

Edvard Grieg, Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel.
Biographical issues and a comparison of their string quartets
Juliette L. Appold

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I. Grieg, Debussy and Ravel – Biographical aspects

Looking at the biographies of Grieg, Debussy and Ravel makes us realise, that there are few, yet some similarities in the way their career as composers were shaped. In my introductory paragraph I will point out some of these aspects.

The three composers received their first musical training in their childhood, between the age of six (Grieg) and nine (Debussy) (Ravel was seven). They all entered the conservatory in their early teenage years (Debussy was 10, Ravel 14, Grieg 15 years old) and they all had more or less difficult experiences when they seriously thought about a musical career. In Grieg's case it happened twice in his life. Once, when a school teacher ridiculed one of his first compositions in front of his class-mates.ⁱ The second time was less drastic but more subtle during his studies at the Leipzig Conservatory until 1862.ⁱⁱ Grieg had despised the pedagogical methods of some teachers and felt that he did not improve in his composition studies or even learn anything.ⁱⁱⁱ On the other hand he was successful in his piano-classes with Carl Ferdinand Wenzel and Ignaz Moscheles, who had put a strong emphasis on the expression in his playing.^{iv}

Debussy and Ravel both were also very good piano players and originally wanted to become professional pianists. Debussy had won several piano-competitions but since this success was not continuous, he abandoned this dream and started emphasising his composing.^v Ravel was successful in the beginning of his piano classes at the conservatory, but then failed several competitions and was after that excluded from Bériots piano-class in 1895.^{vi} He then quit the conservatory for two years.

Debussy and Ravel both also had a similar attitude towards their composition classes, with which they were not completely satisfied. The disappointment was even greater for

Ravel, who, unlike Debussy, had never won the first Prix de Rome competition even though he had entered his compositions there five times.^{vii}

II. Connections between Grieg, Debussy and Ravel

Despite the fact that Grieg was about 19 years older than Debussy and about 32 years older than Ravel, the three composers had similar experiences in their musical careers and they built on similar musical training. To shed some further light on that issue, I will next focus on documents and statements of the composers and will then focus on aspects of their string quartets. We can identify two levels, on which there exist clear connections between the composers:

a) The physical connections

- in person and
- through hearing, performing and writing about each other's music

b) The intellectual connections which were given by

- the musical training including preferences for contemporary, Romantic music and the formation of a new, 'national' language, distancing itself from the dominance of German music and aesthetics
- the preference for suggestive literature, in particular symbolist and naturalist works which partly inspired the use of musical motifs to create new sounds, colours, emotional expressions, suggestive images and imaginations
- the great appreciation of nature

a) The physical 'meeting-point' of the three composers was Paris. In continuation to his studies in Leipzig, Grieg travelled to Paris several times (four times), beginning in 1862. Paris at that point started developing a fondness for Scandinavian music and art,^{viii} which was promoted by the fact –as Harald Herresthal has observed– that there existed a special interest in finding a national musical language.^{ix} Besides hearing a 'Nordic identity' and visualising the landscapes in Grieg's music, the French audience liked the highly poetic and colourful aspects of his music.^x "M. Grieg est l'incarnation vivante et vibrante de la Norwège" was written in *La Liberté* during that time.^{xi}

Grieg's music was performed in Paris since 1877, this year was also the first time –of many times– that his *piano concerto* op. 16 was heard there.^{xii} His string quartet was played

there ten years later (1887). In 1889 (December) Édouard Colonne conducted a Grieg concert including the *Piano Concerto*, the *Peer Gynt* suite and the melodrama *Bergliot*; Grieg himself attended this concert.

