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Pierrots Fâchés avec la Lune: Debussy, Fauré and Ravel during World War 1

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"PIERROTS FÂCHÉS AVEC LA LUNE" : Debussy, Fauré and Ravel
during World War I

MMus Dissertation
DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama

Supervisor: Dr Marian Deasy

20 September 2013

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I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of

Master's Degree (MMus)
in Music Performance

is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purpose other than in partial fulfilment for that stated above.

Signed: _____ (Candidate)

Date: _____

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation proposes to consider the music of French composers Claude Debussy, Gabriel Fauré and Maurice Ravel written during the Great War, under tremendous professional, personal and cultural pressures. These pressures are examined largely through these composers' correspondence and the writings of contemporary critics, composers and artists in the first two chapters; a selection of their output from the war years, in particular their piano works and their chamber music, is the subject of the third chapter.

The aim of the dissertation is to reveal certain aspirations common to all three, aspirations that were motivated, dictated even, by the political and cultural context and powerful enough to sustain their musical creativity in traumatic times. These were: a) a return to the values of a French tradition heralded by contemporary scholars, critics and musicians around 1900, that of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries composers, of which Rameau had been the greatest representative; b) a desire to create a distinctly contemporary musical language that was appropriate for its time and reflected a cautious yet resolute positioning in the musical *avant-garde*; c) a yearning for artistic independence from constricting ideological discourses or aesthetic movements.

The dissertation considers these wartime compositions under various perspectives: as an integral part of the war effort; as major contributions to the modern music scene of that period; as the culmination of the oeuvre of Debussy and Fauré since the last decades of the nineteenth century, and Ravel's oeuvre since the early 1900s. It is hoped that it will open the door to a new interpretation of these works, that of compelling expressions of artistic escapism.

INTRODUCTION

The conflict that took the lives of so many millions between August 1914 and November 1918 proved to be, for musicians, painters, poets and writers, a critical milestone in their creative evolution. Those on the front, in whatever military capacity, earned the respect and the admiration of those, less 'fortunate', who were forced to remain on the fringe. Whether serving their country or looking on from a neutral position, all were stirred into questioning their aesthetic beliefs and the very meaning of artistic creation.

Having suffered many losses among its members, the artistic *avant-garde* that had been based in the French capital since the early 1900s faced another major threat: a virtual censorship of modernism, spearheaded by powerful ultra-nationalist lobbies and tacitly endorsed by mainstream political circles, that jeopardized its integrity. Art movements and trends which had fascinated and polarized the public were now chastised as decadent, irrelevant, subversive and dangerous. Music went through a great deal of soul-searching too; despite the proliferation of events organized for various benefits and charities throughout the land, this was a period of relative artistic sterility.

Amid the bleakness shone with singular radiance the contributions of three influential figures in French music: Claude Debussy (1862-1918), Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). Their wartime music is today celebrated as some of their greatest. Although their age differences meant that the war impacted differently on each one, circumstances that were distressing on a number of levels affected their musical sensibility in ways not entirely dissimilar. In stylistic terms, each underwent a dramatic transformation during that period.

This study, "*Pierrots fâchés avec la lune*" ('Pierrots angry with the moon') after a

subtitle that Debussy allegedly gave his Cello Sonata from 1915 (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1), surveys the wartime music of these composers and their responses to the thrust of patriotism and the attack on modernism.

The first chapter gives a brief account of the personal circumstances of each composer leading up to and during the Great War. The potent nationalism that had underpinned the creation of the *Société Nationale de Musique*, in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, had largely determined the course of French music until 1910. This chapter, therefore, looks at the different phases and strands of nationalism as it penetrated musical circles and informed many of the choices made by these three composers (analysed in greater detail in Chapter 3).

The second chapter takes a look at the responses of the musical and painting *avant-garde* to charges of anti-patriotism in the propagandist climate, before and during the war. It contains the responses of Picasso and Stravinsky, both hugely influential within Parisian circles, and explains the pivotal role played by Cocteau, Diaghilev and Canudo in the attempts to fuse art and music. The conflict between the inevitable drive towards modernity and the need for political correctness, the tactical choices they resorted to in order to deflect from charges of outright modernism, the inclination of *avant-garde* artists to borrow from the Italian pantomime, an accepted symbol of 'pure' Latin tradition, are also surmised.

The third chapter proposes to correlate the musical responses of Debussy, Fauré and Ravel to wartime impositions and demands, with the perspectives introduced in the second chapter, through the study of key works: Debussy's *En blanc et noir* for two pianos, some of the *Etudes* for piano and the Cello Sonata; Fauré's second Violin Sonata Op.108 and his first Cello Sonata Op.109, and finally Ravel's piano works *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *Frontispice*.

