piece of action. There was little foreground space, and this further discouraged viewer participation, there were no elaborate gestures and conventional expressions, and the figures merely gazed at the observer blankly and indifferently. The line of top hats cuts the picture in two just about halfway, and the upper section of greenery emphasises the flatness of the work. The tree trunks lead the eye from right to left with horizontal rhythm, and at the same time unify the upper and lower sections. The central foreground tree links the foreground with the background. It is interesting to note that except for several studies done for the painting, it was completed largely in the studio.

At first Manet used the technique of thin brown initial colours which he learned from his teacher, Couture, but later he did away with heavy shadows and dominant lighting, and used strong,

natural light. This he used so as to fall directly onto his figures, resulting in a unity previously not realised. He used pale and tinted grounds, which strengthened the flat areas in his works. These areas also contrasted successfully with his generous use of black, which was used chiefly for clothes and costumes. Pure black had previously been avoided by the Academic artists, as its use destroyed colour harmonies. In this way Manet's use of black further added to the feeling of fragmentation in his work. The eye appears to be "jolted" from black shape to white shape and back to black shape. The paint layers are thin, especially in the lower half of the picture. Apparently Manet wanted to create an air of spontaneity, of having been done very quickly, even though he was, by all accounts, a slow and cautious artist, often scraping off layers and repainting them repeatedly.

In 1863 Manet exhibited "Luncheon on the grass" at the Salon des Refuses, and again caused confusion and indignation. He had adapted a composition, and poses, of a 16th century engraving after Raphael, and had presented his viewers with a scene of a nude female figure and two fully clothed male figures, in a setting of what appeared to be a public park. Manet had modernised everything, ie. the clothing, the setting, the accessories. The critics found the painting flat and without form, but this flatness was what Manet wished to achieve. He had used the technique of carefully modelled areas outlined in light and dark. The light seemed to come from outside the picture, and tended to rid the composition of mass or bulk. He apparently used the shocking theme to

illustrate his point - the important thing was not the subject matter, but how the subject matter was treated and painted. Because of his treatment of form, he was also able to concentrate on detail in the foliage, and on his figures, without either appearing as apart from the whole.

Most significantly, through his use of subject matter he actually succeeded in converting a group of figures into a still life.

THE IMPRESSIONISTS : 1870 - 1880

In order to free themselves completely from studio painting, the Impressionists had to re-educate their eyes by careful observation of natural outdoor lighting. They dispensed with the contrasting lights and darks of Romanticism and Realism, and also rejected the use of the earth colours, ie. browns and blacks, and experimented with pale colours and tonal values. They also looked to the luminous skies of seascapes, and the opaque shadows which tended to flatten pictorial space as discovered and used by Ingres. They began to use to full advantage grounds of pale colours, and also colours which were directly related to the end product, and they painted out of doors from start to finish.

CLAUDE MONET :

From the 1860's to the mid 1870's Monet worked in Normandy, Paris, and the surrounding countryside, and later at Argenteuil.

In the 1860's he was influenced by Courbet, and his dark forest settings. As he developed his Impressionist style, he began to prefer more open, sunlit landscapes, including parks and gardens that appeared regularly in his work. His change of style can be seen in "Women in the Garden" which he started in 1866, and also in "Bathing at La Grenouillere" three years later. La Grenouillere was a popular boating resort for weekenders, and had a floating restaurant which was used in some of Monet's works, and also in the later works of Renoir. It was also the perfect place for the Impressionist artist to find endless and fascinating subject matter - the ever-changing water scenes and human activity lent themselves to the ideals of the painters. In "Bathing at La Grenouillere" Monet used a lighting effect that he would have learned from Manet, an afternoon light falling from behind the artist. He produced a surface consisting of alternate blocks of dark, opened up and lightened by patches of bright, dazzling sunshine, which resulted in the sharp contrasting of lights and darks which strongly recalled Manet's work of the early 1860's.