When the Dreyfus-affair (1894–7) took place, Grieg took position for the accused. Grieg had condemned the forensic decision against Dreyfus and had in consequence publicly refused to conduct a concert, saying, he would not come back to a country which does not understand the sense of freedom. He did end up coming back to France later. But the Parisian audience, including Debussy and Ravel had a split opinion on that issue. And almost 10 years later, when Grieg came back to conduct a concert, Debussy still commented Grieg's position harshly in his article written as Monsieur Croche.^{xiii} In that same text, Debussy's criticism of Grieg's piano concert was adverse, and he even made fun of Grieg's appearance.^{xiv} The second review from March 1903 was not much more favourable.^{xv} In regard to the piano concerto Debussy criticised a similarity to Schumann's music. On the other hand Debussy praised the *Peer Gynt* suite which –to him– had its own charm, well chosen rhythm and a “more Norwegian” expression.^{xvi} Debussy also performed Grieg's music. It is documented that he played the third Sonata for piano and violin (op. 13) together with Arthur Hartmann in January 1914.^{xvii} One month later, he described songs by Grieg to Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht, saying: “This music has the icy coldness of the Nordic lakes, the intensive fire of the sudden appearance of the Nordic spring.”^{xviii}

Maurice Ravel's acquaintance with Grieg's music is documented in one of his first childhood-compositions which was based on Ase's death of *Peer Gynt*. Ravel also later played Grieg's piano concerto for his conservatoire competition.^{xix}

Ravel met Grieg personally in April of 1894 in Paris at the house of Molard, a student of Pessard. According to an anecdote, while the students were discussing, Ravel quietly went to the piano and started playing one of Grieg's Norwegian Dances. Grieg listened, smiled, then got impatient and abruptly said: (free translation) “No, young man, not at all like that. Much more rhythm! It is a popular song, a peasant's dance! You should see our peasants with their fiddles and stamping the rhythm with their feet. Start over!” Ravel started over and Grieg was joyful and, to the surprise of the others, jumped around.^{xx}

After Grieg's death Ravel visited Oslo, where he was asked, whether Norwegian music had influenced him. His answer was: “I am fairly certain, that Edvard Grieg's influence was much more significant in non-nordic countries than here in the north. The generation of

French composers, which I am part of, was strongly attracted by Grieg's music. Next to Debussy there's no other composer, whom I feel more related to, than Grieg."^{xxi}

b) A more subtle, but just as important connection between the composers can be found on the intellectual level. Grieg, Debussy and Ravel had strongly been influenced by German and other virtuosic, romantic music.^{xxii} Schumann, Liszt and Mendelssohn –among others– played an important role in their musical formation.^{xxiii} But as much as they appreciated and learned from that kind of music, Grieg, as well as Debussy and Ravel, distanced themselves from the Germanness in their own musical language and started forming a national music of their own.

In addition, the literary movement played an important role in the musical education and aesthetic ideas of Grieg, Debussy and Ravel. The three composers maintained very close relationships to authors and the literature of their time and nationality.

Grieg had met Ibsen in Rome in 1865 and stayed in touch with him over the years. He read his works and shared his thoughts with him.^{xxiv} One highlight of the interrelation between Ibsen's literature and Grieg's music was, of course, *Peer Gynt*. It received another artistic interpretation with the poster that Edvard Munch had painted for its first performance in Paris in 1889.^{xxv} The music itself evoked images and atmospheres of the play which Debussy and Ravel greatly appreciated.

Debussy and Ravel both worked closely with Mallarmé and other contemporary and symbolist authors. The authors of symbolism around Mallarmé had applied musical techniques to their poetic writing. They 'orchestrated' the verbal expression by borrowing musical ideas. Each vowel represented a sound and was expressionistic by itself. It was also able to correspond to a colour. Furthermore, the sounds of the words had great importance for their meaning. A poem could therefore be orchestrated like a musical composition.^{xxvi} Debussy and Ravel had set those kinds of texts into music and they both evoked the aesthetic of the poetry of their time by using certain playing techniques and thereby changing sounds and timbre.^{xxvii} In that sense, they used musical techniques that Grieg already had used and that can easily be paralleled to characteristic aspects of both the literary and artistic movement. Some of these can be described as the use of 'musical disguise', 'allusion and suggestion', use of 'colours' and the creation of 'indirect impressions'.^{xxviii} In other words, and also applied to the quartets, the newness of their music lies in the creation of musical moments that evoke a new feeling for space, for a narrative, for spatial contrasts between

proximity and distance and for the suggestion of nature, colours, reality and dream. The use of string instruments seemed especially well suited to evoke those kinds of aspects, since –in contrast to other instruments– they offer a wide variety of creating different sounds.

