



Gillian Opstad

EMMA
&
CLAUDE
DEBUSSY

The Biography of a Relationship

EMMA AND CLAUDE DEBUSSY

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THE BIOGRAPHY OF A RELATIONSHIP



GILLIAN OPSTAD

THE BOYDELL PRESS

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Cover image: Debussy and Emma in their garden, 1905.

For Christopher

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I have included fewer photographs of Debussy than Emma and her children as images of Debussy are better known and can be accessed elsewhere. Most being historical family snapshots over a hundred years old, the quality is variable, but they are certainly of interest.

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Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. The original French has been included in many instances, but not usually of letters or footnotes contained in *Debussy's Correspondance (1872–1918)*, edited by François Lesure and Denis Herlin, published by Gallimard in 2005.

Abbreviations and Note

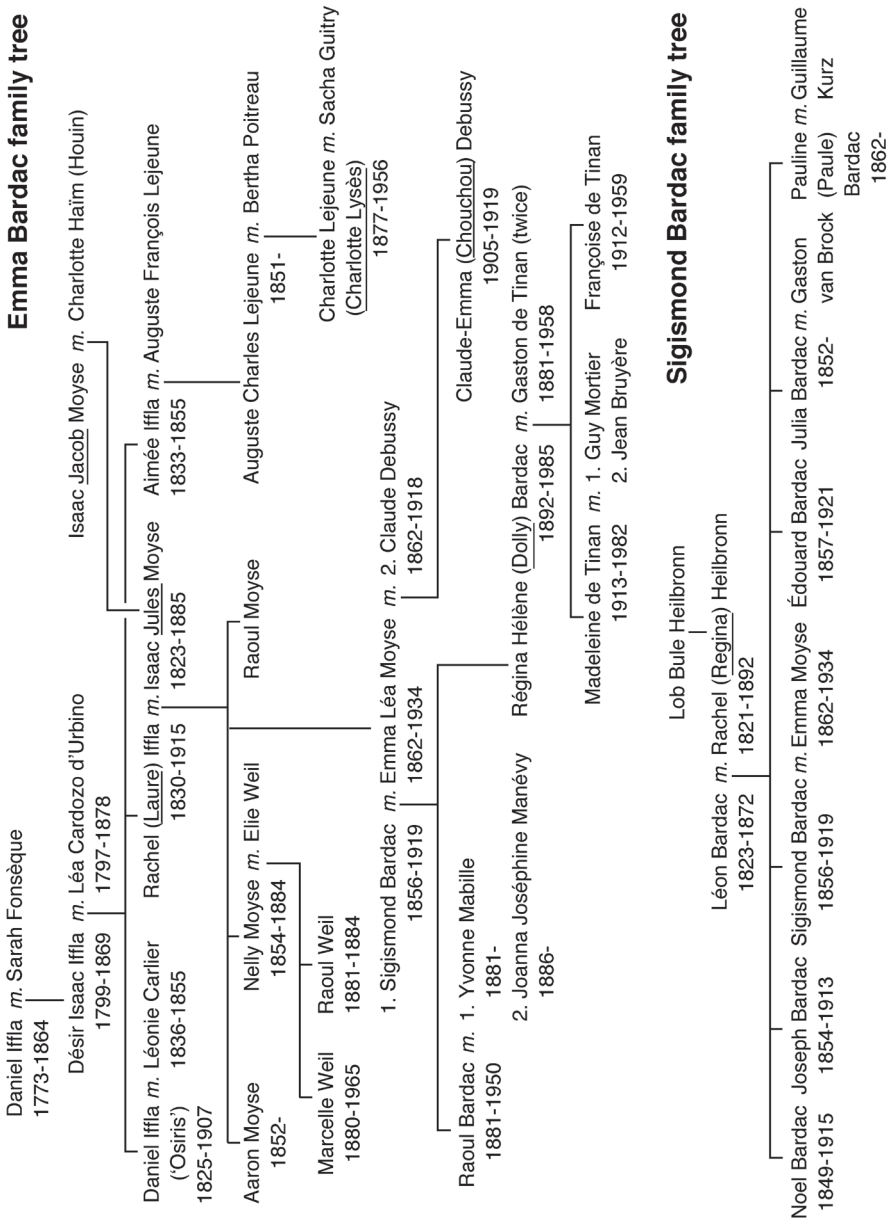


BnF Musique	Music department of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
C.	Claude Debussy, <i>Correspondance</i> (1872–1918), ed. François Lesure and Denis Herlin, annotated by François Lesure, Denis Herlin and Georges Liébert, Paris, Gallimard, 2005.
De Tinan, French interview	CD copy of a recording of an interview in French with Hélène de Tinan and an unnamed female interviewer, untitled, unattributed, kindly given to the author by M. Philippe Lagourgue.
Dolly Bardac, London interview	British Library: <i>British Institute of Recorded Sound lecture series: Dolly Bardac – Memories of Debussy and his circle</i> . Recorded 5 December 1972. British Library shelfmark T572.

Note

Since I gathered valuable information from documents held at the Centre de Documentation Claude Debussy, Paris, this organisation has closed and its resources are in the process of being subsumed into the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique. I have been advised by Madame Catherine Vallet-Collot, Cheffe du service Collections patrimoniales, to leave the references as they are. They will be able to be found under a generic reference: VM FONDS 210 CDE. Further information will be made available in 2022 in the *Catalogue Archives et manuscrits* of the BnF.

Emma Bardac family tree





PART ONE



EMMA: WIFE, MOTHER, LOVER

Emma's ancestry and background

The Moyses and Iffla families

When Claude Debussy left his first wife Lilly for Emma Bardac, a wealthy married Jewish woman, he found the reaction of his friends and acquaintances painful and his own state of mind bewildering. In view of his family background and his childhood, the relationship with a sparkling hostess of a musical salon initially seems unlikely. Although both he and Emma were the children of shopkeepers, parental circumstances and decisions determined the degree and the rate at which they would be able to climb socially, she escaping a modest background in her teens by way of an aspirational arranged marriage, he an even more modest background by developing his innate talent.

Enlightening facts about Emma's childhood or the truth of her domestic life during her first marriage remain obscure. Apart from official documents and occasional references in newspapers, little has survived in the way of family papers to provide clues about her education or transition from provincial to metropolitan life.

Emma Moyses was born in Bordeaux on 10 July 1862, the same year as Claude Debussy, who was born at St. Germain-en-Laye, to the west of Paris, on 22 August. One of the main shopping streets in Bordeaux is the rue Sainte-Catherine, a long artery which has played an important role commercially in the city since medieval times. At the northern end a smart covered arcade called the Galérie Bordelaise was opened in 1834, linking the rue Sainte-Catherine with the rue de la Maison Daurade near its junction with the rue des Piliers de Tutelle. Nowadays the rue Sainte-Catherine runs south all the way to the Place de la Victoire, but in the days of Emma's ancestors this street from where it crosses the Cours Victor Hugo onwards was called the rue Bouhaut. This area was inhabited by a dense population of Jews; all her grandparents lived either in or near this street.

On her father's side, Emma's grandfather was Isaac Jacob Moyses, a merchant (*marchand*) who had moved from Alsace to Bordeaux, where he married Charlotte Haïm. When Emma's father was born in 1823 their address in Bordeaux was 22 rue des Augustins. On her mother's side her grandparents were Désir Isaac Iffla, a commission merchant (*commis marchand*), one who received a percentage of the sale price when he bought or sold, who married Léa Cardozo d'Urbino. Léa was descended from Italian Jews, two of whom – her grandfather Haïm Athias and her uncle, David Athias – were Chief Rabbis. Désir Isaac and Léa's address at the time of the birth of their daughter, Emma's mother, was 25 rue Bouhaut. Moyses, Cardozo and Iffla are Sephardic names. Many of the large Sephardic Jewish community in Bordeaux were *marchands* and *négociants* who prospered in the city as they established successful businesses and efficient trade networks.