Also reminiscent of Manet is the thick and juicy quality of the paint, used in this instance by Monet. But unlike Manet's paintings, this one was painted and finished out of doors, the speed of the brushwork is evident, and the desire was to capture the effects that the scenery had to offer. The paint layer is mostly opaque and hides the white ground, except in parts that have been hastily sketched in. The white ground helped to retain the brilliance of the colours to a large extent. His brushwork is vigorous, and his brushmarks even

indicate the size of the brushes that he used, but do not give much indication of depth. But the straight horizontal strokes and pastel shades on the distant water aid the impression one has of depth and of recession. The brushwork is also very descriptive, and he manages to capture the character of different forms - boats are outlined with unbroken strokes, and short horizontal strokes indicate the water in the foreground. Small, quick dabs make up the flowers and the foliage. He also rejected the idea of a smooth finished surface to a painting, and worked towards achieving natural textures. Monet's palette for this work was fairly limited, chiefly vermilion, greens, blues, and chrome yellow, which were almost the colours of his later Impressionist palette. Black had been discarded completely. Cobalt violet, a colour that had only been available since about 1859, was put to good use in this painting, especially in the foreground water. He also used a certain amount of lead white, which was used liberally from about 1870, and resulted in pale pastel-like qualities, and a new brilliance for the entire canvas. This was the end result of his desire to achieve light tones and minimal light-dark contrasts in his fully lit landscapes. Compositionally the painting was unconventional: the horizontal duckboard, or bridge, falls almost directly across the middle of the picture, and the broad shapes of light and dark below and above the line appear to echo or imitate each other, which in turn gives a flat unity to the composition, this being reinforced by the harmony of colour, and the textured brushwork. Evidence of Monet's interest in contrasts of naturalistic illusion and flat patterning, which were later

the ideals of Impressionism, were already evident here.

In the 1870's Monet still sought to pursue his aims of achieving sensations of light and colour in nature, and his works were based solely on his outdoor visual experiences where he could achieve and retain the unity of natural lighting. Monet and the other Impressionists began to seek an alternative to the official Salon, not only because their work was unacceptable, but because the facilities of the Salon were unsuitable for the successful showing of Impressionist works. The walls were dark and the lighting subdued, and the pictures were hung in rows up to the ceiling. Traditional paintings were admirably suited to this type of environment, especially with their heavy, decorative gold frames, and contrasting tones. The Impressionists, on the other hand, began using white and tinted plain frames to set off their works to best advantage. Impressionist works were usually intimate in nature, and were best viewed in daylight, and hung on neutral walls.

The theme of the railway became a popular one amongst the Impressionists, and was developed from the one previously used by earlier artists, for example, as used by Courbet and Manet in 1861 and 1874 respectively. Manet used the theme to deal with the station itself, and not with the events that took place there. In his "Saint-Lazare station" of 1877 he showed that he saw the environment as an industrial landscape filled with clouds of steam and broken sunlight. The cast iron frame of the glasswork is light and delicate,

even elegant, and its symmetrical construction made it perfect compositionally for the lighting effects that Monet wished to achieve. The composition is strong and formal, the point of the roof falls in the dead centre of the top of the canvas. The main engine, which comes towards the viewer, is placed just left of the centre, to avoid the over-emphasis of symmetry. The light inside the structure is cool, and the steam from the train is a brilliant pale blue which contrasts with the warmth of the outside sunlight. Warmth floods in through the window in the roof, and casts a golden light on the foreground network of tracks - this warmth of colour is then picked up and touches of it are seen in the blue of the shadows. The paint layer is typical of Monet, it exploits the opaque colours to their limits, which are made lighter by the addition of lead white. The ground colour is pale, a mixture of colour found elsewhere on the canvas. The paint is stiff and chalky, with the same slurring of colours, for example, the blues and the whites of the steam. The effects of coloured light on moisture in the atmosphere, whether it be steam, mist, fog or heat, always fascinated Monet, and gave him an excellent reason for his studies in light refraction.

EDGAR DEGAS :

Early in the 1860's Degas dispensed with academicism and sought to render the subjects that he saw around him in modern life. He fused in his art the elements of draughtsmanship and colouring, tradition and innovation. He desired

to add an element of emotion to his work, and to rid himself of the influence of Academic emotional symbolism.