Another aspect that Grieg, Debussy and Ravel had in common, and which also co-existed with their preference for symbolist literature, was their strong love for nature. All three speak openly about this. Grieg for example writes: “The mountains, the fjords and the perfumed forests have always been a great source of inspiration for me. [...] I heard the song of the nature and I wanted to made the perfumes of the Norwegian pine forests known to the concert halls all over the world.”^{xxix} His music partly reflects his interpretation of landscape aspects, and his contemporaries understood those, and many French reviews reveal this to us as well, as Harald Herresthal has documented in his article “Edvard Grieg und Frankreich”.^{xxx}

Debussy makes a similar declaration on nature and music. In an interview given in 1909, he stated that it was in nature, that the new music should find its inspiration. He also criticised that people would not listen to the “thousands of sounds in nature”. He said “One listens too little to the multifaceted music that nature offers us so generously.”^{xxxi} Musical composition of his landscape perceptions are clearly noticable in works like: *Nuages*, *La Mer*, *Jardin sous la pluie*, *Reflets dans l’eau*, *Iberia* etc.

Ravel also was very fond of nature. He loved hiking through the forest of Rambouillet. He knew all trees and birds and imitated their songs. He also cultivated a large garden and observed plants and animals in there. He took his guests through the garden and expressed his great appreciation for nature^{xxxii} Some titles of his compositions indicate landscape aspects, like *Miroirs*, *Rapsodie espagnole*, *Jeux d’eau* etc. The connection between his love for nature and for literature shows in the following quote: “I express in music, what you say in words when for example you are standing in front of a tree. I think and feel in music and I wanted to think and feel the same things as you do.”^{xxxiii}

The love for nature was another major source of inspiration source shared by the three composers which can be closely associated to their literary and philosophical preferences.

III. Observations on their string quartets

Considering these connections, I would finally like to briefly summarise some key points of the string quartets by Grieg, Debussy and Ravel.

The French author René Ghil, for whom the sounds of instruments were very important for their signification. With his aesthetic and symbolist ideas, René Ghil came to

the conclusion that the string instruments – being able to create a wider variety of sounds than other instruments – could best evoke different human and poetic expressions including passion, prayer, fear, anxiousness etc. and would therefore be a good choice for interpreting symbolist ideals.^{xxxiv}

Op. 27 in g-minor is Grieg's only known quartet today. For Grieg, the string quartet was an attempt to work on a large scale form.^{xxxv} It was also a medium to express a story, which Grieg never unveiled 'in words' to his audience.^{xxxvi} Finn Benetsad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, who offer a very detailed account on the quartet in their publication on Grieg's Chamber music have made the following important observations:

- Grieg's music was mainly defined by impressions, atmospheres, feelings and images^{xxxvii}
- It was strongly inspired by the Hardanger landscape^{xxxviii}
- Grieg includes Norwegian songs and Norwegian literature in the quartet: 1) the main theme of the first movement (which also defines the character of the whole composition since it functions as the connecting musical motif in every movement) is a tune he earlier had composed to Henrik Ibsen's poem "Spillemaend";^{xxxix} 2) the Trio of the third movement contains a melodic line which "bears a rather remarkable resemblance to a Norwegian *halling* dance", which Grieg used later in his *Norwegian Dances*.^{xl} [The quartet came into being around the same time (c. 1 year later) as "Peer Gynt".]
- The opening 'song' not only always comes back in varied forms in the movements, but it also frames the quartet
- Grieg uses distinctive musical motifs and a musical signature (including the "Grieg-Motif")
- The quartet is in general dominated by two contrasting moods which are fused throughout the work and thereby are creating a sense of unity.^{xli}
- There is frequent use of modality in the melodic and harmonic structures^{xlii}
- There are escalating rhythmic and dynamic moments, including "violently accentuated syncopations"^{xliii}
- There are abrupt changes of contrasting themes
- Its orchestral sounds and repeated homophonic textures^{xliv} are characteristic to its overall sound

Claude Debussy completed his only string quartet op. 10 in g-minor in 1893. It was performed by the Quatuor Ysaye on December 29th 1893 in Paris. Characteristics of the piece and similarities with Grieg's quartet are:

- The opening notes are melodically very similar to Grieg's beginning of his quartet
- It strikes us through its dramatic and poetic suggestiveness
- Debussy wrote the quartet while getting familiar with Mallarmé's *Pelléas et Mélisande*
- The music creates different musical spheres, like 'spatial atmosphere' / atmosphere of floatation
- Debussy makes use of modality and parallel chord-progressions (as Grieg had 're-discovered' and used in his string quartet)
- The climax building, abrupt resumption of musical motifs has similarities to the suspension-building moments in Grieg's quartet
- Debussy's music expresses a certain closeness to Baudelaire's literature (according to Paul Dukas^{xlv})
- It is an impressionistic tone painting^{xlvi}
- It offers a variety of nuances of sound through use of tremolo, flageolet, con sordino, col legno, sul tasto, pianissimo^{xlvii} – thereby creating sounds that reminded the audience of flutes and brass in a miniature orchestra^{xlviii}

Ravel completed his only string quartet in F in 1903. As it was for Grieg and Debussy, this was also Ravel's only string quartet, his one large form-chamber music piece. He wanted to 'construct' this piece.^{xlix} Characteristics of the quartet are:

- The opening melody is similar to the one of Grieg's and Debussy's quartet – Ravel's beginning has the characteristic of a children's song (and is in that sense closer to Grieg's quartet which begins with a poem that Grieg had set to music before)
- The key to the quartet is F Major, but Ravel makes frequent use of modality and pentatonic motifs, as we can already hear in the opening tune
- The opening melody-motif always comes back in every movement and dominates the character of the piece, just like Grieg's 'song' is a main feature of his quartet
- Ravel wrote the quartet while working on the programmatic piece *Shéhérazade* (poems by Tristan Klingsor)

- Like Grieg and Debussy, Ravel also creates ‘shadowy’ planes of sounds / spatial sounds / atmosphere of floatation
- variety of nuances of sounds through use of tromolo, flageolett, con sordino, col legno, sul tasto, pianissimoⁱ
- Ravel’s quartet also offers a lot of suggestive and impressionistic tone painting
- It includes many dramatic and poetic elements

To conclude my paper: In their biographies, the three composers had similar experiences in their musical careers and they all somewhat broke with established systems.ⁱⁱ All three composers defined a national identity in their own musical language by using similar approaches such as: ideas from literature, art and nature, a clear attempt to distance their music from the German school. They built on –and at the same time broke with– the music of the German tradition: they expanded the suggestiveness and tone-painting and at the same time overruled previously existing conventions of musical structure and use of harmonies, rhythms, timbres and the way of using the string-instruments. The music thereby received a new quality of perception and suggestiveness. They broadened the idea of music through applying literary ideas and aesthetics of their time.

The quartets are in consequence built on similar ideas and can therefore be related to each other. Regarding the influence Grieg had on Debussy and Ravel we can observe that they both highly appreciated the national and suggestive aspects of Grieg’s music. This is where the biggest influence comes from –more in the ideology and aesthetic approach to the meaning of music than in a more theoretical approach which grew out of this new aesthetic approach. They all create new, but similar spheres and tone-planes and spaces. Their music reflects the further development of their personal musical history, the application of moments derived from symbolist literature and impressionist art, as well as the love for their country and nature.

ⁱ At school, the 12-year old Grieg had shown his “variations (on a German tune) for piano” to a friend who could not resist passing this news on to his teacher during class. The teacher asked to see the composition and called another teacher to look at the piece of music. After the latter had left, Grieg was expecting or hoping for positive recognition. The opposite happened: In front of the other students, Grieg’s teacher ridiculed and humiliated him in front of his class-mates, yelling at him and forbidding to continue composing. See Hella Brock, *Edvard Grieg als Musikschritsteller*, Altemmendingen 1999, 24–25, also in Hella Brock, *Edvard Grieg*, Leipzig 1990, 48.

ⁱⁱ During that time he had shortly returned to Norway for health reasons, since he suffered from respiratory troubles / pleurisy.

ⁱⁱⁱ He criticised, for example, the method of Louis Plaidy. Hella Brock, *Edvard Grieg*, 54—58.