Emma's father, Isaac Jules Moyses, was born on 2 May 1823. One of the witnesses to his birth was Joseph Astruc, 112 rue Bouhaut. The Astrucs were a Jewish bordelais family, the most famous of whom in the artistic world was the impresario and writer Gabriel Astruc, born in 1864, who founded the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées where Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* received its first performance and who brought Debussy's *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* to the stage at the Théâtre du Châtelet. Gabriel was the nephew of Adrien Astruc, a banker and cousin of Emma's mother Laure. Adrien was a business associate of Emma's father, and later would be a witness to Emma's marriage.¹

It is worth noting that another famous bordelais was born in 1838 in the rue Bouhaut, at number 241: Judas Colonna, who would later change his name to Édouard Colonne. He and his second wife would eventually play an important part in Emma's musical life in Paris, where Édouard had become a renowned conductor. In the annual directories for Bordeaux in the 1860s, members of the Colonne family are listed as teachers of music and sellers of music and instruments. Their shop was in the rue Porte-Dijeaux, not far from the Moyses family addresses, but unfortunately it is impossible to know whether Emma as a child received any musical instruction from any members of this family.

Emma's mother, Laure Iffla, one of five siblings, was born on 26 June 1830 at 25 rue Bouhaut, now number 244 rue Sainte-Catherine. In contrast to neighbouring properties, the building itself presents a rather grand façade, with elaborate carvings above the windows. Laure was not her original name, that appearing on her birth certificate being the more Jewish Rachel.

Isaac Jules, known as Jules Moyses, was twenty-seven years old when he married Laure Iffla on 24 March 1851. By this time his parents Isaac and Charlotte had moved to 32 rue Sainte-Eulalie, now 32 rue Paul Louis Lande. On the marriage certificate Jules described himself, like his father, as a *commis marchand*. Laure, aged twenty, had dropped the name Rachel, for it did not appear on her marriage certificate. Her parents, Désir Isaac and Léa Iffla, had moved to 13 Fossés des Tanneurs – now the site of the Musée d'Aquitaine and only a short distance from the rue Bouhaut.

Jules and Laure Moyses's daughter, born on 10 July 1862, was given the names Emma Léa, the latter after her grandmother. By now the family had moved away from the area of the rue Bouhaut to the opposite, more prosperous end of the rue Sainte-Catherine. Whilst her father described himself as a *négociant*, from the trade directory of 1860 we discover that Jules Moyses sold men's and children's clothes at both 63 rue St-Rémi and 17 rue des Piliers de Tutelle, one being just round the corner from the other. This explains why two of the witnesses who signed Emma's birth certificate were tailors.

Emma was born at number 11 rue des Piliers de Tutelle, only a few doors from the shop at number 17. It is clear from its appearance that number 11 was not as prestigious as number 17, but this is also evident from the census of 1861, the year before Emma's birth. That year it housed thirty-six people altogether, ten separate families, one of

¹ Information about addresses and businesses is from the relevant volumes of the *Annuaire général du commerce et de l'industrie de la ville de Bordeaux et du département de la Gironde, 1860–1880*.

which was Jules and Laure Moysse with their two children, Emma's older siblings, Aaron Charles, aged nine, and Sarah Nely (known as Nelly), aged seven. This road emerges at its far end opposite the imposing Grand Théâtre, an indication of the more bourgeois character of the neighbourhood compared with the rue Bouhaut.

Significantly, at 71 rue St-Rémi was another business specialising in men's clothes, made to measure (*spécialité de vêtements confectionnés pour hommes et sur mesure*), called W. Iffla, Commerles et Massieu, which also traded in the impressive arcade, 6–8 Galérie Bordelaise. William Iffla, according to Emma's marriage certificate, was a cousin eleven years younger than her father, Jules Moysse. The proximity of these addresses and names of the owners surely indicate that Jules Moysse had come to meet his wife, Laure Iffla, through the trade. As the years went by links between the two businesses became closer and Jules Moysse's tailors' shop expanded to carry out 'commission et exportation'. By 1878, the year before Emma's marriage, Jules Moysse could be discovered at the opposite end of the Galérie Bordelaise at 4 rue de la Maison Daurade. Both he and William Iffla were respected members of the business community as they were now *électeurs commerciaux* (*élect.com.*), a position created in accordance with the law of 21 December 1871, which enabled them to vote for representatives of their trade in the tribunals of the Chamber of Commerce.²

Jules Moysse spent two years at this address, then in 1880 appeared the address given on Emma's civil marriage certificate of 1879: 21 Cours de l'Intendance. This should mark the apogee of his social climb: a prestigious stone-fronted house on this wide boulevard where the bourgeoisie would stroll and shop in an elegant ambience. The census for 1881, two years after Emma's marriage, shows only two families living at the address. This brings with it a puzzle. One family has seven members including servants, the other has four members, but Jules is not mentioned. His wife is listed, not as Moysse, but as Laure Yflar, her maiden name Iffla spelt differently or mistranscribed. Two men were present: a widowed shoemaker (*cordonnier*) aged fifty and a self-employed married man aged forty-nine, neither of whom appear to be related to the Ifflas or Moyses. The fourth person is a maidservant. Perhaps Jules was away at the time of the census, but this does not account for the return to Laure's maiden name. It may be to do with a scandal involving Laure's husband and brother, which will be discussed later.

Daniel Iffla, known as Osiris

Laure's elder brother, Emma's uncle Daniel Iffla, became the most influential and prominent member of this generation of her family.³ His is an extraordinary tale of wealth and woe which needs to be understood to appreciate the impact of his decisions on Emma's life with Debussy.

² *Journal officiel de la République Française*, 22 December 1871, reporting on *Assemblée Nationale, séance du jeudi 21 décembre 1871*.

³ For a comprehensive biography of Emma's uncle see Dominique Jarrassé, *Osiris, Mécène juif, nationaliste français*, Editions Esthétique du Divers, 2008.



1. Daniel Iffla Osiris, c. 1899

When Daniel was born on 23 July 1825 the Iffla family address, as noted, was 25 rue Bouhaut. As a child he attended a Jewish boys' school in the rue des Étuves and was also a choirboy in the synagogue, but whilst still in his teens he left his family for Paris to attend the Lycée Turgot. He was very soon to enter the world of finance, associating with other Sephardic financiers, first working for an *agent de change* called Moreau then entering the bank of Jules Mirès, which had been created by the famous Pereire brothers.

He made an immense fortune on the stock exchange and in investments in railways, but it's unclear exactly how he did this when he had no extended family in the banking business, like the Rothschilds and other Jewish dynasties, and seems to have succeeded entirely due to his own efforts. There was certainly a network of Spanish and Portuguese Jewish financiers from Bordeaux who formed an influential group and who

worshipped at the Paris synagogue, which in 1851 was in the rue Lamartine. In 1877 the synagogue moved to a new building nearby in the rue Buffault. Daniel Iffla personally provided the finance for this, his fortune at that time amounting to eight million francs.

On 26 July 1855, at the age of thirty, Daniel married not a Jewish, but a Catholic woman, Léonie Carlier, whom he had met when renting a room in her family's house at 11 rue la Bruyère. She was pregnant at the time of the marriage but, tragically, on 13 October of that year, aged only nineteen, she died, as did the twin girls she had just brought into the world. Devastated, Daniel never remarried. From now on he devoted his efforts wholeheartedly to collecting works of art and philanthropy. He changed his name by legal decree on 24 August 1861,⁴ one year before Emma's birth, to Iffla-Osiris and it is the name Osiris by which he is best known.

Why Osiris? There are many hypotheses. Some say that his mother's brother faced many dangers on a ship of that name and his mother vowed to name her son Osiris if he survived them. Osiris kept a model of this ship.⁵ Or it may have been the cult of Osiris with which Daniel Iffla became enthused. Osiris was the benign Egyptian ruler and judge of the dead who gave the hope and expectation of rebirth in the next life. Another spur for this insistence on an Egyptian connection could have been Osiris's worship of Napoleon and everything Napoleonic. Following the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon's forces, much research was carried out on the great pyramids and other monuments. Collectors began amassing Egyptian relics. Osiris possessed a collection of little statues of the god after which he had named himself.⁶ It is also said that he received advantages from certain friends in government ministries, possibly linked to the fact that Osiris was a symbol of freemasons. For whatever reason, Daniel Iffla now used the name Osiris in all his business transactions.

