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CROSSROADS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE FRENCH SONATAS FOR VIOLIN AND
PIANO WRITTEN DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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by

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ABSTRACT

The First World War affected the musical landscape of France in immeasurable ways. Composers from three distinct musical movements—Gabriel Fauré, representing French Romanticism; Claude Debussy, associated with musical Impressionism; and Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger, who would soon form *Les Six*—all composed masterful sonatas for violin and piano in the final years of the war. This document examines these works’ stylistic, harmonic, and formal characteristics, influences, and interinfluences; the intricacies and challenges the pieces demand of their performers; and the marks of the Great War on the sonatas.

INTRODUCTION

This document aims to describe the unique characteristics of the violin sonatas of Gabriel Fauré (No. 2), Claude Debussy, Darius Milhaud (No. 2), and Arthur Honegger (No. 1), all written in the final years of World War I. By examining these, I also hope to help elevate the less-known of the four into the performance repertoire.

Being a lover of twentieth-century French music and having a world-renowned strings collaborative artist for a teacher, I, as part of a class during my first year at the University of California, Santa Barbara, started to investigate, where was the bulk of the twentieth-century French music for strings and piano written? Upon further exploration, I found that some of my favorite pieces in this genre were written in a cluster during the First World War, one century ago. So my doctoral research gradually came to focus on questions like: What was the writing like during this period? What challenges do these pieces present? What makes them special? How were these composers affected by the war, and how does this show up in their sonatas?

I quickly narrowed down to a set of four sonatas for violin and piano that sparked my interests so much that I researched them over the span of my graduate studies at UCSB and presented on and performed parts of them in my doctoral lecture-recital. Though all written by French composers over the course of just a few years, they represent a surprisingly broad set of styles, influences, and ideas from writers generally considered to be members of three distinct musical movements, while at the same time bearing equally striking similarities that suggest strong common influences or interinfluences among the composers. Regarding these sonatas, I will do my best to answer the above questions in this document.

BACKGROUND

Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger, along with Francis Poulenc, Georges Auric, Louis Durey, and Germaine Tailleferre, were members of what came to be known as *Les Six*, or the French six, moving forward from the French style of music known as Impressionism—whose primary figures were Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel—and exploring simpler textures and new musical ideas.

Marked by the death of Debussy in 1918, which had “firmly linked him in the public mind with the war and the fate of the French nation,” Debussy had “come to symbolize the French musical tradition.”¹ *Les Six*, then, “challenged the preoccupation with Debussy and the immediate past,”² identifying instead with avant-garde figures like Igor Stravinsky and Erik Satie who strived for constant renewal. The second violin-piano sonata of Milhaud and the first of Honegger, completed in 1917 and 1918, respectively, were written a few years before the official formation of *Les Six* and already display some of the general traits these composers would become associated with. Members of *Les Six* went in different directions as the 1920s progressed—a topic for a different paper—but suffice it to say, Milhaud and Honegger spent prolific lifetimes working toward new French musical traditions. The Violin Sonata of Claude Debussy (1917) was his final work, and in fact contains innovations in its own right that celebrate his career, look to the distant past for new inspiration, and look forward toward a new style of output left unrealized due to his death at fifty-five. Finally the Second Violin Sonata of Gabriel Fauré (completed 1918) is one of the finest employments of his late style, and represents both the ideals of French Romanticism established by this composer alongside such figures as

¹ Barbara L. Kelly, *Tradition and Style in the Works of Darius Milhaud 1912-1939* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 6.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

Camille Saint-Saëns, and also a style (and even modernism) unique to Fauré and forged over a lifetime of work and study.

MILHAUD'S SECOND VIOLIN SONATA

Darius Milhaud was born in Marseille to a Jewish family from Aix-en-Provence. Milhaud started his musical life as a violinist, later switching to focus on composition. After acceptance into the Conservatoire de Paris, he studied composition with Charles-Marie Widor and befriended Arthur Honegger. Between 1917 and 1919, Milhaud worked as secretary for Paul Claudel, the renowned dramatist and poet who was at that time the French ambassador to Brazil.

As a result of these experiences, after returning to France, Milhaud penned works influenced by the popular music he had encountered in South America, including compositions by Brazilian composer-pianist Ernesto Nazareth. *Le bœuf sur le toit* (Op. 58, 1920) contains melodies written by Nazareth and other prevalent Brazilian composers and imitates the sounds of Carnival. He also completed *Saudades do Brasil* (Op. 67) in the same year, a suite of twelve dances depicting various neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro. Both pieces still hold places in the currently performed repertoire as “at once unmistakably modern and irresistibly likable.”³

It was there in Rio in 1917 that he wrote his Second Violin Sonata and premiered it with himself at the violin. Already in this early work, one can sense how the composer “loved the rugged hills and bright hot sunlight of Aix-en-Provence—‘earthy, chunky, robust music,’”⁴ blending memories of home with some elements of his present milieu.

³ Terry Teachout, “Modernism with a Smile,” *Commentary* 105, no. 4 (1998): 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

Though Anti-Wagnerian along with the bulk of his French compatriots (he said a performance of *Parsifal* “sickened me by its pretentious vulgarity”), he did “greatly admire the neoclassicism of Hindemith,” neoclassicism eventually becoming a term closely tied with Milhaud’s output. While contemporaries in the twentieth century veered off to write in new forms that strayed from the western musical tradition, Milhaud “believed absolutely in their [his and fellow neoclassicists’] ability to express themselves fully within the framework of tonality.”⁵ The beginnings of this mindset are present in early Milhaud works like the Second Violin Sonata in their relatively uncomplicated textures and forms.

The score to Milhaud’s second piano-violin sonata lacks a key signature, immediately setting the stage for all of the harmonic exploration that will take place throughout the piece. Folk material depicting the French countryside forms the thematic elements of the sonata from its start. Example 1 shows the basis of the sonata’s opening in the pentatonic scale.



Ex. 1—*The opening violin melody to Milhaud’s Violin Sonata No. 2, and the pentatonic scale formed by its pitch members*

Pentatonic scales consist of only five notes, in contrast with western common-era heptatonic major and minor scales, and are a facet of many ancient and folk musics around the world. Both the tempo indication, *Pastoral*, and the simple pentatonic violin melody place us explicitly into rural France from the beginning.

⁵ Ibid., 50.

How Milhaud harmonizes this melody in the piano would become one of his trademarks throughout his career. A polychord is the superimposition of two or more chords, while polytonality is the presence of two or more simultaneous keys. Milhaud used these techniques, which are sometimes thought of as dissonant or challenging in tonality, extensively in his output, and their presence can be heard differently and bring forth different moods and characters depending on the harmonic circumstances.

Superimposing related chords, say a chord and its traditional dominant, can actually produce a relatively harmonious sound that often equates to an extended tertian harmony. In the second measure (marked in Example 2), there is tension between the C and the B in the composite harmony that resolves in the third measure. Altogether, the listener is undisturbed by the polytonality and Milhaud achieves in evoking a relaxed and pastoral mood. In fact, as shown in Example 3, Milhaud fleshes out this extended tertian chord completely later in the movement in a short piano solo, albeit in a different key. So, mild dissonance is an aspect of this type of polychord, but is generally perceived by the listener as something not too foreign or intimidating.

Ex. 2—Mvt. I, mm. 1-4—*Superimposition of E minor chord in violin over D9 harmony in piano equates to composite extended tertian harmony*



Ex. 3—m. 121—*The superimposition from m. 2 is reproduced all at once, this time with G as root*

Another type of superimposition features additional dissonance but still doesn't quite strike the audience's ear as altogether harsh. This has been termed a double inflection: a chord which includes two intervals of the same distance from the root but of differing qualities. These are very common in jazz, which is another idiom Milhaud came to be associated with. Another way of describing this type of polychord is one in which the different harmonies contain shared tone(s). Example 4 shows this kind of double inflection, using both A natural and A flat.



