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On Making a New Realization of *Uspud* by Erik Satie and J. P. Contamine de Latour

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Abstract This essay reflects on a new digital realization by Andrew Hugill of the 'Christian ballet' *Uspud* (1892) by Erik Satie and J. P. Contamine de Latour. The creative process of making the realization entailed a critical re-examination of existing scholarship and revealed that the relationship between music and drama is closer than has previously been understood. The essay situates *Uspud* in the context of 1890s Montmartre and demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that it was conceived as a shadow play and scored for solo harmonium. It analyses the music in detail, considering how its motivic construction and use of timbral contrasts both supports the action and conveys the inner states of uspud himself. It considers the humorous and serious aspects of *Uspud*, arguing that this was a key work in the evolution of Satie's artistic and personal identity.

Introduction

This article discusses the creative process of making a new digital realization of the 'Christian ballet' *Uspud*, composed and written by Erik Satie and J. P. Contamine de Latour in 1892, which may be viewed at https://vimeo.com/833015733. This process has also entailed a critical re-examination of existing scholarship. I have endeavoured throughout to distinguish between matters of creative interpretation and matters of demonstrable fact; however, it is important to acknowledge that the creative interpretation relies on two assumptions which are treated as fact. The article contains substantial justifications for this.

The first assumption is that Satie's instrumental directions for 'Flûtes', 'Harpes', and 'Quatuor' are the names of stops on a harmonium. I originally made this suggestion to Ornella Volta sometime in the early to mid-1980s, as she subsequently acknowledged

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I am very grateful to Gilbert Delor, whose enquiry to me on 8 April 2023 about the use of the harmonium in *Uspud* has prompted both my new realization and this essay. His comments and feedback have been invaluable throughout the project. I would like to thank Philip Grange and Caroline Potter for their constructive criticism, which has opened up several additional thoughts and lines of enquiry. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of Royal Musical Association* for all their helpful comments.

in an article.[1] In 2023, I was contacted by Gilbert Delor, who is currently preparing a new edition of Volta's publication of Satie's writings.[2] He questioned how a harmonium could possibly sound like a harp, given the latter's plucked strings. The answers to that and other questions are included in the detailed discussions below. As a result of this research, we both concluded that it is now proven beyond reasonable doubt that Satie wrote *Uspud* for harmonium.

Gilbert kindly requested that I revive my 1990 arrangement of *Uspud* for the George W. Welch ensemble. While this did include harmonium, I preferred to try to do something more authentic. This search for authenticity led to the digital realization which is the topic of this article. I worked directly from the second version of Satie's original manuscript, which is held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The idea that the piece was scored for harmonium has been accepted by all the leading Satie scholars but, to the best of my knowledge, it has never been performed that way.[3]

The second assumption is that *Uspud* was intended as a shadow play. The evidence for this is substantial, even though there are no indications of exactly how it might have been done. It was clearly inspired by the shadow play of *La Tentation de saint Antoine* (The Temptation of Saint Antony) created by Henri Rivière in 1887 and its parody by Miquel Utrillo made in 1892.[4] Perhaps Satie and Contamine, having seen the success of Rivière's production, were entertaining any idea that might attract attention, or maybe they also wanted to make a parody, or perhaps their intentions were more serious. Whatever the truth, by presenting the text of Contamine's storyline instead of the puppet theatre, I have opened up some unexpected insights into the work, which are detailed below. In time, perhaps a fully staged production could be created as a result.

A Brief History of *Uspud*

In 1881, Rodolphe Salis founded the cabaret Le Chat Noir at 84 Boulevard de Rochechouart in the Montmartre district of Paris. This establishment became a kind of blueprint for modern cabaret, with patrons sitting at tables drinking and eating while being entertained. Salis himself was the MC (Master of Ceremonies), specializing in sarcastic put-downs and insulting the paying guests. The place quickly attracted well-known visitors, such as the future King Edward VII, who Salis greeted with 'Eh bien regardez-moi celui-là, on dirait le Prince de Galles tout pissé!' (well, looky here, it's the

[1] Ornella Volta, 'Uspud', *Revue internationale de musique française*, 23.23 (1987), pp. 54–79 (pp. 65–66). Ornella stated that the 'piano' installed in the basement of the Auberge du Clou was probably a harmonium and credited the insight about harmonium stops to 'the young English composer and musicologist Andrew Thomson'. I changed my surname from Thomson to Hugill (which was previously my middle name) in 1989.

[2] Ornella Volta, *Erik Satie: Autres écrits*, new edition forthcoming in 2025, to be published by Les Presses du Réel, Dijon.

[3] See, for example, Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 275.

[4] Bruna Donatelli, '*La Tentation de saint Antoine* de Flaubert et *Uspud* d'Erik Satie: affinités secrètes et résonances en filigrane', *Flaubert*, 21 (2019) <http://journals.openedition.org/flaubert/3617> [accessed 26 December 2023]; Volta, 'Uspud', p. 66.

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Prince of Wales, and he's pissed already!).[5] It was also the favoured meeting place of a rowdy ragbag of individuals from the Bohemian set in Paris. These included groups of young radicals such as *Les Incohérents* and *Les Hydropathes.* The latter were so called because of their declared aversion to water, preferring only to drink alcohol.[6] Their literary club had been founded in 1878 by Émile Goudeau and published its own journal.[7]

By 1885, Le Chat Noir had outgrown its premises and so moved to 12 rue Laval (renamed rue Victor Massé in 1887). In an act of great daring, Salis had a piano installed, something which was banned in drinking establishments at the time, thereby giving the cabaret an advantage over its rivals.[8] The piano provided a focus for the entertainments, so the venue became a favourite of singers and musicians as well as writers, poets, and painters. Many of these jostled for attention, trying to develop careers out of the shows and networking opportunities the place provided.

One of the main attractions at Le Chat Noir was the shadow theatre. This began almost by accident one day, when Rivière placed a napkin in front of a puppet theatre and shone a light through from behind a cardboard figure. By 1887, he had installed a proper theatre, comprising a screen 44 inches high and 55 inches wide held in place by a very substantial frame. Electric lighting from behind enabled the shadows of cut-out zinc puppets to be displayed in some seventy slots, giving an impression of depth in shades of grey. Slides could also be used to create colours, like a moving stained-glass window (Figure 1).[9] It was a huge success and ultimately went on tour during the 1890s, visiting French-speaking countries such as Tunisia and Algeria, as well as Belgium and France.

One of its most successful productions was entitled *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, based on the work by Gustave Flaubert. This was a notable example of a multimedia piece that successfully blended puppet theatre with music and moving imagery (see Figure 2).[10] Flaubert's story was derived from the folk legend of a hermetic and ascetic saint who is plagued by demons and visions. Printed programmes from Le Chat Noir indicate that the shadow play was directed by Rivière and accompanied by a small

[5] Michel Genson, 'La Griffe du Chat', *Le Républicain Lorrain* (2012), my translation, <https://www.republicain-lorrain.fr/actualite/2012/12/16/la-griffe-du-chat> [accessed 23 December 2023].

[6] Caroline Crépiat and Denis Saint-Amand, 'Des Hydropathes au Chat Noir', in *Vie de Bohème et petite presse du XIXe siècle*, ed. by Alain Vaillant and Yoan Vérilhac (Presses universitaires de Paris Nanterre, 2022), pp. 223–40.

[7] Daniel Grojnowski, 'Hydropathes and Company', in *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humour and the Avant-Garde, 1875–1905*, ed. by Philippe Denis Cate and Mary Shaw (Rutgers University Press, 1996), pp. 95–110.

[8] Phillip Denis Cate, 'The Spirit of Montmartre', in *The Spirit of Montmartre*, ed. by Cate and Shaw, pp. 1–94 (p. 26); Jean-Pierre Thiollet, 'Hommage à Salis le Grand', *88 notes pour piano solo* (Neva Éditions, 2015), p. 147.

[9] Peter Dayan, 'Shadow Images Moving to Music: *La Tentation de saint Antoine* in Montmartre', in *Music, Narrative and the Moving Image: Varieties of Plurimedial Interrelations,* ed. by Walter Bernhart and David Francis Urrows (Brill, 2019), pp. 125–39 (p. 133).

[10] Michela Niccolai, '*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* au Chat Noir: un exemple de collaboration multidisciplinaire', *Flaubert*, 21 (2019), <http://journals.openedition.org/flaubert/3586> [accessed 5 June 2023].

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Figure 1. Paul Merwart, after Caran d'Ache, *Première des projections d'ombres de 'L'Épopée' au Cabaret du Chat Noir*, 1886. Public domain. Available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Projection_au_Chat_Noir_1886.jpg.

orchestra that included piano or harmonium.[11] Listed amongst the musicians were two names which are well-known today: Alphonse Allais and Erik Satie. Allais was supervising a team of four percussionists who created sound effects for many of the shadow theatre productions. Satie frequently stood in for Albert Tinchant, a poet who had been appointed 'first pianist' of Le Chat Noir. As Bertrand Millanvoye recounted, Tinchant was

> only vaguely a musician. […] He was content to pick his way among the keys with two discrete fingers […]. Happily for him, several of his friends, amongst whom were those who were to become famous composers, such as […] Erik Satie, could readily deputise for him.[12]

For all his achievements, Salis was evidently a very difficult man. His penchant for insulting people extended well beyond his role as MC. He was also extremely stingy and would go to great lengths to avoid paying anybody who worked at Le Chat Noir,

[11] Steven Moore Whiting, 'Music on Montmartre', in *The Spirit of Montmartre*, ed. by Cate and Shaw, pp. 159–98 (p. 184).