The "Portrait of Duranty" of 1875 showed Degas' most innovative experiments in artistic technique - he used a combination of opaque non-oil-based mediums, with distemper providing the basic material of the work which was painted on unprimed canvas. A shine that is evident in several places suggests that the canvas was probably sized with a glue size before use. The distemper is overworked with pastel which did not adhere too successfully, and there is evidence of paint loss in parts. The beige colour of the canvas which has been left bare in some areas gives warmth and unity to the overall, resulting in muted harmony. Both the mediums, ie. distemper and pastel, are mat and opaque. The pastel has characteristically powdery hatched marks, which have been worked over distemper colours. The use of pastel was selective, and it served to focus attention on the figures by strengthening drawing and heightening colour. Pastel hatching on such areas as faces, succeeded in constructing form in terms of modelled colour and tone, but also contradicted the structure of the face where the marks do not follow the form. This created a striking tension between illusion and surface pattern. The composition is powerful and typical of Degas' experiments with pictorial construction and space. He was influenced by Japanese prints and also by photography, and tried to depict what he saw, and attempted to capture on canvas what was happening at the time.

His format was square, and stressed surface flatness. Once again the device of disturbing horizontals across the picture are perceived, which deny both depth and recession. The colour, ie. bright blue and brown beneath it add to this, linking with similar colours in the background to flatten the pictorial space. The result of these devices emphasises the tension between abstract design and illusionistic representation, which gives a tautness and immediacy to the figures.

Degas, unlike his colleagues, always worked in his studio, Preferring artificial light to natural light, and tried to achieve results of casual immediacy and guilelessness. He defined the aim of his style as "bewitching the truth", and tended to work in series - he found a certain subject and explored it for years. An example of this was the dance, he explored every aspect of it from the dress rehearsal room, to the stage, to the dancers themselves. He studied their moods, their poses on stage and off stage, and tried to capture the sense of immediacy and emotion that went with dancing and the theatre. His dancers were never idealised, but were little nondescript women in dancing skirts, either working to achieve an illusion of lightness and ease, or simply lounging about as in the work "The Rehearsal" of 1874. This and all his mature works show the principles of accidentality and instantaneity that were found in Monet's "Saint Lazare Station".

Each painting is a kind of snapshot, a moment in time,

illustrating clearly the influence of photography.

He was also fascinated by cafe life and its seamier aspects. This theme was used in his "Glass of Absinthe" of 1876. The picture is an excellent composition of apparently accidental diagonals in depth, and is composed of the tables, the bench, and even the seemingly diagonal relationship of the two figures in their drunken stupor. The same kind of closed-in space, which comes forward into that of the spectator was also seen in Manet's "Bar at the Folies-Bergere".

POST IMPRESSIONISM : IN PAINTING

During the 1880's Impressionism began to disintegrate. Although exhibitions continued, more and more members dropped out and ceased to send their work for exhibition. Renoir visited Italy and found a new direction based on his study of Raphael, and Monet realised that what he was actually creating was only a prolonged moment, and Cezanne, one of the original members, left to study a new style in isolation.

Soon all the remaining artists had in common was the experience of light as the foundation of artistic vision, and each began to develop their own sharply individualistic style. A brief look at the work of the following artists will illustrate some of the directions that were taken.

TOULOUSE-LAUTREC :

Because of a physical handicap, Toulouse-Lautrec took refuge in the cafe night-life of Paris, where he found he could hide from the public eye, and painted largely unnoticed scenes of cafes, theatres, and cabarets. All his works are examples of the same uncritical acceptance of the facts of Parisian night-life that he actually wished that he could have been a part of. "At the Moulin Rouge" of 1892 showed the influence of Degas, but the tolerant humanity which he expressed in this work was quite his own. To reinforce the psychological impact of the picture, he extended it on all sides, the plunging perspective on the left leads the eye with startling intensity towards the heavily made-up face of an entertainer, the light coming from below and casting green shadows on the face. His drawing was vivid and lively, and his patterning methods and surprising colour contrasts were later to influence artists around 1900, when Picasso first arrived in Paris.