Ex. 4—m. 86—*The F Major chord in the piano left hand and D-flat Major chord both contain F, but with different types of thirds above the Fs (A natural vs. A flat)*

As the first movement's second theme is exposed, a third type of polytonal writing emerges in which the violin presents a different folk-like melody, but this time against much more dissonant competing and unrelated harmonies (see Example 5). In this case, the lightness

of the material presents a playful, joking character. Later in the work such clashing harmonies seem to connote something much more war-like and sinister.

Ex. 5—mm. 30-31—*Violin and Piano LH lines in B-flat Major and its parallel minor, respectively, frame a piano RH countermelody in D Major*

A secondary theme that emerges in Milhaud's first movement, which again uses a pentatonic scale as its foundation, also illustrates the quintal nature of that scale. The broken perfect fifths between F and C, G and D, and D and A, circled in Example 6, are all present in this short example and help to show that the pentatonic harmony can also be seen as a quintal harmony, built in fifths.

Laissez le Mouvt légèrement s'animer

2 Laissez le Mouvt légèrement s'animer

Ex. 6—mm. 60-61—Another pentatonic theme in Milhaud's first movement (above) with component fifths circled. Below, the harmony's pitch members are given as in the Piano LH in the example, then stacked in perfect fifths illustrating the harmony's quintal nature

One instrumental technique to note is that the violin writing asks for the use of a mute throughout the first movement, which both contributes to the light character and demands a special balance between light piano playing and that of the violin. The piano intentionally overwhelms the violin in one spot, an exclamation across the piano and a quintal expansion that covers ten of the twelve tones. This is also a good example of another hallmark of French music from this era: extreme dynamic and/or register shifts. Certainly dynamic shifts from soft to loud and vice versa in music date back to the Baroque, but French composers such as Ravel had begun to employ especially rapid shifts from one dynamic extreme and register to the opposite in the twentieth century—cf. *Une barque sur l'océan* from *Miroirs* (1905), shown in Example 7. While Ravel's undulations shift from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* and back over two measures, imitating turbulent waves, Milhaud shifts from *fortississimo* to *pianissimo* over a barline, suggesting a very dramatic interjection.

The image displays four systems of musical notation for piano. The first system shows a piano introduction with a dynamic marking of *pp*. The second system features a vocal line with the lyrics "dìmi - nu - en - do" and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The third system shows a piano accompaniment with a dynamic marking of *mf* and a "3" marking. The fourth system shows a piano accompaniment with dynamic markings of *pp net*, *mf*, and *mp*.

Ex. 7—Ravel mm. 37-39, Milhaud Mvt. I, mm. 73-82—*Extreme and sudden dynamic shifts in Ravel (above) and Milhaud (below)*

The opening passage to the final movement of Milhaud’s Second Violin Sonata, featuring louder, more persistent rhythmical figurations in the piano, features polytonal writing that presents an entirely different character flavored by more dissonant, war-like chords and texture. The piano part pits C-sharp Major broken chords in its left hand against A Major chords in its right. The two harmonies share a common tone (C#) but the remaining chord members clash brutally (E# against E natural, G# against A).

IV

The image shows a musical score for the first six measures of Milhaud's Fourth Movement. It consists of two systems. The first system shows the violin part (top staff) and the piano accompaniment (bottom two staves). The tempo is marked 'Très vif'. The piano part is marked 'A Maj.' and 'C# Maj.'. The violin part is marked 'modal material borrows from both harmonies and plays on half-step dissonances'. The piano part features 'rippling piano figurations throughout movement'. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with similar rippling textures.

Ex. 8—Milhaud Mvt. IV, mm. 1-6

The violin part borrows from both of the aforementioned harmonies and takes advantage of the dissonances in its menacing melody. Measures 3 and 4 can be seen as a brief respite from the commotion, in which the omnipresent C# is carried into a G Lydian harmonic context and the piano features a rippling texture. The war-like character resumes in measure 5 and can be found throughout the movement (not without contrasting sections herein discussed) till its end. It could be surmised that this march-like, confrontational material depicts the war back home.

Milhaud uses mystical-sounding superimposed augmented chords (C# augmented over D augmented, themselves each halves of disparate whole-tone scales, forming a composite hexatonic scale) in a rippling figuration in the piano to take us away from one land and into another (the middle section of the final movement), in a way that is different from but comparable to methods used in the other sonatas. One might hear a wash here in the rapid figurations up and down the keyboard, a characteristic of this movement that again hearkens back, in ways, to Ravel's 1905 waterscape (see Example 9, below, and Example 8, above).

Ex. 9—Milhaud mm. 29-32—*In which superimposed augmented chord figurations in the piano wash the sound and allow for a journey into the new section. The chords form a composite hexatonic scale.*

Though we associate more complex polyrhythms, which are the simultaneous uses of conflicting rhythms, with modern music, simpler ones have been an aspect of folk and classical music for centuries. One of the simplest is the hemiola, which pits three against two, and which emerges as one of the Latin-American-influenced materials in Milhaud’s final movement (see Example 10). In the same passage in which the piano carries along the hemiola, the violin utilizes natural harmonics by placing a left-hand finger lightly on the string, thereby producing a higher tone—a frequency multiplying that of the open string based on the placement of the finger.



Ex. 10—mm. 90-94—*While the piano continues a hemiola pattern established earlier in the middle section of the fourth movement, the violin produces eerie-sounding natural harmonics*

More complex polyrhythms are scattered throughout Milhaud’s score, as seen in Example 11. This polyrhythm adds to the conflict inherent to the simultaneous polytonality in the bellicose fourth movement and exquisitely prepares the grandiose arrival point at m. 24.



Ex. 11—*Measure 23 of the fourth movement of Milhaud’s Second Violin Sonata contains a polyrhythm of 5:16:12*

HONEGGER’S FIRST SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Back in Paris, studying at the Conservatoire, Arthur Honegger wrote his First Violin Sonata, which is the least known and performed of the sonatas explored here. Honegger was born in 1892 to Swiss-German parents in Le Havre, France, where he began his musical studies.

Later, after studying for two years at the Zurich Conservatory, he studied composition at the Conservatoire de Paris from 1911 to 1918, with Charles-Marie Widor—Milhaud had urged Honegger to join Widor’s class⁶—and Vincent d’Indy, who, of Honegger, said “Some of the young of today will turn into true composers. But Honegger has genius.”⁷ Honegger was renowned for his enthusiasm for trains, once telling a journalist, “I have always loved locomotives passionately. For me they are living creatures and I love them as others love women or horses.”⁸ His ‘*mouvement symphonique*’ *Pacific 231*, written in 1923 and which depicts a steam locomotive, would endure as his most notorious work.

Before the genesis of the violin sonata, Honegger had been conscripted by the *Rekrutenschule* to serve in defense of Switzerland.⁹ While the effects of the war on Honegger’s life and output are inestimable, his two-month service in 1915 on the Italian-Swiss border is described by biographer Harry Halbreich as “more boring than alarming.”¹⁰ Found to be a poor marksman, he was appointed choral conductor, and one of the composer’s most noteworthy memories from his service was split his trousers during a performance.¹¹ More significantly, he was able to bring back to France a number of valuable scores unavailable there at the time. Due to this, the composer, Milhaud, and other colleagues were able to explore works by such composers as Bartók and Schönberg.¹² After returning to Paris, Honegger was privileged to continue life as a student and enjoy “an artistic life that the war restricted only partially.”¹³

⁶ Harry Halbreich and Reinhard G. Pauly, *Arthur Honegger*, (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1999), 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸ James Harding, *The Ox on the Roof: Scenes from Musical Life in Paris in the Twenties* (London: Macdonald and Co., 1972), 190.