[12] Bertrand Millanvoye, *Anthologie des poètes de Montmartre: notes biographiques et bibliographiques* (Société d'Éditions littéraires et artistiques, 1909), pp. 398–99.

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Figure 2. 'Le Désert de la Thébaïde' (The Theban Desert). Image from *La Tentation de saint Antoine* by Henri Rivière, Act I. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Used with permission.

from suppliers and staff to artists and performers.[13] Several patrons had become disillusioned with Le Chat Noir following its move to the relatively glamorous new premises, seeing it as a betrayal of their *fumiste* principles of anti-capitalism and anarchic satire.[14] This, combined with their personal antipathies, led them to drift away to the Auberge du Clou (Nail Inn) at 30 avenue Trudaine, a mere two-minute walk from the Le Chat Noir. This establishment derived its name from the nails covering its walls, whereon impoverished artists could hang their paintings in lieu of paying their bills (Figure 3).[15]

Amongst this breakaway group were Tinchant and Satie, who were both by now *hydropathes* by habit if not by name. The Auberge du Clou was a relatively humble establishment compared to Le Chat Noir, but the cabaret spirit of live entertainment continued there nonetheless, with the two men retaining their roles as first and second

[13] Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 46.
[14] Cate, 'The Spirit of Montmartre', p. 38.
[15] Christian Wacrenier, 'Auberge du Clou avenue Trudaine: un vandalisme de plus', *Montmartre Secret* (2022) <https://www.montmartre-secret.com/2022/01/l-auberge-du-clou-avenue-trudaine.un-vandalisme-de-plus.html> [accessed 21 June 2023].

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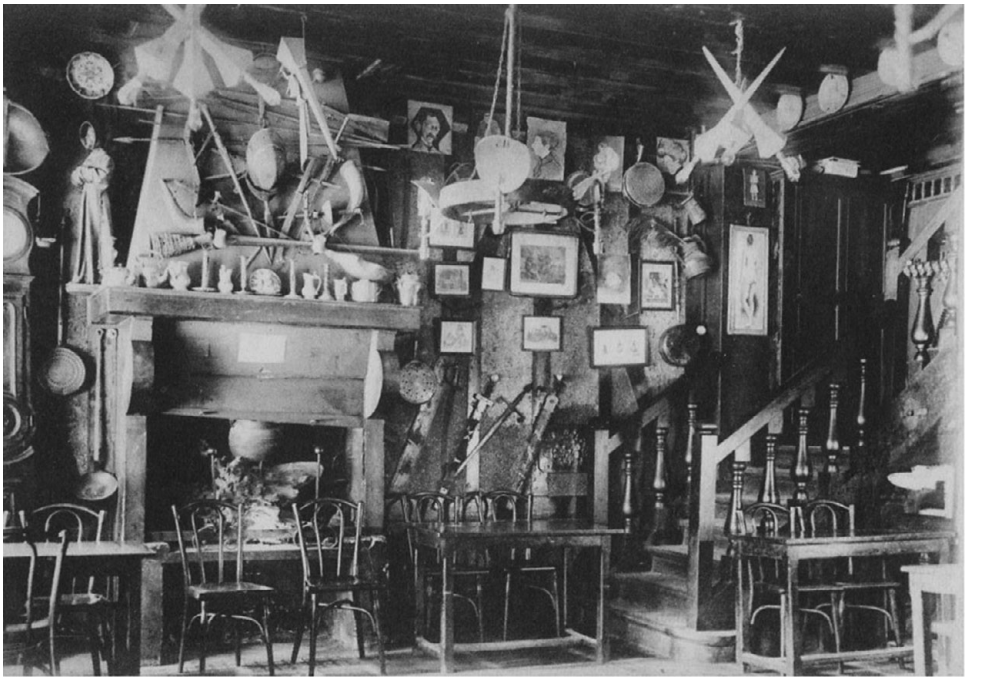

Figure 3. Interior of the Auberge du Clou, complete with paintings on the famous nails. Public domain.

'pianist' respectively.[16] However, Tinchant died in November 1892 at the age of 32, one of many Bohemian victims of excessive alcohol consumption, leaving Satie as the principal in-house musician.

It was here that *Uspud* was conceived by Satie, with his friend and fellow Rosicrucian the Spanish poet José-Maria Vicente Ferrer Francisco de Paola Patricio Manuel Contamine, who published under the name J. P. Contamine de Latour or sometimes as Lord Cheminot. The closeness of their relationship at this time is reflected in the medallion created by Suzanne Valadon for *Uspud* (Figure 4). In creating their own version of *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, Satie and Contamine were obviously hoping both to capitalize upon and to parody their involvement with Rivière and Le Chat Noir. Their intention presumably was to stage a performance in the shadow theatre founded in the basement of the Auberge du Clou in 1892 by Miquel Utrillo i Morlius, believed to be the father of the painter Utrillo (whose mother reputedly was Suzanne Valadon).[17] Utrillo had been given permission to set up this theatre by the inn's owner, Paul Tomaschet. Ornella Volta observes that the basement was very small and would

[16] Volta also suggests that Satie played the harmonium in the basement, whereas Tinchant played the piano on the first floor (the ground floor being too small for a musical instrument as well as the bar), hence the designation (Volta, 'Uspud', p. 63).

[17] Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, p. 125.

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Figure 4. Suzanne Valadon, *J. P. Contamine de Latour. A. L. Erik Satie. 1892–1893.* Used by Satie for the cover of the *Uspud* brochures, 1893 and 1895. Public domain.

certainly have been unable to accommodate a grand piano, further supporting the idea that the musical instrument used to accompany the performances was a harmonium.[18]

Utrillo had himself staged a parody of Rivière's production to launch the new theatre; in his version of the story, the hermit jettisons his religious garb and falls in with the devil.[19] It is possible that Satie and Contamine had the idea of reusing some of Utrillo's puppets, but in the end no performance of the shadow play of *Uspud* was ever staged; the run-through which took place at the Auberge du Clou consisted only of Satie playing the music while reading aloud the text.[20] An account by the conductor Gustave Doret describes Satie doing exactly that while playing a 'ballet' called 'Sainte-Uspude', to great comic effect. According to Doret, this took place 'spontaneously' as part of a soirée in his apartment in 1894, but Peter Dayan suggests that Doret's memory may well have been at fault given the various errors he makes in both the storyline and the title of the work.[21] Since Doret was determined to portray Satie as a clown, it seems likely that there is at least some embellishment going on here. Perhaps Satie, seeing an opportunity, did give some kind of performance at Doret's place, or maybe Doret was just using the well-known story of the Auberge du Clou event to underline his point of view about Satie. It is impossible to know for sure.

[18] Volta, 'Uspud', p. 65.
[19] Volta, 'Uspud', p. 66.
[20] Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, p. 108.
[21] Gustave Doret, *Temps et contretemps: souvenirs d'un musicien* (Fribourg: Librairie de l'université, 1942), p. 98; Peter Dayan, 'Érik Satie, *Uspud*, et la mystification au service de "art"', *Romantisme*, 156 (2012), pp. 101–13 (p. 105).

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Figure 5. 'Le Désert de la Thébaïde: Musiques Célestes' (The Theban Desert: Celestial Music). Image from *La Tentation de saint Antoine* by Henri Rivière, Act II. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Used with permission.

While some of Rivière's imagery does correspond quite directly with parts of *Uspud* (the scene from *La Tentation* depicted in Figure 5, for example, could have served for the angelic choir of Act II of *Uspud*), the two versions are markedly different. Rivière's colourful production follows Flaubert quite closely: the saint is tempted by an array of distractions from the modern world, such as money, science, and dance, and goes through a series of exotic encounters with the Queen of Sheba, the Sun King, and various mythical figures from Ancient Greece, Egypt, India, and Japan. The music is credited to Albert Tinchant and Georges Fragerolle and comprises mostly fragments of popular melodies from opera and other sources.[22]

While *Uspud* does contain some hints of exoticism, such as the mention of lotus flowers blossoming at the feet of the christian church in Act II, its imagery is almost entirely Christian in nature (as its subtitle, 'ballet chrétien en trois actes' (Christian ballet in three acts), suggests) and references neither the modern world nor foreign myths.[23] The story is closer in spirit to the accounts of Anthony the Great given by

[22] Henri Rivière (1864–1951), La Tentation de saint Antoine: féérie à grand spectacle, en 2 actes et 40 tableaux / par Henri Rivière; musique nouvelle et arrangée de MM. Albert Tinchant et Georges Fragerolle (1888) <https://gallica.bnf.fr>.

[23] The christian church is a representation of the institution in the form of a beautiful woman; the lower case follows Satie's orthography; see below.

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Athanasius I of Alexandria in the fourth century than to Flaubert's text. The tormentors of uspud are processions of martyrs, saints, and demons, rather than instances of the seven deadly sins. *Uspud* has a monochromatic quality that is reflected in the austerity of the music and in keeping with the asceticism of its central character.

Satie's well-documented attempts to have the work produced at the Paris Opéra bear all the hallmarks of a self-promotion exercise. Given that it was a shadow play, he must have known that trying to get it fully staged was a hopeless endeavour. Nevertheless, he set about challenging its Director, Eugène Bertrand, to a duel because he had failed to acknowledge receipt of the score. Contamine recounts how Satie handed out copies of his letters to Bertrand around Montmartre, trying to drum up support for his quixotic challenge. When Bertrand finally agreed to a meeting, Satie and Contamine copied out the score overnight from 16–17 December 1892 and arrived with it the following day. Bertrand was surprisingly receptive in the ensuing discussion, pointing out the limitations of his budget but nevertheless agreeing to consider the piece. But Satie was not to be deprived of his outrage and haughtily declared that it should be examined by 'a jury of forty musicians, half chosen by the minister and yourself, and half by us'.[24] Having thus ensured the failure of the endeavour, Satie was able to retreat with his head held high and with an agreeable sense of notoriety hanging around the whole episode. In April 1895 he published a booklet containing the text and excerpts from the score, with a title page which declares proudly, 'présenté à l'Opéra', a fine distinction being implied between 'présenté à' (presented to) and 'représenté à' (performed at).