It can be seen from Toulouse-Lautrec's work that he used many of the elements of Impressionism, ie. the typical flatness, the lack of recession, the juxtapositioning of colours, the limited palette, the subject matter - and it is interesting to see how he used this knowledge and visual experience to develop his own style.

PAUL GAUGUIN :

Gauguin was an artist with no formal training, and began to

paint under the influence of Pissarro. He quickly adapted the ideas of the Impressionists, and exhibited regularly with the group from 1879 to 1886. As time went by, Gauguin found that he was strongly drawn towards the exotic and that that was different, which could have been due to the fact that he was of Indian descent.

His work soon became associated with travel, and in 1883 he gave up his job and left his family to devote himself to art. He believed that modern civilisation was sick, and he took to the villages of Brittany, which he preferred to the city. In later years he lived in Tahiti, and eventually died alone and destitute in the Marguesas Islands.

Gauguin dispensed with what he called the formlessness of Impressionist vision, and also the idea of Western devotion to naturalistic effects. He wished to return to the archaic, which can be seen in his desire to live and work in the remote and 'backward' villages of France, and the South Seas. As a result of this, for the first time in the history of art, a return to 'primitive' styles in art was evident. He still looked for immediacy of experience as done by his Impressionist colleagues, but his became a more intensified search. This he achieved in "Vision after the Sermon" of 1888. The intense red of the ground is an immediate translation in his own terms of the powerful sensations of the folk festival. The figures are outlined in the manner which he had learned from his study of oriental and medieval art, but the contrast between the large foreground heads and

the smaller group in the distance is still Western in origin, and is drawn from subjects developed by artists like Degas, Renoir, and Toulouse-Lautrec.

Interestingly enough, he was only slightly influenced by the natives in Tahiti, he actually took his own flattened style and brilliant colouring technique to the South Seas, and used it to paint the people and the scenery that he found so fascinating. His attitudes to drawing and painting were still very strongly Impressionist derived, but his contours were as continuous as those found in Greek or Egyptian art. The contours were brilliant, intense, often arbitrary, showing in the free-form shapes that had little or no relationship to visible reality.

Although his work was Impressionist in concept and origin, it clearly shows a movement away from the style, and illustrates yet another case of individual development.

PRE - IMPRESSIONISM : IN MUSIC

As has already been mentioned, traits of Impressionism in music have been evident in the music of many periods. But to all intents and purposes, the earliest concrete beginnings can be traced back to the work of Chopin. In addition, he was also a great harmonic innovator, and this and his way of thinking and feeling, in terms of music, were of great importance in the development of the Impressionist aesthetic. The work of Chopin has already been discussed, but it would

seem necessary to take a closer look at the works of Liszt and Wagner, who were also extremely active in France, in order to be able to assess more fully the position of music at the outset of the Impressionist style.

FRANZ LISZT :

The works of Liszt have been said to fall somewhere between the work of Chopin and the Impressionism of Debussy. His earliest work in this respect was the "Feux Follets" - the title itself suggesting the Impressionist aesthetic - the play and interplay of mobile light particles. The impression or feeling is one of a continuously moving sea of light. The piece was said to have influenced the water-pieces of many later composers.

On 9 March 1831 Liszt attended a performance of Paganini, and it was apparently after this that he decided to become the 'Paganini of the piano'. His ultimate desire was to create a new kind of repertoire for the piano, in which he would be able to adapt to the keyboard some of Paganini's amazing achievements.

In 1838 he produced the "Six Paganini Studies", which represented a major breakthrough in piano technique - the study in E flat major being typical of his achievements. On completion of the "Twelve Transcendental Studies" in 1838, Liszt began work on a set of studies which embraced every aspect of piano playing, and was ready to create a new

brand of pianism.