⁹ Halbreich and Pauly, 30.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 39.

Honegger began writing his First Violin Sonata in 1916 and completed it in February 1918. This in fact was the period in which his closest friend Darius Milhaud was away in Brazil,¹⁴ so the two companions wrote their violin-piano sonatas concurrently but from a distance.

It was during the composition of the violin sonata that Honegger met and became enamored with his future wife, Andrée Vauraburg, who beat him in a Conservatoire counterpoint examination in June 1916 after having sat with Honegger and Milhaud in their history class taught by Maurice Emmanuel.¹⁵ By the summer of 1917, the two were spending holidays together, though they would not marry for another nine years. One might speculate that the more sentimental material in the sonata, particularly the secondary theme of the second movement, was a reflection of Honegger's feelings toward Vauraburg.

Like Milhaud's second, folk material provides thematic foundation for Honegger's First Violin Sonata, which David Moore describes as "already show[ing] signs of his developing personality, with elements of humor and even violence."¹⁶ In addition to using simpler, more traditional melodic and harmonic language, the composer strived for formal balance by including an energetic Scherzo between two moderate-tempo movements.¹⁷

The second movement, marked *Presto*, comprises a contrapuntal whirlwind based on two folklike themes, a spirited dance marked by bucolic vigor¹⁸ in F Major and then a simple, tender melody in B Major evoking a pastoral setting not unlike Milhaud's (see Example 12). As in

¹⁴ Ibid., 34.

¹⁵ Ibid., 36.

¹⁶ David Moore, "HONEGGER: Trio; Violin Sonata I; Cello Sonata; Violin & Cello Sonatine." *American Record Guide* 79, no. 1 (2016): 119.

¹⁷ Halbreich and Pauly, 262.

¹⁸ Ibid., 263.

Milhaud's sonata, it's not these themes, but rather their creative treatments that gives the sonata the verve that presages the defining characteristics of *Les Six*.

II

The image shows a musical score for the second movement of a sonata. It is divided into two parts. The top part, starting at measure 18, is marked 'Presto' and 'f' (forte). It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bottom part, starting at measure 131, is marked 'p' (piano). It features a more melodic line with sustained notes and some grace notes. The key signature for both parts is two sharps (D major), and the time signature is 2/4.

Ex. 12—Mvt. II, mm. 1-28 and 131-150—*Two contrasting folklike themes from Honegger's middle movement*

In a letter to musicologist Paul Landormy, Honegger noted that “I attach great importance to musical architecture, which I hope will never be sacrificed in favour of literary or pictorial considerations. I have a tendency, perhaps excessive, towards polyphonic complexity. My great model is J. S. Bach.... I make no attempt, as do certain anti-impressionist musicians, to return to harmonic simplicity. On the contrary, I consider that we ought to make use of the harmonic material created by the school that has preceded us, though in a different way, as a basis for lines and rhythms.”¹⁹ Indeed, Honegger makes extensive use of canon and even fugue in the middle movement of his harmonically ingenious First Violin Sonata.

At mm. 57-62 of the second movement (shown in Example 13), the left hand of the piano imitates the violin after a single measure amidst a diminished harmonic context; the crunched rhythmic placement supports the compressed harmony and detached articulation. The following iteration of this primary thematic material features extended tertian harmony and a canonic imitation correlately placed farther from the leading violin entry—two measures behind.

¹⁹ Paul Landormy and Fred Rothwell. “Arthur Honegger.” *The Musical Times* 70, no. 1039 (Sep. 1, 1929): 789.

Another interesting canon occurs in the exposition's slow section, marked *tranquillo* and shown in Example 14, wherein the piano imitates the violin melody after one measure alongside a countermelody in its inner voice and perfect-fifth pedal tones in the bass.

The image shows a musical score for Example 13. It consists of two systems. The first system shows a violin melody (labeled 'melody') and a piano accompaniment. The piano part has an 'imitation' of the violin melody after one measure. The second system shows the continuation of the melody and piano accompaniment, with another 'imitation after two measures' highlighted. Dynamics include 'cresc.' and 'imitation'.

Ex. 13—mm. 57-68—*Sequential canons with differently delayed imitations in Honegger's second movement exposition*

The image shows a musical score for Example 14. It consists of two systems. The first system shows a violin melody and a piano accompaniment. The piano part has a 'countermelody in inner voice of piano' and 'drone pedal tones' in the bass. Dynamics include 'pp' and 'Tempo'.

Ex. 14—mm. 163-170—*Another canon alongside countermelody and above pedal tones*

Use of canon then pervades the development and conclusion of the second movement. There in the development, there are fragments of a fugue, shown in Example 15.

Ex. 15—mm. 188-203—*Fugue in the development of the middle movement of the Honegger sonata*

Whole-tone scales are hexatonic (six-tone) scales featuring the interval of whole step between each scale degree. Because the scale degrees are equidistant, usage of whole-tone harmonies can connote blurriness or indistinctness. This effect is a feature of several of the works discussed here, including Honegger’s scherzo. Here the composer transitions from the dreamy slow section back into the excited *Presto* using a whole-tone harmony, lingering for a moment before diving back into the dance (see Example 16). The music thereby loses grounding before the performers begin the lively development.

Ex. 16—mm. 180-187—*Closing material from the tender section of the Scherzo movement (above) features a blurriness created by usage of whole-tone harmony (composite harmony illustrated below)*

Special violin techniques contribute to the special color of this music, illustrated in Example 17. Indications to play melodic material high on the fingerboard on a low string, to place the bow close to the bridge, and to pluck the strings (*pizzicato*) add to the playful nature of Honegger's middle movement.



Ex. 17—mm. 202-206 (above), 215-218 (middle), and 90-97 (below)—*Indications to play material high on the G string, play sul ponticello, and alternate between arco and pizzicato generate playful colors in the Scherzo*

While deferring a thorough discussion of the outer movements of Honegger's First Violin Sonata, it's worthwhile to note that the sonata begins and ends in the same interesting tonality that clearly establishes itself as quintal (built in fifths) in the final chords of the piece (shown in Example 18). Like Milhaud's tertian harmony that eventually fleshed itself out completely, the same process bookends Honegger's whole sonata, this time with a quintal harmony. It also creates a sense of the cyclicism that will be explored further in the Debussy and Fauré sonatas.



Ex. 18—*Harmonies rooted in C# begin and end the sonata, both of which belong to a quintal chord illustrated at right*

Also worthwhile is a comparison of material from the final movement of Honegger's sonata with the finale of Debussy's *String Quartet* (1893), by this time a staple of the French repertoire and a work Honegger was undoubtedly familiar with and likely influenced by.²⁰ Both the final movement of Honegger's First Violin Sonata and that of Debussy's *String Quartet* begin in a subdued manner, then ensue to compound-meter material that begins quietly and gradually builds in speed and volume to impassioned and chromatic declarations, shown in Example 19.

