Tissimo

The Chords of Gymnopédie No. 1

Erik Satie — the same slow waltz, now one color per chord

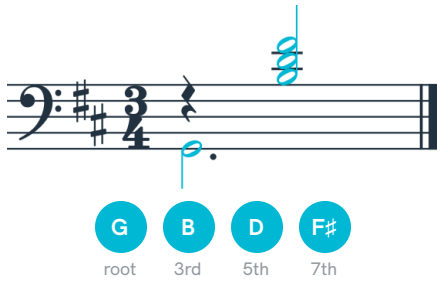
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Satie's famous piece rocks between just two chords — Gmaj7 and Dmaj7 — one per bar, back and forth like a slow swing. A *major seventh chord* is a major triad plus one extra note: the **7th**, sitting one letter below the root's octave. Learn these two shapes and you can already play most of the piece. Here every chord wears **one single color** — the color of its root's scale degree in G major, the music's home:

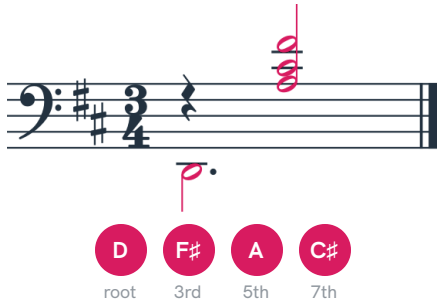
1 G · 2 A · 3 B · 4 C · 5 D · 6 E · 7 F♯

THE TWO-CHORD SWAY — BARS 1-16

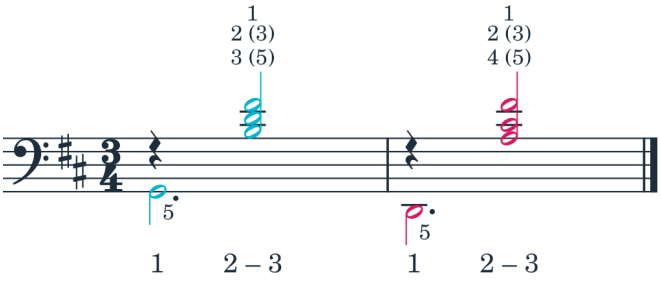
Gmaj7 — G · B · D · F♯



Dmaj7 — D · F♯ · A · C♯



HOW THE LEFT HAND PLAYS THEM



* alternate fingerings for smaller hands in parentheses

Satie splits each chord in two: on **beat 1** the left hand plays the deep **root alone** (finger 5), then floats up to press the **other three notes together on beat 2** (fingers 3-2-1 on B-D-F♯, 4-2-1 on A-C♯-F♯) and holds them through beat 3. Notice that both chords keep the **same top note, F♯** — only the notes underneath change. Catch each bar in the pedal so the root keeps ringing under its chord.

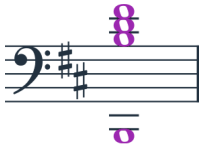
THE VISITORS — THE MINOR TURN

F♯m



bar 17

Bm



bar 18

Em



bar 19

Em7



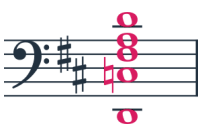
bar 20

Dm



bar 21

D7



bar 26

Satie recycles your hand shapes. Bm is the same upper shape you already know from Gmaj7 (B-D-F♯) — only the bass note is new. F♯m reuses Dmaj7's upper shape (A-C♯-F♯) the same way. Each visitor wears its own degree color — and watch for the **naturals** in Dm and D7: the sharps from the key signature melt away, and the music turns wistful.

Try it Loop **bars 1–2** — Gmaj7, Dmaj7, back again — counting **1 · 2–3** until the sway feels automatic. Then walk the minor turn, **bars 17–21**, one chord per bar. The piece says goodbye with **Am7 resolving to D minor** in its last two bars — see page 3. Play everything *lent et douloureux* — slow, soft, and full of feeling.