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- ^{iv} Hella Brock, Edvard Grieg, 55.
- ^v He kept –for a while– playing the piano partly as a privat pianist to the Russian lady Madame von Meck, whom he accompanied on International journeys to Switzerland, Russia and Italy.
- ^{vi} It was during his time as a student with Bériot and Pessard that Ravel had written his earliest compositions in 1893. See Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel, Man and Musician*, Columbia 1975², 17. He quit the conservatoire, Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel*, 19.
- ^{vii} He entered his first competition in 1900 with *Les Bayadères*, after that he tried his luck with a fugue composition, but again, failed. Having failed a competition twice in a row, he had to quit his composition class. See Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Man and Work*, Columbia 1975², 27.
- ^{viii} Régis Boyer, *Le Paris des Scandinaves au temps d'Edvard Grieg*, in: *Grieg et Paris*, ed. by Harald Herresthal and Danièle Pistone, Caen 1996, 35–43.
- ^{ix} Harald Herresthal, *Edvard Grieg und Frankreich*, in: *Edvard Grieg (Musik-Konzepte 127)*, 24–5, 29–31.
- ^x „Edouard Grieg est de toutes nos grandes fêtes musicales, et les bravos parisiens l'ont souvent acclamé pour l'originalité d'un talent haut en couleur et délicieusement poétique.” In *L'Art Musical*, 5.8.1889. Quoted in Harald Herresthal, *Edvard Grieg und Frankreich*, 31 (Footnote).
- ^{xi} On 26 december 1889. Quoted in Harald Herresthal, *Histoire des relations musicales franco-norvégiennes*, in: *Grieg et Paris. Romantisme, symbolisme et modernisme franco-norvégiens*, ed. by Harald Herresthal and Danièle Pistone, 15–32, here: 25.
- ^{xii} Documented in Aimar Grønvd, *Norske Musikere, Kristiania 1883*, 174ff. Quoted in Harald Herresthal, *Edvard Grieg und Frankreich*, in: *Edvard Grieg (Musik-Konzepte 127)*, 24.
- ^{xiii} Documented in Gil Blas, 20 April 1903, *Edvard Grieg*. In *Claude Debussy, Monsieur Croche*, 155–160.
- ^{xiv} Documented in *Gil Blas*, 20 April 1903, in: *Claude Debussy, Monsieur Croche*, 155–160.
- ^{xv} “Have you noticed, how unbearable the northerners become when they try to be southerners? The finale of this concert, which reminds us of Leoncavallos manner, is an amazing example. The piano “tootles along”, if I may say so, as if it were an Italian street musician, and the orchestra seconds with wild and excessive colour, so one could believe not to get away without a major sunstroke. But Tera Carreno has a lot of talent, more than Grieg, who might misus his right to be Norwegian a bit.” Documented in *Gil Blas*, 16 March 1903. Free translation of *Monsieur Croche*, 129.
- ^{xvi} „Das Beste des ganzen Nachmittags war die *Peer-Gynt-Suite*, die Grieg zu dem gleichnamigen Drama von Ibsen geschrieben hat. Die musikalischen Gedanken besitzen einen eigenen Zauber, die Rhythmen sind geschickt gesetzt, der Ausdruck ist viel echter norwegisch. Auch die Orchestrierung ist ausgewogener, an die Stelle allzu leichter Effekte treten ingeniose Einfälle.“ Documented in *Gil Blas*, 20 April 1903, quoted in *Claude Debussy, Monsieur Croche*, 159.
- ^{xvii} Letter to Jacques Durand 14 January 1914.
- ^{xviii} « Cette musique a la fraîcheur glacée de ses lacs, l'ardeur pressée de ses printemps hâtifs et brusques. » (Debussy 1987, 263) Quoted in *Claude Debussy, Correspondance*, 1738 (Footnote). Also quoted in *Claude Debussy, Monsieur Croche* (translation into German by Josef Häusler) 263.
- ^{xix} He performed it in 1895, Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel Leben und Werk*, 19. Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Man and Musician*, New York 1975, 15.
- ^{xx} Quoted in Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Écrits, Entretiens*, Paris 1989, 547–8.
- ^{xxi} Documented in Tiedens Tegn, 7.2.1926. Quoted in Harald Herresthal, *Edvard Grieg und Frankreich. Zur Grieg-Rezeption*, in: *Edvard Grieg (Musik-Konzepte 127, Hg. Ulrich Tadday)*, 23–44, here: 41.
- ^{xxii} „Ichselbst bin in der deutschen Schule erzogen, ich habe in Leipzig studiert und bin musikalisch ganz deutsch. Dann ging ich nach Kopenhagen und lernte Gade und Hartmann [I.P.E.] kennen. Da ist mir der Gedanke gekommen, daß ich mich nur auf nationaler Grundlage weiterentwickeln könnte. Da war unser norwegisches Volkslied, das mir die Wege gab.“ Letter from Grieg for a Berlin newspaper 4 April 1907. Quoted in Jing-Mao Yang, *Das „Grieg-Motiv“ Zur Erkenntnis von Personalstil und musikalischem Denken Edvard Griegs*, Kassel 1998, 200.
- ^{xxiii} Grieg received a ‘German music education’ right from its source in Leipzig. Ravel had said to François Poulenc that Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte* were a thousand times better than Schumann's *Carnaval*. Documented in François Poulenc, *Moi et mes amis*, Paris 1963, 173ff. Quoted in Roger Nichols, *Maurice Ravel im Spiegel seiner Zeit*, 112. Ravel also revised Schumann's *Carnaval*. Debussy liked Schumann, Liszt and Chopin. Documented in a text by Raymond Bonheur: „Erst in der Klavierklasse, als er die Gelegenheit hatte, ihre Werke zu studieren, kam er wirklich in Kontakt mit den großen Romantikern, die seine Lehrmeister werden sollten: Schumann, Liszt und Chopin – besonders Chopin, durch den er unauslöschlich geprägt wurde.“ Quoted in Roger Nichols, *Debussy im Spiegel seiner Zeit*, 19. Further influences were given by Wagner, Mussorgsky, Rameau and Couperin.
- ^{xxiv} See Finn Bennestad, *Peer Gynt La collaboration de deux géants : Henrik Ibsen et Edvard Grieg*, in : *Grieg et Paris*, 63–74.