In 1835 Liszt fled to Switzerland, and in his compositions entitled "Years of Pilgrimage", which were composed in Switzerland, one can hear how he felt about the country from his musical interpretations of the sights and the sounds, and the wealth of natural beauty that fascinated him. This collection also contains 'atmospheric' pieces with qualities like overall serenity.

In his orchestral compositions he made much use of bells, and their sounds, reverberations being picked up by off-beat chords on the harp, and later he had trombones and trumpets join in with the chiming. He made no attempt to end on a conventional note, but simply let the reverberations hum themselves away into nothingness. This formed the basis for all the later Impressionist bell-pieces, the reverberations giving way to a remoteness and a sense of indefiniteness. He succeeded in transcending the simple visual imagery of nature into mystical symbols by means of his music, and it is in this that one comes to realise how close he was in spirit to the Impressionist painters.

RICHARD WAGNER :

The techniques of musical Impressionism were of course the combination of music and the other arts, and especially the area of feeling to which music soon aspired in emulation of the Impressionist-Symbolist aesthetic.

Besides being the innovator of adding this new dimension to music, Wagner was also the first to make use of the wealth of colour that was obtainable from the orchestral families, when freely mixed like colours on a palette. He had the same preoccupation with colour that artists like Constable and Turner were known to have, and also compared favourably in outlook to the writer Charles Dickens. Wagner coloured his work with a new self-awareness and personal flair.

In his depiction of nature he contributed a sense of sophisticated realism, which had strongly influenced the Impressionists - he emulated the surging of waters in orchestral sound, and later the play of light through water - an area which the Impressionists soon adopted and adapted for their own. His technique of emulating the shimmering, the quivering, also became a favourite device of the Impressionist painters. The first true Impressionist representation of nature in music was seen in Wagner's "Siegfried (Act 111)". He emulated, in music, a whispering and rustling over a deep tonic pedal-point of horns and double-basses, creating an enchanted atmosphere of sound which was later to be used in many of the works of Debussy and Ravel.

The critic, Jules Lafargue, was one of the first to sense the similarity between Impressionist art and the music of Wagner, and after seeing an exhibition of Impressionist art, he said that the pictures seemed to be made up of "a thousand dancing touches of colour like the voices in a forest of Wagner". It was this same fleeting quality, and differentiated and

shimmering effect of light that was seen in the work of Turner, that compared so closely with Impressionist music. Wagner was adept at creating sensuous atmospheres, which was one of the main preoccupations of Impressionist art, ie. the world of light, sleep and dreams, which is evident in "Tristan and Isolde". After this composition Wagner's style began to change from the explicit to the allusive and the evocative, and he went on to overthrow the old traditions governing preparation and resolution of dissonance, in which he anticipated the Impressionist style in music that was later to emerge.

IMPRESSIONISM IN MUSIC :

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

The coming together of music and painting under the general heading of Impressionism was brought about by Claude Debussy. He was a revolutionary at a time when established musical practices were thought to be the only ones to follow. Although he still recognised and showed respect for these old traditions, this did not prevent him from striking out on his own. What he succeeded in doing was to destroy all the existing ideas about rhythm, melody, instrumentation and harmony, and he also pointed out that the possibilities of musical sonorities were infinite, and he also did much to change the ideas of what was good taste and what was not. While under the influence of earlier composers like Berlioz, Wagner and Liszt, Debussy in his own way set about achieving

what he believed could be achieved in music. He strongly defended the right of music to exist in its own right, and not only as an 'elaboration of Narrative', nor as the result of the observation of a set of ideas or principles to be followed. All that mattered to him was the experience of music and the impression that it made on the senses.

Tonality to him was unimportant, the traditional patterns of rhythm and metre were not of any consequence, all in all formal procedure was a general nuisance.

From 1892 to 1899 Debussy worked on a set of experimental pieces for violin and orchestra. He explored the possibilities of how his music could correspond with a painter's attempt at finding the possible combinations to be obtained from one colour. In his case the colour that he worked with was grey. He also at this time became acquainted with the artist, James Whistler, who was exploring the same tonal values and combinations in painting. It was not unusual then, for Debussy to name his three pieces "Nocturnes" - after Whistler's nocturnal pictures. Originally Debussy had intended the pieces for the violin and the orchestra, but after two or three years he gave up the idea and concentrated on the orchestra alone.