Reflecting the internal organisation of the Sonata to which it alludes, *Pierrots fâchés avec la lune* has its chapters named after the movements from that work: *Prologue*, *Serenade*, and *Finale*.

CHAPTER ONE

PROLOGUE

The tensions that existed in French musical circles since the acrimonious departure of Camille Saint-Saëns from the helm of the *Société Nationale de Musique* in 1886, and that culminated in 1909 with the founding of the secessionist *Société Musicale Indépendante* by Maurice Ravel, Charles Koechlin and Florent Schmitt among others, faded into a fragile consensus among musicians, as events worldwide gathered pace. Calls for a *Union Sacrée* (Holy Alliance), a term coined by France's President Poincaré on the day following the German declaration of war (3 August 1914), had been answered almost unanimously by French workers from all sides of the political spectrum. In a similar gesture, composers felt compelled to answer their nation's needs, and put aside their differences for the time being. If past antagonisms were rendered insignificant by the impending conflict, it should be remembered that they had their sources in deep-rooted social divisions exacerbated during the notoriously traumatic period of the *Dreyfus Affair*¹.

¹ In 1894, the wrongful conviction by the French military of its sole Jewish officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, for high treason led, a few years later and after the identity of the real traitor (Commandant Esterhazy) became known, to a thorough questioning of its moral authority, as well as the authority of the Catholic institutions that endorsed its anti-semitism and anti-republicanism. Brought to court in 1896 following the actions of the newly-appointed Chief of intelligence Georges Picquart, Esterhazy was acquitted by the same tribunal that had sentenced Dreyfus to life imprisonment in the infamous *Bagne de Guyane*, compelling the novelist and social commentator Emile Zola to publish in 1898 a front-page article in the newspaper *L'Aurore* entitled "J'ACCUSE...!" in which the duplicity and collusion within the military became eloquently exposed, forcing the eventual acquittal of Dreyfus by presidential pardon in 1899.

For further reading on the aftermath of the Affair in French musical circles, see J.F. Fulcher: *French cultural politics & music: from the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (Oxford University Press, 1999)

This chapter, while pertaining to matters related to Debussy, Fauré and Ravel, presents the state of tension in the French musical scene. Beginning with these composers' own situations, their professional activities and their health (Section 1.1), it then focuses on the extreme pressures exerted on them by ambient patriotism and extreme nationalism. The burning subject of what defined 'classic' Frenchness and the spirited efforts to revive long lost traditional values, most appropriately through chamber music (favoured by all three composers during that period), will be addressed in Sections 1.2 and 1.3.

1.1 Delicate personal situations

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) was at the breakout of the war a much-admired composer whose poetic sensibility and sophistication, though still the object of controversy and divisions among critics and musicians, had attained a status of pre-eminence; yet his financial situation was highly precarious. Having taken up residence in a fairly exclusive, leafy suburb of Paris² with his pregnant companion Emma Moyses³ in 1905, Debussy's expensive lifestyle⁴ had become increasingly self-indulgent with the growing-up of his cherished daughter Emma-Claude, nicknamed Chouchou. A number of works for the stage had been sketched in the decade separating *La Mer*, written in that same year (1905) and the Cello sonata (1915); somehow, the operatic golden goose on which Debussy was so keen to lay his hands in order to keep afloat kept

² at 64, Avenue du Bois de Boulogne in Paris (the number was changed to 80 shortly after)

³ Emma Bardac, née Moyses, was a sensitive singer and socialite of Jewish origins. Dolly, the younger of her two children with the wealthy banker Sigismond Bardac, was the recipient of a Suite for piano (four-hands) by Gabriel Fauré which carries her name. Fauré had been a close admirer of Emma in the 1890s. Debussy was married to Lili Texier, a young seamstress of modest background, at the time of his affair with Emma (June 1904); Texier's attempted suicide in a bid to bring him back and his subsequent dismissive attitude cost Debussy numerous professional and personal friendships. Emma's divorce with Bardac came through as she became pregnant in May 1905; Debussy's divorce with Texier was a bitter episode which ended in August of that year. They eventually married in January 1908.

In *Centre de Documentation Claude Debussy* website (www.debussy.fr), Biography section (20 June 2013)

⁴ According to Debussy specialist and biographer Francois Lesure, 'his taste for luxury was born out of his family's poverty' in F. Lesure: *Debussy, Biographie critique* (Fayard, 2003), 423

eluding him. In spite of lucrative collaborations with the famed impresario and Director of the *Ballets Russes* Serge Diaghilev (*Prélude á l'Après-midi d'un Faune*, *Jeux*), and Italian writer and philosopher Gabriele D'Annunzio (*Le Martyre de Saint-Sebastien*), as well as advanced payments for new material made by his exclusive publisher and friend Jacques Durand (engagements not always fulfilled by the composer), Debussy remained irretrievably broke.

