REGARDING FAURÉ

Edited and translated by

TOM GORDON

Regarding Fauré

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Frontispiece: Portrait of Gabriel Fauré, April 29, 1896, by John Singer Sargent. Reprinted courtesy of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop. Photo credit: David Mathews. Image copyright © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Harvard University Art Museums.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The Gordon and Breach Musicology series, a companion to the *Journal of Musicological Research*, covers a creative range of musical topics, from historical and theoretical subjects to social and philosophical studies. Volumes thus far published show the extent of this broad spectrum, from *Music and Its Social Meanings, The Early Works of Felix Mendelssohn* and *Metaphor: A Musical Dimension* to *Music-Cultures in Contact*. The editors also welcome interdisciplinary studies, ethnomusicological works and performance analyses. With this series, it is our aim to expand the field and definition of musical exploration and research.

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PREFACE

This volume is the fruit of a conference that took place May 18–21, 1995, on the campus of Bishop's University, Lennoxville, Québec. Under the rubric "Gabriel Fauré: His Poets and His Critics," the conference celebrated the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth. It was a festive gathering as several generations of Fauré scholars from Europe and North America met—many for the first time—to honor a composer of enduring music and enormous influence.

Individual chapters of this book were first presented as papers at this meeting. The remarkable variety of focus and method they represent attests to the breadth and scope of Fauré studies today. As one of only a very few international events to mark Fauré's sesquicentenary, the Lennoxville conference brought together nearly all major scholars working in the field, producing a veritable barometer of the state of contemporary Fauré studies. Sessions were characterized by a kind of scholarly euphoria generated by so rich an exchange of information and ideas among a circle of dedicated Fauréans.

Thus the existence of this volume is, in the first instance, indebted to those individuals and organizations who encouraged and supported the conference. Gratitude is first and foremost extended to the Foundation of Bishop's University and Dr. Hugh Scott, then-principal of the University, for the encouragement and financial support that assured success. Acknowledgment is also gratefully given to Dr. David Bevan, then-vice-principal of Bishop's University, for his administrative expertise. The meeting was also sustained by international support from the Corporation universitaire franco-québécoise and its regional representative M. Jean-Pierre Jarjanette, cultural attaché of France in Québec; and from the British Council, through the offices of Mrs. Sarah Dawbarn.

While the conference was under my general administration, I received inestimable support and assistance from several participants.

Among these I must first single out Jean-Michel Nectoux who, as the world's senior Fauré scholar and the composer's most ardent and eloquent advocate, was unstinting in his generous counsel on every detail of the meeting organization. His presence and participation in every session constituted a veritable "laying of the hands" on the next generation of Fauré scholars. No less, I wish to acknowledge seminal contributions of Dr. Mimi Segal Daitz of City College of New York, whose numerous scholarly and material contributions do not, unfortunately, find reflection in this volume. The exhibition of Fauré first editions she assembled from her private collection was a point of tremendous interest for all participants. And, for his daily aid and support, his willingness to engage in every aspect, I acknowledge the contributions of my colleague from the Université de Sherbrooke, Dr. Jean Boivin.

Sessions ran extremely smoothly due to the kind participation of chairs Jacinthe Harbec, Jean Boivin, Alan Gillmor and Michel Carle. Their efficiency was attributable to the administrative team that dedicated months of effort to preparation. Here I express my deepest gratitude to Jane Hospes, administrative assistant in the Department of Music; Dominique Nicol and André L'Ecuyer; and composer-graphist Alain Mayrand, who designed and mounted the exhibit.

The multimedia potentials of a conference provide dimensions to the original gathering that cannot appear on the pages of this book. The aforementioned exhibit is one; a full schedule of splendid concerts was another. For this tremendous enhancement to our meeting, I must acknowledge the generous partnership of Société Radio-Canada, and particularly producer Michèle Vaudry. Among the performers who participated were Canadian pianist Stéphane Lemelin, the French duo of soprano Véronique Dietschy and pianist Philippe Cassard, a chamber ensemble from l'Orchestre Métropolitain de Montréal, and members of Bishop's University performance faculty, including sopranos Michèle Gagné and Eleanor Gang, and pianist Brigitte Poulin.

However seminal the conference was to this book, the book itself has several Maecenas of its own. Some of these are the same; several of the most significant are new. Credit must again be accorded to Bishop's University for financial support of the book through a grant from its Publications Committee and for the partial teaching-load reduction I was granted to dedicate more time to the rewarding task of editing my colleagues' work. Throughout the editorial process I was guided and encouraged by two individuals. Jennifer Williams Brown, series editor for *Musicology, A Book Series*, is gratefully recognized

for her initial and continuing encouragement of this project and her timely and expedient assistance throughout the process. Editor Kirsty Mackay has done professional and cheerful front-line duty throughout the entire assembly of the book, ever-ready with an efficient answer to a neophyte editor's endless questions.

In keeping with the bilingual nature of the conference, several of the essays in this book were originally written in French. Cécile Tardif provided her own translation. I translated the articles by Nicole Labelle, Michel Duchesneau and Jean-Michel Nectoux. For these translations I had access to the expert advice of my colleagues Dominique Nicol and Jean Levasseur. Finally, acknowledgment is made to Eleanor Gang for preparation of the musical examples, with the exception of those found in the chapter by James Sobaskie, who prepared his own examples.

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INTRODUCTION

Rearguard or Avant-garde?

Tom Gordon

Respectfully footnoted by music historians as the mentor of Ravel and his generation; relished by performers for his cornerstone contribution to a peripheral musical genre, the French *mélodie*; revered by musical amateurs for his beatific and suspiciously enduring Requiem, Gabriel Fauré seems to have secured a place firmly on the margins of music history. His career began in the nineteenth century, molded by an apprenticeship in church music. It was crowned in the twentieth century by a respectable term doing yeoman's service as director of France's most conservative musical institution. Both axes of his career—the organ bench at La Madeleine or the director's office at the Conservatoire—were the usual domain of musicians of the second order. And the insinuations of ordinariness do not stop there. The taint of the salon, where so many of his works were first heard, often prejudiced against a fair understanding of them during his lifetime. However worthy his career, however estimable his oeuvre, the suspicion of disproportionate political influence would be unavoidable in his appointment—as an outsider—to the directorate at the Conservatoire. His charming but seemingly laconic personality worked against him in a world where more flamboyant hands commanded attention. And well before he made his own ventures into the twentieth century, he had already been eclipsed by his protegé Maurice Ravel and by the central figure of that next generation, Claude Debussy. These facts do

not delineate the profile of a composer who could be viewed to have changed the course of history.

Yet somehow there is more to Gabriel Fauré than meets history's synopsizing eye. For every Fauré detractor who dismissed the composer as a salon accoutrement, there was a counterpart who denounced him as a dangerous revolutionary. Composer, mentor, champion of a nationalistic esthetic of music, Gabriel Fauré's actual achievements merit more consideration than the passing remark status he has been accorded in most histories. The 150th anniversary of his birth offered an appropriate occasion to refine our understanding of Fauré, to reconsider his multiple roles in the active milieu of turn-of-the-century Paris, and to begin the reassessment of his achievements and position.

Despite the dubious honors enumerated above, Fauré has endured—endured through the valiant championing of a few faithful: his son; Vladimir Jankélévitch; more recently Jean-Michel Nectoux; and, in English, Robert Orledge. Fauré's "life and works" have been well documented in a string of biographies that have appeared steadily from the height of his career to the present. The early biographies, which resonate with affection and personal insight, were written largely by former students and disciples like Louis Vuillermin (1914), Louis Aguettant (1924), Alfred Bruneau (1924), Charles Koechlin (1927), Philippe Fauré-Fremiet (1929), Georges Servières (1930), Emile Vuillermoz (1960) and Marguerite Long (1963).[1] The dispassionate eye of respectful distance and the authority of documentary research were turned to Fauré's legacy in the pioneering study by Vladimir Jankélévitch.[2] This work has been continued in the thoughtful and comprehensive volume of Robert Orledge, whose 1979 biography[3] afforded the most authoritative reference on the composer written in English. And finally, the scholarly dedication of Jean-Michel Nectoux has occasioned an absolute bounty of invaluable documentary and interpretive studies, culminating in his exemplary critical biography, *Gabriel Fauré: les voix du clair-obscur* (1990, translated into English by Roger Nichols and published in 1991 under the title *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life*).[4] Few composers have been as well served by their critics and biographers.