Despite being one of the richest men in the city, people said Osiris was miserly, for he refused to have electricity installed in his house in the rue La Bruyère, where he acquired several properties through his wife's family, but his defence was that by saving such money he had more to spend on the needy. Philanthropy became the driving force of his life – and of his death for, significantly, writing and rewriting his will to distribute his wealth as charitably and as patriotically as possible became an obsession. Amongst many worthy projects, Osiris funded the equivalent of food banks, *L'Œuvre du Pain pour tous*. For the hungry of Bordeaux a *Bateau soupe* was moored on the quay side, which existed until the Second World War. In 1889 he instituted a triennial prize that is still awarded to this day by the Fondation de l'Institut de France to mark the most important discovery or work in science, literature or the arts benefiting the public interest.⁷

⁴ *Journal Officiel de la République française, décret impérial* no.9504. Cited in J.-P. Ardoin Saint Amand, *Osiris, l'oncle d'Arcachon*, Société historique et archéologique d'Arcachon et du Pays de Buch, Arcachon, 1996, p. 34. Henceforth referred to as 'Ardoin Saint Amand, *Osiris*'.

⁵ Early biography of Osiris written by Gabrielle Henry, Osiris's secretary: Gab, *Monsieur Osiris*, Paris, 1911, p. 15. Online at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k64714o68/f13.image.texteImage> (last accessed 3 July 2021).

⁶ Mentioned by Jules Claretie in his preface to Gab, *Monsieur Osiris*, p. 10.

⁷ <https://www.institutdefrance.fr/lesfondations/osiris> (last accessed 3 July 2021).

He was extremely patriotic and had statues erected to many famous people. He admired his grandfather, another Daniel Iffla, who had carried out distinguished service under Napoleon. In homage to Napoleon, in 1896 Osiris bought and renovated the Château de Malmaison, home of Napoleon and Josephine, thus saving it from destruction. In 1903 he donated it to the state and later gave his collection of works of art to be exhibited in a special pavilion there.⁸ By then he had already received various honours, including the Orden de Isabel la Católica for his promotion of Spanish railways,⁹ and he had become a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1898, but this gift to the French state ensured that he received the status of Officier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1905. He was nominated for both honours by his friend Jules Claretie, famous writer, drama critic and director of the Théâtre Français. Another gift donated to the state upon his death was the Château de la Tour Blanche with the condition that a Bordeaux Wine School be created there. In 1909 the Ministry of Agriculture created the La Tour Blanche School of Viticulture and Oenology.¹⁰ The words '*Donation Osiris*' still appear on the wine label.

Following his death, a letter written by Osiris on 6 July 1888 was quoted in the newspaper *Le Temps*¹¹ which showed extraordinary devotion to his deceased wife. He related that whilst he and the Catholic Léonie were still engaged, they were walking through the cemetery of Montmartre when she remarked upon the wall dividing the burial grounds of Jews and Christians. She pointed out to him the exact plot she wished to have reserved, the nearest to the Jewish area. Upon her premature death, this request was refused as a large iron gate was about to be installed between the two parts. Thirty-three years later, the barriers between the Jewish and Christian areas were destroyed, enabling Osiris to satisfy his wife's desire. He had a new coffin made with a pocket for photographs of his mother and sisters, including Laure, Emma's mother, and placed a photograph of himself inside a silk cushion. Wearing his wedding suit, unaided, he transferred her remains, placing her bones tidily in a new grave. Upon his death, Osiris joined his wife in this tomb beneath a vast statue of Moses, a copy of that by Michelangelo,¹² which he had commissioned from Antonin Mercié and which still stands proudly in Montmartre cemetery today.

There were many stages in the process of drawing up Osiris's will. In *Le Monde illustré* on 9 February 1907 it was stated, 'He began this will, which will cause much discussion, in 1890. Quite indecisive by nature, he composed it slowly, page by page, rewording it frequently, very concerned to make judicious, noble and just use of his fortune.'¹³ Osiris's first *testament mystique*, a sealed will, was 'made at Arcachon

⁸ <https://musees-nationaux-malmaison.fr/chateau-malmaison/histoire-du-chateau-de-malmaison> (last accessed 3 July 2021).

⁹ In 1860 he published a book with A. Baudoz, *Histoire de la Guerre de l'Espagne avec le Maroc*, which contained information about the potential for investment in Spanish railways.

¹⁰ L'École de Viticulture et d'Oenologie de La Tour Blanche.

¹¹ *Le Temps*, 5 March 1907.

¹² The original stands in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome.

¹³ One of several newspaper cuttings at the Archives municipales, Bordeaux. Fonds Evrard de Fayolle: *Coupures de presse relatives à Daniel Iffla Osiris*. 42 S 6366-6367.



2. Osiris in his conservatory, rue La Bruyère, Paris, c. 1900. Photograph by Dornac

where I am at this moment in my Villa Léonie Osiris, where the sky is blue and cloudless, on fifteenth September eighteen hundred and ninety-six.¹⁴ The original executors were his secretary and a certain Elisa Ferguson, after whose deceased sister he named one of the villas he possessed in Arcachon. In this version he decreed who else should be listed on a plaque and buried in his tomb. This list, still prominent on the immense monument, reflects Osiris's desires rather than the people who actually ended up there. It includes his parents, the mysterious Madame Thomas Ferguson and her daughters Elisabeth and Elisa from Nottingham, his sister Laure and her husband Jules (Emma's parents), his nephews and nieces, including Emma and another niece, a granddaughter of his and Laure's sister Aimée, Charlotte Lysès. Engraved in stone is also the history of his grandfather Daniel Iffla's military service, and yet another plaque commemorates the Chief Rabbi of Bordeaux, David Athias.

During Osiris's lifetime he funded the construction of several synagogues, most notably that in the rue Buffault in Paris, but also at Tours, Vincennes and Bruyères in the Vosges, not to mention Tunis and Lausanne, where he also funded a statue of William Tell, again by Mercié. Despite being refused permission to have the name of his Catholic wife inscribed in the Paris synagogue, he had a large plaque mounted there listing many 'famous children of Israel'. At its base are engraved the names of his parents, their children, including Emma's mother Laure, and 'Madame Léonie Carlier, wife of Daniel Iffla Osiris'. A further list is added of his friends, significantly including the name Bardac. Further plaques bear his name and those of the founders of the synagogue, all of which can be seen to this day.

Emma's marriage

As noted, Osiris's niece, Emma Léa Moïse, was born on 10 July 1862. Of the years between her birth and her marriage at the age of seventeen it appears to be virtually impossible to discover any detail. She had an older brother, Aaron Charles, sister Nelly and a younger brother, Raoul, who died prematurely. As a young lady we know she was musical and that she could speak English. In the trade directories for Bordeaux under the heading *Écoles communales d'enseignement pour les jeunes filles*, there is listed a school for girls run by a certain Dacosta in the rue Sainte-Eulalie, the road in which her Moïse grandparents lived, which she could well have attended, but no list of pupils survives.

Emma had great affection for Arcachon, the resort built amongst pine trees just over thirty miles south of Bordeaux. It was expanding from a small fishing village into a smart destination for the wealthy inhabitants of Bordeaux who enjoyed the newly discovered benefits of healthy fresh air, pine forests and sea bathing. In 1857, on the initiative of another Bordeaux-born banker, Émile Pereire, a new railway line opened to facilitate access from the city and that year Arcachon became an independent town by decree of Napoleon III. It grew from four hundred inhabitants in 1857 to nearly four thousand in 1872. Investment opportunities were recognised by those with means and it is not surprising that Osiris owned at least seven of the many lavish and architecturally distinctive villas there, mainly in the smart district called the Ville d'Hiver.

¹⁴ Ardoin Saint Amand, *Osiris*, p. 35.