However, as Peter Dayan points out, this deliberate befuddlement of someone like Bertrand did have a more serious artistic purpose. Even though *Uspud* was apparently 'comical, grotesque, inadequate, ridiculous, and caricatural', it reflected

> a general principle behind all the Parisian avant-garde art of the time […] that art should work by suggesting something absent from the material of the work, something that appeared to come from somewhere else, somewhere outside what we could physically see or hear.[25]

This kind of mystical idealism fitted very well with Satie's position during this period. His involvement with the 'Sâr' Joséphin Péladan's Salon de la Rose+Croix, with its stated aim to 'ruin realism', had taken off after their first meeting at Le Chat Noir in late 1890.[26] Péladan's novel *Le Vice suprême* (1884) was itself heavily indebted to Flaubert's *La Tentation de saint Antoine.* But by 1892 Satie had become impatient with Péladan, declaring in an open letter to the editor of *Gil Blas* that 'Péladan has in no wise exercised authority on my Aesthetic independence'.[27] Satie consequently founded L'Église métropolitaine d'art de Jésus Conducteur (The Metropolitan Church of Art of Jesus the Conductor), with himself as both high priest and sole adherent. *Uspud* was the first work produced from this new position and so seems to be a parody not just of Rivière's

[24] Robert Orledge, *Satie Remembered* (Faber & Faber, 1995), p. 33.
[25] Dayan, 'Shadow Images', p. 134.
[26] Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France: Joséphin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose-Croix* (Garland, 1976), p. 211; Alan M. Gillmor, *Erik Satie* (Macmillan, 1988), p. 71.
[27] Quoted in ibid., p. 90.

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shadow play, but also of Péladan's work. As such, it is a mystification heaped upon a mystification of a mystification — no wonder the patrons of the Auberge du Clou (with a few notable exceptions) found it incomprehensible. The 'controversy' around the work was fairly quickly forgotten, and Satie himself moved on as his Rosicrucian style evolved and then was abandoned in favour of less esoteric works, such as the *Pièces froides* (1897).

However, all this irony, parody, and brouhaha does not exhaust the idealistic aspects of *Uspud*, for at its heart there was something else going on: the formation of Satie as an original artist through an assertion of his identity. The very things for which he is most prized by later composers such as John Cage really come to the fore in *Uspud*, especially the use of fluctuating durations of blocks of material, a delight in hidden number games, the use of repetition and extreme reduction of material, the excision of any sound that is not essential to the foreground of the work, and a particular approach to theatrical performance that later was to find its fulfilment in *Parade*, *Mercure*, and especially *Relâche* (1924). The *Entr'acte cinématographique* from that work is an early example of film music composed from durational blocks of repetitive material synchronized (albeit somewhat loosely) to on-screen action while also following its own peculiar path, a compositional strategy that echoes *Uspud.*

The creative process of making a digital realization has left me in no doubt that *Uspud* was conceived as a shadow play; this is made abundantly clear by the way in which the storyline suggests actions suitable for silhouetted puppets. For example, the following directions appear at the end of the third act:

> uspud recommande son esprit au seigneur, puis se livre aux démons qui le déchirent avec fureur.
>
> *uspud commends his spirit to the lord, then gives himself over to the demons who tear him apart in fury.*
>
> l'église chrétienne apparait, éblouissante de clarté et escortée de deux anges, portant des palmes et des couronnes.
>
> *the christian church appears, shining with clarity and escorted by two angels, bearing palms and crowns.*
>
> elle prend l'âme d'uspud dans ses bras et l'enlève vers le christ, qui rayonne dans le ciel.
>
> *she takes the soul of uspud in her arms and bears him towards christ who shines in the firmament.*

These actions, while technically feasible, would present enormous challenges to a stage director in a conventional theatre. But in a shadow theatre they are easy to achieve and are indeed very idiomatic and effective.

Uspud: Scores, Brochures, and Published Editions

There are some small differences between the various scores of *Uspud.* The first manuscript was dated 17 November 1892 and has a single desert setting for all three

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acts.[28] While the storyline is essentially the same as for the published version, the apparitions are somewhat more varied and there is a family tree included in Contamine's hand. In this version, the score contains instrumental indications for 'Flûtes' and 'Harpes'.

The recopied second version, prepared overnight on 16–17 December 1892 by Satie for presentation to Bertrand, includes the additional instrumental direction 'Quatuor' and somewhat modifies the storyline, most notably to feature a different setting for each act and simplified lists of apparitions. An opening motif in octaves is added and there are a few extra dynamic indications and pause bars. This is the version held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, which I used for my digital realization.

According to Volta, Satie only ever published the libretto in his lifetime, illustrated with four musical fragments from the score. The 'large *Uspud* brochure' was a self-published edition made in 1893, for which he had appealed to the generosity of his relatives.[29] This was followed in 1895 by a 'small *Uspud* brochure', this time omitting the text entirely and containing only the four musical excerpts. In more recent times, a score prepared by Robert Caby was published by Éditions Salabert in 1970 with added rehearsal numbers, which do not appear in Satie's manuscript.[30] This was updated for the new Salabert edition by Robert Orledge in 2016.

The version of the text in the large brochure is a pioneering example of lower-case typography. It was not the very first example of this — there was an early nineteenth-century handwriting primer for German children illustrated with fables in lower case and, towards the end of the century, the international phonetic alphabet (perhaps better known then due to the popular interest in philology) — but twenty years would pass before Dada and the full bloom of lower case, so Satie and Contamine were really innovators in this regard. I have followed Satie's orthography and retained the lower-case spelling of the name of 'uspud' throughout this essay, except when it is given as the title of the work, which he capitalized. This use of lower case was not only typographical experimentation: Robert Orledge has discovered that, while trying to create names for the characters in *Uspud*, Satie and Contamine devised an encryption system.[31] The original score gives the following family tree:

> *Véritable formation généalogique de la famille dont Uspud est issu.*
>
> Irnebizolle, sœur d'Uspud; Jindebude, mère de Saint Plau; Yturrube, fils de Corcleru; Uspud, fils de Saint Plau; Ontrotance, cousin de Sainte Benu; Saint Plau, frère de Tumisrudebude; Corcleru, oncle d'Apufonse; Saint Induciomare, frère d'Yturrube; Sainte Micanar, cousin d'Entimedu; Gulbejare, père d'Irnebizolle; Apufonse, frère d'Ontrotance; Sainte Benu, sœur de Jindebude; Entimedu, oncle de Saint Cléophème;

[28] Volta, 'Uspud', p. 57.
[29] Ibid., p. 54.
[30] The opening tempo indication of 'Lent' in this edition is an error as well as an anomaly. Satie clearly marked the opening motif 'Très lent', in common with all the other tempo markings.
[31] Robert Orledge, 'Erik Satie's Ballet "Uspud": Prime Numbers and the Creation of a New Language with Only Half the Alphabet', *The Musical Times*, 150.1908 (2009), pp. 35–37.

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> Saint Marcomir, père de Sainte Benu; saint Cléophème, grand oncle d'Uspud; Tumisrudebude, mère de Gulbejare.

While uspud himself is the 'sole character' in *Uspud*, many of these 'saints' appear in the visions that torment him in Act III, where their names are all given in lower case in the large brochure. The names also proved fertile in terms of potentially generating new works, which are described in an advertisement as 'in preparation' but which were never actually composed: 'ONTROTANCE, ballet in one act; CORCLERU, ballet in three acts; IRNEBIZOLLE, ballet in two acts; TUMISRUDEBUDE, ballet in three acts'.

The encryption system that generated all this anticipates the work of the Oulipo, the group of writers and mathematicians founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais to work with literary constraints. Orledge describes the system in great detail; in brief, it uses only prime numbers from a numerically encrypted alphabet in which A = 1, B = 2, C = 3, etc. This is further extended through 29, 31, 37, 41, 43, 47, 53, 59, and 61 to allow for multi-letter combinations. All the character names in *Uspud* are derived in this way, so 'uspud' is u + s = 19, and p + u + d = 41; 'irnebizolle' is i + r + n = 41, n + e = 19, b + i + z = 37, and ol;le = 17;[32] 'ontrotance' is o + n = 29, t + r + o = 53, t + a + n + c + e = 43; and so on. It looks as though the starting point for this was the artists' own names. Erik Satie, for example, comes out as e + r = 23; i + k + s = 39; a = 1; t + i = 29; e = 5. By combining their names in this way, the pair were able to produce a restricted alphabet of only thirteen letters: a, c, d, e, i, l, m, n, o, r, s, t, u. As Contamine wrote:

> He [Satie in the 1890s] was in the position of a man who knows only thirteen letters of the alphabet and decides to create a new literature using only these, rather than admit his own insufficiency. For sheer bravado, it was unparalleled at the time, but he made it a point of honour to succeed with his system.[33]

This has often been interpreted as a comment on the limitations of Satie's compositional technique, but it turns out to also be a surprisingly literal description of the rules secretly used to write Uspud. It is evident that Satie was developing his own musical language at this time and found such constraints to be both creatively productive and amusingly distinctive. Such hidden precision and the embedding of his (and Contamine's) own identity into the text of the work indicate just how central *Uspud* was to this process.