The documentation that has informed these important studies has also become increasingly available in published form. Fauré's considerable activity as a music critic appeared in a selective anthology under the title *Opinions musicales* in 1930.[5] The complete critical writings will soon be published in an edition by Nicole Labelle, who gives us a foretaste of their wealth and diversity in her essay in this

volume. An eloquent and sometimes confessional epistomologist, Fauré's lifelong correspondence with Camille Saint-Saëns; with his wife Marie Fremiet; and with numerous other figures in his life has been edited and anthologized in several complementary volumes by Philippe Fauré-Fremiet and Jean-Michel Nectoux.[6] Rounding out the essential bibliography is the first comprehensive Fauré bibliography, Edward Phillips's *Gabriel Fauré: A Guide to Research.*[7] What then is left to be said to assure a full portrait of the legacy of this composer? Certainly the need for a *catalogue raisonné* and a critical edition of his works remains to be met. But the time is also ripe to turn this bounty of documentation to further account and generate from it evaluative and re-evaluative works. The present collection of essays is an attempt to address this need. For despite the wealth of documentation on his life and works, Fauré's actual import in the remarkable world of French music in the fifty years surrounding the year 1900 is not fully recognized. With much of the documentation of his life and work before us, it may be possible to reclaim Fauré from the margins of music's general history.

The essays in this book propose new consideration of Fauré along a series of tangents exploring first elements of the context that surrounded him and his contributions to it. Among other tools, music criticism—that written by Fauré himself and that directed at his works—proves a vital key to the refinement of our understanding of Fauré's position in the milieu. Second, essays grouped under the rubric "mentor and métier" explore Fauré's contributions beyond composition. First as protégé, then as mentor himself, Fauré's roles in this cycle that assured the flourishing of French music at the turn of the century are here assembled and evaluated, permitting a consideration of his significant contributions to the métier of the French musician. Third, his compositional legacy comes under close and sharpened scrutiny in a series of essays that propose new analytical approaches to old problems of understanding Fauré's distinctive musical language. And finally, a diverse collection of essays centered on Fauré's contributions to the *mélodie* examine his pivotal role in this genre from fresh and innovative points of view.

Context and Criticism

The standard evaluations of Fauré remain colored by received wisdoms. His place in the constellation of *fin-de-siècle* French composers

has been overshadowed by the more evidently revolutionary—a factor hardly surprising given that he witnessed the debut of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* and the birth of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps*. And while it is true that his most popular work—the Requiem—is an eloquent manifestation of the most conservative of nineteenth-century styles, his most important works—*Pénélope*, the late song cycles and chamber works—are both chronologically and stylistically works of the twentieth century. How to address this anomaly? This volume begins by examining some of the contexts that seemed to confine him. How restrictive were they? And what role has criticism played in our perception of Fauré? What role should it play?

Cécile Tardif opens the discussion with a fresh consideration of the famous salons of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Paris. Glibly dismissed as sanctuaries for social privilege and artistic mediocrity, the salon—and even more injuriously, the composer as "salon fixture"—has long been the object of easy derision. Tardif's painstakingly thorough review of what was actually performed, and by whom, in the three orders of Parisian salons, from the last few decades of the nineteenth century to the beginning of World War I, sets the record straight. Performed by the leading virtuosi of the day, flanked by works of Robert Schumann, Jules Massenet, Camille Saint-Saëns, Wagner, Beethoven and Mozart, Fauré's works, as heard in the salons of notable patrons like the Princesse de Polignac and the Comtesse Greffulhe, could have suffered far less noble introductions to the world.

Still another tenet of the Fauré canon has been his position in the emergence of French musical nationalism. A founder of the Société nationale in 1871, diplomatically named president of the Société musicale indépendante in 1909, Fauré became an easily identified and politically safe icon for several conflicting camps of musical nationalists in turn-of-the-century France. Easily identified perhaps, but how defined? Nicole Labelle offers us a *précis* of Fauré's nationalism, its definition, orientations, and roots through a synoptic digest of the composer's own critical writing. Labelle's careful selection and considerate appraisal of Fauré's voluminous and overlooked critical writing reveal the principles underlying the composer's nationalist affinities—however elegant and diplomatic his actual pronouncements might have been.

Two models for a reconsideration of Fauré's chamber music also rely on an examination of context. One of these is tantalizingly speculative, drawing lines of connection to a current in the complementary medium of poetry. The other is premised on an exhaustive

review of contemporary critical and journalistic evidence. Katherine Richards's disciplined speculations explore the work of the Parnassian poets as a metaphor for Fauré's chamber music. Like Fauré, the Parnassians' elegant constructions have seemed faded in critical considerations that have focused on the far more revolutionary oeuvre of the symbolist and impressionist schools. Richards puts forward persuasive arguments positing that the Parnassians' finely tuned amalgam of measured construction and suggestive image offers a suitable analogy for Fauré's chamber works, themselves models of the fusion of structure and imagination.

And Michel Duchesneau summons persuasive evidence to deflate the warhorse of received wisdom surrounding Fauré's actual role in the emergence or re-emergence of French instrumental music. This "renaissance," characterized by the bounty of chamber works concurrent with Fauré's own First Violin Sonata and First Piano Quartet, and long attributed to the venue the Société nationale concerts provided from the 1870s on, is seen to be a partial truth at best. Duchesneau's systematic and comprehensive reception history of Fauré's actual contributions to the genre demonstrates that Fauré's greatest import in the chamber music "renaissance" was less a product of the nineteenth century than is commonly understood. The stimulation to the evolution of the chamber genres, leading, as Duchesneau would say, to the "triumph of genre," was a distinctly twentieth-century phenomenon.

Mentor and Métier

When credit is accorded Fauré, it is as often for his influence as for his achievements. Fauré's role as mentor—most notably of Maurice Ravel—and his position at the center of major musical institutions like the Société nationale and the Conservatoire merit investigation if the real nature of his influence is to be evaluated fairly. Two essays in the collection explore Fauré from this angle.

Sabina Ratner offers us a thoroughly documented portrait of Fauré being mentored by one of the most powerful "influence peddlers" of *fin-de-siècle* France, Camille Saint-Saëns. From this portrait (and supported by the insights into Fauré's roles in the Société nationale and Société musical indépendante offered by Michel Duchesneau), we get a vivid image of the forces that shaped the composer—and even more significantly the composer's destiny in the French musical milieu.

A judicious *mélange* of anecdote and hard document pave the way to a much fuller understanding of Fauré's roles at the Conservatoire in Gail Hilson Woldu's engaging chapter. Affectionate portraits drawn by several of his composition students depict Fauré's teaching as neither pedagogically disciplined nor pedantic, but rooted in sympathy and respect for his students. A detailed *dépouillement* of documents regarding Fauré's entry into the director's office and his notorious reforms at the Conservatoire illuminate this oft-mentioned but rarely analyzed dimension of his career. The volley of critical reaction played out in the Parisian press offers testament to the degree to which Fauré was viewed as a revolutionary in his day.