- ^{xxv} See Finn Bennestad, Peer Gynt La collaboration de deux géants : Henrik Ibsen et Edvard Grieg, 63.
- ^{xxvi} Stéphane Mallarmé expressed in a letter to René Ghil, that he would phrase poems like a composer rather than like an author. Anne Penesco, “L’esthétique des instruments à archet chez Debussy et Ravel: une poétique mallarméenne du timbre”, in : Etudes sur la musique française autour de Debussy, Ravel et Paul le Flem, Lyon 1994, 51.
- ^{xxvii} „Debussy et Ravel recherchent les timbres rares à la façon dont René Ghil considère les voyelles françaises comme une précieuse collection de sonorités délicates, ou à la manière dont Valéry recommande: “... écoutez jusqu’aux harmoniques les timbres de Racine, les nuances, les reflets réciproques de ses voyelles, les actes nets et purs, les liens souples de ses consonnes et de leurs ajustements.” Anne Penesco, “L’esthétique des instruments à archet chez Debussy et Ravel: une poétique mallarméenne du timbre”, in : Etudes sur la musique française autour de Debussy, Ravel et Paul le Flem, Lyon 1994, 51–62, here : 51.
- ^{xxviii} “Verschleierung” “Andeutung und Suggestion” “indirekte Wirkung” etc. Andreas Liess, Claude Debussy Das Werk im Zeitbild, Baden Baden 1978², 237.
- ^{xxix} “Les montagnes, les fjords et les forêts parfumées de mon pays natal ont toujours été une grande source d’inspiration pour moi. [...] J’entendais le chant de la nature et j’ai voulu faire sentir le parfum des forêts de pins norvégiennes dans les salles de concert du monde entier.”^{xxxix} in his journal, how much he loved... (Zitat in Fußnote von Grieg et Paris, S. 94f.) He also wrote: „Norwegisches Volksleben, norwegische Sagen und Geschichte und vor Allem norwegische Natur übten seit meiner Jugend einen grossen Einfluss auf meinem Schaffen. Die Gelegenheit, mich in dem norwegischen Volkslied zu vertiefen, hatte ich aber erst später.“ Quoted in Jing-Mao Yang, Das „Grieg-Motiv“, 206.
- ^{xxx} Harald Herresthal, Edvard Grieg und Frankreich, 42–3.
- ^{xxxi} Free translation of the author. “Man hört nicht auf die tausend Geräusche der Natur um sich herum, man lauscht zu wenig auf die so vielfältige Musik, die uns die Natur übereich anbietet.“ Documented in Comoedia, 4. November 1909, quoted in Claude Debussy, Monsieur Croche Sämtliche Schriften und Interviews, 286.
- ^{xxxii} Documented in texts by Hélène Jourdan-Morhange on Maurice Ravel. Quoted in Roger Nichols, Maurice Ravel im Spiegel seiner Zeit, 118–123.
- ^{xxxiii} He wrote this to the author Jules Renard, documented in Jules Renard, Paris 1960, 1100f, quoted in Roger Nichols, Maurice Ravel im Spiegel seiner Zeit, 79.
- ^{xxxiv} See Anne Penesco, L’esthétique des instruments à archet chez Debussy et Ravel, 52.