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THE SHAPE OF THE WHOLE PIECE

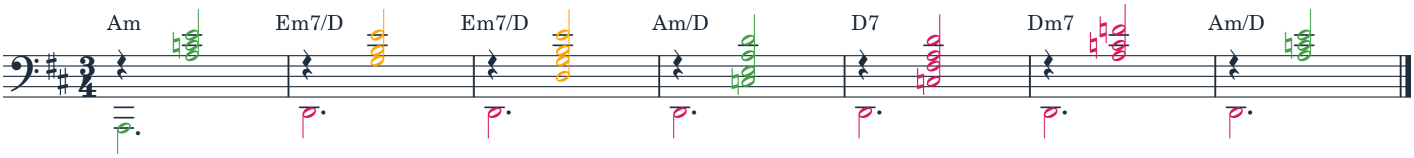
The piece is **78 bars** long and it says almost everything twice: bars 40–71 repeat bars 1–32 **note for note**, and only the last seven bars are new. Page 1 covered the first two blocks; this page covers the middle, and page 3 covers the ending.

bars 1–4 intro — left hand alone	**bars 5–16** the two-chord sway: Gmaj7 · Dmaj7	**bars 17–21** the visitors: F♯m · Bm · Em · Em7 · Dm	**bars 22–31** the bass drops anchor on D
bars 32–36 the climb: Em · F♯m · Bm · A/E · F♯m7/E	**bars 37–39** cadence: Em7 → Am7 → **D major**	**bars 40–71** bars 1–32 again, unchanged	**bars 72–78** the same climb repainted — ends in **D minor**

ABOUT PEDAL POINTS

A **pedal point** is one bass note a composer plants and refuses to move while the harmony above it keeps changing — the name comes from the organ, where one foot can hold a note down. The bass stops agreeing with the chords, so tension builds without anything getting louder and the music feels **held in place**. Composers use one at a start or before a final cadence; Satie uses one in the middle of the piece. Bach's *Prelude in C* holds a G pedal for eight bars (Handout 377).

THE BASS DROPS ANCHOR — BARS 22–31

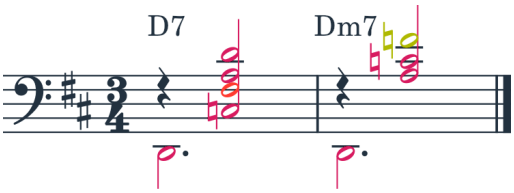


bars 22–28, left hand

Here the chords thicken to **four and five notes** and the piece starts to look hard. It isn't: the bass takes a low **D at bar 23 and holds it for nine bars** while chords you already know — E minor, A minor, D7 — land on top of it. Bars 29–31 repeat bars 24–26.

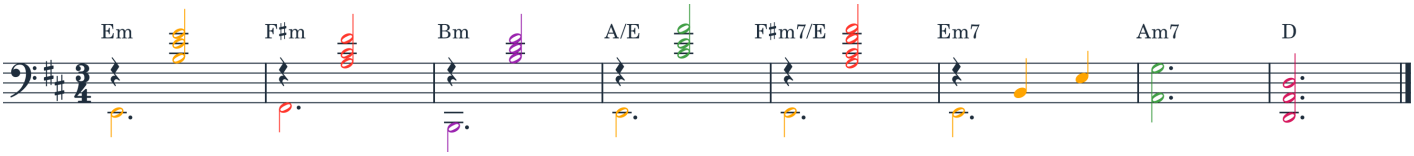
The coloring follows from that: chords change color as they change root, but the pedal D keeps its own **magenta** unbroken from bar 23 to bar 31 — one held note, not a fresh chord tone each bar. Same rule elsewhere: a bass that is not the root (Am/D, A/E) keeps its own color, and when two chords share a root (D7/Dm7, D/Dm) the 3rd keeps its own.

ONE NOTE REPAINTS THE CHORD — BARS 26 AND 27



Put these two bars side by side: same D in the bass, same A and C above it — the only difference is the third. **F♯** makes it **D7**, bright and restless; **F♮** makes it **Dm7**, soft and shadowed. Both are built on D, so both wear D's magenta — only the 3rd shows its own color, and that is the point: F♯ is the **7th degree** of the key, F♮ is **borrowed from outside it**. Satie ends the piece with exactly this swap.

THE CLIMB TO THE CADENCE — BARS 32–39



bars 32–39, left hand — Em amber, F♯m red, Bm purple, A green, D magenta

Out of the pedal the bass walks again — **E → F♯ → B**, then E for three bars — while the chords brighten: Em, F♯m, Bm, A/E, F♯m7/E. The cadence itself is deliberately mild. There is no C♯ leading tone shoving the music home (an A7 would give you one); Satie writes **Em7 → Am7 → D** instead, so the piece arrives without ever raising its voice.