Analytical Approaches

For too long, Fauré's unique musical language has been dismissed as "hybrid," a description that successfully closes discussion and prevents serious and thoroughgoing analysis. Elusive to be sure, but not so much as to elude the Schenkerian analyses of Edward Phillips and James Sobaskie. The critical apparatus (and no less, the analytical discipline) of the classicist are brought to the service of musical analysis revealing Fauré's distinctive musical dramaturgy in Steven Huebner's "Ulysse Revealed." And a revelation of a different sort awaits Fauré enthusiasts, as Sylvia Kahan draws open the curtain on a virtually unknown Fauré opus, the Prélude to *La Passion.*

Edward Phillips tackles the hybrid question head-on in his exploration of the nature of sonata form in Fauré's chamber music. In his chapter, Phillips delves beneath the surface features of thematic articulation to hypothesize the tonal imperative of forms that seem so attenuated in Fauré's late-nineteenth century application. By highlighting rhythmic obscuration of harmonic and contrapuntal relations at various structural levels, Phillips challenges us to understand the logic of seemingly static tonal relations as an organically derived replacement for conventional tonal kineticism of the sonata form.

Nuance is both the byword and method of James Sobaskie's analytical approach to Fauré's harmonic language. Through an ingenious and thoughtful application of Schenkerian techniques, Sobaskie has determined Fauré's unique language to be not so much elusive as allusive. Three different types of musical allusion—tonal implication, transient tonicization and modal suggestion—are demonstrated to be techniques of the same fundamental gesture of tonal nuancing. The

resultant theory of tonal allusion affords a clear and comprehensive basis for understanding Fauré's distinctive sound and unique style.

The analytical arsenal of an entirely different domain is brought to bear in Steven Huebner's exegesis of the epiphanic moment of Fauré's late and dramatically elusive opera *Pénélope*. The heroine's recognition of her husband only after he successfully strings his own bow and impales his wife's suitors has been a magnet for a variety of readings and much debate among classical scholars. In Huebner's "Ulysse Revealed," this literary controversy affords the premise for an exploration of Fauré's musical dramaturgy. Huebner's careful plotting of the tonalities, motives and textures associated with Ulysse, Pénélope and their interaction, reveals the gradual unfolding of awareness that links the drama of both text and music in Fauré's seemingly enigmatic opera.

And finally, Sylvia Kahan reveals a work that has been heretofore confined to the footnotes of Fauré scholarship. Conceived as part of a complete set of incidental music to a passion play by Edmond Haraucourt (with no less than the "Divine" Sarah Bernhardt in the role of the Virgin Mary), Fauré's *La Passion* fell victim to unrealistic deadlines, theatrical chicanes and, most lethal of all, a lost manuscript. The sole performance of the only complete movement, the Prelude, was a peripheral musical event in 1890. Thanks to her meticulous reconstruction of the full score (reproduced in this volume) from the set of orchestral parts in the Bibliothèque nationale, Sylvia Kahan has presented us with a glimpse into an unknown work that fuses Fauré's theatrical and religious music styles at a pivotal point in his compositional career.

Les Mélodies

Chronologically, quantitatively and—many would argue—qualitatively, the French art song was the most important genre in Fauré's output. His opus one and his preoccupation virtually to his musical *ultima verba*, the *mélodie* was the form to which Fauré consigned his most personal expressions and many of his most original musical conceptions. The four essays in this section focusing on the song display a surprising variety of approaches to this rich and significant repertoire.

Against a vividly drawn backdrop of turn-of-the-century pantheism, Carlo Caballero offers us a nuanced portrait of Fauré's personal religion. Defined more by his actions and associations than by his expressions of belief or disbelief, Fauré's spiritual canon is seen to be a

personal reflection of some of the dominant currents of the time. In turning to Fauré's works for confirmation of the composer's religious sentiment, Caballero quickly passes over the liturgical and overtly devotional—the beatific Requiem included—to the examination of the tangentially Biblical song cycle *La Chanson d'Ève*. Through a close reading of Van Lerberghe's sensual and pantheistic poem and an equally sensitive analysis of Fauré's setting, Carlo Caballero offers rare and impressively documented insight into the rich rapport between the composer's beliefs and the work. With unusual delicacy, the reader is offered revelation about not only the specific work but the man who created it.

Fauré's expression of Eve's spiritual ecstasy segues neatly into a thorough exploration of the symbolist preoccupation with ecstasy in general in Stacy Moore's comparative investigation of the representations of ecstasy in songs by Duparc and Fauré. Against the wealth of critical theory regarding the representation of ecstasy in contemporary German repertoire, Moore delineates a quite different approach in the settings of symbolist poems by French composers, finding the manifestation of ecstasy less in distortion and exaggeration than in the disassociation of climactic moment in text and music, and in the exquisite denial of exaggeration.

Robert Orledge summons the considerable wealth of his experience with Fauré's compositional method in his superbly constructed source study and analysis of the composer's late cycle *Mirages*. Using traditional techniques fueled by new insights, this chapter provides an exemplary illumination of the understated *poème chanté* style of Fauré's twentieth-century *mélodies*. Proceeding through a detailed analysis of choices the composer made, Orledge arrives at a profound understanding of Fauré's deliberately restricted technical means and his attribution of musical significance to the smallest gestures. It is a revelation that casts light on the whole of Fauré's late style.

Finally, Jean-Michel Nectoux offers a vivid and radically new portrait of the songs and the song composer through a thorough investigation of the singers who sang them. From his comprehensive survey of the singers—both those who attained Fauré's ideal and those who failed—Nectoux is able to deduce the essential elements of performance practice in Fauré's *mélodie* even before the age of recorded sound. From his encyclopedic knowledge of the primary sources of Fauré biography, Nectoux draws from little-known memoirs, testimonials, diaries and firsthand accounts of the performances of his songs that Fauré himself condoned. A vivid delineation of desired performance style

emerges and takes its place in a long history of inherently French performance practice. Nectoux's essay provides a concrete demonstration not only that Fauré made significant contributions to the genre of the French art song, shepherding its transformation from the generation of Gounod to that of Debussy—but also that his repertoire shaped the métier of song singer in twentieth-century France.

Rearguard or Avant-garde?

This book seizes the opportunity presented by the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth to investigate the person of Fauré: as teacher, performer and friend. The most charming accoutrement in any salon, at the same time, the most reticent of men, Fauré is here reconsidered and found to be something more than a (salon) fixture or figure (of influence), but a seminal force in a pivotal age. And no less, this occasion has offered the chance to re-evaluate his position as a composer and the legacy of his work. Although some of Fauré's contemporaries considered him a "revolutionary,"[8] Fauré's "revolutionary" status has faded with time, as history has winnowed the official list of avant-gardistes. As we explore the contemporary assignations of Fauré's revolutionary status—and perhaps more importantly as we bring fresh interpretations to his position from the late-twentieth-century vantage point—it is essential to define the nature of his progressive achievements.

Gail Hilson Woldu chronicles his reforms at the Conservatoire—not the stuff of a full-blown revolution, but a progressive jolt to the most conservative of institutions. Similarly, Cécile Tardif permits us to see the possibility of progressive musical developments in even the most conservative venues, the salons. Nicole Labelle sheds light on Fauré's role in the seminal emergence of French musical nationalism, refining our understanding of it as more than musical jingoism, but rather as a response to a profound understanding of the historical legacy of French music. With support from Katherine Richards and Sabina Ratner, Michel Duchesneau proves dramatically that Fauré was a more seminal force in the chamber music renaissance of the twentieth century than of the late nineteenth. Sobaskie and Phillips substitute exactitude for the slippery "hybridism" of typical Fauré analysis, elucidating the composer's personal but very progressive approach to the application of tonal language. Not to be dismissed merely as colorful layering of modal and chromatic elements, Fauré's harmonic language is the result of a carefully considered process that

added delay, elision and allusion to the vocabulary of tonal functions. Complementary analytical approaches are offered by Huebner and Kahan.