Music had been a constant companion all his life, but Debussy composed intermittently during the war. He wrote hardly anything substantial after 1915, his most productive year which ended musically with the *Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maison*, a fundraiser for which he wrote music and lyrics. After the laborious completion of his Violin Sonata in March 1917, the extreme winter of 1917-18 was the unlikely pretext for one last piano piece, a token of gratitude for his coal merchant whose wife played the piano. With fuel in scarce supply, a relieved Debussy inscribed a verse from Baudelaire's *Le Balcon*: '*Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon*', which now remains as the piece's title. Having for years discarded one stage project or proposition after another for various reasons⁵, Debussy saw his financial worries grow dramatically when a court order fined him 30 000 Francs in July 1917 for non-payment of the alimony to his first wife Lily Texier since 1910. With his marriage to Emma increasingly strained under these pressures and feeling more and more debilitated by the colonic cancer that had been diagnosed in 1909, he increasingly took refuge in gardening. After the dismissal of Chouchou's piano tutor in October ⁶ and a brief stay in the Basque country, Debussy confessed to his old friend Robert Godet that he was more or less confined to his four walls and, for all intent and purpose, in musical shutdown⁷.

⁵ Lesure: *Debussy*, 302: mainly the two short novels by Edgar Poe, *Le Diable dans le Beffroi* and particularly *La Chute de la Maison Usher* which came closest to completion (it conjured up visions of ghostly women in times of depression). There were also tentative approaches made between Debussy and Victor Segalen (*Siddharta*, *Orpheus*), Gabriel Mourey (*Psyché*), George de Fleure (*No-Ja-Li*) and Charles Morice (*Crimes amoris*) and plans to adapt 'classic' works by Shakespeare (*As you like it*) and Bédier (*La Légende de Tristan*, after the medieval tale).

⁶ Debussy invokes his daughter's lack of progress and the teacher's erratic schedule but financial reasons seem more plausible. in *Debussy Letters*, selected and edited by R. Nichols & F. Lesure (Faber&Faber, 1987), 332

⁷ " (...) this journey to Switzerland... If it's just someone stirring us along, I don't find it funny. Anyway, we can't ignore my deplorable state of health- it puts a stop to my finest bursts of good intentions." *Ibid.*, 333

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924), almost seventy at the start of the war, was coming to the end of a second five-year tenure as Director of the Paris *Conservatoire National Supérieur*, a post he had occupied since 1905. Having been called upon at a time when political pressure on his predecessor Théodore Dubois had intensified, Fauré had bravely faced up to the unenviable task of overhauling the venerable institution⁸. Struggling to cope with the demands of administrative and academic duties, he gradually distanced himself from his post in order to compose. The *Conservatoire*, noted for its sensitivity to the political climate, brought a fair amount of grief to its ageing director: in July 1910, as his initial five-year mandate was coming to an end, a particularly hostile campaign led by the renowned violinist Lucien Capet, leader of a String Quartet that bore his name, had called for his stepping down. Much to his chagrin, leading actress Sarah Bernhardt had lent her high-profile support to this mutiny. Known for his generosity towards talented artists -including Bernhardt, Fauré somehow rose above these intrigues upon his election for a second term, with customary tact.

When war was declared in August 1914, he had been relaxing in the spa resort of Ems, in Belgium, and found himself stranded behind enemy lines. After a convoluted journey back to Paris through Switzerland and the south of France he got back to the *Conservatoire*, where the delayed resumption of classes eventually took place in December, to a depleted body of students and staff; he stayed at the helm of the establishment until after the war, retiring in 1919.

The cumulative effects of his intense professional activities as Conservatoire Director and leading composer took their toll on Fauré during the war. His

⁸ François Clément Théodore Dubois (1837-1924) was Director of the *Conservatoire* from 1896 to 1905, a critical period in its history. A distinguished organist, he taught composition from the foundation of the Ars Gallica movement and was among the first members of the *Société Nationale*. His students included Dukas, Magnard and Schmitt, all of whom went on to produce music of contrasting orientation, which suggest a certain open-mindedness on the part of their teacher during that period. His directorship coincided with the founding by d'Indy of a rival institute, the *Schola Cantorum*, which openly critiqued the Republican ethos of the state-run establishment. Dubois' stance hardened considerably in the 1900s: the scandal that led to his resignation was caused by his refusal to allow Ravel to enter the final round of the *Prix de Rome* competition in 1904. This had been Ravel's fourth attempt at the coveted prize, a state-funded three-year residency at the Villa Medici during which recipients had to send the fruits of their labours back to Paris, where they would be judged and performed, and for which the aspiring artists would be remunerated. Romain Rolland, a friend of the young rising star, was so incensed by this decision that he led a campaign calling for Dubois' replacement.