Ex. 19—*The final movements of Honegger's sonata (above) and Debussy's String Quartet (below)*

This serves as another example of where the young composers, whose writings and political views sought to distinguish themselves from their predecessors, were still steeped in the French tradition of their elders. Indeed, about this pre-*Six*, period, Honegger admitted, “Debussy has always been one of my greatest musical pleasures and I can see objectively that he was a genius. Impressionism dazzled me as in a flash of rare intensity.”²¹

²⁰ Halbreich and Pauly, 263.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

DEBUSSY'S VIOLIN SONATA

The incorporation of folk elements into classical music, however, was certainly not an innovation attributable solely to *Les Six*. Debussy's final composition, his Violin Sonata, makes clear references to folk, gypsy, and Spanish violin playing,²² while retaining elements of the Impressionistic style he had been developing for some three decades. In fact, Debussy and Ravel both objected to the explicit likening of their music to the artistic movement championed in particular by Claude Monet: in a 1908 letter to his publisher, Jacques Durand, Debussy wrote "I'm trying to do 'something else'—in a way, realities—what imbeciles call 'impressionism,' a term as misused as it could possibly be"²³ and Ravel claimed that the term simply could not be justifiably applied to music.²⁴ Nevertheless, this document uses today's tendency to use this term to refer to Debussy's prominent writing style—one that his late works, in fact, can be seen as both perpetuating and moving away from.

Debussy's late sonatas revealed the composer's current personal, political, and artistic positions. He was diagnosed with colon cancer in 1909 and underwent a drug treatment, an unsuccessful operation, and radiation therapy. The disease continued to take its progressive course over the following years. The onset of the Great War further depressed the composer, but it also inspired nationalistic fervor, and he gathered formidable focus into writing a set of six sonatas for different combinations of instruments. It may seem unusual that the sometimes iconoclastic Debussy would return near the end of his life to so conservative a form as the

²² Augustin Hadelich, "A gypsy favorite that never fails to steal the show," *Strings* 25, no. 10 (May 2011): 33; Léon Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Work*, trans. Maire and Grace O'Brien (London: Humphrey Milford, 1933), 266.

²³ Douglass M. Green, review of *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* by Paul Roberts, *Notes* 53, no. 3 (1997): 806.

²⁴ Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews, compiled and edited by Arbie Orenstein* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 421.

sonata, but he explained that his model was the eighteenth-century French sonata rather than the classical German sonata. Debussy used these late sonatas as expressions of his anti-German political and artistic stances, explicitly stressing their quintessentially French nature. Marianne Wheeldon writes: “Recovering the ‘old French style’—that is, the tradition of Rameau and Couperin—was a theme that pervaded Debussy’s critical writings, becoming especially pronounced in the war years. According to Debussy, the loss of a French musical tradition was the direct result of a persistent and stifling Austro-Germanic influence, one that he believed consumed native French artistic sensibilities.”²⁵

Barbara Kelly has put Debussy’s relation to his French predecessors into broader context. Drawing on the work of other scholars, she points out that, “Scott Messing has argued that the works in which this close study of Rameau’s style manifests itself most are the late sonatas. Debussy was certainly portraying himself as an inheritor of French baroque traditions by conceiving them as a set of six sonatas and by describing himself as... *musicien français*.”²⁶ With their novel austerity they exhibit “the war-time... aesthetic of *dépouillement* [stripping of the inessential], where musician elements are reduced to their minimum. ...Once again Debussy was continuing to innovate while looking back. His sonatas are not a[n] homage in the manner of Ravel’s *Le tombeau de Couperin*, in which... Ravel found a specific model in Couperin’s ‘Forlane.’ Neither are Debussy’s sonatas nostalgic: he was using the past to justify innovation.”²⁷ Individual movement titles within these late sonatas, such as that of the second movement, *Intermède*, in the Sonata for Violin and Piano, contrast with those of nineteenth-

²⁵ Marianne Wheeldon, “Debussy and ‘La Sonate Cyclique,’” *Journal of Musicology—A Quarterly Review of Music History, Criticism, Analysis, and Performance Practice* 22, no. 4 (2005): 668.

²⁶ Barbara L. Kelly, “Debussy’s Parisian affiliations,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 40.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

century sonatas and instead recall eighteenth-century movement.²⁸ To make his objective—and his nationalistic objectives—all the more clear, Debussy signed these late sonatas “Claude Debussy, *musicien français*.”²⁹

Debussy was only able to finish three of the six sonatas he had sketched: the Cello Sonata (1915); the Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp (1916); and the Sonata for Violin and Piano, completed in April 1917. This was all accomplished during a period of ill health. “The war years only brought more misery as the patriotic Debussy lamented his inability to be of practical use to his beloved France and found his inspiration drying up. Only in the summer of 1915 did he experience a return of his former creative powers, but that winter his rectal cancer became serious and, apart from the Violin Sonata..., his composing career was over and his existence was only made bearable through morphine.”³⁰ About the composition of the sonata, the composer wrote: “This sonata will be interesting from a documentary viewpoint and as an example of what may be produced by a sick man in time of war.” Debussy served as pianist at its premiere on May 5, 1917, and again in September at what was to be his final public performance. Debussy, deeply depressed by the destruction brought on by the war, died in Paris on March 25, 1918, during the final German offensive and at a dire time for France.³¹ Regardless of the dark circumstances surrounding its creation, the Violin Sonata is a dazzling work that blends fantastic outbursts with more reflective material.

The elements often associated with musical Impressionism that made their way into the Debussy sonata are the use of various distinctive timbres (e.g. the watery, indistinct, pedaled

²⁸ Wheeldon, “Debussy,” 669.

²⁹ Kelly, “Debussy’s Parisian affiliations,” 40.

³⁰ Robert Orledge, “Debussy the man,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22.

³¹ Vallas, *Claude Debussy*, 270.

writing in the piano against a melody in artificial harmonics in the violin in the middle section of the sonata's first movement) to connote different colors or moods; extended harmonies, as seen in this same section; and ambiguity in harmony, parallel motion, and modal writing, all described below. However, while retaining these Debussyian hallmarks, the late sonatas present a preference for a simpler neoclassical texture.³² The composer described this transition as “a return to ‘pure music.’”³³

Debussy's output, and the Impressionist genre, is marked by the use of modes—scales and corresponding harmonies that are neither major nor minor in the traditional sense, whose reincorporation into western music in the twentieth century has been described variously as archaic, folklike, new, and exotic. A rejection of the tonalities that had been established in the common era of music, modal harmonies can take the listener to unexpected places and can promote a sense of ambiguity. All of these ideas can be seen in the opening passage to Debussy's Violin Sonata.

After the piano establishes a G minor harmony with a simple root position chord, the listener is immediately taken out of the context of that harmony with a C Major chord, perhaps implying an overall G Dorian mode (see Example 20).

³² Boyd Pomeroy, “Debussy's tonality: a formal perspective,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 156.

³³ Wheeldon, “Debussy,” 644.

VIOLON *Allegro vivo (55 = d.)*

PIANO *Allegro vivo* *pp dolce sostenuto*

where are we? *p dolce espress.*

implication of G dorian, immediate loss of strong G minor tonality

p poco marcato *first cadence rests on C Major*

Ex. 20—*Ambiguities in the opening section of Debussy's piano-violin sonata*

After traveling through several unexpected harmonies: E-flat minor, then a D9 chord with raised 9th borrowed from the G Dorian mode, the music arrives at its first cadence in C Major. So, like the opening to Milhaud's sonata, it's not this Spanish-tinged violin melody, which never betrays the G minor key signature, but rather its harmonic support that sends the listener into territory that could be interpreted as foreign or perhaps from another time.

Indeed, it's valuable to note that the folk- or dream-like beginning to the Debussy work is not at all dissimilar to Milhaud's in his Second Violin Sonata. In fact, the composers use remarkably similar chords in the two openings (albeit spelled differently)—Milhaud to support a G-Major melody, and Debussy to support one in G minor—shown in Example 21.