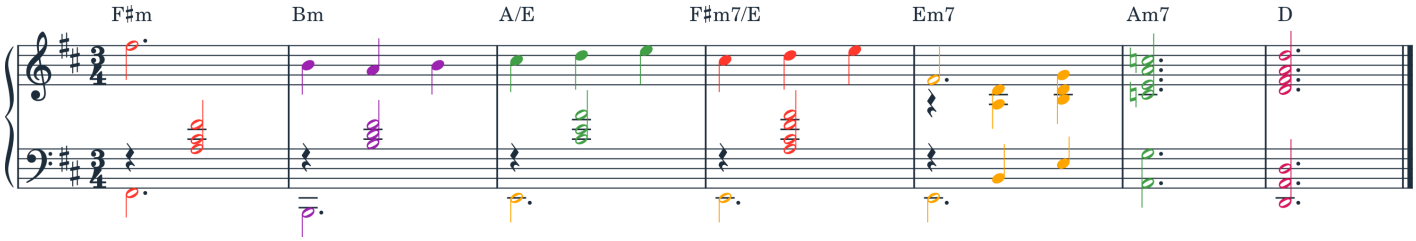
Try it Practice the two layers apart. **1** · Play only the bass — one low D per bar, nine bars — and feel how little it moves. **2** · Play only the chords on beat 2, naming each aloud (Em7, Am/D, D7, Dm7). **3** · Put them together with the pedal caught on beat 1 so the D rings underneath, then loop bars 26–27 until you can hear F♯ and F♮ without looking.

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THE CADENCE — AND THE TWO WAYS IT LANDS

A **cadence** is how a phrase comes to rest: the last two or three chords that tell your ear the music has arrived. This piece has only one cadence, and plays it **twice** — **Em7 → Am7 → D**, at bars 37–39 and again at bars 76–78. Both times the first two chords are identical, note for note; both times a five-bar climb leads into them. What changes is the color of that climb and the chord it finally lands on: **D major** the first time, **D minor** the second. Everything on this page is that one difference. (Bars 40–71 are the first half again, unchanged.)

THE TWO ENDINGS, BAR FOR BAR



first time — bars 33–39; F♯m red, Bm purple, A green, Em7 amber, D magenta — every root a note of G major



second time — bars 72–78; the **olive-gold** chords are borrowed (Handout 384)

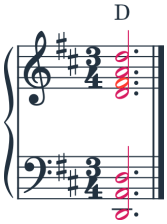
Three things change, and they all pull the same way. **The sharps fall:** every F♯ becomes F♮, and where the first ending leans on C♯ (bars 33 and 35–36) the second plays plain C — so F♯m, Bm and A turn into **Dm, F and Am**, chords that belong to D minor. **The bass stops walking:** instead of F♯–B–E it parks on **E for five straight bars**. **And the melody turns around:** the line that rose C♯–D–E now falls E–D–C. The B stays natural throughout, so this is the gentle, Dorian shade of D minor. Bar 77 — the Am7 — is identical both times. Watch the colors: every chord of the first ending is built on a note of the G-major scale, while the second leans twice on **F major** — F♮ is the one root from outside the key, which is why it wears the muted, borrowed olive-gold.

FIRST TIME	F♯m	Bm	A/E	F♯m7/E	Em7	Am7	D
SECOND TIME	Dm/E	F/E	Am/E	F/E	Em7	Am7	Dm

The last two chords of each line are the same music: **Em7 → Am7** arrives identically both times. Only the chord it opens onto is different.

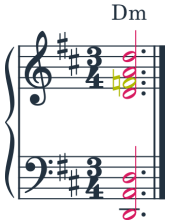
THE LAST CHORD

Bar 39 — D major



Halfway through, the cadence lands on **D major**. The right hand's **F♯** is the 3rd of the chord, and the door stands open: the music can simply start again.

Bar 78 — D minor



The very last bar keeps the same D and A and lowers that one note to **F♮**. The whole change of mood — the reason the ending feels like a goodbye — rests on a single half step.

Try it Play **bars 33–39**, then play **bars 72–78** straight afterwards and listen for the exact moment your ear notices. Next, play just the two final chords — **D major**, then **D minor** — until you can hear that single F move. Then take the whole piece *lent et douloureux*, and let the last chord stay minor: Satie never brightens it again.

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