hearing also had been steadily deteriorating for a number of years and eventually led to complete deafness⁹. Already in frail physical condition, his mental strength was severely tested when his younger son Philippe -later to act as his unofficial biographer- joined the third Regiment of the *Zouaves*, an infantry corps that fought in the Dardanelles (Gallipoli) in 1915. Fauré, himself a veteran of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, was in constant fear for his son. A series of deaths (close friends, relatives) added to his low morale. He initially found some salutary relief in the writing of the last in a long line of *Barcarolles* and *Nocturnes*, the twelfth of each series (his only compositions from 1915)¹⁰; by the summer of 1918, however, with still no end of the atrocities in sight, he confessed to his wife : ‘my soul and my heart are down to my heels!’¹¹

Unlike Debussy and Fauré, Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) was in his prime when war broke out. Initially thwarted by his physical shortcomings, he was eventually declared fit enough to join the army¹², upon which he enlisted in March 1915. In his excitement to fight *les boches*, he envisaged, rather hastily, becoming an air fighter pilot, thinking that his short stature would come in handy. This dream (“mad ideas”, according to his brother Edouard) may have had more to do with an obsessive taste for mechanical wonders and passion for modernity than with a genuine appetite for daredevil manoeuvres; nevertheless, seeds of a heroic death had been planted in his mind in the immediate aftermath of the declaration of war, and these seeds were undoubtedly beginning to germinate (see Section 1.3, 21). An anecdote told by the painter Jacques-Emile Blanche

⁹ Fauré nevertheless persisted in his habit of accompanying singers well into his seventies, although he did refrain from performing his chamber music. The soprano Madeleine Grey, to whom he dedicated the collection of songs *Mirages* Op.113, declared in plain language: ‘*With Fauré, it could happen that the end would be several bars apart.*’ in J.M. Nectoux: *Fauré* (Edition du Seuil,1972, revised 1995),

¹⁰ J.-M. Nectoux: *Gabriel Fauré: les voix du clair-obscur* (Flammarion, 1993), 366-8 & 396-7.

¹¹ G. Fauré, *Lettres intimes*, edited by P. Fauré-Fremiet (Grasset, 1951) 242 (translation: A. Rao)

¹² G. Larner: *Maurice Ravel* (Phaidon, 1996), 152-8. His physical aptitude for service was severely tested by the medics, who initially turned him down on account of his weight; his height was also an issue, but records show he was measured taller than he actually was... Larner reckons that Ravel was able to influence the course of events and overturn these early rejections.

tells of Ravel actually buying himself an air officer's uniform, assuming the good news to be imminent¹³.

Like Fauré, his former composition teacher at the *Conservatoire*, Maurice Ravel devoted the little time he could find away from the dullness to composing for the piano, an instrument for which he had written some of his best music to date. The collection of dances in the manner of the Baroque Harpsichord Masters which he entitled *Le Tombeau de Couperin* was his main wartime effort, occupying him until 1917. Both title and content evoked an age gone by, a homage to the French masters of the high Baroque who frequently honoured one of their own with such musical tributes. For Ravel, the nostalgia and grieving feelings of those Early Music laments struck a painful chord in 1914, when a number of close friends (some from his childhood in the Basque resort of St-Jean-de-Luz where his mother was born) and professional acquaintances were killed in the space of a few months.



Fig.1.1: Ravel in uniform near Verdun (www.euskonews , retrieved on 17/09/2013)



Fig.1.2: Ravel's own design for Durand's 1918 edition of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (IMSLP)

¹³ *Correspondance Jacques-Emile Blanche- Maurice Denis*, edited by G.-P. Collet [Droz, 1989], 29. Blanche was not given to reminisce positively of Ravel: in his autobiographical recollections, *La Pêche aux Souvenirs* (1940), he describes Ravel as "un sot (...) qu'un hasard a doté de quelque génie" -'a dimwit (...), the random recipient of a certain amount of genius'. (translation: A. Rao)

Ravel dedicated each of the seven movements to one of the deceased¹⁴ ; these dedications can be seen right above the tempo mark in the 1918 original Durand edition, for which he took the trouble of designing the front page (Fig. 1.2). The list serves today as a stark reminder of the all-encompassing, universal (in social terms) reality of the carnage.