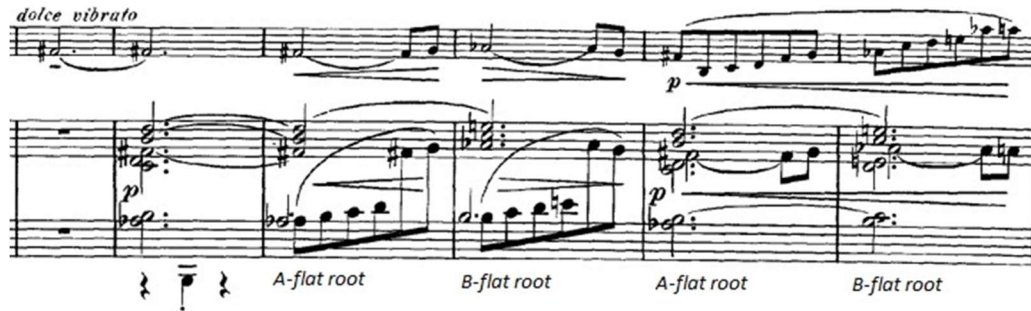
The image displays a musical score for comparison. The top two staves represent the opening of Debussy's Violin Sonata (mm. 10-14), featuring a folklike melody with a whole-tone harmonic background. The bottom two staves represent the opening of Milhaud's Violin Sonata No. 2 (mm. 1-4), which also features a folklike melody with a whole-tone harmonic background. The Milhaud score includes markings: 'Pastoral', 'Sourdine', 'p souple et doux', 'Pastoral ral.', and 'Mouvt'. The bottom staff of the Milhaud score also includes 'mf déclamé' and 'p' markings.

Ex. 21—Comparison of openings to Debussy Violin Sonata, mm.10-14 (above) and Milhaud Violin Sonata No. 2, mm.1-4 (below). Note the appearance in both passages of D \sharp 9 and C Major chords supporting folklike melodies centered on G.

The use of whole-tone harmonies in the Debussy score takes away a sense of grounding. It is remarkable though that Debussy manages to create harmonic motion within the whole-tone world.³⁴ Near the end of the development of the first movement of the sonata, there is a perceptible moving root promoting harmonic motion within the realm of a single whole-tone scale, as shown in Example 22. This material expands into an *appassionato* section containing both whole-tone and diatonic harmonies that generate a whirlwind marked by harmonic changes with every measure and closing with a half cadence on the D \sharp 9 harmony that has proven itself to be something of a global dominant.³⁵

³⁴ Ludmila Ulehla, *Contemporary Harmony; Romanticism through the Twelve-tone Row* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 177-78.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.



Ex. 22—Measures 180-185 of Debussy *Mvt. I* exhibit root motion within the established whole-tone scale (one that contains a number of important members of the global G minor context) and prepare the impassioned conclusion to the development section

Parallel voicing was another facet of Debussy’s writing from early in his career, e.g. in his Second Piano Arabesque, through to the Violin Sonata.³⁶ Parallel voicing is also known as harmonic planing, and one can distinguish between two types of planing utilized by these composers: diatonic planing, where general intervallic relationships remain consistent but individual notes obey the key signature of the current harmony (i.e. the specific intervals may change from chord to chord), and chromatic or triadic planing, where the specific intervallic relationships remain constant, generally resulting in accidentals that go against the current key. Debussy’s usage of planing was often diatonic (cf. the solo piano prelude *La Cathedrale engloutie*), and the arabesque and Violin Sonata are not exceptions. All of these are shown in Example 23.

³⁶ Mark DeVoto, “The Debussy sound: colour, texture, gesture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 180.



Ex. 23—Parallel harmonies in Debussy’s *Deuixième Arabasque*, above left, (1890) and *Violin Sonata*, above right (1918). *La Cathedrale engloutie* (below) contains another well-known example of diatonic planing, written in the heart of Debussy’s career (1910).

Milhaud also used parallel voicing in his *Second Violin Sonata*, and would carry the technique into many of his later works to the extent that it became a ubiquitous feature in his compositions (cf. *Saudades do Brasil*, Op. 67, for extensive use of diatonic planing; and the middle section of “Tango des Fratellini” from *Le Boeuf sur le toit*, Op. 58, for use of chromatic planing). Example 24 shows an excerpt from the final movement of Milhaud’s sonata featuring two types of planing. This appears to have been a keystone in the writing of the Impressionists that the young Milhaud readily carried into his oeuvre.

chromatic planing in piano right hand

très rythmé

diatonic planing in piano

ff

Ex. 24—Chromatic and diatonic planing in the final movement of Milhaud's Second Violin Sonata (mm. 115-125)

Part of the thematic material in the middle section of the first movement of Debussy's violin-piano sonata demonstrates many of the components of Impressionism (modal writing, parallelism, etc.) and an altogether distinct color not seen in any of these other sonatas. As shown above in *Une barque sur l'océan*, water imagery was a chief component of Impressionistic writing and was both an implicit and explicit component of Debussy's writing throughout his career:

Reflets dans l'eau.

Andantino molto
(Tempo rubato)

PIANO

1374677

Modéré, sans lenteur (dans un rythme très simple)

pp

pp

pp

pp

Ex. 25—*Visibly evident water figurations in Reflets dans l'eau from Images, libre 1 (left) and De l'aube à midi sur le mer from La Mer (right), both written 1905*

Though Debussy sought to return, or perhaps move forward, to a different style of writing in his final sonatas, the waves in the middle section of the first movement of the Violin Sonata (Example 26) are evident to the naked eye and constitute one of the Impressionistic elements inherent to the work. Like the calmer sections of Ravel's ocean, the piano lingers on certain tonalities for unexpected lengths of time, with melodies on the violin employing special techniques, before more dramatic action returns and disrupts the tranquility. Indications for the violinist to play over the fingerboard (*sur la touche*) and a motive consisting entirely of artificial harmonics further contribute to the special color of the section.

Meno mosso (Tempo rubato)

pp

2/4 sur la touche

p

Meno mosso (Tempo rubato)

pp

iusingando

Tempo I^o

3/4

pp

Tempo I^o

Ex. 26—mm. 84-103—*Wave figurations, sur la touche, and artificial harmonics contribute to the character of the middle section of the first movement*

Debussy's Violin Sonata exhibits a different form of cyclicism than Honegger's. In "Debussy and *La Sonata cyclique*," Marianne Wheeldon writes extensively on the cyclicism essential to the late sonatas, its relation to the writings and compositions of the late French Romantics, i.e. those of d'Indy and Franck, respectively, and what can be seen as Debussy's innovative use of cyclicism in rejection of traditional German romantic writing. Cyclical writing is where we hear the repetition, in a later movement or part of the piece, of motives, themes, or whole sections from an earlier movement in order to unify structure. A brief quotation from its first movement appears in the final movement of Debussy's sonata (see Example 27) before the

composer dives into new material. Debussy's cyclicism constitutes a more explicit unifying force than Honegger's harmonic bookends and exemplifies a technique that our final composer would take full advantage of.

The image shows three systems of musical notation for the piano part of Debussy's Sonata in G major, Op. 105. The first system is marked "Très animé (55 = ♩.)" and "Très animé", with dynamics "pp léger et lointain" and triplets. The second system is marked "Meno mosso (poco) sur la touche" and "pp dolce sostenuto", with dynamics "più pp" and "Meno mosso (poco)". The third system continues the piano part with dynamics "pp".