Performing *Uspud*

As discussed in the Introduction, Satie's instrumental directions are written above the staves throughout the score: 'Flûtes', 'Harpes', 'Quatuor'. These have often puzzled musicologists, since the music assigned to those 'instruments' would be impossible to

[32] Orledge explains that the letter n is used here as a 'floating letter' to make the numbers work in both pairs; 'ol' and 'le' are also treated in pairs.

[33] Patrice Contamine de Latour, 'Erik Satie: souvenirs de jeunesse', *Comoedia*, 3 (1925), p. 5.

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execute. However, they are surely the names of stops on a harmonium.[34] The music for *Uspud* works much better on harmonium than piano. It is really no surprise to think that Satie used a harmonium when one recalls that he had spent his early years studying music with an organist, Gustave Vinot. This experience had also awakened in him a love of Gregorian chant, which was the foundation of so much of the Rose+Croix music. The images of Satie drawn and painted by Santiago Rusiñol in 1891–92 depict the composer seated at a harmonium rather than a piano (see Figures 6 and 7).

The harmonium, or 'orgue expressif', was a very common instrument in France in the 1890s. It blows air across banks of free reeds made of brass or steel and is thereby distinguished from the American reed organ, which sucks air through the reeds. Harmoniums usually have a split keyboard, with some stops that operate only in the bass or treble registers and some that cover both. The names used for the stops on French harmoniums of the period were modelled on organ stops and rather exotically based on an evocation of ancient Greece, something that doubtless would have greatly appealed to Satie. Every harmonium was almost unique, but even so, the stops named 'Flûte' and 'Harpe éolienne' (Aeolian harp) were to be found on most instruments of the period. For example, the very popular harmoniums made by the venerable Parisian firm Victor and Auguste Mustel (1815–90) all included those stops in both bass and treble registers.

There were common organ stops called 'Quarte' (sometimes given as 'Quartane' or even 'Quarte de Nasard'), but given that harmoniums usually had an array of 4-foot and 8-foot stops, I think it is more likely that Satie was using 'Quatuor' as shorthand to refer to a combination of stops. The music assigned to the 'Quatuor' is relatively thick compared to the rest, with much octave doubling, supporting this idea of a mixture. It is notable that the direction 'Quatuor' does not appear in the first manuscript of *Uspud* and was only added to the second copy made by Satie on 16–17 December 1892.[35] This suggests that he latterly recognized either a need or an opportunity to signal a different stop combination.

Harmonium stops that supposedly resembled string sounds were very common (of course, they did not really sound like strings at all). 'Viola' was a standard 4-foot stop that worked across the entire keyboard; also quite common was the 'Baryton' stop, evoking an ancient lower-register stringed instrument. I have found a harmonium made by Alexandre Père et Fils in Paris in the 1890s that has a stop named 'Violoncelle', while finally, the 'Contrebasse' (or sub-bass) stop would give a deep octave doubling

[34] Instrumental instructions for Flûtes and Harpes (only) also appear in the full score of *Le Fils des étoiles* (1891), suggesting that it too was written for harmonium. There is some ambiguity here, though, because the music is more pianistic than *Uspud*. The preludes to its three acts, published later by Satie, in 1896, were certainly scored for piano; it is most likely that Satie conceived it for piano but was ready to play it on harmonium if required, whereas *Uspud* was specifically conceived for the unique harmonium situated in the basement of the Auberge du Clou. The contemporaneous monodic composition *Leitmotiv du 'Panthée'* (1891), dedicated to Péladan, carries no instrumental indication but also works very well on harmonium, as Robert Orledge suggests ('Preface and Commentary', *Erik Satie: Intégrales des œuvres pour piano (Complete Works for Piano)* (Éditions Salabert, 2016), pp. xii–xix (p. xvi).

[35] Orledge, 'Erik Satie's Ballet "Uspud"', p. 34.

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Figure 6. Portrait of Erik Satie playing a harmonium. Drawing by Santiago Rusiñol, 1891. Public domain. Available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Santiago_Rusiñol_-_Portrait_of_Erik_Satie_Playing_the_Harmonium_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg.

that greatly enriched the sound. I suspect that Satie would have been using a combination of these stops when playing the 'Quatuor'.

The use of a harmonium makes immediate sense of so much that was heretofore mysterious about *Uspud*. Whereas playing it on a piano tends to unify the sound world, the changes in harmonium registration introduce clear contrasts between each musical cell, revealing that this is in fact a highly dramatic work. This use of the character of various stops to create timbral contrasts was fairly common, most notably deployed by Arnold Schoenberg in works such as *Herzgewächse* (1911), whose score shows precisely the same technique of writing the names of the specified stops above the staff as appears in *Uspud*.[36]

[36] Interestingly, Satie and Schoenberg seem to have recognized one another as important musical pioneers. There are some similarities between their careers too. In 1901, Schoenberg was working as a conductor at the Überbrettl cabaret in Berlin, where his *Brettl-Lieder* were first performed. Meanwhile, in the same year, Satie was making his daily six-mile walk from Arcueil to Montmartre to play

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Figure 7. Portrait of Erik Satie at the harmonium. Painting by Santiago Rusiñol, 1892(?). Public domain. Available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Santiago_Rusinol_Portrait_of_Eric_Satie_at_the_harmonium.jpg.

The story of the only performance of *Uspud* given in Satie's lifetime has been frequently recounted, mainly thanks to Contamine, who described it in his text 'Erik Satie intime: souvenirs de jeunesse'.[37] According to him, Satie played it through on the 'piano' one evening at the Auberge du Clou. The specification of a piano is not quite as contradictory as might be supposed: harmoniums were sometimes called 'piano harmoniums', and it is unlikely that Contamine would have been terribly bothered about making a distinction between the two instruments anyway, since

piano in cabaret venues such as the Divan Japonais and Nouvelles Athènes (Gillmor, *Erik Satie*, p. 114). In 1920, Schoenberg took what must have been quite a reputational risk by organizing multiple performances of Satie's *Descriptions automatiques*, *Chapitres tournés en tous sens*, and *Vieux sequins et vieilles cuirasses* by the pianists Eduard Steuermann and Ernst Bachrich, firstly in Vienna, then (once) at the Mozarteum in Prague (Albrecht Dümling, 'Der junge Schönberg und die Arbeitersängerbewegung', *Zeitschrift für Musiktheorie*, 1 (1975), pp. 11–21). Satie, in turn, advocated for Schoenberg against the prevailing anti-German sentiments in France at that time, writing: 'We know that Art has no homeland… poor thing… its lack of fortune prevents it… So why not play Richard Strauss and Schoenberg?' (Nigel Wilkins, *The Writings of Erik Satie* (Eulenberg, 1981), p. 68).

[37] Contamine, 'Souvenirs', p. 5.

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both have a piano keyboard. He recounts that *Uspud* caused 'passionate discussions […], some saying it was a masterpiece, others declaring it was a disgraceful hoax'. Satie reacted with his declaration that he would present it at the Opéra and that he would be proved right about its value, saying, 'I'm far superior to you, but my well-known modesty prevents me from saying so.' But one listener saw past the brouhaha:

> In the middle of the tumult brought about by this rendition, one man remained impassive. Beneath his stubborn, bulging forehead, two little dark eyes shone like carbuncles; with his arms crossed, he smiled silently under his faun-like beard. It was Claude Debussy. He had realized at once what a fund of seriousness, of boldness and sensitivity lay under Satie's outrageous clowning.[38]

This was the beginning of a critical friendship that served Satie very well for much of his life. Debussy evidently understood the meta-irony of Satie's serious humour, but it was the discipline behind the music he heard that was the most important thing. Debussy's own compositions frequently display a similar contrast between an apparently lazy surface and a highly rigorous technique.

Performances since then have been relatively few (see Appendix), but do reveal a few things: 1) there has been something of a resurgence of interest in *Uspud* in recent years; 2) the piano-only versions tend to make it into an ultra-minimalist work and so downplay the drama in favour of a serene, contemplative mood; 3) the non-piano versions go in the opposite direction and have a lot of fun with the drama, while sometimes not worrying too much about authenticity.

For the present realization, I have used a virtual harmonium provided by the Vienna Symphonic Library. This instrument dates from the 1890s and has sampled 'Flûtes' and 'Harpes' stops over open reeds to create an authentic sound. For the 'Quatuor', I used the 'Grand Jeu', which engages a combination of stops including the sub-bass and octaves. I recorded the performance in Logic Pro and created the slides in iMovie. Adding the slides was a revelation, as I grew to understand how the drama related to the music and so the extent to which Satie was careful, indeed precise, about the relationship between the two. This comes across most clearly in watching and listening to the realization while imagining the shadow play.

One discovery I made was that, at various points in the manuscript, Satie indicates a double-dashed line after a bar line (see Figure 8). These clearly have a different function from the solid double bar lines that frequently punctuate the score and signal the end of a musical cell. While working with the storyline, it became obvious that these relate to scene changes in the shadow play itself. I have assumed that the screen would have gone blank at these points, while the music continues. The presence of these indications suggests that *Uspud* was more carefully thought-through than scholars have previously suggested. While Satie and Contamine delighted in telling people that the work was 'a compendium of foolish things designed […] to dumbfound the public', they evidently did spend a considerable amount of time and effort working on the details of the

[38] Contamine, cited in Orledge, *Satie Remembered*, p. 30.