Later in life, Emma remembered her holidays spent at Arcachon as a child, before Osiris built his properties. In 1910, writing to André Caplet, close friend of both her and Claude Debussy, she told him wistfully how she had stayed in the Villa Riquet when young, the one Caplet was going to visit. 'I expect it has changed a lot since ...'¹⁵ This guest house was originally built by Émile Pereire in the 1860s. It is now called 'Océanique', but outwardly is easily recognisable from contemporary photographs. Emma envied Caplet being near the old pine trees and sandy beaches. One of Osiris's vast villas nearby, built in 1895, was originally called Villa Osiris. He had intended to donate it to the town for use as a library, but this plan never came to fruition. Its name was changed to Alexandre Dumas after Osiris's death in 1907, although that author never actually stayed in it.

One plan that did materialise, however, was the building of a synagogue. The architect Osiris employed was Stanislas Ferrand, designer of the synagogue he had already financed in Paris. This was a private synagogue, a small, simple building on the avenue Gambetta,¹⁶ which Osiris erected and opened, initially, without the knowledge and to the disquiet of the Bordeaux Consistory.¹⁷ In the same road on adjoining plots of land are four of Osiris's villas, three of which were named after members of the Moysse family: Nelly (after Sarah Nely, Emma's older sister), Laure-Raoul (after Emma's mother and her son Raoul, who died young¹⁸) and Emma. The fourth was named Betsy-Ferguson, who, as noted, was honoured with her name engraved on Osiris's tomb.

On Sunday 21 December 1879, at six o'clock in the evening, this new synagogue was inaugurated unofficially with a special ceremony, a marriage: that of Osiris's niece Emma Moysse to Sigismond Bardac. Rabbi Lodois Mendès blessed the couple. It was reported in the local paper that the Rabbi had come especially from Paris, but Emma's father Jules had a correction inserted a week later saying that in fact Mendès was the former choirmaster at the Temple de Bordeaux.¹⁹ Apparently the congregation had to stand because the chairs were not delivered in time.²⁰ According to the press, the entire population of Arcachon turned out to witness the event which added to the festive atmosphere.²¹ True to his principles, Osiris ensured a collection was made during the celebration for distribution to the local poor.

Three days earlier Emma had attended her civil marriage at the town hall in Bordeaux. The certificate signed on that occasion gives her parents' address as 21 Cours de l'Intendance. Three of the witnesses were her cousin William Iffla and two bankers coming from that world of Emma's uncle and her new husband, Adrien Astruc from Bordeaux and Gaston van Brock from Paris. Van Brock was born in Bordeaux on 27 October 1850. He received the Légion d'Honneur in 1884, and was elevated in 1908 to Officier de la Légion d'Honneur, by which time he was *Président du Conseil d'Administration des*

¹⁵ *Correspondance (1872–1918)*, ed. François Lesure and Denis Herlin, Paris, 2005, p. 1245: 10 February 1910. Henceforth abbreviated to C.

¹⁶ Originally called avenue Euphrosine.

¹⁷ It was not officially inaugurated until 3 October 1891.

¹⁸ Ardoin Saint-Amand, *Osiris*, p. 10.

¹⁹ *L'Avenir d'Arcachon* 28 December 1879 and 4 January 1880.

²⁰ Gab, *Monsieur Osiris*, p. 74.

²¹ *Le XIXe siècle*, 26 December 1879.

Mines de Malines (Gard).²² His name will recur later as a witness to Emma's marriage to Debussy. In 1874 he had married Julia Bardac, a sister of Emma's husband-to-be.

Mention has been made of a scandal concerning Jules Moysse and Emma's uncle, Osiris, which could have had a bearing on Laure reverting temporarily to her maiden name of Iffla (or Yflar). Needless to say, in an increasingly antisemitic society, a Jew in possession of such wealth as Osiris's gathered much opprobrium, so any whiff of dubious dealings would be seized upon. In a book entitled *Le Testament d'un antisémite* by Edouard Adolphe Drumont²³ there is reference to a case brought before the court in Bordeaux in 1880, only very shortly after Emma's wedding, so the story may well have been spread abroad during preparations for the event. Osiris, in collaboration with Adrien Astruc, who had a limited company Astruc & Cie, had been involved in the bankruptcy of a certain M. Mitraud. Osiris needed to recuperate three hundred thousand francs and managed to persuade his brother-in-law, Emma's father Jules Moysse, to form a new company, Astruc & Moysse, with the purpose of repaying himself at the expense of other creditors. This was judged fraudulent by the court, a verdict confirmed by the Court of Appeal in 1886. Laure Moysse and her daughter Emma must have felt much embarrassment at this unfortunate turn of events around the time of Emma's marriage.

Jules Moysse had great expenditure at this time, for Emma's sister Nelly married Elie Weil on 16 October, only three months before Emma's ceremony, and a dowry would have been required. In Emma's case, on the day of her civil marriage, 18 December 1879, a contract was signed stating that her bridegroom Sigismond would bring with him five thousand francs' worth of furniture and works of art. Emma's dowry consisted of a trousseau valued at six thousand francs and the sum of fifty thousand francs to be paid to her husband.²⁴

The Bardac family

Who was Emma's husband, Sigismond Bardac? He was born in Nizhny Novgorod in Russia on 14 October 1856, the son of Léon Bardac born in Odessa in 1823 and Rachel, born in Fulda, Germany, in 1821, daughter of Lob Bule Heilbronn.²⁵ Rachel was always known as Régina, the name given on Emma's marriage certificate. Sigismond had two older brothers, both born in Odessa, Noël in 1849 and Joseph in 1854. He also had a younger brother Édouard, born in 1857, and two sisters, Julia and Pauline. Pauline was born in the same year as Emma, 1862. We know from Noël's birth certificate, issued originally by the Rabbi of Odessa for the registration of Jews in that city and translated when he was nominated for the Légion d'Honneur, that his father Léon was a *commerçant de la Première Guilde*.²⁶

²² <http://cths.fr/an/prosopo.php?id=122139> (last accessed 10 June 2020).

²³ Edouard Adolphe Drumont, *Le Testament d'un antisémite*, Paris, 1891, pp. 178–9.

²⁴ Ardoin Saint Amand, *Osiris*, p. 11.

²⁵ On her death certificate dated 2 January 1892 her age is given as seventy-one.

²⁶ <https://www.leonore.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/ui/notice/17224> (last accessed 3 July 2021).



3. Sigismond Bardac near Montmartre cemetery

When the Russian-born Bardac family came to Paris they rapidly established themselves as a key force in the world of international banking, being associated in particular with the funding of the fast-expanding Russian railways. The French market was becoming the primary source of loans to finance railway construction and expansion at the time and by the end of the 1880s the French Third Republic was the largest source of credit for the Russian empire. The Bardac bank was a significant investor in this field. When Léon died in 1872, Noel, the oldest son took it over at the age of twenty-three. Sigismond was only sixteen at the time but it was not long before it became the bank N. J. & S. Bardac. The bank also became an ally of the powerful Imperial Ottoman Bank and a regular participant in syndicates it managed, especially in connection with railway concessions.²⁷

Osiris and Léon Bardac, Sigismond's father, were of a similar age and it is most probable that their paths crossed both at the synagogue and at the stock exchange in Paris, environments with which none of Debussy's relations would have been remotely familiar. There was also a common interest in financing railways since Osiris was joint author of a book on the subject. It is not possible to determine how or where Léon's son was introduced to Osiris's niece, but in view of the difference in age and the distance between the cities they inhabited, it is clear that this was an arranged marriage, not unusual for orthodox Jewish families. When the marriage banns were published in Paris on 1 December 1879, Sigismond's address was 5 avenue de Messine in the eighth arrondissement. Another Paris address ascribed to Sigismond at the time of his marriage was 3 rue du Colisée, which would recur in official documents on future occasions.