Ex. 27—The opening material (mm. 1-17) in the violin part of the final movement Debussy's sonata is a near-exact quotation from the opening of its first movement, albeit with new figurations and harmonies in the piano

Debussy was dissatisfied and anxious about the sonata during its composition,³⁷ but once completed he felt more comfortable with it, writing to a friend: “In keeping with the contradictory spirit of human nature, it is full of joyous tumult.... Beware in the future of works which appear to inhabit the skies; often they are the product of a dark, morose mind.” Léon

³⁷ Vallas, *Claude Debussy*, 255-56.

Vallas aptly comments that “the whole work betrays fatigue and effort...,” vehemently fighting for life.³⁸

FAURÉ’S SECOND SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

The personal and artistic relationships between Claude Debussy and Gabriel Fauré were both intricately interwoven and strained. A detailed history will not be given here of their romantic involvements with Lilly and Emma Bardac, but the impact of the sisters on the composers’ output cannot be underestimated.

Emma and Fauré were romantically involved for several years in the last decade of the nineteenth century;³⁹ Bardac inspired new creativity in Fauré’s writing, exemplified in *La Bonne Chanson* (Op. 69, completed 1894).⁴⁰ Debussy’s marriage to Emma Bardac in 1908 must have brought forth some estrangement between the two composers; they maintained cordial contact, possibly at Emma’s behest. Fauré and Debussy wrote relatively little about the other’s compositions, and the few letters between them that survive sustain a polite tone. One such letter is a response to Fauré having requested that Debussy perform some of his *Études*, which had been published in 1916, at a concert. Debussy’s letter from April 29, 1917, hides that he was succumbing to cancer. “My hesitation in responding to your kind letter, dear Master and friend, stems from this lowliest of reasons: I can no longer play the piano sufficiently well to risk performing my ‘Studies’... In public I am attacked by a particular kind of phobia: there are too many keys; I no longer have enough fingers; and all of a sudden I no longer know where the

³⁸ Ibid., 266.

³⁹ Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life*, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 181.

⁴⁰ Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes, *Gabriel Fauré: The Songs and Their Poets* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 253.

pedals are! It is sad and dreadfully distressing. Do please believe that I am not trying to be in any way unhelpful, very much to the contrary, for I should have particularly liked to please you.

Forgive me, and believe in the devoted affection of your Claude Debussy.”⁴¹

Gabriel Fauré’s musical talents were recognized early on, and at the age of nine, he was sent to the École Niedermeyer in Paris, where he studied to be a choirmaster and organist. Among his later teachers was Camille Saint-Saëns, who became a lifelong friend. At the height of his career, he held the esteemed positions of organist of the Église de la Madeleine and director of the Paris Conservatoire, and retreated to the countryside during holidays to focus on composition. With figures like Saint-Saëns, he became one of the emblems of French romantic music, and by his final years, Fauré was recognized in his country as its foremost composer. A national tribute took place for him in Paris in 1922, led by the president of the French Republic.

Fauré’s output links the end of Romanticism with the burgeoning modernism of the twentieth century. Chopin was actively composing at his birth, and by his death, movements such as the Second Viennese School and jazz were in full bloom. Throughout his works, one finds French ideals like clarity, moderation of expression, and general restraint and subtlety; all of these are found not only in Fauré’s second violin-piano sonata but in abundance in each of the other sonatas discussed here, and the composers owe this style to in great part to Fauré and his oeuvre.

Musicians often associate modal-chromatic writing with the Impressionists, who developed a new sense of modal harmony with its own implications of tonality, cadences, etc., and which can send the listener into territory sensed as foreign or ancient. Fauré’s more formal modal writing continually evokes a sense of exploration, throwing its audience into unexpected

⁴¹ J. Barrie Jones, *Gabriel Fauré: A Life in Letters*, (London: Batsford, 1989), 168.

places at every turn. His extensive study of plainchant and ecclesiastical modes during formative years studying at the École Niedermeyer⁴² led him to a mastery of modal writing that contrasted with the diatonic and chromatic writing of fellow Romantic composers. This ingenious style was tempered by a careful preservation of classical formal aspects and exhibited a preference toward long cantabile lines. These are all cornerstones of Fauré's Second Violin Sonata.

Fauré knew well and developed a style that took full advantage of the fact that any harmonic situation is actually able to resolve—even while retaining traditional voice-leading rules—in many different ways than they generally were by his contemporaries and predecessors. Certainly this sort of device was used by many common-era composers for centuries to take the listener into unexpected territory, but Fauré's late style was one in which this technique was used constantly. Therefore the audience for these works follows the composer perhaps into different rooms of an enchanted castle, until finally it reaches conclusions of revelation where everything suddenly basks in sunlight.

The opening to the final movement of the Second Violin Sonata, shown in Example 28, serves as a fine illustration of this style. The tension of the circled C# Major chord (V/ii) might resolve to F# minor (ii) and lead us back to the tonic (e.g. V → I) in another composer's writing; however, the unexpected resolution of the upper voice downward allows for the lower voices to lead to C Major. Such harmonic twists permeate the sonata.

⁴² Cooper, Martin, *French Music from the Death of Berlioz to the Death of Fauré* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 78.



Ex. 28—The opening (mm. 1-5) to the final movement of Fauré’s Second Violin Sonata contains the ingenious pivoting that exemplifies the composer’s late style

The style and ingenuity of the Second Violin Sonata seemed to have been lost on some of the composer’s contemporaries but admired by the new generation of French composers. The innovations inherent to Fauré’s late style were criticized; journalist Charles Tenroc espoused a disdainful approach in his characterization of the Second Violin Sonata and launched a reproach at Fauré for the modernity of the work.⁴³ This criticism was strikingly similar to that used to describe the musical language of *Les Six*, and it actually worked to keep Fauré’s work in the foreground of the public’s attention. “Without provoking violent reactions, Fauré’s chamber music inspired the composers—young and old alike—who attended the concerts of the *Société nationale* and elsewhere. Fauré was not only a model to his students, but also to the entire subsequent generation of composers.”⁴⁴

In 1924, Milhaud wrote: “In the measure of the years that have passed, and after having given us works like the Ballade, the Theme and variations, the Preludes... the Quartets, the First Violin Sonata and the irresistible songs, Fauré now offers us a new art with *Pénélope* and the works which he has written since It is an art both level-headed and, at the same time, marvelously energetic.”⁴⁵ Though Fauré was in general excluded from the French sphere of contemporary music in the early twentieth century—due in part to his longtime affiliation with

⁴³ Tom Gordon, *Regarding Fauré* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1999), 59.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

the *Société Nationale*, his works were unseen next to the works of such composers as Kodály or Milhaud being played at the concerts of the new *Société Musicale Indépendante*—the modernity of Fauré’s late chamber music was evident, however dissimilar it was from that of Ravel or Stravinsky, and it held overarching effects on French music during and after the First World War.⁴⁶

The Second Violin Sonata in E minor, far less frequently played than the first, was begun at Evian in the summer of 1916 and completed in Paris over the following year. Fauré spent the rest (seven years) of his life writing periodically about the second sonata and its disappointing lack of acceptance; in July 1924, about when, in March 1922, Alfred Cortot had performed the sonata before Elisabeth, Queen of the Belgians, to whom it is dedicated, the composer wrote of the way the performers had “woken” his sonata from its “long, sad sleep,” “almost as if it were a fairy-tale.”⁴⁷

The baroque character of Fauré’s late works (and likely the *dépoulliment* found in the other sonatas examined in this document) can be attributed in part to the musical atmosphere in wartime France. The war was doing away with large orchestras, and composers were shifting their writing towards the chamber setting. Along with the prominent French rejection of Wagnerian excess, composers drew inspiration from the forgotten form and balance of the baroque and classical periods.⁴⁸ Influential salon proprietor Winnaretta Singer, who was partial to baroque music, encouraged composers such as Debussy to write for smaller ensembles in the manner of Couperin and Rameau. This is one of the sources of what would become known as French neoclassicism, featuring lighter textures and sharper materials.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid., 59-60.