- ^{xxxv} „I must do something for my art. Day after day I become more dissatisfied with myself. Nothing I do pleases me, and even if I seem to have ideas there is neither fluency nor form when I proceed to the working out of anything greater. It is beyond reason – and yet I know where it comes from. It is due to lack of practice, and also to lack of technique, because I have never managed to get beyond composing in fits and starts. But there must now be an end of that. I want to battle myself through the larger forms, cost what it may. If I become mad in the process, you now know the reason.” Grieg to Gottfred Matthison-hansen, 13 August 1877, quoted in Daniel Grimley, Grieg Music, Landscape and Norwegian Identity, Woodbridge 2006, 6.
- ^{xxxvi} Grieg wrote: “Das Quartett hat zwar eine Geschichte. Ich mag aber dergleichen Reklame nicht. Auch bin ich noch nicht schreibfähig genug, um alle, jeden Tag einlaufenden Fragen, meine Werke betreffend, zu beantworten. Ich wäre Ihnen dankbar, wenn Sie – für den Fall, daß Sie es angemessen finden, bei der Sache etwas zu tun – Herrn Franquet [?] mitteilen lassen wollen, daß das Quartett während eines Aufenthalts in der großartigen Natur von Lofthus in Hardanger im Jahre 1877–78 geschrieben und in Köln Ende 78 vom Heckmann-Quartett zum ersten Male gespielt wurde und einen großen Erfolg hatte. Anfang 79 wurde aber das Werk nach einer Aufführung vom Heckmann-Quartett im Gewandhaus in Leipzig von der konservativen Presse so total heruntergemacht, daß es, soeben bei E. W. Fritsch in Leipzig erschienen, einige Jahre wie gelähmt dalag. Nachher ist das Werk in den Peters’schen Verlag übergewechselt, und der Konservatismus in Leipzig ist unter dem neuen Gewandhausregime totgeschlagen. Das Quartett wurde von den modernen Geigenspielern entdeckt (Brodsky an der Spitze) und wird jetzt überall von den besten Quartettgesellschaften gespielt.“ Letter to Hinrichsen, 16 September 1903. Quoted in Hella Brock (1990), 212.
- ^{xxxvii} See Jing-Mao Yang, Das „Grieg-Motiv“, 202: “Griegs Schaffensweise dürfte als sehr vom Gefühl geleitet zu betrachten sein. Dabei spielt der *Einfall* eine entscheidende Rolle. Es ist durchaus möglich, daß sein bestimmtes Gefühl in einem entsprechenden Tonbild verankert ist. Das heißt: Wenn er ein gleiches Gefühl in verschiedenen Werken zum Ausdruck bringt, dann greift er oft unbewußt zum gleichen Tonbild. Dies ist vielleicht der Hauptgrund dafür, daß er so oft seine Melodien auf die gleiche Art und Weise beginnt. Davon ausgehend, kann man vermuten, daß die Denkweise des Komponisten hauptsächlich vom bildlichen Denken beherrscht wird.“
- ^{xxxviii} Grieg wrote: „I spent the summer at Börve in Hardanger (where I began work on my string quartet, which I completed during the winter at Lofthus). I remained continuously at Lofthus until the autumn of 1878 ... I don’t know if you have taken notice of a song by Ibsen: *My dreams were of my beloved / Through the warm summer night / But by the river I wonder’d / In an eerie and pale moonlight. / Heigh, do you know song and terror? / Can you dazzle the heart of the fair / That in mighty halls and cathedrals / She’ll covet to follow you*