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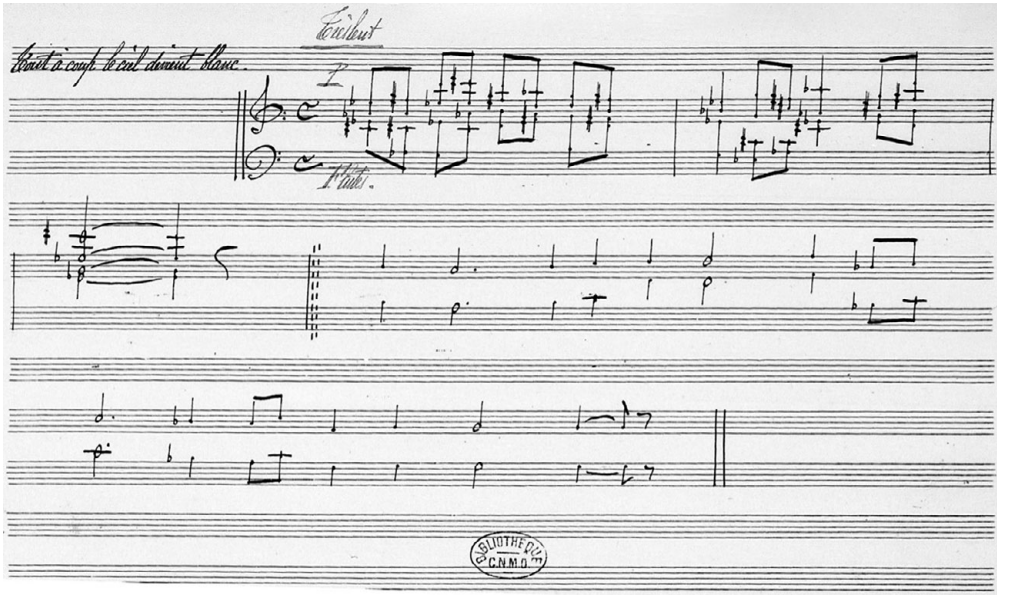

Figure 8. A page of the manuscript of *Uspud*, showing the double-dashed lines after a bar line. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Used with permission.

staging.[39] It seems unlikely they would have done so if the piece was as deliberately throwaway as the impression that they chose to give.

The Music of *Uspud*

The music of *Uspud* has already been quite thoroughly analysed, most notably by Patrick Gowers, Alan Gillmor, and Robert Orledge.[40] Given the extreme economy of the score, the analysis apparently presents relatively few challenges. Gowers identifies twelve motifs that recur in various guises throughout the piece; these exploit many of the harmonic devices Satie was using throughout the Rose+Croix period, in particular chains of 6–3 (first inversion) chords that are sometimes distorted by the ancient Greek 'chromatic' mode (ST–m3–ST–ST–m3–T–ST); chains of 5–3s in parallel motion; seventh and ninth chords; and stacks of combined perfect and augmented fourths. Gowers categorizes these according to their devices, so motifs 1 to 5 are 'motifs using the Greek chromatic mode', 6 and 7 are 'motifs in the style of the *Danses gothiques*', and 9–12 are 'other motifs'. He then groups them according to their first appearances in *Uspud*: Act I: 6, 2, 3, 1, 4, 5, 8, 9; Act II: 10, 7, 11; Act III: 12.

Gillmor goes into more detail about the transformations of these motifs, in particular their many rhythmic variations, while Orledge talks about their extensions, making the

[39] Contamine, 'Souvenirs', p. 2.
[40] Patrick Gowers, 'Satie's Rose Croix Music (1891–1895)', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 92 (1965–66), pp. 1–25 (pp. 3, 17); Gillmor, *Erik Satie*, pp. 98–101; Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, pp. 160, 189–90.

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point that any sense of continuity, let alone development, is 'shattered' when, as often happens, a silent bar follows or the next motif implacably reappears, with its marking of 'Très lent'. Satie repeated that instruction no less than fifty-five times throughout the score, and there is no other tempo marking. It is almost as though he imagined the score being read in a random order from separate pages and wanted to ensure consistency of tempo throughout. Orledge does mention the appearance of the big C-major chord that accompanies the arrival of the christian church at the climax of the second act, but only as an extension of Gowers's motif 5. When making my realization, my ears were immediately struck by the intense drama of this moment and by the way it appears to be almost a cinematic 'jump cut'. It is certainly surprising, but it also resolves some preceding passages of increasing richness and chromatic activity. It resembles the kind of response a cinema pianist accompanying a silent movie might make to a sudden, unexpected change of scene.

Nor is this the only such example: in the third act we once again have unexpected and repeated root-position triads. This time a grand chord of B minor accompanies the appearance of 'a legion of demons [that] arises on every side'. Satie's positioning of the text in the manuscript does not align exactly with this moment, but that is no surprise: the shadow play moves at its own pace. It is close enough. One's ears can be the guide to the correspondence between sound and action at this point. I would also observe that the sequence that lands on a repeated root-position G-major chord in the second act surely evokes the sound of a choir of angels and archangels that is described in the storyline at that point. This can be heard very clearly when using a harmonium.

All these major and minor chords break out of the chromatic system of the rest of *Uspud* and so draw attention to particularly distinctive bits of action. This leads to a new approach to the analysis of the music; the comments that follow are not to suggest that the analyses of Gowers, Gillmor, and Orledge are incorrect, but, with the greatest possible respect, I do disagree with them about the relationship between the shadow play and the music. Gowers remarks on the 'dissociation of text and music', commenting that 'the score is pure music with its own integrity regardless of surrounding events', and Gillmor repeats James Harding's comment that 'music and libretto are like two trains that pass in opposite directions'.[41] Orledge, meanwhile, cites the big C-major passage described above and remarks: 'As one might expect, the relatively dramatic music (for Satie) is wholly at odds with its text, which tells of "The reappearance of the christian church, white as snow and transparent as crystal".'[42]

One only has to imagine the shadow play while reading the story and listening to my harmonium version to entertain a very different interpretation. The sudden appearance of 'white' C major, for example, in all its triumphant and radiant clarity, so obviously contrasts with the muddy chromaticism of the preceding material that it is hard to imagine a more appropriate accompaniment to the action at that point. The appearance of this female incarnation of the christian church is evidently startling both to uspud and the audience. Similarly, Gowers's motif 12, the long, sustained first-

[41] Gowers, 'Satie's Rose Croix Music', p. 38; Gillmor, *Erik Satie*, p. 98.
[42] Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, p. 161.

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inversion G-major chords that open Act III, seem immediately to evoke quiet religiosity when heard on harmonium. The warm chains of root-position triads that constitute the second half of Gowers's motif 10 suggest uspud's spiritual states. And so on.

Why did Satie subtitle this piece a 'Christian ballet' when there is, apparently, no dance? Commentators have always assumed that it is just a joke, or designed to impress M. Bertrand at the Opéra, or they have avoided discussing the matter at all. My suggestion is that it is actually an accurate reflection of the relationship between music and action. Ballets famously include lengthy passages of music that allow the choreographer to indulge in interpretation rather than advancing the action. The composer does not specify precisely what the dancers will be doing at any given point, but rather allows the music to unfold in a way that is suggestive and hopefully sympathetic to the dance. In the silhouetted world of the shadow theatre, where characters may be transported great distances with a simple movement of the hand, these intermediate passages need not be very long. *Uspud* is full of single chords or very short phrases that seem to exist almost randomly within the larger structures of the motifs identified by Gowers. Those motifs themselves fluctuate in length and may be extended or contracted. All this, I contend, is designed to accompany imagined actions that Satie and Contamine were destined never to see but which must have been very real to them; after all, they had been working with shadow theatre for years. The actions are balletic in the sense that they relate to movement and to interpretative freedom. Of course, Satie relished the befuddlement that was caused by this soubriquet, but I believe he did also have some kind of more practical intention in mind.

The motivic construction of the music has a dramatic function that has both similarities with and differences from Wagnerian leitmotif. Satie was, at least initially, an enthusiastic member of the Wagner cult in Paris at the time. Péladan was to write a book on Wagner's theatre (rather than music) two years after *Uspud*, but Satie quickly realized he had very different intentions to Wagner, as he explained in 1922:

> At that time, I was writing my *Fils des étoiles* — on a text by Joséphin Péladan; and I explained to Debussy how we Frenchmen needed to break away from the Wagnerian adventure, which did not correspond with our natural aspirations. And I told him that I was not at all anti-Wagnerian, but that we needed our own music — without sauerkraut if possible.[43]

The lack of development in *Uspud*'s motifs underlines this attitude. Whereas Wagnerian leitmotifs are presented in an endlessly changing and sumptuous musical setting that contributes to a sense of dramatic evolution, Satie's are stripped down and rather inflexible, creating abrupt contrasts that reflect changes in scenography or the interior state of uspud himself. They have a very different sense of scale that is appropriate to the reduced theatrical setting and are presented without much in the way of decoration.

[43] Rollo Myers, *Erik Satie* (Dover, 1968), p. 32.

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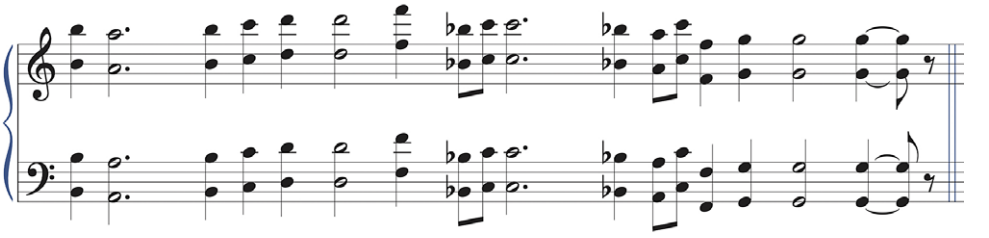
Example 1. Erik Satie, *Uspud*, opening. © Les Éditions Salabert. Used with permission.