Sigismond quickly followed Osiris's example and began collecting works of art, becoming one of the foremost collectors in France. It was not only for the size and quality of Sigismond's collection but also for its variety that he became a significant figure in that world. Not just beautiful paintings, but ivories, gold statuary, enamels and ancient artefacts can be traced today in many museums internationally which had their provenance in the collection of Sigismond Bardac, including the Louvre and the Victoria and Albert Museum.²⁸ His reputation whilst he was busy acquiring *objets d'art* became notorious to some. For example, in 1900 there was a rather grudging comment in the *Bulletin de la Commission départementale des monuments historiques du Pas-de-Calais* that the magnificent reliquary of the Ursulines of Arras, one of the most beautiful pieces of religious works in gold being exhibited at that year's *Exposition Universelle* in Paris was 'lost to the town. It belongs to M. Sigismond Bardac'.²⁹ This was just one of several items he exhibited.

²⁷ *London and Paris as International Financial Centres in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Youssef Cassis and Eric Bussière, Oxford, 2005, p. 128.

²⁸ E.g. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O120709/gospel-cover-unknown> (last accessed 24 May 2020).

²⁹ In the *Catalogue Officiel illustré de l'Exposition rétrospective de l'art français* the twelfth century *Reliquaire de la Sainte Épine* is listed on p. 287. There are about twenty other items belonging to S. Bardac: <https://archive.org/details/catalogueofficieoexpo> (last accessed 3 July 2021).

Someone with a clear memory of Bardac was the art dealer Germain Seligman. 'I do remember Sigismond Bardac quite well,' he wrote.

Of Russian origin, he was one of three well-known banker and collector brothers, Sigismond, Noel, and Joseph. Sigismond was the most active collector of the three and remarkably well-posted about activities in the art world. To be in the know is of considerable importance if one is to be on hand when a collector is in a mood to buy – more especially when he is in a mood to sell. There was always news to be gleaned from Bardac, and sometimes there was the possibility of acquiring some coveted treasure from him. He was never satiated in his hunt for new possessions and occasionally had to part with one in order to acquire another.³⁰

Another well-known art dealer who often mentioned the Bardac brothers in his diary was René Gimpel. When he asked Joseph Bardac what had motivated him to start collecting works of art he received the answer,

My brother Sigismond gave us a taste for it. Noël followed him first, then me. It was easy after the 1870 war. No one wanted old stuff, it was all gold and red plush ... at a sale at the Hôtel Drouot I bought two boxes containing the most beautiful colour engravings, one for eighty francs, the other for seventy. Today that would be a million, a million!³¹

In the nineteenth century in France, when a couple married who were of different nationalities the woman automatically lost her nationality and took her husband's. This had been inscribed in the French Civil Code since 1803. Upon marriage to a Russian, Emma therefore automatically lost her French nationality. She would not regain this until a decree of reintegration into French nationality was passed on 18 September 1889.

Birth of Raoul Bardac and Emma's singing lessons

One year and three months after their marriage, in the early hours of 30 March 1881, Sigismond's and Emma's son Raoul was born at 5 avenue de Messine. He, like Emma, would eventually need to be granted full French nationality according to the decree of 1889, when Sigismond was also able to claim this.³² It is likely that Raoul was named after Emma's young brother who had died prematurely.

When Emma married and moved to Paris, her parents had followed in her footsteps, for it was at a Paris address, 272 rue du Faubourg St. Honoré, that her father, Jules Moyses, died on 20 April 1885. He was described on his death certificate as *rentier*, a person of independent means, as was his wife Laure, *rentière*, now a widow. Emma's sister, Nelly Weil, had died the previous year at the age of

³⁰ G. Seligman, *Merchant of Art 1880–1960. Eighty Years of Professional Collecting*. New York, 1961. Viewed online: https://archive.org/stream/merchantsofart180oseli/merchantsofart180oseli_djvu.txt (last accessed 4 February 2021).

³¹ R. Gimpel, *Journal d'un collectionneur*, Paris, 1963, p. 159.

³² www.généalogie.com lists names of those who successfully applied for *Réintégration de la nationalité française* as printed in the *Bulletin des Lois*.

thirty. Her baby son, another Raoul, had died at the age of two years ten months on 9 March that same year, so there must have been much grieving in the family. Nelly left behind her husband Elie and a daughter Marcelle Henriette Léa Weil, born on 24 August 1880.

For eleven years Raoul Bardac would remain an only child. Clearly, his was a privileged background. He was brought up in a smart area of Paris surrounded by beautiful objects and was given an excellent education. His first school was the Petit Lycée Condorcet in the rue d'Amsterdam, the junior department of the Lycée Condorcet which he later went on to attend, one of the oldest and most prestigious schools in Paris. Evidence of his progress in the lower school by the age of nine is the name Bardac in the list of prizewinners for 1890 published in *Le Figaro*.³³

He was brought up not just in an artistic environment, but also a musical one for his mother, Emma, was receiving singing lessons from the second wife of the conductor and founder of the Concerts Colonne, Édouard Colonne, who came originally from Bordeaux. Eugénie Élise Vergin was a successful soloist at the Opéra, the Opéra-Comique and the Théâtre Lyrique and much in demand as a singing teacher in Paris.

Emma was a star pupil of Madame Colonne, and it is because of this that we are able to discover her in the press. On 31 May 1889 she performed in a concert given by pupils of Madame Colonne, a 'brilliant' occasion, according to *Le Gaulois*, for some of the participants were already 'véritables artistes' including 'Mme Bardac, a fine dramatic artist, who gave a spirited performance of the *Berceuse* by Guiraud, and *l'éternelle Chanson* by Paladilhe'.³⁴ At a similar event on 30 May 1890, we learn that she received some of the loudest applause in a concert consisting of both choral and solo works. In *Le Matin*, once again the adjective 'brilliant' was used. Emma was particularly praised as 'the charming Madame Bardac, who applied great artistry to *Le chant de la vigne* by Ch. Lefèvre'.³⁵ Reviewing the same concert, *Le Gaulois* listed some of the eminent guests among Madame Colonne's audience: 'Mmes la comtesse de Beaumont, Viardot, de Grandval, princesse Davidoff, Comtesse Rostopchine ...'.³⁶ Emma could hardly have had a more aristocratic, if not discerning, audience. Pauline Viardot, (daughter of the tenor Manuel Garcia and sister of the diva Maria Malibran) was the distinguished opera singer, now retired after a vibrant career, who held her own concerts in her salon at 243 boulevard Saint-Germain.

Viardot was to be seen again at a concert of Mme Colonne's the following year, 1891, accompanying some of the performers in her own compositions. In *La Nouvelle Revue* we read of Mme Colonne's universal reputation as a singing teacher. Her pupils were 'virtually artists in their own right rather than pupils', even those selected amongst the *femmes du monde* amongst whom was listed 'Mme Bardac'. The audience comprised aristocracy, musicians and 'many famous authors and composers'.³⁷

³³ *Le Figaro*, 8 August 1890.

³⁴ *Le Gaulois*, 4 June 1889.

³⁵ *Le Matin*, 3 June 1890.

³⁶ *Le Gaulois*, 31 May 1890.

³⁷ *La Nouvelle Revue*, 1891/05–1891/06, p. 664.

What confidence Emma must have had to convey, singing in front of such illustrious company. Madame Colonne certainly had faith in her ability to present herself as an extremely talented pupil.

As might be expected for members of society in their position, Emma and Sigismond attended the Opéra. Sigismond's name appeared on the official list of subscribers to this institution from 1893 to 1898. Osiris was also a subscriber.³⁸ Osiris's secretary, Gabrielle Henry, revealed that despite his care over domestic expenditure, he was not only to be seen at the Opéra every week, but enjoyed the company of singers. He is known to have lent valuable jewels from his collection to certain actresses.³⁹ In view of later comments, it seems Sigismond Bardac was also well acquainted with ladies of this profession, which at the time was regarded as rife with 'loose' women.

At home, Emma Bardac certainly furthered her son's musical prowess. By the age of twelve (1893) Raoul had already composed several works, and that year his *Romance* for piano and violin was performed by the violinist, Eugène Ysaÿe⁴⁰ – the year, incidentally, in which Ysaÿe played in the first performance of Debussy's String Quartet at a concert of the Société nationale de musique given in the Salle Pleyel. Once again Raoul's name appeared in a newspaper for his achievements at school, for he was listed amongst the prizewinners for the *classe de 5ième* of the Petit Lycée Condorcet.⁴¹

By 1893 great changes had taken place in Emma's life. Her son Raoul's contact with Ysaÿe could have come about through her friendship with Mme Colonne or Pauline Viardot, but it is also possible that it was through someone to whom Emma became very close, the composer Gabriel Fauré, who was to become Raoul's teacher of composition.