The first movement of "Nocturnes" is entitled 'Clouds'. Here he attempted to capture the impression of the changing colours and the nature of the sky, and the movement of the clouds, which faded away in grey tones which were tinged with white. After 'Clouds' came 'Fetes', which depicted a festival of

night - the scene is moved by the natural rhythm of the music and also by the hidden rhythm contained in the interplay of the points of the instrumental colours. In this respect one can try to see the "rhythm" as one would see "movement" on canvas.

The final piece 'Sirens', catches the mood of the sea, and the legendary voices of the Sirens. A choir is used, but the voices are used as instruments, as no words are involved. While working on "Nocturnes" Debussy had also been busy with "Pelleas and Melisande", and it was this work in 1902 that made the previously unknown Debussy widely known to the public. "Pelleas" soon became a controversial subject with Debussy continuously in the limelight. The work was based on the ideas of Maeterlinck, a literary figure at the time, who pursued the idea that men and women lived in a dream world, and that they were not free but controlled by unseen forces, and that they were only truly free after death. The setting was medieval in nature, set amongst castles, lakes, and forests. The atmosphere was set out in the Prelude, where the basic melodic intervals as in folk music were illustrated in dark colours. The whole opera was concerned with the feelings that preceded action, and intensity of sensations expressed through music. The vocal lines are expressive and sensitive to every inflection of the French language.

When "Pelleas" was finally produced on stage the critics claimed that Debussy had destroyed rhythm and melody, and

that he had produced a decadent and demoralising work. It still, however, enjoyed a good deal of success, and certainly was instrumental in the development of Debussy's career.

After 1903 Debussy began to produce his piano pieces for which he is generally better known. In 1905 he published the first set of "Images", and in 1907 the second set was completed. In these pieces he explored the colours of landscapes, streams, lakes, rivers, and tried to convey these colours in his individual pianistic style. He was a master of colour effects, and made use of harmonies adapted from medieval practices. Each piano piece is a new impression - and in "Images" impressionism is the central theme. In the 'Bells across the Leaves' (from the work "Images"), one can hear the spacing of the sounds, the extended use of the whole-tone scale which results in new and strange harmonic clusters. After 1904 Debussy went to England, and it was here that "La Mer" was completed in 1905. It consisted of three pieces for orchestra, and conveys the different moods of the sea at different times of the day and night, and is not only concerned with the beauty of the sea, but also with its strength. When "La Mer" was performed for the first time in Paris once again an outcry arose, but the reason for this was mainly due to his unpopularity and not because of the nature of the work itself.

MAURICE RAVEL :

Ravel was a contemporary of Debussy, even though he was 13 years his junior. Also Impressionist in outlook, he was less elusive in style and expression than Debussy, and had managed to find a more prominent place in life at an earlier age. He also claimed to be indebted to Liszt, Grieg, and Satie, whose harmonic originality he admired.

Ravel's Impressionism lay in the compromise that he effected between vagueness and the sensuousness of Debussy's Impressionism, and the clean, hard contours and logic of classicism. He distanced himself from his inspiration, ie. nature, because he preferred stylised representations of nature to nature itself, and filled his works with animals, children and mythical characters.

His first Impressionist work "Jeux d' Eau" was an excellent piece of Impressionism, and also a landmark in piano literature history. This piece was modelled on Liszt's "Villa d' Este", and was the first piece to explore fully the illusory or evocative properties of the piano. It is almost certain that this pianistic Impressionism had an effect on Debussy, and probably prompted him to revise his conception of piano sonority. The piece also illustrates the difference between the Impressionist styles of Debussy and Ravel, whereas Debussy tried to achieve an all-enveloping haze, Ravel looked for a firmness of line, while also capturing fluidity, the essence of Impressionism in music.