Serving near the front lines as a lorry driver on a truck he humorously christened Adélaïde¹⁵, Ravel had to endure the frustrations of mechanical trouble and spent most of the time waiting for spare parts to arrive. His duties were not as free from dangers as he claimed, however. Writing in 1916, Debussy showed considerable respect and admiration for his friend André Caplet who had also been assigned to driving duties¹⁶:

If I could force my body to concentrate on avoiding accidents, perhaps the rest would follow? But I'm too old... I know nothing of the skill of using the terrain and I'd get killed like a rabbit in a field.¹⁷

Ravel remained on military duty until June 1917, when his physical and psychological ill-health put an end to his military involvement. Having spared his mother the details of his war tribulations and sicknesses (including a bout of dysentery in September 1916 and frostbite to his feet the following March), it was bitterly ironic that news of her own failing health had been kept from him.

¹⁴ G. Lerner: *Maurice Ravel*, 164. These were Pierre and Pascal Gaudin from St-Jean-de-Luz, the birthplace of Ravel's mother; Durand's cousin Jacques Charlot, a valuable assistant about whom Debussy wrote prophetically: 'if fortune continues to favour him, [he] will come back a general! More simply, we must just hope that he does come back...in one piece!'; Jean Cruppi, whose influential mother had helped stage *L'Heure espagnole* at the *Opéra-Comique*; Gabriel Deluc; Jean Dreyfus, whose mother Ravel affectionately called his "War godmother", and the eminent musicologist (a Beethoven specialist like Romain Rolland) Joseph de Marliave. Debussy also dedicated the second of his pieces for two pianos *En blanc et noir* to Charlot.

¹⁵ Humour with a customary dose of sarcasm: *Adélaïde* had been Ravel's stage title of his *Valse nobles et sentimentales* for piano, which he had recently orchestrated for the *Ballets Russes* in 1912.

¹⁶ The composer André Caplet (1878-1925) came to the fore as a Premier Prix de Rome in 1901 and would later join his unsuccessful fellow-competitor and friend Maurice Ravel as committee-member of the *Société Musicale Indépendante*. He became a close friend of Debussy, whose music he orchestrated and transcribed with the composer's approval. After serving in the War Caplet returned to conducting and composed music of religious character. He died from the long-term effects of gassing at the age of 46. (*Dictionnaires des musiciens Larousse*, 1981)

¹⁷ *Debussy Letters*, selected and edited by R. Nichols & F. Lesure (Faber & Faber, 1987), 316. This letter also mentions Caplet's audacious performance of Debussy's Cello Sonata near enemy lines.

He was fortunate to be by her side when she died in early January 1917, but was so shaken thereafter that, after the completion of his *Tombeau*, his creative drive ground to a halt. Writing in July 1918 to the pianist Marguerite Long, wife of Captain Joseph de Marliave to whose memory the *Tombeau's* Toccata was dedicated, he complained that he was 'still fairly distressed, and [I'm] also making the mistake of living in wartime'¹⁸. Ravel's health deteriorated later that year and it was feared that he would succumb to the epidemic of influenza that was gripping Europe.

1.2 Post-1871 nationalism and the revival of French Chamber Music

The production of works requiring more than a handful of performers had necessarily become impossible during the war, as mobilization effectively silenced the activities of most of the orchestras in France. Debussy himself stated with disenchantment:

[Anyway] all the orchestral musicians are at the front and those left behind -by whatever piece of administrative providence- are hard to put up with because they can't console themselves by comfortably hamming it through *The Ride of Walkyries* as usual!¹⁹.



Fig.1.3: Program of a 1903 concert by the *Concerts Colonne*. Featuring Gustav Mahler conducting his own Symphony No.2, this was the kind of programming that spurred on Debussy's causticity. (www.orchestrecolonne.fr, retrieved 18/09/13)

¹⁸ Larner: *Maurice Ravel*, 152-158

¹⁹ Nichols & Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 314. Letter to R. Godet from February 1916.

Even the activities of the Parisian musical societies, the *Société Nationale de Musique* and the recently-founded *Société Musicale Indépendante* (SMI)²⁰, were to virtually cease during the four years of conflict. To a degree, therefore, the choice of writing piano or chamber music appealed to Debussy and Fauré in a climate where the fate of large-scale compositions was, in programming terms at least, uncertain. Less pragmatic but just as crucial was their realisation that chamber music could convey appropriate gravitas without conceding to programmatic or propagandist trends then in vogue, and their common desire to breathe a sense of national identity into a genre still considered a stronghold of Austrian, German and Italian traditions. Fauré, in typically modest fashion, announced chirpily to his wife in September 1917 that he was ‘very happy to now have to (his) credit two more sonatas. Amongst modern cello sonatas, French or foreign, there is only one that counts, that of Saint-Saëns which, by the way, is one of his best works’.²¹

Debussy’s sonata ‘project’ was even more ambitious. He mentioned it with pride to a sympathetic conductor and friend, Bernardo Molinari in October 1915:

There are going to be six of them for different groups of instruments and the last one will combine all those used in the previous five. For many people

²⁰ Founded in 1909 by a group of composers anxious to break away from the staunch conservatism of the older *Société Nationale de Musique*, this ‘secessionist’ organization promoted the interests of modern music in all its diversity. Its principal object was to establish a platform for its members, whose music had either been turned down or ridiculed by the reactionary committee of the *Nationale*. Both Ravel and Koechlin went on to profoundly influence the course of twentieth century French music. Not all the composers featured on the programs of the society concerts were modern: of the ones that sat on the committee (Ravel, Koechlin, Caplet, Florent Schmitt [1870-1958], Jean Huré [1877-1930], Louis Auber [1877-1968] and Jean Roger-Ducasse [1873-1954]), only Ravel and Koechlin would truly embrace modernism. The patronage of one Leo Sachs, an important jewelry dealer and musical dilettante, also ensured that his music would be performed at the Society’s concerts even though it evoked Schumann more than it did Schoenberg; such compromises were necessary since the young association could only survive through private funding, unlike the state-subsidised *Société Nationale*. Notwithstanding these concessions, SMI concerts did much to promote the music of foreign composers, music that was tagged as reprehensible by the conservative milieu. Bartok, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Kodaly, Bloch, De Falla were thus introduced to French audiences, thereby paving the way for the post-war regeneration of French music and the blossoming of Roussel, ‘Les Six’, Jolivet and Messiaen.

For further reading on the SMI, see M. Duchesneau: *L’Avant-garde musicale à Paris de 1871 à 1939* (Mardaga, 1997), 84-92.

²¹ *Gabriel Fauré, Lettres intimes*. Cited in J.M. Nectoux: *Les voix du clair-obscur*, 408

that won't be as important as an opera...But I thought it was of greater service to music!²²

Concerns he may have had about a potentially lukewarm public reception clearly mattered less than the practicality or feasibility of these works. Judging from the tone of resignation of the letter, Debussy was clearly not anticipating a return to writing for the stage, thus sealing the fate of the long-awaited and much-expected follow-up to his erstwhile success, his only full-scale opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* (first performed in 1905).

Debussy's passing, in March 1918, occurred as Parisians were taking shelter from a last-ditch bombardment by the Germans on the capital; his burial in the *Père-Lachaise* cemetery was an intimate affair, as his entourage had become quite depleted and the funeral cortege eventually shrank to 'no more than twenty people'²³, according to a loyal friend, the critic Louis Laloy. As fate would have it, the task of composing the sizeable body of chamber works he had envisaged fell incumbent to Fauré who, despite his being considerably more advanced in years, would successfully complete six major chamber works between 1916 and 1924, the year of his death. His legacy in this genre is still unparalleled; these works rank among the very best French music from the first half of the twentieth century.

Considerably less attracted to modernism, Fauré was, by his own admission, out-of-step with the more radical creations of the musical *avant-garde*²⁴. He nevertheless underwent a considerable stylistic evolution in producing the first two of these chamber works, the Sonata for Violin and Piano Op.108 and the

²² Nichols & Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 303-304. The optimistic tone of this letter was perhaps brought on by Debussy's fondness for Italy, although his experiences of Rome some thirty years earlier (during his stay at Villa Medici as a winner of the Prix de Rome) had been less enthralling than the 'marvellous little cakes' and 'macaroni' thrown by Molinari for Debussy and his family (June 1911).

²³ L. Laloy: *La musique retrouvée* (Plon, 1928), 229. Laloy recalled the gathering of 'about fifty friends, in the garden of Debussy's house, but most of them disappeared along the way...'

²⁴ the composer and critic Emile Vuillermoz (1878-1960), a former composition student and SMI member, sent Fauré the music of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* in the 1920s, when it was still considered 'dangerous' by d'Indy and other *Scholistes*. Fauré then replied: 'Your "*Pierrot lunaire*" made me spend a really awful night. I am not lying!' Yet, although he would regularly confess to not liking this kind of music, Fauré always shied away from sectarian judgements. in J.M. Nectoux: *Les voix du clair-obscur*, 435 (translation: A. Rao)

Sonata for Cello and Piano Op.109, the first of two. Dating from 1916 and 1917 respectively, they are almost the exact contemporaries of Debussy's sonatas for the same combinations - both their cello sonatas share the same key of D minor and exhibit certain cyclical features that recall a favoured compositional feature of Cesar Franck, in particular his Violin Sonata in A major from 1886 (see Chapter 3, p.87).