A good example of this dramatic function is the plainsong melody that opens the work and reappears at key structural points (Example 1). This is associated with uspud and always appears in conjunction with invisible things such as his spirit and his interiorities; to identify each appearance, I have used the rehearsal numbers provided in the 2016 Salabert edition.

Act I

1, double octaves, *f*, Quatuor
This was added by Satie to the second version of the score. It functions as a kind of short overture, over the 'curtain up', as uspud is discovered for the first time. It thereby becomes associated with uspud himself. The loud dynamic and double octaves using the Quatuor stop make this a heraldic statement.

2, single octaves, *pp*, Flûtes
Text: *la fumée qui s'en dégage se change en séraphins qui s'évanouissent dans l'espace* (the smoke that rises from them turns into seraphim which fade into the air). This delivers a sudden change of mood from the previous loud and dramatic material, reinforcing an association with evanescent things. There is a subtle suggestion that uspud's personage is thereby rendered a mere embodiment of his spirit.

8, single octaves, *p*, Flûtes
This is the first appearance of a pair of extended dashed vertical lines (see Figure 8). The text says: *tout à coup le ciel devient blanc* (suddenly the sky turns white). My supposition is that the screen goes completely white while we hear the motif, with its connection to intangible and invisible things (fading seraphim, uspud's spirit). In other words, the puppets are removed from the scene, and we have something close to a blank screen at this point, encouraging our imaginations.

18, single octaves, *pp*, Flûtes
This appearance is once again preceded by double-dashed vertical lines. It follows an extended sequence in which uspud throws stones at the christian church. There is then a passage of spiritual contemplation while the puppets are readied for the next

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sequence, in which the stones turn into balls of fire, something that would require preparation time.

27, single octaves, *p*, Harpes
This appearance accompanies the much remarked-upon *grande convulsion de la nature* (great convulsion of nature). Of course, there is no obvious connection between the quiet statement of plainsong and the wild events taking place on screen, but since we have already associated this motif with the interiority of uspud, I suggest that this is a picture of his spiritual indifference to the surrounding action. Bear in mind that the 'great convulsion' is actually very easy to achieve in a shadow play: one simply removes trees, rocks, and other elements of the setting, in a suitably dramatic fashion. It also takes place silently — this is a visual, not an auditory, convulsion. It was for moments such as this that Alphonse Allais and his team of percussionists would probably have been required to create sound effects. It is not clear to me whether they would have actually been deployed in this case, although they would almost certainly have been necessary to evoke the 'formidable clap of thunder' around 3, so it was presumably the intention to use them here too. Of course, they were unavailable to Satie and Contamine (there is no indication that Allais joined the Auberge du Clou set), so this is really an imaginary shadow play. The persistence of quiet plainsong through the noise, though, would have been dramatically very effective.

Act II

30, harmonized, *pp*, Harpes
Demons have just surged forth and disappeared; once again, we are left alone with uspud and his quiet contemplation. But he has evolved since the first act: this typically Rose+Croix harmonization of the plainsong suggests a more complex inner world that reflects on the troubling apparitions that have appeared and are about to appear. The outside action is beginning to penetrate uspud's inner state.

38, harmonized, *pp*, Flûtes
This is exactly the same as the previous appearance and appears in a similar context. The procession of martyrs has come and gone; the choirs of angels and archangels have vanished. uspud is once again alone but deeply affected by what he has experienced. The music is quiet and back to the most pure and spiritual Flûte stop. uspud is about to be enveloped by the great white light that initiates his conversion, so music of spiritual contemplation is the prelude to this dramatic highlight.

Act III

42, harmonized with low octaves and full chords, *ff*, Quatuor
Text: *l'esprit-saint pénêtre uspud* (the holy spirit is with uspud). This is the climax of the entire drama, and so naturally it is uspud's inner spiritual world that is now completely

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and triumphantly transformed by the Holy Spirit. The use of the Quatuor stop brings in the sub-bass octaves that give this harmonization a grand and powerful force. There would not be much happening on screen at this point. The attention is all focused on the music, the conveyor of intangible spirituality.

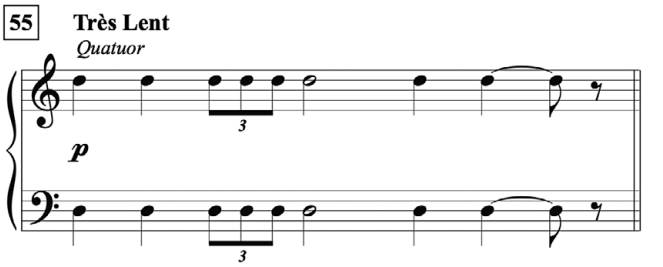
49, harmonized with low octaves and full chords, *p*, Harpes
As uspud is clothed in the white robes of the neophyte, we once again hear the grandest version of his inner music, but now more quietly, in a penitential version, and on the Aeolian harp stop. This rendition has a sense of dignity.

56, in octaves, *pp*, Harpes
Text: *elle prend l'âme d'uspud dans ses bras et l'enlève vers le christ, qui rayonne dans le ciel* (she takes the soul of uspud in her arms and bears him towards christ who shines in the firmament). This is quite affecting, to my ears. The spirit of uspud has become one with the body and, like the fading seraphim in Act I, travels upwards. At the same time, the impoverishment of this little plainsong reminds us of the humbleness of the saint and his surroundings. I can't help but relate uspud at this moment to the self-styled 'Monsieur le Pauvre', Satie himself, living alone in his tiny 'Abbey' at 6 rue Cortot.[44]

Example 2 is one instance of a 'fanfare' motif; this comprises rhythmical repeated notes, in either unison or octaves. These appear in many of Satie's Rose+Croix pieces. Gowers does not identify them as a motif, presumably because they are not at all melodic. However, they are quite a striking and recurring feature. The first example occurs in the third bar of 1; uspud has just made a pile of relics at the foot of the statue and now sets fire to them. The fanfare accompanies this gesture, rising by a minor third as it does so.

Next come the repeated Ds in the 'fanfare of trumpets' that begins at 13; this precedes the aerial parade of martyrs. The fanfare illustrates a fanfare: that seems straightforward enough, except that this is marked *p* and played on the Flûte stop. Perhaps this is because the action is happening in the sky, suggesting distance.

Example 2. Erik Satie, *Uspud*, 'Fanfare', Act III, Fig. 55. © Les Éditions Salabert. Used with permission.



[44] Gillmor, *Erik Satie*, p. 33.

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In Act II, there is a lengthy and insistent fanfare on D, as uspud '*implore ses dieux lares*' (beseeches his household gods). This precedes the appearance of demons, so seems to have a dual function of heralding an imminent event but also perhaps corresponding to some ritual action performed by uspud.

The next instance occurs at 46 in Act III, when there is a lengthy fanfare in octaves on D, interrupted by a brief turn before settling onto D once again. This is similarly marked *p* and this time accompanies the procession of martyrs who pass through the air before uspud. Once again, there is a clear heraldic intent behind this fanfare.

At 55 there is another, shorter D fanfare in octaves, also marked *p* (this is Example 2). In the manuscript this is clearly laid out after the preceding action, in which uspud is torn apart in fury by demons, and the next action, the final appearance of the christian church. As before, a heraldic intention is clearly implied here.

The aforementioned repeated B-minor chords 3 bars after 51 echo the rhythms, of these fanfares, but here the harmony is filled in and so seems to anticipate the arrival of the 'legion of demons'. In the manuscript, the text describing that moment appears on the following page, but the music of that section all ties into that piece of action, which would itself take much longer to unfold than just the few bars that appear adjacent to the text.

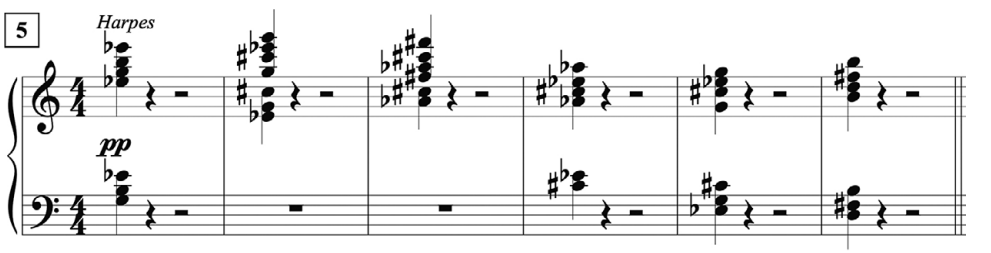
What all these have in common is that they presage some kind of action external to uspud himself, usually coming from the heavens. The only exception is the first, whose monotonous nature is raised in pitch as uspud sends smoke heavenwards. These are not particularly loud or imposing fanfares, indeed they are almost absurdly quiet, but they are very insistent and evoke a sense of anticipation every time.

Below are some other moments when the creative process of working on the digital realization has revealed how the music illustrates the on-screen action. If a shadow play performance is ever made, then perhaps the veracity of these interpretative assertions could be even more thoroughly tested.

Act I, 5 (Example 3): *la statue tombe en morceaux* (the statue falls to pieces). The music also falls to pieces at this point, with six single stab chords separated by three beats of silence. This breaks the flow of sound that has been established so far. I can imagine a piece falling off the statue with each stab.

Act I, 11 (Example 4): *uspud étonné prend du sable et en frotte les yeux* (uspud in surprise picks up some sand and rubs his eyes with it). Two eye rubs are accompanied

Example 3. Erik Satie, *Uspud*, Fig. 5. © Les Éditions Salabert. Used with permission.