Perhaps most strikingly, a group of these essays unfolds a complex of reasons why Fauré deserves to be considered the Schubert of the French *mélodie*. As Jean-Michel Nectoux so compellingly reveals, Fauré not only wrote more than 100 exquisite *mélodies*, he created the need for and defined the métier of *mélodie* singer—persistently writing for a very specific type of voice until that voice perforce evolved out of the salon into the concert hall. And the subtlety of the repertoire he produced is displayed in chapters by Stacy Moore, Carlo Caballero and Robert Orledge.

As many of the chapters in this book clearly demonstrate, once cut free from the Gounodian-knot of *Après un rêve*, Fauré has rightful claim to a place in the constellation of innovative and visionary twentieth-century composers. To posit a place for Fauré in the avant-garde of a generation that produced, on his native soil alone, composers like Varèse, Stravinsky and Debussy would represent an irresponsible act of misplaced fervor. But, at the same time, to consign him solely to the rearguard peripheries of French romanticism is, as these essays so persuasively demonstrate, to overlook the substantial legacy of a musician of supreme dedication and profound originality.

Notes

1. Louis Vuillemin, *Gabriel Fauré et son oeuvre* (Paris: Durand, 1914); Louis Aguettant, "Rencontres avec Gabriel Fauré," ed. by Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Études fauréennes* 19 (1982); Alfred Bruneau, *La Vie et les oeuvres de Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1925); Charles Koechlin, *Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Alcan, 1927); Phillipe Fauré-Fremiet, *Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Rieder, 1929); Georges Servières, *Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: H. Laurens, 1930); Émile Vuillermoz, *Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Flammarion, 1960); Marguerite Long, *Au piano avec Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Julliard, 1963).
2. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Fauré et l'inexprimable* (Paris: Plon, 1974).
3. Robert Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré*, rev. ed. (London: Eulenburg, 1983).
4. Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré: Les Voix du clair obscur* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990). In English, Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré, A Musical Life*, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
5. Gabriel Fauré, *Opinions musicales*, ed. P. B. Gheusi (Paris: Éditions Rieder, 1930).
6. Jean-Michel Nectoux, ed., *Camille Saint-Saëns et Gabriel Fauré, Correspondance*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Klincksieck, 1994); Gabriel Fauré, *Lettres intimes*, ed.

Philippe Fauré-Fremiet (Paris: La Columbe, later Grasset, 1951); Gabriel Fauré, *Correspondance*, ed. Jean-Michel Nectoux (Paris: Flammarion, 1980); and Gabriel Fauré, *Gabriel Fauré: His Life Through His Letters*, rev. ed., comp. and ann. Jean-Michel Nectoux, trans. J.A. Underwood (London: Marion Boyars, 1984).

7. Edward Phillips, *Gabriel Fauré: A Guide to Research* (New York: Garland, 1998).

8. In objecting to Fauré's candidature for the post of professor of composition, Ambroise Thomas called Fauré a "revolutionnaire." As Gail Hilson Woldu points out, there was much concern at the time of his appointment as Director of the Conservatoire that he would initiate "revolutionary" changes at an institution which was named for conservativism and defined by its respect for tradition. See Pierre Lalo, *Le Temps*, August 9, 1921; also Marguerite Long, *Au Piano avec Gabriel Fauré*, (Paris: Billaudot, 1963), 43.

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Fauré and the Salons

Cécile Tardif

In the summer of 1848 when Gabriel Fauré was just a child of three, the composer Édouard Lalo — himself only twenty-five at the time — came up with the idea of founding a nation-wide, democratic musical association, the *Association des artistes musiciens*, for the purpose of "performing or having performed, as well as publishing, every musical composition which an elected jury would deem truly worthy of the art." Lalo also petitioned the state for "suitable premises in which to house administrative and publishing offices or to give concerts."[1] Before the project could be realized the Revolution of 1848 (among other things) intervened and Lalo's ambitious dream never saw the light of day.

Twenty-two years later, in 1871, another revolutionary jolt set a similar project in motion, this time under the name Société nationale de musique. Édouard Lalo was among its founding members. So, too, was twenty-five-year-old Gabriel Fauré. French composers seemed finally to have found a way to make their voices heard, responding to a need that had been felt for a long time.

Using these two dates, 1848 and 1871, as reference points, where did French composers have their works performed between the expression of the need for an organization promoting French music and its realization? And even after 1871, could the Société nationale alone, however great its importance and influence, possibly fulfil this enormous mandate: to give a voice to French instrumental music, and in particular to the *mélodie* and chamber music? Was it in concert halls, then, that the public discovered the new musical compositions?

The answer is no. To a large extent, French music lived, right up until the First World War, in the musical salons, those very salons in which Gabriel Fauré was frequently seen and his music performed. The fact that he was a "fixture" of Paris's high society

salons has often been held against him, but this reproach has to be questioned. Rather than trying to find excuses for his presence in the salons, would it not be better to explore the phenomenon of the Parisian salons to understand why they were so popular and to determine their true influence in musical circles? A fresh look at the salons, trying in the process to purge them of several decades' worth of prejudices, will enable us to better understand their real value.

The mere mention of the music salon almost inevitably evokes the image of people gathered about the piano, swooning as they listen to a brooding pianist or a ravishing young singer... who is probably really in search of a suitable husband! This ever-present image represents a stereotype greatly disparaging of the salons. If there is indeed sometimes a morsel of truth in stereotypes, there is also room to question whether the music salons consisted only of closed circles where women yawned with boredom behind their fans while listening to insipid melodies performed by more or less mediocre musicians, while the gentlemen took refuge at the buffet. Were they truly nothing more than high society enclaves where the guests couldn't tell the difference between Debussy's *Fêtes* and a march by Meyerbeer?[2]

Although these impressions carry a certain element of truth, they are at the same time incomplete, reflecting only a small portion of the intense musical activity that ruled the day in the Parisian salons. While some musical salons may well have generated these negative reactions, many others presented an entirely different picture. We will then examine some of the characteristics of the music salons before we take a closer look at the musical activity that took place within their walls.

There is a tendency to consider the salons as monolithic and to associate them with activities of an eminently bourgeois type. In truth, contemporary sources testify that at the beginning of the Third Republic in 1875, at about the time when Fauré made his appearance on the musical scene, the salons fell into three broad categories: aristocratic, bourgeois and artistic.[3] While the boundaries between these categories are not always clear, the salons in each group do share a certain number of characteristics which will be presented below.

The Aristocratic Salon

The aristocratic salons are the most often ridiculed nowadays, but they are also the ones about which we know the least. Many of them were witness to musical performances of great quality, and a few undoubtedly contributed to the blossoming of French chamber music.

It was in the seventh arrondissement, the Faubourg Saint-Germain, that the old aristocracy held their salons. After the important work done by Baron Haussmann to redesign Paris, a few of the more adventurous noble families emigrated to the fringes of the eighth or the sixteenth arrondissements. But whatever the address, the residences shared certain characteristics: the mansions were vast — of proportions practically unimaginable today — and the "salons" in which the guests were entertained resembled small concert halls more closely than they did salons as we know them today. Thus, when Fauré played his works at the Palais Rose, the mansion of the extravagant Count Boni de Castellane, it was not for a small group gathered about the piano, but for an audience of 600. When he played at the receptions of the legendary Robert de Montesquiou, no fewer than 500 people applauded his work.

These balls or grand receptions, however, were the exception. Most salons were less ostentatious, and the hostess generally had a fixed day on which she entertained. But even these more modest salons were very impressive; the renowned salon of the Princesse de Polignac accommodated no fewer than 100 listeners, all comfortably seated in armchairs. The Princesse — of whom more will be said below — wasn't always satisfied with chamber music. Therefore, she often treated her guests to a full orchestra, sometimes even the chorus from the Opéra![4]

The Bourgeois Salon

The salons of the bourgeois type were concentrated in the recently fashionable eighth arrondissement, home to bankers, industrialists, businessmen, lawyers and upper level bureaucrats, all people eager to move up the social ladder or to maintain a privileged

position in society. One way to achieve this was to have a salon to which the hostess had managed to attract the musical "star" of the day, whether composer, pianist, violinist or singer.