Some forty years before Debussy and Fauré started on their chamber music journey, a notion had been spreading that French art, and French music in particular, had suffered greatly from foreign imports and the privileged treatment accorded to Rossini and Meyerbeer²⁵. While it is true that a proliferation of Parisian *Salons* run by wealthy amateurs and aristocrats did foster the needs of native talents (not just in music) during the second half of the nineteenth century²⁶, the doors to operatic success and the financial security brought with it were generally closed to French composers born after the 1830s. As for the production of indigenous instrumental music (apart from organ music), the absence of state patronage outside the *Opéra*, the *Opéra-Comique* and the *Conservatoire* did little to incentivise composers whose mainstay was the lyrical stage (Auber, Thomas, Massenet, Gounod, Hérold).

Music was even more neglected outside Paris: when as a boy of eight Gabriel Fauré showed the first signs of a promising talent, his father sought the advice of a local counsellor in their little town near the *Pyrénées* who immediately suggested enrolling the child at the *Ecole Niedermeyer* in Paris. Late in life, Fauré recalled how he thrived in that unique environment under the tutelage of Camille Saint-Saëns, thirteen years his senior and later to become one of

²⁵ for further reading on the state of Parisian Opera and the extent of the Rossini cult, see E. Brody: *Paris - the musical kaleidoscope, 1870-1925* (Robson Books, 1987)

²⁶ Fauré's entrance into the cream of high society was through the auspices of the famous singer Pauline Viardot, sister of the legendary soprano La Malibran and a close friend of the Russian novelist Turgueniev, whose Salon he frequented from 1872. His association with the Viardots became something of a mixed blessing in the autumn of 1878 when his hopes to marry the younger daughter Marianne were dashed after a brief engagement. For further reading on the penetrating influence of Salon culture, see J. Ross: 'Music in the Salons', in *French Music Since Berlioz*, edited by R. Langham Smith & C. Potter (Ashgate, 2006)

France's best-known composers, pianists and organists²⁷. Significantly, the *Niedermeyer* schooling, as well as being responsible for training students in religious music, was steeped in the tradition of *haute composition* as had been articulated in the early decades of the century, a tradition which had been personified by Schumann and Mendelssohn (in chamber music at any rate) in Fauré's time²⁸. The influence of Niedermeyer and Saint-Saëns, the latter not just a mentor but also a life-long friend, proved determining in shaping Fauré's art, and was of the utmost significance for his late instrumental masterpieces.

Social and political apathy towards native musicians was not the main source of discontentment, however. In 1871, France had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of its neighbour (then Prussia). The maverick figure of Richard Wagner was in Paris at the time, a city that he had tried in vain to conquer for decades, albeit musically speaking. The intense frustrations he had endured at the hands of the French musical establishment had compelled him to write an overt political satire in celebration of the French defeat, thence avenging some of the humiliation ; attempting to rub salt into the wound, he had even sought to have his acerbic cocktail of ridicule and cynicism served ... in Paris!²⁹

That same year, anxious to restore a sense of national pride, Saint-Saëns- once a Wagnerian himself- co-founded the *Société Nationale de Musique* (SN) under

²⁷ The website dedicated to Louis Niedermeyer (1802-1861) includes this Fauré quote, a touching testimonial from 1922, two years before his death: "Music? we were bathed in it, it sipped into us from every pore. (...)The school gathered pupils from all ages. And so simultaneous singing classes were created that practised exclusively the performance of works by Palestrina, Vittoria, Orlando Lasso or Bach and Handel. In those days, Bach's masterpieces (our daily sustenance) had not yet found their way into the organ classes of the Conservatoire. Must I confess that the dignity, the severity of the schooling we owed to the strict and yet fatherly guidance of Niedermeyer made us a little vain, a little pedantic, and that -were someone to call the Conservatoire 'a bad place for music', we did not protest?" www.niedermeyer-nyon.ch (accessed on 26 July 2013- translation: A. Rao)

²⁸ The concept of '*haute composition*' had been advanced by Anton Reicha (1770-1836) in his *Cours de composition musicale*, written in 1814 and published in 1818 while he taught at the Paris Conservatoire.

For further reading on *haute composition*, see T. Jones: 'Nineteenth century Orchestral and Chamber Music, in *French Music Since Berlioz*

²⁹ Brody: *Paris, the musical kaleidoscope*, 45. *Eine Kapitulation (Lustspiel in Antiker Manier)* [A Capitulation, comedy in the antique style]. Wagner had dreamed for nearly twenty years of taking over the French capital with a series of grand operas. After the *Tannhäuser* debacle of 1861 and a further decade of frustration, he penned this crass piece of musical '*revanchisme*', then left Paris and set to work on his Bayreuth project. The conductor Hans Richter tactfully declined to stage *Eine Kapitulation* in Paris, which Wagner had proposed to set in the style of an Offenbach operetta.

the banner *Ars Gallica* ('Gallic Art'), with the poet Raymond Bussine. The Society aimed to promote 'authentic' French music or, at any rate, music with a French flavour (Belgian composers were not excluded). Members included Edouard Lalo, César Franck, Massenet, Bizet, Duparc, d'Indy and Widor, all of whom were 'convinced that abstract musical forms, to this point largely belittled in France in favour of lyric theatre, could be filled with what they believed to be "French content", emphasising clarity, formal ingenuity and grace' (J. Fulcher).