⁴⁷ Robert Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré* (London: Eulenberg Books, 1979), 168.

⁴⁸ Jessica Duchon, *Gabriel Fauré* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 189.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 190.

On the intimate and introverted nature of the second sonata, violinist Helene Jourdan-Morhange, one of the sonata's first performers, wrote: "This passion has nothing to do with romanticism, but rather with an inner turmoil that leaves the surface flat and smooth."⁵⁰ Fauré dedicated the sonata to Queen Elisabeth of the Belgians, an admirer of the composer who herself played the violin. Another Belgian to attempt the work was Eugène Ysaÿe; but he appears not to have succeeded in mastering it in his old age.⁵¹ He would not be the last violinist who, familiar with the popular, charming, and energetic A-Major sonata, would be startled and perplexed by the dense and uncompromising one in E minor: its beauty tends to be eclipsed by its metric, harmonic, polyphonic, and formal complexities, all indicating a certain departure from its forty-years-older predecessor (but not without some similarities briefly described below).

Fauré was either completely or near-completely deaf in the final years of his career, and high and low sounds were particularly deformed in his hearing.⁵² It's been theorized that this contributed to his tendency for occupying the middle range of the sound spectrum in his late works, contrasting greatly with the extreme ranges and textures found in the Impressionist works of the first decade of the twentieth century. Tension in this work, then, comes from within the music, rather than through extreme dynamics, range, or instrumental techniques. Fauré had been exposed to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach during organ studies at the École Niedermeyer at a more extensive level than that of contemporaries trained at the Conservatoire.⁵³ His late works in particular show a pioneering *dépouillement* and dense intellectual content that would both

⁵⁰ Ibid., 191.

⁵¹ Ibid., 192.

⁵² Cooper, *French Music*, 211.

⁵³ Ibid., 78.

become a primary tenet of the approaches of certain members of *Les Six* and also pay respect to the baroque masters.⁵⁴

Two historical examples illustrate ties between Fauré's methods and those inherent to the era of Couperin alongside the composer's own abilities to captivate using his own language. Couperin's well-known *Les Barricades Mystérieuses* from his *Sixième Ordre* (sixth suite of harpsichord pieces), composed in 1717, features constant suspensions into subsequent harmonies, creating a syncopated feeling and frequent moments of harmonic tension and resolution. Even on a visual level, one can observe similarities between these aspects of Couperin's writing and Fauré's third movement (Example 28, above, and 29).

Les Barricades Mystérieuses.

Vivement.

Rondeau.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Les Barricades Mystérieuses" by Couperin. The score is for a harpsichord and is in 2/4 time. It is marked "Vivement." and "Rondeau." The score consists of two systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef. The first system shows a complex texture with many notes, including many beamed sixteenth notes in the treble clef. The second system continues this texture, with a first ending bracket over the final few measures. The score illustrates the concept of suspensions in three of four voices, creating rhythmic lilt and momentary harmonic tensions and resolutions.

Ex. 29—Mm. 1-9 of the fifth piece in Couperin's *Sixième Ordre* features suspensions in three of four voices, causing rhythmic lilt and momentary harmonic tensions and resolutions throughout

The intimacy and compact range found in the calmer sections of Fauré's sonata hearken back to the baroque style. Example 30 shows how the second movement (*Allegro*) of the Third Violin Sonata in E Major of J.S. Bach, BWV 1016, bears a remarkable resemblance to the final

⁵⁴ Ibid., 142.

movement of the Fauré. About these similarities, Orledge writes: “He was wrongly thought outdated by the neo-classicists whilst being a ‘classic’ in his own right, and he was a classicist deeply rooted in the music of the sixteenth century and Bach.”⁵⁵



Ex. 30—mm. 48-56 of J.S. Bach’s Violin Sonata No. 3, *Allegro*—*Suspensions into following harmonies and occupation of the middle ranges of both instruments typify the movement and bear similarities to Fauré’s third movement*

Fauré certainly did not explicitly borrow material, but the similarities to Bach’s score in terms of texture, register, and style are remarkable. Suspensions into the next harmonies also typify Fauré’s writing here and again suggest a lilting story. Regarding the intimacy of the writing, Cooper notes that this music contains a “personal manner... even more noticeable than the general sense of style,” written during a period where the composer found communication increasingly difficult.⁵⁶

The Great War saw Fauré engaged in several different tasks. He was preparing an edition of the piano music of Schumann, one of his favorite composers, for his publisher; new editions were needed since the war had made obtaining scores from Germany a challenge. One can see in the solo piano works he wrote during this period, the Twelfth Barcarolle, Op. 106b, and Twelfth Nocturne, Op. 107, his mental anguish concerning the war, one that would appear in the Second

⁵⁵ Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré*, 272.

⁵⁶ Cooper, *French Music*, 214.

Violin and First Cello Sonatas. His younger son, Philippe, was on active service throughout the war.⁵⁷

Most of the extensive Second Violin Sonata, Op. 108 was written at Evian on the southern French shore. The middle movement bloomed forth from an initial sketch during the following winter in Paris; it is a reworking of the slow movement from the early discarded Symphony in D minor of 1884.⁵⁸

A detailed comparison of Fauré's Second Violin Sonata with the exceedingly more popular first sonata in A Major, completed 1876, will not be given here. Suffice it to say that there are in fact striking similarities between the two that indicate Fauré's lifelong adherence to certain compositional principles—Duchen writes: “many of Fauré's hallmarks are present in both: liquid piano writing beneath open, soaring melodies, long lines, extended and unpredictable phrase lengths, as well as the decisive energy of each sonata's opening movement”⁵⁹—but that the second, written over forty years after the first, exemplifies Fauré's mature style and a lifetime of work. Orledge comments on the composer's late period: “In trying to ‘elevate’ his pure and almost abstract art ‘as far as possible above everyday existence,’ he was bound to face incomprehension; and he was disillusioned when third period masterpieces like the Second Violin Sonata and the *Fantaisie* were ignored for earlier creations like the First Violin Sonata and the Ballade. Those that call him a salon composer and ‘master of charms’ have never really come to grips with his very varied output.”⁶⁰ Norman Suckling justly characterizes these late works as having vigorous opening movements, effervescent finales, and middle movements that “distil[l] an atmosphere of peaceful intensity where every vibration is significant without

⁵⁷ Jones, *Gabriel Fauré*, 164.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁵⁹ Duchon, *Gabriel Fauré*, 191.

⁶⁰ Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré*, 273.

being insistent,” also featuring a new simplicity and a preference for small melodic cells.⁶¹ And American composer Aaron Copland wrote: “All of Fauré’s production may be divided into the usual three periods. But there is no such radical difference between his and last manners as is evident in many other composers. In fact, it is not very difficult to find premonitions of his last manner even his earliest creations, and traces of the early Fauré in his most recent publications. It is the *quality* of his inspiration that has most changed. The themes, harmonies, form, have remained essentially the same, but with each new work they have all become more fresh, more personal, more profound.”⁶²

Though Fauré’s second violin-piano sonata beautifully encapsulates the baroque feeling described above, it also incorporates many sophisticated techniques that earn its place as a modern piece in the twentieth-century repertoire. Fauré’s ingenious methods of moving through harmonies, as discussed earlier, take the listener and performer to unexpected places. This gives a chromatic appearance and makes for difficult note-reading for both performers and intonation challenges for the violinist. The constant shifts through unexpected harmonies, and resulting accidentals, give the passage in Example 31 the appearance of the avant-garde writing that the Impressionists and *Les Six* would not hesitate to employ.