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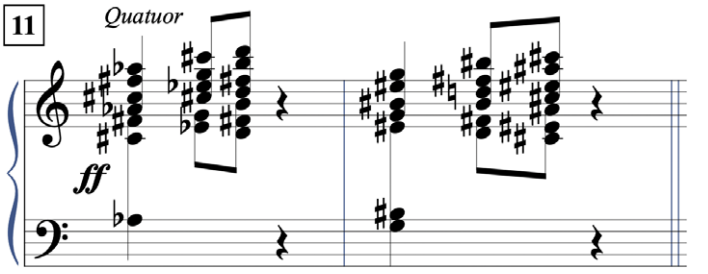
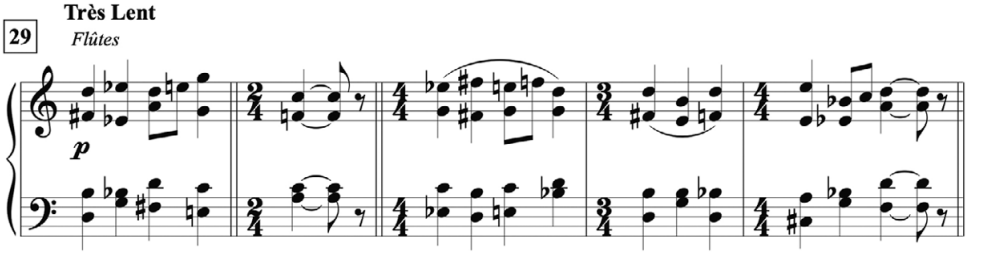
Example 4. Erik Satie, *Uspud*, Fig. 11. © Les Éditions Salabert. Used with permission.



Example 5. Erik Satie, *Uspud*, Fig. 29. © Les Éditions Salabert. Used with permission.



by two *ff* outbursts. The same gesture appears shortly afterwards at 20 when *les pierres se changent en globes de feu* (the stones become balls of fire). However, that time, the two outbursts are separated by the 'something is happening' motif discussed below. The transformation of rocks into fireballs evidently takes longer than eye rubbing.

Act II, 29 (Example 5): *uspud implore ses dieux lares* (uspud beseeches his household gods). This plaintive little chorale opens Act II, and its sense of purpose contrasts sharply with the end to Act I, which drifts away on a repeated and ambiguous chord.[45] It is hard to hear the chorale as anything other than perfect music to accompany a beseeching of gods.

Act II, 4–7 bars after 33 (Example 6): *uspud dans son angoisse, implore le ciel* (uspud in his anguish calls upon heaven). This is the loudest and densest passage in the entire work and immediately precedes the appearance of the christian church in 'white' C major. Notice how Satie extends the motif by repeating beats 2 and 4 of the motif from the fourth bar of 33 and emphasizes the drama of the moment by changing the harmonium stops from Harpes and Flûtes to the richer Quatuor. These bars of impassioned music surely support the action extremely well.

Act II, 34 (first 3 bars) (Example 7): *elle retire le poignard de sa poitrine et enfonce dans celle d'uspud* (she draws the dagger from her chest and plunges it

[45] It is in fact an E♭7 chord minus the fifth, but is spelt enharmonically to be consistent with the Greek chromatic mode (i.e. C♯ instead of D♭).

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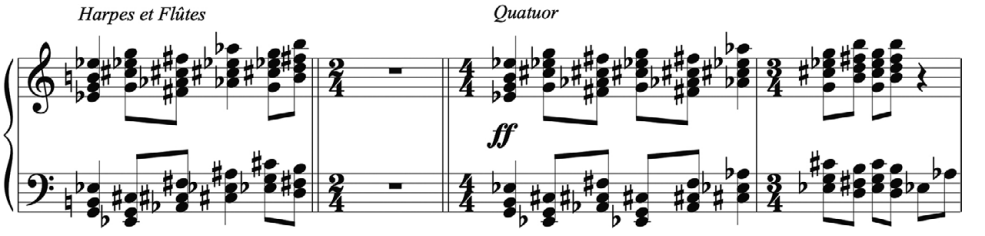
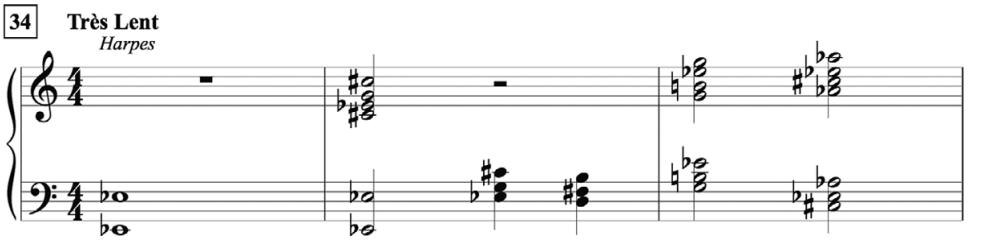
Example 6 Erik Satie, *Uspud*, 4–7 bars after Fig. 33. © Les Éditions Salabert. Used with permission.



Example 7. Erik Satie, *Uspud*, Fig. 34. © Les Éditions Salabert. Used with permission.



into that of uspud). I'm willing to admit that this one seems more questionable, but I find the contrast between the E♭-based sullenness of this little phrase and the splendour of the immediately preceding C-major chord both disturbing and surprising. It is as though this action by the christian church deflates uspud's expectations.

Act II, from 1 bar before 36 to 38 (Example 8): *en même temps, un crucifix gigantesque sort de terre et s'élève vers le ciel, entrainant à sa suite l'église Chretienne. On entend les chœurs des anges, archanges* (at the same time a vast crucifix comes from the earth and rises to heaven, drawing after it the christian church… a choir is heard of angels and archangels). This excerpt begins with a single bar of stacked fourths and fifths. This kind of short punctuating statement recurs throughout *Uspud* whenever there is mystification afoot. During the section that follows, as the crucifix rises up into the heavens and a choir of angels is heard, the music parallels the storyline in a way which requires little imagination to understand.

Act II, 40 (Example 9): This concluding passage of Act II is heard as a little hymn or prayer, following the big drama of uspud's conversion. It is a moment almost of bathos to end the act.

The motif in Example 10, with its lovely and reassuring root-position major chords in the second half, always occurs when uspud is experiencing some kind of bliss or ecstasy. In Act II, at 35 he is witnessing the christian church being dragged into the heavens by the crucifix, and at 39 he is enveloped in white light and converted.

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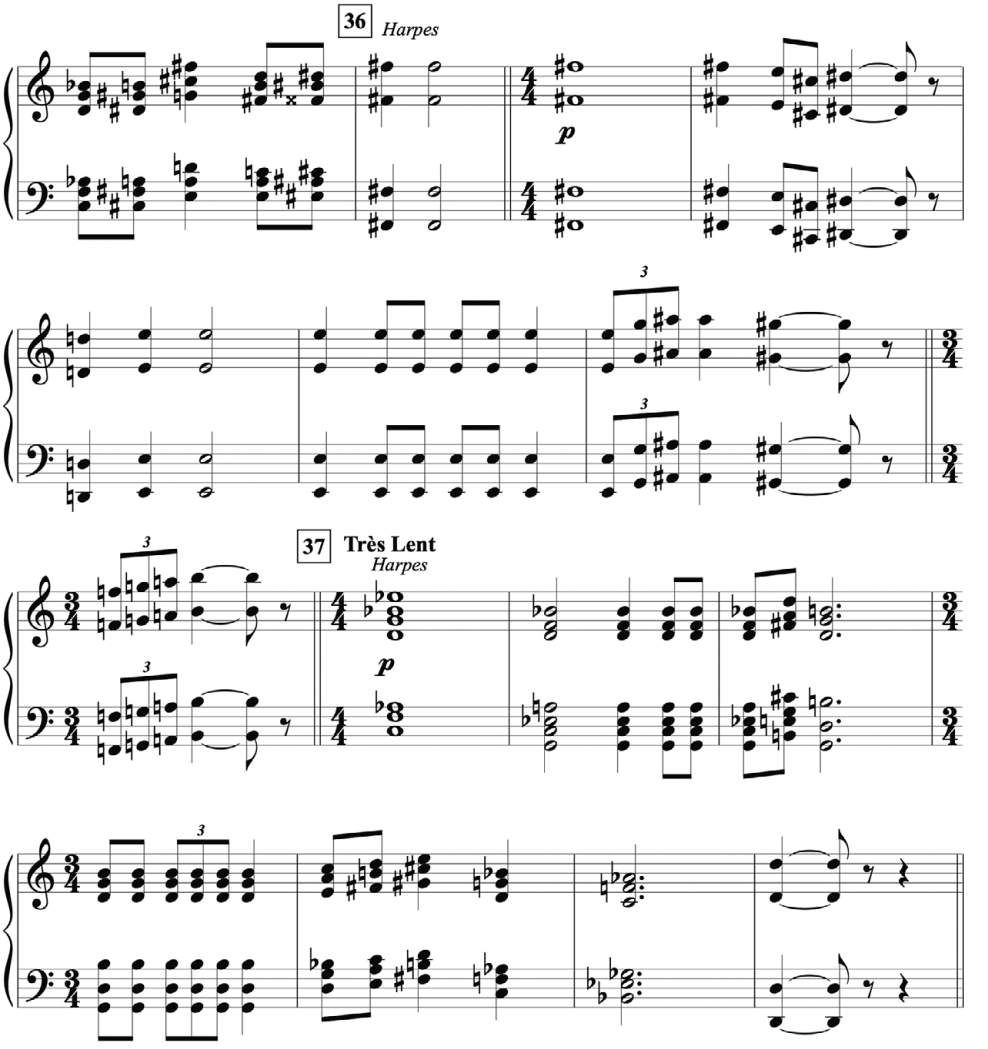
Example 8. Erik Satie, *Uspud*, 1 bar before Fig. 36 to 38. © Les Éditions Salabert. Used with permission.