Although the newspapers of the period offer few glimpses into the goings-on in these bourgeois gatherings, it is quite clear that some — and gradually more and more — of these salons could rival their aristocratic counterparts. Emulation of every detail of the aristocratic lifestyle was, after all, the credo of the bourgeoisie.

The Artistic Salon

Curiously, the artistic salons are the least known or discussed today, and yet they played a considerable role in Parisian musical life. These salons could be found mainly in the ninth arrondissement, where a great many musicians lived. For the most part, the salons held by the artists were more modest than those of the aristocracy or the bourgeoisie. But, whether in their style or in the guests who frequented them, some of the artistic salons equaled those of the aristocratic or bourgeois type. For example, singer Pauline Viardot's salon was very impressive both for its size and for the Cavaillé-Coll organ enthroned at its center. Pianist and composer Louis Diémer gradually moved his salon into a small concert hall added to his residence in 1904. Similarly, one can cite the piano makers Érard, Pleyel and Herz, whose salons also became concert halls (those of Érard and Pleyel are still in use today).

Fauré in the Salons

Gabriel Fauré attended all three types of salons in the multiple capacities of pianist, composer, guest, friend, colleague, and, ultimately, as director of the Conservatoire. In his younger days, he was often seen at the home of Camille Clerc, a successful industrialist and enlightened patron of the arts. Clerc and his wife Marie treated Fauré as a son, and Monsieur Clerc's influence being far from negligible, it was he who convinced the German publisher Breitkopf and Härtel to print his protégé's Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 13 in 1876. This work, composed at the

Clercs', had already known considerable success in the Paris salons.

In 1872 Camille Saint-Saëns initiated Fauré to the "official" world of the artistic salons by introducing him to Pauline Viardot. It was in her salon that he encountered many influential people and soon he found his name on several important guest lists: at the home of painter Madeleine Lemaire, gatherings that drew the cream of society; and at the "matinees" of the famous voice teacher Mathilde Marchesi, events which regularly attracted the latest celebrities among the touring musicians visiting Paris, including Liszt. A young composer like Fauré, just embarking on his career, would find much to interest and excite him in these gatherings. And, on the pragmatic side, the artistic salons often served as a springboard for recently launched careers.

Gabriel Fauré was also a "regular" at two of the most prestigious aristocratic salons of Paris: those of the Princesse de Polignac and the Comtesse Greffulhe. The Princesse de Polignac, née Winnaretta Singer, of the sewing-machine empire, had nothing in common with the artistic ignoramuses generally associated with the aristocracy or the bourgeoisie. She was, rather, a pianist of remarkable abilities and a watercolorist of considerable talent. History already pays her tribute as one of the great patrons of the arts: several masterworks are indebted to her deep knowledge and appreciation of the arts and to her unfoundering generosity.[5]

Similar esteem is accorded to the Comtesse Greffulhe, née Princesse de Caraman-Chimay, who demonstrated an honest talent as a pianist. Fauré was often to be seen in her salon, and they kept up a regular correspondence over the years.[6] The composer attended many other salons, including that of the Comtesse de Guerne, whose voice was described as "ravishing," and who was considered one of the two or three great living singers by no less than Marcel Proust.[7]

It is hard to believe that attending any or all of these salons could possibly have been detrimental to the development of Gabriel Fauré's talent or to that of any of the other composers who frequented them. Quite the contrary, most benefitted greatly from attending. While it would be beyond the scope of

this discussion to describe the whole range of musical activity that flourished in the salons, a brief overview of the composers, performers, and guests who frequented them will help dispel some of the injustices that have long plagued the history of the musical salon.

The Composers

The label "salon music" would be regarded as a compliment by few composers today. But although the connotations of the term are unquestionably dismissive, the meaning itself is notably vague. Does it, for example, refer to works composed specifically for the salon — *mélodies*, romances, little piano pieces, etc. — ephemeral works for "fast-food" type consumption? Or can it be taken to refer to the vast repertoire of chamber music — quartets, quintets, etc. — played in the salons? It is not our purpose to answer these questions. Rather, in what follows the focus will be on the music that was played in the salons, should it be labeled "salon music" or not.

The data collected from period newspapers and journals is quite surprising in this regard. The reality, once again, is far from the customary clichés. It is impossible to reproduce here all the analyses which led to these results. However, it seems worthwhile to examine in some detail the profile that emerges concerning the ten most popular composers whose music was played in the salons (Table 1.1).[8]

While some of the names that appear in the table are to be expected — Schumann, Schubert, Massenet, for example — others come as a complete surprise: Wagner and Bach could not be more remote from the very notion of "salon composer." Some names that are not recorded in the table (because they appeared in ranks 11 or lower) are even more surprising: Brahms, Couperin, Debussy, Gluck, Rameau, to name a few. But perhaps most astonishing is the absence of some expected names, such as Cécile Chaminade, whose name has long been associated with the epithet "salon composer."[9]

According to our data, Gabriel Fauré ranked fourth among the composers most played in the aristocratic or bourgeois

salons, but twenty-first in the artistic salons. (Averaging his position in the three types of salons, Fauré ranked eleventh.) Does this mean that if the Marquise de Brou, the Comtesse Greffulhe, and above all the Princesse de Polignac had not believed in Fauré's talent — or at least in his capacity to attract guests to their salons — that we might not today know the *Cinq mélodies de Venise*, the First Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 13 or the First Piano Quintet, op. 89? If, in April 1894, the Comtesse de Saussine and, a year later, Madeleine Lemaire had not opened the doors of their salons to Fauré for the first performances of *La Bonne Chanson*, would that work still be gathering dust at the bottom of a drawer?[10] Probably not, trusting that talent and genius will always prevail. But it does suggest that the role that the music salons played in the propagation of the vocal and chamber music of French composers was far from minimal.

Table 1.1 showing the ten most popular composers affords another interesting observation. According to the data collected from *Le Figaro*, living composers garnered four of the top ten places in salon popularity. The data drawn from *Le Ménestrel* counts six living composers among its "top ten." This certainly represents a far greater receptivity to contemporary works than exists today.

Table 1.1.
Ten most popular composers ranked by frequency of performances

Rank	*Le Figaro*	*Le Ménestrel*	Combined
1	Robert Schumann	Jules Massenet	Jules Massenet
2	Camille Saint-Saëns	Louis Diémer	Robert Schumann
3	Jules Massenet	Ambroise Thomas	Camille Saint-Saëns
4	Gabriel Fauré	Charles Gounod	Louis Diémer
5	Richard Wagner	Robert Schumann	Charles Gounod
6	Franz Schubert	W.A. Mozart	W.A. Mozart
7	W.A. Mozart	L. van Beethoven	L. van Beethoven
8	Charles Gounod	Frédéric Chopin	Frédéric Chopin
9	J.S. Bach Gabrielle Ferrari	Camille Saint-Saëns	Franz Schubert
10	L. van Beethoven	Théodore Dubois	Ambroise Thomas

The Performers

Today's commonly held assessment of the performers heard in the various salons is far from flattering. Again, are the stereotypes to be trusted? Once more, the newspapers and journals of the day reveal some rather surprising facts, thus discrediting some of the most persistent preconceptions.

As expected, singers overwhelmingly dominate the long list of performers who appeared in the salons. What is less expected is that most of them, far from being mere society amateurs, were either pensionnaires at the Opéra de Paris and the Opéra-Comique or international stars.