there? [Translation by W. H. Halverson] It was the theme from this song (from 1876) [„Fiddlers“, Opus 25:1] that I used in 1877 in the string quartet. And in this, as *you* will understand, there lies a piece of personal history. I know that I had a big spiritual battle to fight, and I used a great deal of energy creating the first movement of the quartet there among the dark mountains of Sörfjord in that sad summer and autumn.” Quoted in Finn Benestad & Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg, Chamber Music Nationalism – Universality Individuality*. Oxford 1993, 63. The letter is also printed in *Edvard Grieg Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 9 (Kammermusik), 155 and quoted in Hella Brock’s biography of Edvard Grieg (1990), 216, see also Hella Brock, *Edvard Grieg [Biographie]*, 213.

^{xxxix} Ibid.

^{xl} Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Grieg Chamber music*, 91.

^{xli} Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Grieg Chamber music*, 69.

^{xlii} The key of the first fourteen bars is G Aeolian, see Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Grieg Chamber music*, 73.

^{xliii} Ibid.

^{xliv} See Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Grieg Chamber music*, 104.

^{xlv} Paul Dukas, Brief vom 1. Oktober 1893 an Vincent d’Indy; veröffentlicht in: Georges Favre *Écrits sur la musique et l’éducation musicale*, Paris 1966, 97: “Eben dieser Debussy hat mir diesen Sommer die drei ersten Teile eines Streichquartetts vorgespielt, das mittlerweile abgeschlossen sein sollte. Von Anfang bis Ende bezaubernd. Das ist mal ein musikbegabter Bursche! Und eine himmlische Leichtigkeit, auch wenn er diese aus falsch verstandenem Baudelairianismus und mit der Lasterhaftigkeit des Künstlers abstreitet. Er hat mir auch seine Oper vorgespielt, die ebenfalls bald beendet sein muß. [...Cid-Mendès].“ Roger Nichols, *Claude Debussy im Spiegel seiner Zeit*, 53.

^{xlvi} Reminding us of Debussy’s closeness to impressionistic art: „Die Malerei übte eine besonders große Anziehungskraft auf ihn aus. Er besuchte besonders gern Museen und Ausstellungen, und er hatte eine Vorliebe für den skandinavischen Maler Fritz Thaulow und für Claude Monet. Debussy bedauerte es immer, sich anstelle der Musik nicht die Malerei als Betätigungsfeld erwählt zu haben.“ In: Roger Nichols, *Claude Debussy im Spiegel seiner Zeit*, 68.

^{xlvii} Anne Penesco, 55.

^{xlviii} “The audience of the first performance of the string quartet on 29 December 1893 had the impression that the composition was not performed by a string quartet, but rather by a miniature orchestra of flutes and brass wind instruments. They were confused by the novelty of the work and by its orchestral sound.” Quoted in: Claude Debussy, *Streichquartett Quatuor op. 10*, Leipzig 1971, Preface by Reiner Zimmermann, VII.

^{xlix} « *Mon Quatuor en fa* (1902–1903) répond à une volonté de construction musicale imparfaitement réalisée sans doute, mais qui apparaît beaucoup plus nette que dans mes précédentes compositions. *Shéhérazade*, où l’influence, au moins spirituelle, de Debussy est assez visible, date de 1903. Là encore, je cède à la fascination profonde que l’Orient exerça sur moi dès mon enfance. » Maurice Ravel, *Esquisse autobiographique*, in : Maurice Ravel, *Lettres, Écrits, Entretiens*, ed. by Arbie Orenstein, Paris 1989, 44.

¹ Anne Penesco, 55.

ⁱⁱ Grieg: School experience / German music education, Debussy: Paris Conservatoire, tension between “wilful and experimental nature and his ability to play the game by winning the necessary prizes”, he “alluded on several occasions to the restrictive teaching of his teacher in his writings in the press”, Ravel: never winning the Prix de Rome) Regarding Debussy, see Barbara L. Kelly, *Debussy’s Parisian affiliations*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. by Simon Trezise, Cambridge 2003, 25–42, here: 27.