Ravel's themes were real melodies, and not fragments, even though they were subtly full of Impressionist texture. All the familiar attributes of Impressionist water music were evident here for the first time in history. Debussy's influence is less evident in his "Miroirs". This work marked Ravel's change in harmonic development, the Ravelian norm of dissonance emerged, which was far more advanced than that of Debussy. The first set was wholly Impressionist in its succession of flitting shapes and motions, basically melodic, but the textures unsubstantial. The second set evokes birds lost in a forest, and consists of stylised bird-song. The only piece of sea music is similar to his "Jeux d' Eau" with waves of arpeggio and melody which attracts to itself the prominent intervals of Impressionist harmony.

Ravel's most celebrated piece of piano Impressionism was "Gaspard de la Nuit", which was inspired by Aloysius Bertrand's poems - "Ondine", "Le Gibet", and "Scarbo" - this was essentially more melodically orientated Impressionism. "Daphnis and Chloe" was one of the great masterpieces of 20th century orchestral music, employing the device of a wordless chorus, as used by Debussy in "Sirens". It is Impressionist in its veiled bitonal harmony, and glimmering orchestral textures. This was Ravel's last work in orchestral Impressionism, from then on he began to develop in the direction of Expressionism after the style of Schoenberg.

POST - IMPRESSIONISM : IN MUSICVINCENT D'INDY :

Vincent d'Indy differed from Debussy in that his responses were rational and intellectual, while Debussy's were instructive and sensuous. There was apparently no contact between them at all, apart from a little personal animosity. d'Indy was by all accounts impressed with Debussy's "Pelleas", and Debussy was in turn moved by d'Indy's "L'Estranger" of 1903. The sea music of the Prelude to Act 1 of this work may well have been the inspiration for Debussy's "La Mer". d'Indy was a man who loved nature, especially the mountains. He came from the mountainous area of the Vivarais, and would return there each year for inspiration. He was also an amateur artist, and probably used his sketches for his musical compositions.

He was influenced mainly by Wagner and Franck. His best work, "Jour d'Ete a la Montagne" of 1905 is Wagnerian in that nature is represented as an ever-changing backdrop to human activity and emotion. He also used the Impressionist manner quite distinctly and unself-consciously. In later years the use of light was his subject, and of his "Diptyque" he said that the work had no other purpose but to express in music two different impressions of light.

ALBERT ROUSSEL :

Roussel was an ex-naval officer and friend of d'Indy, who

was also influenced by Debussy, but never used Impressionist mannerisms. For Roussel, Impressionism widened his emotional range of music, and allowed him greater control over his perceptions. In his "Rustiques" for the piano there is evidence of Impressionist influence. The pieces were inspired by the countryside outside the cities of France, with harmony and melody being used to create kaleidoscopic textures. His harmony was instinctive, and dictated by the needs of the moment. Roussel's first symphony "Le Poeme de la Foret" was the longest of his nature works, inspired by the forest of Fontainebleau, which was so loved by the Impressionist painters. (It has been said that what the sea was to Debussy, the forest was to d'Indy, and Roussel fell somewhere in between). In this work he illustrated a bleak and snowy landscape, trying to express that even under conditions such as these, that nature was never still even in her tranquillities. This was a feature that Impressionist painters had worked so hard to achieve. Some of the sounds have even been likened to Impressionist brushstrokes in parts.

In later years Roussel adapted even further Impressionist techniques to create an oriental atmosphere as a result of his trip to China in 1909.

CONCLUSION :

As was observed in the case of Impressionist painting, the end of the era in music came with the desire of the Impressionist musicians to develop their own highly individualistic styles. As has been illustrated, these composers had gained valuable experience and expertise from the Impressionist movement, and were now at a stage when they were ready to branch out in different directions on their own.

For the purposes of this study, a very brief account has been given of the Impressionist movement in art and music, and an attempt has been made to illustrate the close relationship that existed between the two, and to show how closely the ideals, ideas, aims and desires of the two areas coincided and overlapped.

It would be most interesting to perhaps elaborate and discuss in depth the antecedents and consequences of the movement at a later stage, as well as to trace the history and development of sculpture, poetry, and literature.

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