What society hostess today wouldn't be ecstatic to welcome Jean or Édouard de Reszké, Pol Plançon, Jean Lassalle, Nellie Melba, Emma Eames, Emma Calvé, Rose Caron, Mary Garden, Adelina Patti? Many other names that appear in the accounts may have diminished recognition value today, but they were nonetheless among the great names of the day in the lyric art: Gabrielle Krauss, Felia Litvinne, Lucien Muratore, Gabriel Soulacroix, etc.

As for the pianists, imagine a roll-call including Diémer, Fauré, Saint-Saëns, de Greef, Paderewski, de Pachmann, Planté, Pugno, and many others. Violinists included Alard, de Bériot, Boucherit, Marsick, Sarasate, Enesco, Ysaÿe, Kreisler, etc. Among the cellists: Brandoukoff, Franchomme, Delsart, Lebouc, Casals, van Waefelghem. The very best string quartets were also frequently asked to perform in the salons: Quatuor Marsick, Quatuor Capet, Quatuor Poulet, Quatuor Parent, among others. The litany could go on. This list, partial though it is,[11] relegates the image of the mediocre salon performer to the shadows of memory.

It is important to remember, when looking at these illustrious names, that many of the performers were amateurs rather than professional musicians. It was not uncommon at all to see the great names and the simple amateurs share the stage — whether in the salon or the concert hall. Fauré did not hesitate to take this fact as a compositional determinant. In a letter to Henri Heugel, publisher and music editor of *Le Ménestrel*, Fauré

announces the release of an *Ave Maria* for two sopranos. He adds:

> By its very nature, this *Ave Maria* will be more appropriate for a chapel or a salon than a large church. Indeed, I am convinced that its career will be made above all in the society circles of young women and girls and I count on the lovely students of Mme Trélat to give its debut. Near the end there are two measures where I have indicated an *ossia* in small notes for the use of singers who cannot negotiate the high B.[12]

Thus Fauré did not hesitate to anticipate and accommodate the performance level of his eventual performers. He did not always seek out the best known performers for his works, particularly his songs. (See Table 1.2: Fauré works inventoried in accounts in *Le Figaro* and *Le Ménestrel*.) Quite the contrary, in fact, is evidenced in a letter he wrote to the Comtesse Greffulhe:

> And I am certain that there are a great many of the songs from the last few years that you do not know yet! I dream that you will hear them with the ideal performers — none of whom, by the way, come from the ranks of professionals. It is rather the amateurs who understand me and best transmit my songs ...[13]

Fauré may seem to have preferred amateurs to professionals, but it was, nevertheless, the great performers, such as Eugène Ysaÿe, Édouard Risler, Claire Croiza, Jeanne Raunay, who made the largest contribution to the dissemination of his works. (See Table 1.3: Some performers who interpreted Fauré's works.) None of these performers, as Robert Orledge has so correctly observed, disdained to be heard in the salons.[14] In the end Fauré always seemed to opt for the right performer in the right situation. He did not hesitate to entrust the first performance of his First Piano Quintet[15] to the Princesse de Polignac's salon, for he knew that he could count on performances of the highest level, including his own at the piano.

Table 1.2.
Fauré works inventoried in accounts in *Le Figaro* and *Le Ménestrel*

Mélodies	Piano	Chamber music	Other
Accompagnement	7[e] Barcarolle	Berceuse	Choeur de la Fête d'Alexandrie (?)
Après un rêve	Dolly	Élégie	En Prière
Automne	3[e] Impromptu	1[er] Quatuor, op. 15	Madrigal
Les Berceaux	4[e] Impromptu	Quatuor	Pavane
La Bonne Chanson	Nocturne	Quintette pour piano et cordes	Requiem
La Chanson d'Ève	Thème et variations	Romance	
Chanson napolitaine (?)	3[e] Valse-Caprice	Sonate pour violon et piano, op. 13	
Clair de lune			
Le Don silencieux			
La fleur qui va sur l'eau			
Mandoline			
Nell			
Octobre (?)			
Poème d'un jour			
Les Roses d'Ispahan			

The Guests

It would be naïve to believe that the guests who crowded into the salons were there solely for the love of music — just as it would be naïve to make the same assumption about those who attended the opera or concerts. Indeed, we should not forget that the guests of the salons and the audiences at concerts were much the same crowd.

Who, then, were the guests at these musical gatherings? Were they at all like Marcel Proust's characters? Like, for example, Mme Verdurin who shed torrents of tears and was afflicted with an eight-day migraine each time she would hear the "little phrase" from the Vinteuil Violin Sonata (one could just as easily substitute Fauré's Violin Sonata). Were they more like the aristocratic Mme de Cambremer, the beneficiary of a solid musical education, who nodded her head in time with the music? Or

Table 1.3.
Some performers who interpreted Fauré's works in salons

Works	Performers
Quintet for Piano and Strings	Gabriel Fauré and the Quatuor Capet
Piano Quartet, op. 15	Gabriel Fauré Louis Diémer (piano) Jules Boucherit (violin) Georges Enesco (violin) P. Monteux (viola) André Hekking (cello) Joseph Salmon (cello)
Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 13	Gabriel Fauré Georges Enesco Henri Marteau (violin) Guillaume Rémy (violin) Firmin Touche (violin)
Various *mélodies*	Gabriel Fauré Maurice Bagès Jane Bathori Mathilde Colonne Felia Litvinne Jeanne Remacle
Piano works	Gabriel Fauré Alfred Cortot Léon Delafosse Louis Diémer Édouard Risler

were they rather more like the bourgeois Charles Swann, so deeply moved by the new music he heard in Mme Verdurin's salon as to become virtually obsessed by it?[16]

In fact, the majority of women who attended these matinees and soirees had received a musical education that would be the envy of many today: piano and singing lessons, usually with the great masters of the day, including Gabriel Fauré. Although few of these young women became professional musicians — this, after all, was never the goal — it is difficult to believe that the teaching they received had no effect whatsoever on the development of their musical sensibilities. It is unimaginable that

the likes of Princesse de Polignac, Comtesse Greffulhe, and Comtesse de Guerne would be deaf or indifferent to the harmonies that resounded in their salons. Sadly, it appears to be true that most of the gentlemen preferred the buffet to the musical menu ...

As for the guests that attended the salons of the artistic type, it must be emphasized that they were colleagues, music teachers, or enlightened amateurs. However few details we may have about what transpired in the artistic salons, it is certain that those who attended were all fully capable of appreciating the true value of the works and performers they heard.

If, as is often believed, some among the guests only wished to be seen at their umpteenth *séance musicale*, others — and these were undoubtedly far more numerous than suspected — fully savored the joy of hearing works that they might not otherwise have had the opportunity to discover.

Conclusion

The fact that Gabriel Fauré played and was played in the music salons was not a lapse of professional judgment that must be exonerated, excused or hidden. Indeed, the categorical scorn that has been levied on the salons is repudiated by the extent to which the salons protected, nourished and encouraged the burgeoning of chamber music and the French art song. (See Table 1.4: Soirees or matinees devoted to Fauré's music.)

Table 1.4.
Soirees or matinees devoted to Fauré's music

Salon	Date
Beaunier, Mme André	1908 06 25
Behrens, Mme Walter	1898 12 17
Bibesco, Princesse Alexandre	1901 02 12
Blondel, M. et Mme Albert	1907 02 02
Fleury, Mme de	1901 04 01
"Five o'clock" du *Figaro*	1903 04 20
Lemaire, Madeleine	1895 03 26

In 1922 the music salons, having been swept away along with an entire lifestyle in the squall of the First World War, were at death's door. Their memory had already begun its long descent into purgatory. At that time, a journalist remarked snidely to Fauré that he had experienced much success in the salons. From the old composer, the journalist received this admirably simple and sincere response: "I was very preoccupied with material needs. I had good friends and, when one is ignored by the general public, it is satisfying to be understood by someone."[17] What finer tribute could one find to the music salons and to the women who, in great majority, held them?

Notes

[1] Édouard Lalo, *Correspondance*, ed. Joël-Marie Fauquet (Paris: Aux Amateurs de livres, 1989), 43.