³⁸ *Annuaire des artistes et de l'enseignement dramatique et musical* in 1893, 1895 and 1903.

³⁹ Gab, *Monsieur Osiris*, op.cit., pp. 32, 37; D. Jarrassé, *Osiris*, p. 60.

⁴⁰ D. Priest, "Une causerie sur Claude Debussy" de Raoul Bardac', *Cahiers Debussy*, no.26, 2002, p. 45, n.3.

⁴¹ *Le Temps*, 29 July 1893.

Emma's relationship with Gabriel Fauré

Fauré's marriage

Gabriel Fauré was born in 1845 in Pamiers in south-west France, about seventy kilometres south of Toulouse. From the age of nine he was educated in Paris at the *École de Musique Classique et Religieuse* founded by Louis Niedermeyer in 1853, a boarding school created specifically for teaching music and the humanities. Upon the death of Niedermeyer in 1861, Fauré became a pupil and close friend of Saint-Saëns, who, although ten years his senior, provided the key which opened the doors to the musical élite of the day. His own first composition pupil was André Messager, also soon to become a close friend. In 1871 Fauré was one of the founding members of the *Société nationale de musique* (SNM), an organisation which aimed to promote contemporary French music. He became Choirmaster at the church of Saint-Sulpice under Charles-Marie Widor and in the 1870s often took Saint-Saëns' place at the organ of La Madeleine. He was soon assimilated into musical and social society with help from established families, including that of Pauline Viardot. Fauré fell deeply in love with Pauline's daughter Marianne, but her affection could not match his passion. In fear of his ardent nature, it took four years for her to be persuaded to become engaged to Gabriel in July 1877, the year he was appointed to the prestigious but arduous task of *Maitre de Chapelle* at La Madeleine under Théodore Dubois. Marianne was twenty-three; he was thirty-two. Unable to reconcile herself to the marriage, three months later she made the inevitable break with her fiancé.

Fauré was by now an attractive, mature bachelor, exerting a magnetic power over the young women who frequented the salons and concerts he attended. A stream of beautiful songs and instrumental works flowed from his pen, performed and admired in the drawing rooms of wealthy patrons of music. A major figure who welcomed him to her salon was Marguerite Baugnies, who in 1892 became Marguerite (or Meg) de Saint-Marceaux after her second marriage to the sculptor René de Saint-Marceaux. Younger than Fauré by five years, she was the dedicatee of his song *Après un rêve* and the first *Nocturne* for piano. In 1875 she moved to 100 boulevard Malesherbes, where she instigated her famous 'Fridays', welcoming such musicians as Messager, Gounod, Hahn, Chausson, Ravel, Dukas and, for a while, Debussy. The salon culture in Paris in this era was so endemic that it became an essential way for composers to meet each other, hear their own works performed, listen to the works of their contemporaries and take advantage of the hospitality and hopefully sponsorship of their hosts and hostesses.

Meg was determined that Gabriel, now aged thirty-seven, should put an end to his carefree bachelor life. According to the composer Georges Migot, she put into a hat the names of three women whose surnames all began with F – Fueillet, Feydeau and Fremiet.¹ The first two were the daughters of writers, and the third was the daughter of a famous sculptor, Emmanuel Fremiet, particularly celebrated for his detailed sculptures of animals. Gabriel pulled out the name Marie Fremiet. On 27 March 1883 he married Marie and nine months later their first son, another Emmanuel, was born.²

Marie was reticent and reclusive. She painted quietly, mainly flowers on panels and fans, the opposite of her husband who mingled with the establishment, fulfilled his duties at La Madeleine and was forced to travel constantly to meet his teaching obligations. Her father became a father-figure to the composer, to the extent that some said Fauré had ‘married his father-in-law’.³ Fauré’s own father died in 1885, his mother in 1888. There was also a significant link between Emmanuel Fremiet and Emma’s wealthy uncle. Osiris, whose patriotism led to his passion for erecting statues of nationally important figures, commissioned Fremiet to create an equestrian statue of La Pucelle (Joan of Arc), which was erected in the Place Lafayette in Nancy in 1890. It was a copy of Fremiet’s statue in the Place des Pyramides in Paris, erected there in 1874.

The Fremiets had a second home, a country house in Bas-Prunay near Bougival where, from 1884 onwards, Fauré used to join them in the summer when he was free. Here his second son, Philippe, was born in 1889. Bougival at this time was well established as a desirable destination for Parisians to relax, eat and drink, and dance at open-air cafés, as depicted in paintings such as Renoir’s *Danse à Bougival*. The more wealthy, such as Sigismond Bardac, possessed houses there in which they could reside and entertain at will, maintaining their privileged standard of living amongst the society to which they were accustomed.

Emma’s ‘progressive’ salon; Fauré teaches Raoul

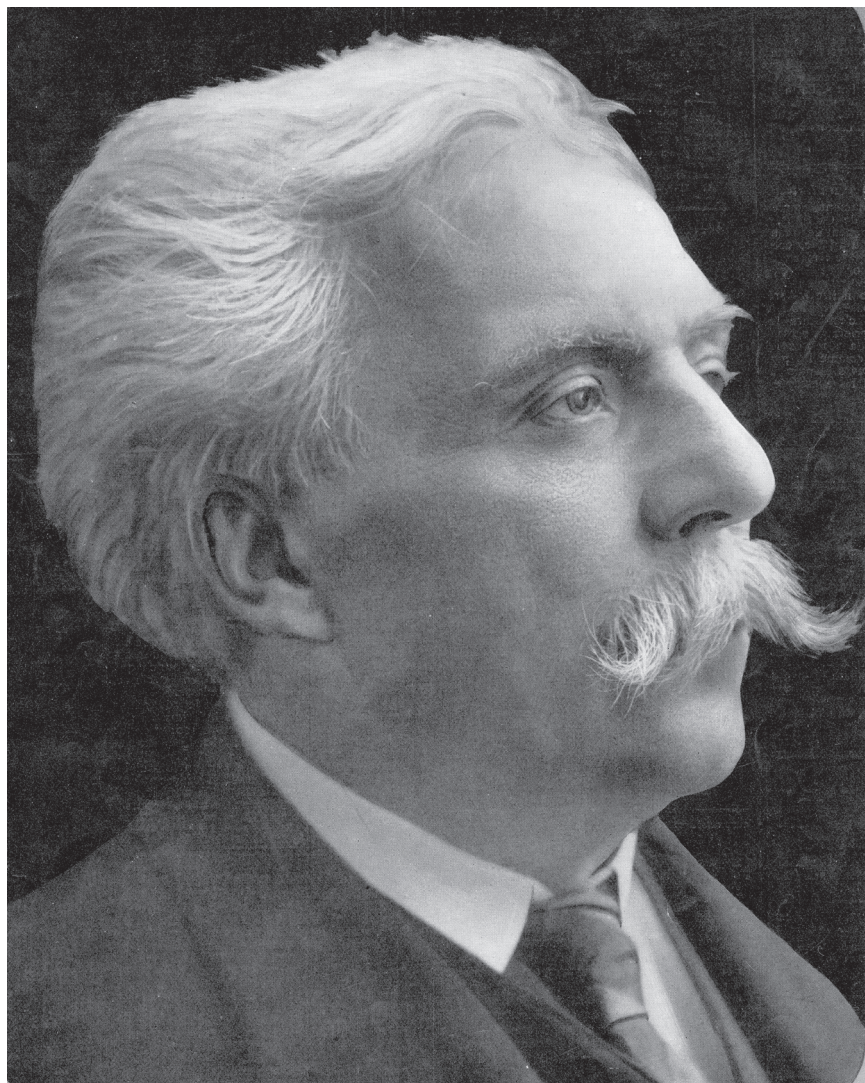
At that time the prestigious Paris address of the Bardacs was 30 rue de Berri in the eighth arrondissement, a street running between the Champs-Élysées and the Boulevard Haussmann. There Emma held her own musical salon where she received composers and performers, and sang herself. This has been described as a ‘progressive’ salon which Fauré attended regularly and to which he eventually brought many of his gifted composition pupils.⁴ Emma therefore had the perfect opportunity to provide her son with the best musical tuition and exemplars possible.