⁶¹ Cooper, *French Music*, 212.

⁶² Aaron Copland, “Gabriel Fauré, a Neglected Master,” *The Musical Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (Oct. 1924): 576.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system features a vocal line at the top with the instruction "un poco più f" and a piano accompaniment below. Two green boxes highlight specific chords in the piano accompaniment. The second system shows a piano solo with a "cresc." marking and a "mf" dynamic. Blue boxes highlight specific chords in the piano accompaniment.

Ex. 31—Mvt, I, mm. 135-140—*Constant shifts through unexpected harmonies cause a switch from double-flats to double-sharps within the span of four measures*

Fauré and even his teacher Saint-Saëns were quite aware of the power of whole-tone scales as an intermittent device that could be used to travel from one tonal center to another, or to create a sense of instability. Saint-Saëns uses whole-tone writing as a transition between themes in the final movement of his Clarinet Sonata, written shortly before his death in 1921:

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system consists of a single treble clef staff with a piano (p) dynamic marking. The second system consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with piano (p) dynamic markings. The third system also consists of a grand staff, featuring tempo markings 'Poco riten.' and 'a Tempo', and dynamic markings 'dim.' and 'mf'. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 32—*Whole-tone writing serves as a transition between traditionally tonal themes in the final movement of the Saint-Saëns Clarinet Sonata, mm. 72-81*

Fauré uses this device throughout the first movement of the Second Violin Sonata. The passage in Example 33 gives a sense of bewilderment that eventually acquiesces into the tender second theme.



Ex. 33—Mvt. I, mm. 24-32—*Sequential usage of whole-tone writing in a stormy transition near the beginning of Fauré’s first movement fuels the instability that gradually resolves in a lilting, tranquil second theme*

Such tension and agitation in the sonata, particularly in the first movement and evident from its foreboding and rhythmically strained piano introduction in stark octaves, in part surely reflect the composer’s anxieties about his son Philippe, about whose safety Fauré was deeply worried.⁶³

Fauré’s sonata, like Honegger’s, is filled with canon, a melody with one or more imitations of the melody played after a certain duration. During one of the returns to the primary

⁶³ Carlo Caballero, “Patriotism or Nationalism? Fauré and the Great War,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 52, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 608.

theme in the third movement, the violin imitates the piano, and then immediately the piano imitates the violin, constituting just one example of the explorative counterpoint found throughout the work, shown in Example 34.



Ex. 34—Mvt. III, mm. 168-174

Orledge aptly writes on the relationship of this type of writing to early French music: “Fauré’s method in his bigger chamber works is to build up movement over a regular rhythmic pulse and a consistent figuration; but the rapid enharmonic transitions of tonal centre and the manner in which the figuration lyrically evolves—so that the growth of figuration and the flow of the tonalities becomes inseparably the ‘form,’ the architecture—are clearly allied to the technique of the sixteenth century in which melodic growth, polyphonically conceived, is composition.”⁶⁴

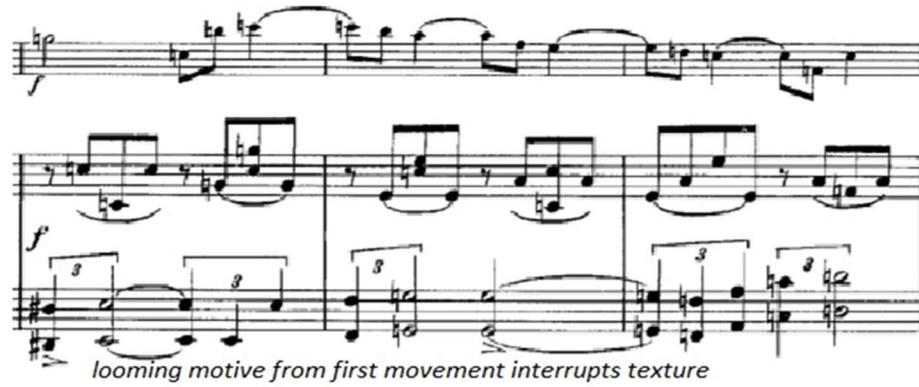
While the Debussy and Honegger sonatas hinted at overall cyclical writing, the Fauré exploits the technique much more fully in order to tell an overarching story.⁶⁵ Toward the end of the gentle and lyrical final movement, turbulent material from the primary theme in the opening of the sonata appears in the bass of the piano, adding to the growing tension and threatening the tranquility with its opposing rhythm, forming a composite polyrhythm, shown in Example 35.

Later, secondary thematic material from the first movement appears and blends with the themes

⁶⁴ Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré*, 272.

⁶⁵ Carlo Caballero, *Fauré and French musical aesthetics* (Music in the twentieth century) (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 150. For more on this topic, see the author’s discussion on Fauré’s cyclicalism within the broader topic of homogeneity.

of the final movement in its glorious ending, seen in Example 36. One can imagine the outpouring of this initially tender theme as a homecoming invitation for Philippe, exuberant joy erupting and resolving the tension inherent to the sonata.



Ex. 35—Mvt. III, mm. 198-200



Ex. 36—mm. 214-217

The sonata is dense with complexities and did not win its audiences over, even in its composer's lifetime. In a letter written March 17, 1922, two years before the Fauré's death due to pneumonia, Fauré wrote to his wife Marie: "Mme Cortot writes that tomorrow evening in Brussels, her husband will play for Queen Elisabeth in her palace the sonata which I dedicated to her in 1917. This ill-fated sonata is still only very very rarely played! What a lot of time is needed for music to become known!"⁶⁶ An astute young Aaron Copland in another continent

⁶⁶ Jones, *Gabriel Fauré*, 197.

similarly wrote an uncanny prediction of the fate of the sonata in a celebratory article on the composer's works and perplexing lack of renown outside of France alongside his "unique" output, one month before the composer's death in 1924: "Yet, in America, and one might add, in all other countries except France, his work is practically unknown. Certainly such a situation can be justly termed 'curious.' And may we not call 'unique,' a man who began writing his first songs in 1865 and has continued for almost sixty years to produce compositions which, paradoxically, become ever more spiritually youthful and serene as he becomes physically older and weaker."⁶⁷

Copland continues: "But now the clouds and mists of Impressionism have cleared away, that no one dreams of denying the towering genius of Debussy, is time to give Fauré his rightful place in contemporary France has already done so, and sooner or later, other nations, believe, will do likewise." And still later: "If they are not well known, we must remember that, in the nature of things, new music travels very slowly. Surely no music could be more limpid, clear, or seemingly effortless, and it seems only a matter of time before they are fully appreciated. Who can doubt that the Second Violin Sonata in E-minor (1917) will some day take its place beside the first in the affections of the public?"⁶⁸ Copland's prediction has yet to come true, but hopefully will among the next generation of pianists, violinists, and their audiences.

CONCLUSION

While the violin-piano sonatas written by French composers during the First World War represented several distinct compositional movements and even sought to diverge from one another, they bear a remarkable number of similarities that suggest common influences and

⁶⁷ Copland, "Gabriel Fauré," 573.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 574.

methodologies. Shared usage of whole-tone, modal, and other harmonies show both a collective heritage and also applications, flavors, and effects unique to each composer. These composers were influenced by the war, their families, illness, their lovers, and each other. All owe ideas of style and shape to their predecessors and to some extent the early French repertoire. The confluence of disparate compositional movements finds remarkable expression in this set of sonatas, which are very distinctive but also reflect their common historical circumstances. All of these rich sonatas deserve places in the currently-performed repertoire a century after their creations.

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