[2] Marcel Proust, *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1993), 368.

[3] Information regarding the music salons has been drawn from Cécile Tardif, "Les Salons de musique à Paris sous la Troisième République" (master's thesis, Université de Montréal, 1995).

[4] The information is drawn from accounts which appeared in *Le Figaro*, a daily newspaper favored at the time by the aristocrats and the bourgeois.

[5] On this subject, see Michæl de Cossart, *Une Américaine à Paris: La Princesse Edmond de Polignac et son salon 1865–1943* (Paris: Plon, 1979).

[6] Several letters offer important insights on the composer's activities in the salons. On this subject, see Gabriel Fauré, *Correspondance*, ed. Jean-Michæl Nectoux (Paris: Flammarion, 1980). Also of interest: Anne de Cossé Brissac, *La Comtesse Greffulhe* (Paris: Perrin, 1991).

[7] Marcel Proust, "La Comtesse de Guerne" in *Écrits mondains* (Paris: Union générale d'Éditions, 1993), 382.

[8] It should be noted that the statistics drawn from *Le Figaro* deal almost exclusively with the salons of the aristocratic and bourgeois types, that is to say the society salons, while those recorded in *Le Ménestrel* deal mostly with the artistic salons.

[9] For a complete list of composers whose name appeared in the accounts, see Tardif, *Les Salons*, xi–xxvi.

[10] Tables 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4 summarize elements of Fauré's presence in the salons, showing which of his works were performed (Table 1.2), performers who championed his compositions (Table 1.3), and salons dedicated wholly to the music of Fauré (Table 1.4).

[11] See Tardif, *Les Salons*, lxviii–lxxxiii, for the complete list of the 1078 performers inventoried.

[12] "Cet *Ave Maria* est plus destiné, par son caractère, à la chapelle ou au salon, qu'à une grande église. Je pense que sa carrière se fera surtout dans les cours mondains de jeunes femmes et jeunes filles, et je compte sur les belles élèves de Mme Trélat pour le lancer. Il y a, vers la fin, deux mesures où j'ai indiqué un *ossia* en petites notes, à l'usage des cantatrices que le *si aigu* gênerait." Fauré, *Correspondance*, 260.

[13] "Et je suis sûr qu'il est beaucoup de mélodies, parmi celles des dernières années, que vous ne connaissez pas encore! Je rêve de vous les faire entendre avec les interprètes parfaits, et je n'en connais pas parmi les professionnels. Ce sont les amateurs qui me comprennent et me traduisent le mieux. ... " Ibid., 249.

[14] Robert Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1979), 30.

[15] Ibid., 179.

[16] Marcel Proust, *Du Côté de chez Swann* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

[17] "J'étais très pris par la vie matérielle. J'ai eu de bons amis, et quand on est ignoré du grand public, on est heureux d'être compris de quelques-uns." Roger Velbelle, *Excelsior*, 12 June 1922, quoted in Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Fauré*, rev. ed. (Paris: Seuil, 1995), 30.

Gabriel Fauré: Music Critic for *Le Figaro*

Nicole Labelle

On 12 February 1911 Claude Debussy wrote to Edgar Varèse: "Criticism ought to be an art, but as practiced today, it is no more than a job."[1]

Gabriel Fauré first practiced the art of criticism for *Le Figaro* on 2 March 1903, writing a review of a performance of César Franck's *Les Béatitudes* at the Châtelet — a work far removed from Fauré's own compositional style. It was Gaston Calmette (1858–1914), then editor-in-chief of the paper, who entrusted Fauré with the post of music critic. Through much of the next eighteen years Fauré would review the whole gamut of musical performances — from Sunday concerts to operatic premieres in Paris and, more occasionally, in Monte-Carlo and Brussels at La Monnaie. His weekly contributions to the Paris daily continued throughout the autumn and winter seasons up until the summer of 1905, when he was named Director of the Conservatoire national supérieur de musique in Paris. With the considerable demands of his new post, Fauré confined his critical excursions to only the most important operatic premieres, a few exceptional revivals, and the occasional symphonic concert.

With the death of Gaston Calmette — killed on 16 March 1914 by a revolver shot fired by Madame Caillaux in revenge for *Le Figaro*'s press campaign launched against her husband — Fauré remained at the paper "only because Robert de Flers[2] begged me to," but contributed very irregularly. His last two articles were devoted to the revival of Paul Dukas's *Ariane et Barbe-bleue* at the Opéra-Comique on 4 May 1921 and to *Les Troyens* at the Opéra on 9 June 1921. Between 1906 and 1921 Fauré would heed the call of critical writing only occasionally, publishing between five and ten articles a year.

What follows is based primarily on a collection of Fauré's music criticism published in 1930 under the title of *Opinions musicales*.[3]

According to Philippe Fauré-Fremiet, the composer produced "more than three hundred articles, many of which have no more than passing interest."[4] In addition to the texts published in *Le Figaro* Fauré wrote opinion pieces for other newspapers, granted interviews, responded to questionnaires and contributed prefaces to a variety of publications.[5] Taken together these writings afford the reader a glimpse at the composer's reflections not only on contemporary music, but also on the music of the past. The corpus of Fauré's writings offers a window on the musical life of two decades of the twentieth century, bringing back to life great moments of opera and the symphonic repertoire from the illustrious years of the Belle Époque.[6]

In a very few pages *Opinions musicales* succeeds in creating a vivid image of Fauré's career as music critic at *Le Figaro*.[7] Much of the music discussed was written by the composers who have vanished from memory; still others have not stood the test of time. The collection contains sixty-three articles originally published between 2 March 1903 and 9 June 1921.[8] The selection is far from comprehensive, virtually excluding Fauré's commentaries on performers. The reviews retained in the anthology cover thirty composers, ranging from Rameau to Richard Strauss and one performer, the famous violinist, Josef Joachim. An inventory of the composers considered reveals that the majority — seventeen — were French. The others included seven Germans, one Austrian, three Italians, one Hungarian, and one Russian. Almost fifty of the articles are concerned with operatic performances. The remaining reviews discuss exclusively symphonic repertoire.

Although the place which critical writing occupied in Fauré's professional life was not negligible, the composer himself considered it of secondary importance in comparison with his other activities. His criticism may have lacked the punch, the ardor and the humor of a Berlioz or a Debussy. Nor did he pronounce himself with the assurance of a Saint-Saëns. Nonetheless his texts present a great deal both to engage the reader's interest and charm the imagination, all the while offering numerous insights on standard and obscure repertoire. A profound knowledge of each work guides the hand of the critic and every text bears the

mark of Fauré's detailed analysis and penetrating reflection. The value which these writings retain still today is attributable to the fact that they are indeed the result of the contemplations of a profoundly musical mind cast across the fertile concert life of Paris in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Although these articles sound faint echoes of the famous battles of national taste — French, German or Italianate — which still waged on at the beginning of the twentieth century in select circles of French society, they are strikingly mute on the subject of the startling new works of the period which completely revolutionized musical language. Fauré's music itself marked the conclusion of a characteristic esthetic of the French tradition. As the new musical world emerged, this tradition became increasingly anachronistic. At the same time, it must not be overlooked that Fauré lent his support to works from the musical avant-garde, even though he never wrote on them, through his patronage of the SMI.

The reviews Fauré published in *Le Figaro* express his reactions to signet events on the Parisian musical scene. They reveal his opinions and his reflections on the composers whom he admired, and, on occasion, on composers whose music he found insupportable.

One of Fauré's foremost objectives in his critical writings was to do justice to the music. Above all he sought to explain and elucidate the works he discussed to a discerning and inquisitive public. Rich and diversified in its vocabulary, his writing style in these texts is refined, delicate and sensitive, while still testifying to a clarity and precision of thought. His critical attitude was never arrogant, distinguished always by careful consideration, delicacy and tact — however conscientious he was in transmitting frank opinion to his readers. Indeed his writings mirror the character and personality of Fauré himself. And if a large part of the texts which appeared in *Le Figaro* are devoted to French music, this only serves to confirm a certain nationalism on the part of Fauré.