¹ Migot was named as the source of this story by Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré. Les voix du clair-obscur*, Paris, Fayard, 2008, p. 70. Migot (1891–1976) was forty-six years younger than Fauré, so the story must have been relayed to him. He only occurred in footnotes in Meg’s diary. Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux, *Journal 1894–1927*, ed. M. Chimènes. Paris, 2007.

² Marie insisted on the boys having the double surname Fauré-Fremiet.

³ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, p. 73.

⁴ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, p. 248.



4. Gabriel Fauré as seen on the cover of *Musica*, September 1910.
Photograph from Art Femina

When exactly Fauré began teaching Raoul cannot be determined, but in view of Raoul's rapid progress in composition, he must have been encouraging his talent from an early age. Fauré therefore was already familiar with Emma's Parisian home; he was also made welcome in the Bardacs' summer villa in Bougival in the summer of 1892 – a highly significant year in both their lives.

The tranquil, luminous scenes through which Fauré must have wandered from the house of his in-laws to the summer residence of Emma Bardac can be seen in two paintings. Charles Lambinet, who lived in Bougival, painted an idyllic rural image, entitled *Bas Prunay*, of a mother and child walking along a track by the river Seine, towards ancient cottages nestling in a hollow sheltered by trees (1860). In 1874 Alfred Sisley completed a light-infused painting of a track winding through fields and trees entitled *La route de Prunay à Bougival*.

What besides his alluring music did Emma see in Fauré? Photographs and a portrait by John Singer Sargent show a fine, imposing facial structure, silvery hair brushed back in waves, thick eyebrows, a full moustache drooping yet carefully trimmed over both sides of the lips. His looks were a reminder of his southern origins. Charles Koechlin wrote, 'A good appearance, certainly. One recalls, under the white hair, that Mediterranean face, bronzed, with his moustaches and Roman nose, and that aspect as of an Eastern dreamer, the eyes, dark-ringed, lost in strange milky luminosities of the pupil.'⁵

Birth of Hélène (Dolly) Bardac

On 20 June 1892 at six o'clock in the morning, Emma's second child, Régina Hélène Bardac was born. Emma was twenty-nine, one month short of thirty years old, although on Hélène's birth certificate her age is given as twenty-eight. Sigismond was thirty-six. The address where Hélène entered the world is noted as 37 rue des Mathurins, Paris. The witnesses signing the birth certificate were Otto Singer, an *associé de banque* who had also been a witness to Raoul's birth, and Alexandre Michel, a *remisier d'agent de change*, one who introduced clients to stockbrokers, so no names from Emma's world of music. The name Régina was chosen after Sigismond's mother, who had died on 2 January 1892 at the age of 71. This name was rarely used for the baby, however, as the little girl was known as Hélène, but more often as Dolly because of her petite size.

There is no doubt that Fauré was passionately in love with Emma at this time. There is, however, doubt about whether Hélène was the result of this passion or whether she was Sigismond's daughter. Why would Hélène claim in later life to be Fauré's daughter if she were not? Jean-Michel Nectoux wrote that she herself stated in confidence that this was the case.⁶ When interviewed in 2010, Debussy's then executor, Maître Henri Thieullent, who remembered meeting Emma as an elderly lady, believed this to be true. He was convinced Hélène was Fauré's daughter because of her resemblance to the composer and because of the length of time

⁵ Charles Koechlin, *Gabriel Fauré*, trans. Leslie Orry, London, 1945, p. 8.

⁶ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, p. 248.

which passed between the birth of Raoul and Hélène, admittedly both purely subjective conjectures. He also related an anecdote dating from much later on, in which Philippe Fauré-Fremiet, Fauré's younger son, met Dolly at a private concert of Debussy's music being given at the house of friends in 1941 or 1942. When he saw her enter he greeted her with the words, 'Ah, ma petite sœur!' ('Ah, my little sister!'). Apparently she was not amused.⁷

In his biography of Debussy, Marcel Dietschy wrote that Emma 'a donné un fils, puis offert une fille' to Sigismond Bardac, a significant distinction.⁸ This difference between two French words for 'to give', *donner* and *offrir*, was not made in the English translation of Dietschy's biography. 'Offert' implied that Dolly was a 'gift', rather than having been conceived by Bardac.⁹ Later Dietschy claimed that Dolly controlled very strictly whatever was written about her mother, leading to him having to imply rather than state the truth about her outright. He refused to show Dolly his book before publication, only allowing her to see specific paragraphs. She even wanted him to omit the word 'aimer' with reference to Fauré in his description of the moment Debussy had first set eyes on Emma: 'this Emma Bardac, whom Fauré had admired, *loved* [my italics], and immortalised before him'. Dietschy had not acceded to this demand.¹⁰

Those who doubt that Hélène was Fauré's daughter argue that the dates when conception would have taken place, during September 1891, do not fit in with Fauré's calendar. He was an admirer of the prestigious salon hostess Winnaretta Singer, later Princesse de Polignac, who, although a lesbian, was married to Prince Louis de Scey-Montbéliard. She provided inspiration and suitable conditions for Fauré to compose, and in the summer of 1891 took him with her husband and two artists and their wives to Venice. From there Fauré corresponded with Marie, who had remained at home painting and obsessively looking after their sons. A wall of silence would eventually rise between husband and wife. Fauré wrote frankly to Marguerite Baugnies during the trip, confessing to feeling something more than mere admiration for Winnaretta. He swore her to secrecy, promising that he did still love his wife.¹¹ In 1891 Winnaretta was twenty-six years old and Fauré was forty-six.

They returned to Paris on 20 June 1891, upon which Fauré continued to correspond with Winnaretta, desiring her appreciation of the songs he was composing, which were to become the *Cinq Mélodies op.58*, settings of words by Paul Verlaine. She then continued to travel. 'Adieu, chère Princesse, toujours absente', wrote Fauré.¹² He knew that no commitment was called for. Winnaretta was granted an

⁷ Author's conversation with Maître Henri Thieullent, 26 August 2010.

⁸ M. Dietschy, *La Passion de Claude Debussy*, Neuchâtel, 1962, p. 166

⁹ M. Dietschy, *A Portrait of Claude Debussy*, ed. and trans. W. Ashbrook and M. G. Cobb, Oxford, 1994, p. 129.

¹⁰ Letter from Marcel Dietschy to André Schaeffner 15 June 1963. N. Southon, 'Une correspondance entre André Schaeffner et Marcel Dietschy', *Cahiers Debussy*, no.34, 2010, p. 102.

¹¹ 12 June 1891, Gabriel Fauré, *Correspondance présentée et annotée par Jean-Michel Nectoux*, Paris, 1980, p. 174. Referred to henceforth as 'Nectoux. Gabriel Fauré. Correspondance'.

¹² Idem. p.188.

annulment on 1 February 1892 and in 1893 she married a gay member of the aristocracy, Prince Edmond de Polignac, a situation agreeable to both as he was a talented amateur composer. There was therefore no reason for Fauré not to pay amorous attention to Emma Bardac, the gifted singer he visited so frequently at Bougival after his return to France in June 1891. It has to be said that Fauré's constant flirtations over the years became a matter of some disapproval to Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux. There are several references in her diaries to his behaviour, which lasted all his life even into old age – his 'little personal interests he cannot control. Love in old age demeans its victims.'¹³

Over the years, other rumours regarding Fauré's possible fatherhood besides that of Dolly were spread abroad. Jean Roger-Ducasse, born in 1873, a musician also eventually to establish very close links to Debussy and his family, entered Fauré's composition class at the Conservatoire in 1896, joining what his biographer described as that 'magic circle' of pupils which included Maurice Ravel, Charles Koechlin, Florent Schmitt, George Enesco and Alfred Cortot. The relationship between master and pupil was so close despite their difference in age and there was such a resemblance between them in appearance that wagging tongues mischievously claimed that Roger-Ducasse was a love-child of Fauré's.¹⁴ There is no foundation for this claim, but it underlines Fauré's reputation for dalliances.