In Act III, the Holy Spirit enters him at 43, and at 48 he is tearing off his robe as he becomes a neophyte.

The phrase in Example 11 occurs frequently and strikes me as 'something is happening' music. It has a feeling of moving along without particularly going anywhere. When one reads the storyline at these points, it is quite easy to imagine the changes taking place in the shadow play.

All of Satie's Rose+Croix music, with its slow and steady crotchet tread, has the feeling of an accompaniment to some kind of ritual action or procession. *Uspud* is no

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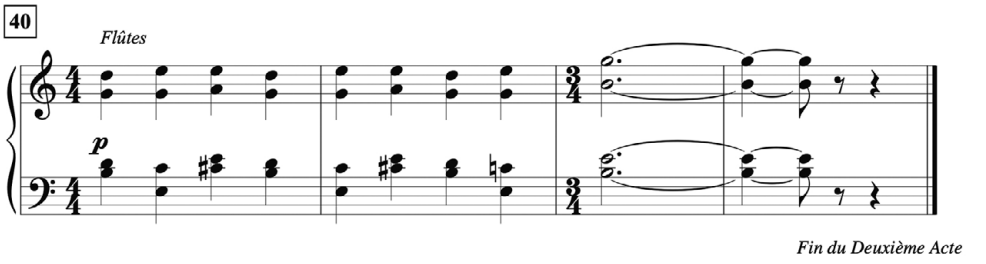
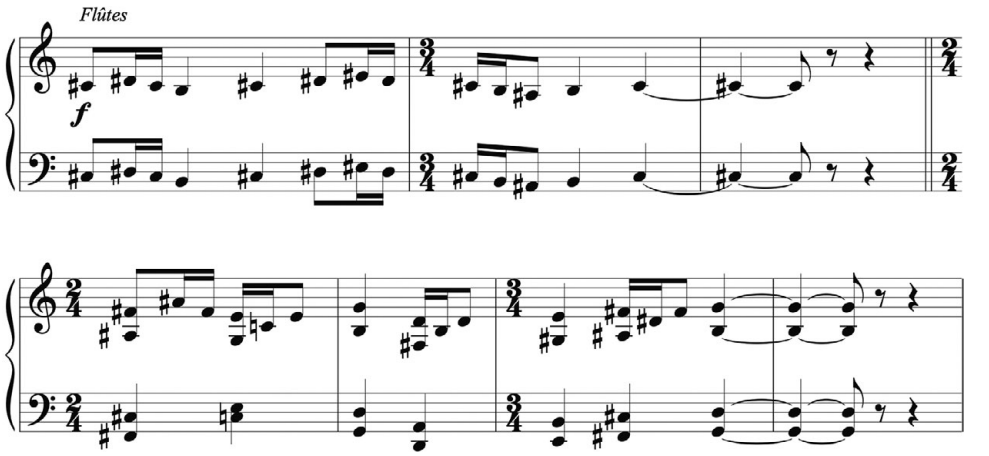
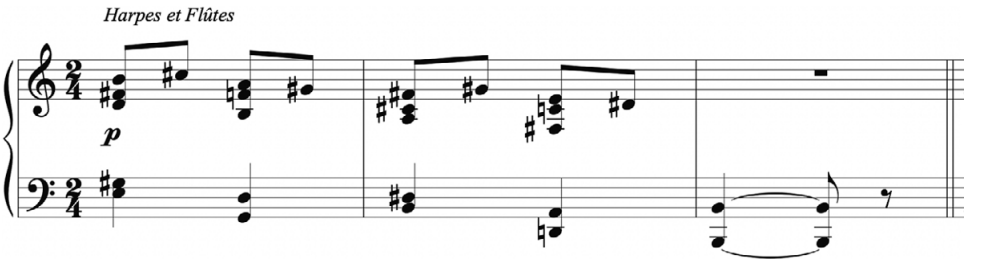
Example 9. Erik Satie, *Uspud*, Fig. 40. © Les Éditions Salabert. Used with permission.



Example 10. Erik Satie, *Uspud*, 3 bars before to 4 bars after Fig. 35. © Les Éditions Salabert. Used with permission.



Example 11. Erik Satie, *Uspud*, 3 bars after Fig. 19. © Les Éditions Salabert. Used with permission.



exception, but it also includes a great deal more contrast than other works of the period. This is because it is intended to be performed as *actual* theatre, rather than the imagined theatre of, say, *Le Fils des étoiles* or the *Danses gothiques.* While the music is certainly economical, *Uspud* is far from the extreme example of austerity that is usually portrayed

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in piano performances. In fact, it is a piece of shadow theatre full of dramatic stage events, whose music alternates portrayals of the changing spiritual states of its protagonist with gestures supporting the action that surrounds him. When music and action seem not to connect at all (such as in the 'great convulsion of nature' that ends the first act), it is because the inner spiritual world of uspud himself, rather than the events affecting him, is the musical focus at that point.

Conclusion

After the premiere of my arrangement of *Uspud* for the George W. Welch ensemble in London in 1990, one newspaper reviewer wrote that it 'had the air of a great, solemn duty'.[46] Now, I would not for one moment want to be too solemn about this piece: I appreciate the humour involved in its gestation and the satirical tone of the content. In some ways, it is quite hilarious. However, neither would I want to over-emphasize that characteristic and so seek to make Satie into the mere clown portrayed by Doret and so many others. I would also not wish to turn it into a 'minimalist classic', which is the unfortunate outcome of so many of the piano-only recordings. Presumably this happens because record companies spot the opportunity offered by the popular love for Satie's music as a kind of soothing and 'mindful' background. But this really misrepresents *Uspud*.

Uspud is an honest expression of Satie's difference. At this time in his life, he was trying hard to fit in: with the Rose+Croix crowd, with the Wagner cultists, with Le Chat Noir, with the Auberge du Clou, even, albeit in a spirit of ironic hopelessness, with the musical establishment in the form of M. Bertrand. But he ended up excluding himself from all these groups; his difference was real and not an affectation. He simply was never really part of these groups and could never have been so. He tried to justify this with amusing statements about his own superiority, but they betray a fundamental uncertainty about his position.

Was *Uspud* just a joke? I don't think so. The intentionally outrageous fuss Satie created when trying to get it staged at the Opéra masked a more serious intention. Realizing that his chances of success in this endeavour were zero, he settled instead for using the work as a kind of calling card, putting himself in the position of a rejected artist in order to achieve maximum publicity while making a public position statement. The fact that the second version of the score was hastily copied out to show to Eugène Bertrand at the Paris Opéra has tended to reinforce the impression that the piece was thrown together in a rather casual way and never really thought through as a serious piece of staged work. The truth, I would suggest, is more complicated than that. There is no doubt that irony and parody are part of the spirit of the piece, but this is also something of a smokescreen to conceal the underlying rigour with which Satie was working.

Leaving aside *Vexations*, which was exceptional in every way, this was really Satie's most substantial composition from the early years. Not only that, it engaged with a

[46] Robert Maycock, 'Music without Shadows', *The Times*, 6 February 1990.

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theatrically grand dramatic form that was somewhat at odds with the solitary intimacy of the *Gymnopédies*. I think that Debussy understood all this and was informed by it when it came to his own attempts to create a music 'without sauerkraut'.[47] The Wagner cult that pervaded Paris found its antidote in this puppet play with music designed to be performed not in a luxurious theatre in Bayreuth, but rather amongst the day-to-day comings and goings of a humble hostelry in Montmartre.

APPENDIX: NOTABLE PERFORMANCES OF *USPUD*

According to Robert Orledge, the first performance of *Uspud* after the event at the Auberge du Clou took place at the Opéra-Comique, Paris, on 9 May 1979, with Michel Tranchant on piano, Hubert Camerlo narrating, and slide projections by Robert Doisneau.[48]

My own arrangement for the George W. Welch ensemble, featuring harmonium, piano, string quartet, clarinet, and tuba, was the UK premiere (as far as I know) and was first performed at Blackheath Concert Halls, London, on Friday 2 February 1990, with the actor Simon Carter narrating and slide projections by Mark Thomson.

Piano-only recordings have been released by Riri Shimada (Sony, 1987, reissued 2001), Jean-Yves Thibaudet (Decca, 2003), Reinbert de Leeuw (Etcetera, 2011), Nicolas Horvath (Grand Piano, 2018), and Alessandro Simonetto (OnClassical, 2022), amongst others.

The theatre company Weeping Tudor performed *Uspud* at St Edward's Church in Penylan, Cardiff, on Thursday 13 October 2016, with James Ellis narrating/performing and Philip May on piano. A video is available on YouTube.

An orchestration by Johannes Schöllhorn, performed by the WDR Rundfunksinfonieorchester Köln and conducted by Baldur Brönnimann, was broadcast and released on YouTube in 2022.

A dance performance entitled 'USPUD: Ballet Sincretic in One Act' took place in 2022, with the music performed on piano by Christoph Dietler, choreography by Damián Cortés Alberti and dancers, dramaturgy by Ira Goldbecher, and costumes by Julio Escudero.

A video interpretation with an electronic version of the music was released online in 2022 by Sisza-arts and is available at their website and on YouTube.

[47] Myers, *Erik Satie*, p. 32.
[48] Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, p. 276.

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