For the quantity as well as the quality of the articles Fauré dedicated to them, Berlioz, Saint-Saëns and Massenet occupied pride of place among the French composers. Wagner, as one

might expect, took the honors among the Germans. In what follows Fauré's musical opinions on composers and their music are considered under the rubrics of the three national schools which the composer himself identified: French, German and Italian.

French Music

Within this gallery of portraits the most venerable composer honored by Fauré's pen was Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764). For Fauré, Rameau was a pivotal rediscovery. Excerpts from *Les Indes galantes* (1735) which he heard at the Concert Colonne in December 1904 prompted Fauré to petition Monsieur Carré to stage the complete work at the Opéra-Comique. Four years later Fauré attended a performance of *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733) at the Opéra. Hearing Rameau's works was for him a revelation. "In spite of a genre and of a style so long forgotten as to seem new, the beauties of this music, the fullness of its character, its variety and the movement which enlivens it become apparent only little by little." Fauré became the defender of a repertoire that had been neglected for far too long and demanded that "the state-supported theaters add these works to their repertoire, just as the works of Corneille, Racine and Molière formed the cornerstone of the repertoire of the Comédie-Française and the Odéon. In equity to the cultural glories of our past, should not Rameau be accorded the same status? And would not our sense of distinct national culture be the better for it?"[9] Fauré, like Saint-Saëns, encouraged the rediscovery of this essential corpus from the French musical tradition which was only coming to light at the turn of the century. Fauré's efforts on behalf of the repatriation of Rameau demonstrate his belief that the French musical institutions needed to return to the earliest sources of a genuinely national art, as formulated in the eighteenth century.

Fauré's reviews of Berlioz from the years 1903–1904 were the occasion of somewhat laconic commentaries concerning the public which preferred *La Damnation de Faust* to *L'Enfance du Christ* because "they preferred to consider what lay before them

rather than what was beyond them."[10] The Requiem aroused enthusiasm "where the taste for large-scale dramatic effects and the indifference for religious music — or indeed for music altogether — can find equal satisfaction."[11]

In general, the music of Hector Berlioz (1803–1869) provoked a very enthusiastic reaction from Fauré. In 1921 he pronounced *Les Troyens* as Berlioz's masterpiece: a mirror of the composer himself in which one "rediscovers most of the characteristic elements of his genius. From the first note to the last, it is pure music. It was already Mediterranean music, long before Nietzsche coined the term to describe certain qualities of our music."[12] He concludes by proclaiming that the whole of Berlioz's music must be considered "as a block."

Fauré rattled the lethargy of the public — always deaf to innovation — still further in regard to Georges Bizet's *Carmen* (1874); he found himself totally incapable of understanding why "music of such total clarity, freshness, color, sensitivity and charm did not win over the public from its first appearance." He reminded that "it had been necessary for this music to go abroad to achieve the extraordinary popularity which it had acquired." And he regretted the conviction that the "injustice which Bizet (1838–1875) suffered would rear up in the path of other artists again and again to the end of time."[13]

Ernest Chausson (1855–1899), Henri Duparc (1848–1943) and César Franck (1822–1890) were among the composers affiliated with the Société nationale whose works Fauré discussed. On the subject of Chausson's *Roi Arthus*, Fauré recalls the Wagnerian line of descent: "Across the *Tristan*-esque atmosphere there is a blossoming of themes and harmonic formulas heard time and again in *Parsifal*, as well as in *Götterdämmerung*." But beyond these influences Fauré noted "Chausson's personality which comes to the fore during the second half of the work."[14]

Admiration permeates his remarks on the subject of Duparc's symphonic poem *Lénore*, first performed by the Société des concerts du Conservatoire. Fauré detects in Duparc's works generally "a constant attention to form, sustained melodic and harmonic invention, and, above all, a profound sensitivity.

Imagination, expansiveness and expressivity abound in this music, served by a secure and admirable talent."[15]

The text devoted to Franck is a model of diplomacy. Whatever his feelings toward the person and music of this composer, Fauré enumerated tactfully — using a language lightly colored with humor — the various manifestations of inept writing in Franck's *Béatitudes*. Thus, "the inevitable similarity of effect, the frequent return of the same musical expression — however exquisitely beautiful it may be — certain weaknesses in orchestration, the wearisome uniformity of the bass lines — virtual pedal points — all this imposes on the work a ponderous monotony. Even the hardiest and most faithful listeners did not reach the eighth *Béatitude* — fully as beautiful as the others — without already having had to repress some irreverent symptom of weariness!"[16]

Comparing performances of the celebrated Symphony in D Minor, "the Andante of which represents [in 1904] one of the most beautiful and most noble pages of contemporary music," Fauré found that the interpretation "conducted by Monsieur Colonne was a bit too slow compared with last season's performance by Monsieur Chevillard which was rather too lively. These two musicians leave the door open to a third interpretation which might consist of consulting the composer's indications and then respecting them. There's nothing to suggest that might not be the best."[17]

For the premiere of *L'Étranger* the founder of the Schola Cantorum received a warm review. If Fauré "regretted the intrusion of a character as symbolic as the Stranger in a real life drama," he could admit, on the other hand, that "the poem as imagined by Vincent d'Indy (1851–1931) represented by its conception, if not its text, a work of the highest and most noble character." After having pointed out "the climactic points in the score where the great talent of Monsieur d'Indy reveals itself in a state of superb and absolute independence," he concedes that "individuality which had been in short supply in *Fervaal* shines forth fully in *L'Étranger* where, unlike so many of his other works, sensitivity and emotion play a much more prominent role here."[18]

If on the day following the premiere of *L'Étranger* Fauré was able to render his opinion with admirable objectivity, it should

not be forgotten that six years later, in 1909, the composer/critic would accept the presidency of the Société musicale indépendante which, from the very outset, was a rallying point for the anti-Schola sentiment and a rival to the Société nationale. As Michel Duchesneau has so correctly observed, "The naming of Fauré at the head of the SMI was fundamentally political. ... For Fauré it was a question of supporting a young movement whose protests seemed to him to be justified. According to Koechlin, however, he lent the SMI no more than his name and his prestige. He never attended the meetings of the reading committee."[19]

Five years after reviewing d'Indy's *L'Étranger* Fauré came to the defense of Édouard Lalo (1823–1892) in a review written the day following a revival of *Namouna*. At the time of its premiere at the Opéra on 6 March 1882, the critics had savaged the work. But Fauré's evaluation of the revival underscored "the imagination of one of the most solid craftsmen of our artistic renewal" and considered that "*Namouna* presents the whole gamut of his innovative ideas, harmony, rhythms and orchestral sonorities within the simplest and most unaffected manner."[20]

The first performance of Magnard's *Bérénice* won favor with Fauré who found this to be a remarkable work by a composer who is virtually unknown today.[21] "This noble and touching music was conceived simultaneously with the poem and as a result, cannot betray it. Written by an artist who can pride himself for his very classical taste and his completely traditional musical culture, the score of *Bérénice* manifests imaginative qualities, emotional strength, a richness of technique, solidity and dignity which never falter."[22] Like Darius Milhaud who would take up the cause of Magnard a dozen years later in his reviews of Concerts Pasdeloup published in the *Courrier Musical* in 1920 and 1921, Fauré was completely seduced by this musician.

Also among the works which are completely forgotten today, *Fortunio* (based on Alfred de Musset's *Le Chandelier*) by André Messager (1853–1929) received a warm and enthusiastic reception from Fauré at its first performance in 1907. "Never abandoning his artistic calling, [Messager] is unparalleled as a