As for Emma's husband Sigismond, he was probably not particularly interested in music. He was passionate about his collection of *objets d'art* and in 1889 was listed officially as a *collectionneur* in the *Agenda de la curiosité, des artistes et des amateurs*, where his address was given as 1 Avenue Montaigne. In 1897 he was elected an official member of the Commission des Beaux-Arts.¹⁵ During the 1890s he also became a member of the cycling club, the Touring Club de France and then the Automobile Club de France, increasingly popular and fashionable activities. He encouraged his son to participate in cycling, for when Raoul was fourteen years old in 1895, he too was listed as a member of the Touring Club de France, his profession being given even at that tender age as *Compositeur de musique* (address: 30 rue de Berri).¹⁶

Significantly, Sigismond later also followed the Osiris theme so dear to his wife's uncle when he contributed substantial funds to archaeological digs at Abydos in Egypt. In 1895–96 he was one of a committee of only three providing money for the archaeologist Émile Amélineau to excavate the necropolis there, which culminated in 1897 with the discovery of the tomb of a king whom Amélineau identified as the god Osiris.¹⁷

¹³ M. de Saint-Marceaux, *Journal 1894–1927*, 26 January 1908, p. 507.

¹⁴ Jacques Depaulis, *Roger-Ducasse (1873–1954)*, Paris, 2001, p. 19.

¹⁵ *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 15 May 1897.

¹⁶ *Revue mensuelle Touring Club de France*, 1895, p. 439.

¹⁷ Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *A History of Egypt from the end of the Neolithic Period to the death of Cleopatra VII*, BC30, 1902, pp. 14–5. Viewed online at https://archive.org/stream/historyofegypt01budg/historyofegypt01budg_djvu.txt (last accessed 28 September 2020); Émile Amélineau, 'Fouilles à Abydos', in: *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 40^e année, no.3, 1896, pp. 197–200.

La bonne chanson

Whether Hélène's father or not, Fauré must have been very aware of Emma's pregnancy. Throughout the summer of 1892 he was possessed by the invigorating spirit of inspiration. Notes flowed from his pen to Paul Verlaine's poetry, whose words he had already found stimulating when composing the *Cinq mélodies*. Every day he visited Emma after his service at the Madeleine. She therefore witnessed the process of creation of his song cycle, *La bonne chanson*. With her natural soprano voice, trained by Madame Colonne, she displayed her considerable gifts as a skilled sight-reader and interpreter. The first, fourth, sixth and seventh songs as they appear in the published cycle were drafted at Bougival in the summer and autumn of 1892; the second, third and eighth in the summer of 1893; the fifth in December 1893; and the ninth in February 1894.¹⁸ Roger-Ducasse knew what was happening: 'Every evening Fauré went to the "château" to show his interpreter his day's work. Often, very often, she would send him back to correct it. I have the first draft of *La Lune blanche* ... she was absolutely right! She used to make him rewrite whole bars.'¹⁹

Fauré set nine of the twenty-one poems which Verlaine had written for his fiancée Mathilde Mauté in 1870. The music flows ecstatically, in turns excitedly then rapturously calm and reflective. The vocal and piano lines undulate and intertwine, resulting in novel and unexpected harmonic progressions. The rhythmic energy and intensity of the cycle give the feeling of spontaneity, the impression of sheer joy in invention, yet it is so assured in its form that Ravel described it as an 'incomparable symphonie ... un vaste poème lyrique émouvant et parfait'.²⁰ There can be no doubt that the passion Fauré was experiencing for Emma had unleashed an unprecedented impetuous creative flow in which adherence to the niceties of conventional formal composition or the gentle murmurings of salon songs were abandoned. The first poem Fauré set, 'Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d'été', is the seventh in the printed cycle and culminates in an image of stars smiling down benevolently not just on lovers but on man and wife. The manuscript of this song is dated 9 August 1892, at which time Dolly was not even two months old. This surely bears musical witness to a very intimate relationship with her mother. Charles Koechlin, a pupil of Fauré's, referred specifically to this song in a letter dated 25 September 1945:

Fauré often took a long time to find exactly the right musical translation of a poetic passage. It was Madame Bardac herself who told me, for the ending of 'Donc ce sera ...', i.e. 'Et quand le soir ...', Fauré had been unable to find [Koechlin's underlining] this admirable ending for months. One summer's evening, on the steps of Madame Bardac's house (on the garden side), Faure told her suddenly, 'That's it! I've found it!'

¹⁸ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, pp. 249–50.

¹⁹ Robert Pitrou, *De Gounod à Debussy*, Paris, 1957, p. 96.

²⁰ Claude Rostand, *L'Œuvre de Gabriel Fauré*, Paris, 1945, p. 107. Quoted in Graham Johnson, *Gabriel Fauré, The Songs and their Poets*, London, 2009, p. 240.

Koechlin believed Verlaine in his poetry was addressing a young girl, not yet his lover. There was something juvenile, almost naïve, in this love, whereas in Fauré there was maturity. 'Fauré's music seems to transcend the text, giving it an exultancy which makes *La bonne chanson* a "unique work".' Koechlin wrote,

I am still certain that *La bonne chanson* was lived by Fauré. Madame Sigismond Bardac (who later married Debussy), an excellent musician, very intelligent and with very sure musical taste, had drawn his attention to Verlaine's work ... it is not impossible that Dolly was Fauré's own daughter ... such is life!²¹

In his biography of Fauré, Koechlin eulogised the cycle:

The rhapsodical quality of *La bonne chanson*, its extraordinary vital force, the passion of light and happiness and all the musical treasures it inspires, remains incomparable. Fauré preserved an especial tenderness for this work, unique in its existence for the optimism, the excitement, the kind of happy intoxication that persistently animates it.²²

The eighth song, 'N'est-ce pas?', contains an image of two lovers, isolated as in a dark wood, 'Our two hearts, breathing gentle peace, Shall be two nightingales singing at evening.' The lovers refuse to consider their Destiny as they walk hand in hand, yet the final line of this poem ends with the words 'Whose love is unalloyed, is that not so?', a question mark, a poignant hint of the unsettling awareness that it cannot last for ever. Thirty years later, Fauré was present when Roger-Ducasse was rehearsing this song cycle with Suzanne Balguerie. He felt moved to tell him,

I never again wrote anything as spontaneously as *La bonne chanson*. I can, indeed I must add that I was helped by a spontaneity of understanding at least its equal by the woman who remains its most moving interpreter. The pleasure of feeling those little pieces of paper come alive as I brought them to her is something I have never experienced since.²³

At the age of seventy-eight he could still relive the vibrancy of his love for Emma.

Fauré's son, Philippe, later reflected, 'Apart from some enthusiastic pages of *La bonne chanson* you hardly ever find the sound of true happiness in Fauré's work'.²⁴ Fauré's affair with Emma marked a crucial stage in his life, eternalised in his composition.

In August 1894 Fauré had to write to Winnaretta from Bas-Prunay to make an excuse for not having dedicated these songs to her. 'You had accepted the five I composed previously [the *Cinq mélodies op.58*],' he wrote. He then promised to dedicate to her his next significant composition. However, she had to wait until 1898 when she

²¹ Letter to Jacques Longchamps, *Charles Koechlin 1867–1950. Correspondance. La Revue musicale*, 1982, pp. 140–1.

²² Charles Koechlin, *Gabriel Fauré*, trans. L. Orry, London, 1945, p. 23.

²³ In Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré, Correspondance*, 17 May 1923.

²⁴ 'Quelques pages enthousiastes de *La bonne chanson* mises à part, on ne trouve guère, dans l'œuvre de Fauré, l'accent de bonheur.' P. Fauré-Fremiet, 'Réflexions sur la confiance Fauréenne', *Gabriel Fauré*, Paris 1957, p. 136.