French music had of course yielded an abundant supply of indigenous chamber music in the course of its long tradition: *Suites* and *Sonates* for harpsichord and a range of instruments (notably the highly fashionable *viole de gambe*) by Rameau, Couperin or Marais were considered, alongside works on much larger scale by their fellow Court composers Campra, Destouches and Charpentier, as the Golden Age of this tradition. These composers' revival, a laudable enterprise given that their magnificent music had been totally neglected since the French Revolution³⁰, was not without ulterior motives. Hijacked by both sides of the political spectrum (the Republican moderates and the extreme Right) in the dying days of the nineteenth century, it was endorsed at ministerial level on the one hand, with the decision that works presented at the *Opéra* should now adhere to the newly fathomed 'classic' French tradition; on the other hand, this tradition was also designed to 'cleanses' the musical landscape from a Romantic inheritance 'tainted' by foreign influence, a perspective that correlated with the views of the *anti-Dreyfusard* lobby.

According to nationalist composer Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931), even the music of Hector Berlioz was suspect as it had received greater acclaim in German countries than in France³¹. The last stipulation by the promoters of the "pure"

³⁰ According to G. Jean-Aubry, writing in 1916, "[the] abandon of our music can be traced back to around 1770. One can read in a book by Bussely: 'The State of Music in France & Italy', published in 1771, an observation he made about Miss Diderot, whom he considered one of Paris's strongest harpsichordist, that she had extraordinary knowledge of modulation, but he added: 'Although I had the pleasure of listening to her for many hours, she did not play a single French piece: everything was Italian or German.' " in G. Jean-Aubry: *La musique française d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Perrin, 1916), 26

³¹ "D'Indy (along with Debussy) dismissed Berlioz as a precursor of the modern French symphony, considering him as an acoustic 'literateur' who did not represent the native style." in *French Music, Culture, and National Identity: 1870-1939*, ed. B. Kelly (University of Rochester Press, 2008), 144

French tradition, led by d'Indy, was that it be comprised of great musicians who had fought for artistic sincerity as opposed to mere fashion or convention, implicitly excluding all Jewish composers as well as composers associated with the *Conservatoire* (d'Indy considered Jews as incapable of creating anything original).

This potent twisting of musical considerations into a political rhetoric was in fact a by-product of the reactionary counter-attack in the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair. From 1900 onwards, virtually every aspect of French culture would be caught in ideological crossfires between partisan rhetoric of opposite camps, often articulated in similar terms, but clearly -or confusingly to twenty-first century readers- subject to very different interpretations (see Section 1.3). In what must be construed as the ultimate paradox, the SN moved away from Saint-Saëns' ensconced notion that all German music should be excluded from its programs. D'Indy, a student and long-term devotee of Cesar Franck, was determined to carry the torch of *Wagnérisme* on behalf of his mentor. Franck, like Saint-Saëns, had been heavily influenced by Lisztian models and especially their sophisticated transformations of cellular ideas that were endowed with great significance and mystique. Since Wagner was to carry Liszt's breakthrough innovations to their limits, embracing Wagnerism made sense to musicians like d'Indy, not only on the grounds of its musical merits, but also because it somehow vindicated their faith in the concept of 'total art', their scorn for changing attitudes and mentalities and their underlying anti-semitism.

If these perspectives sound morally reprehensible today, it must be remembered that French composers had been kept away from the highest musical institutions of the capital, namely the *Opéra* and the *Conservatoire*. Saint-Saëns was quite legitimate in deploring the sorry *status quo* that was plaguing the French *avant-garde* as it had been the plague of his friend and predecessor Berlioz. His attitude was nevertheless born out of raw emotions and, surprisingly for such a tremendous intellect, not entirely rational in its pursuing some musical retribution. These feelings would not be ignored for long, however: as the State began to take greater control of artistic life in France toward the 1890s, the champions of French music eventually forced the

reluctant institutions to open their doors to a younger generation of composers, with the official backing of the Republic.

With hindsight, no matter how honourable the intentions behind the self-promoting efforts of the SN in the late 1800s or the renewed interest in French early music were in the early 1900s, by 1915 it was inevitable that the heightened state of nationalist fervour would compel Debussy, Fauré and Ravel to follow in the 'classic' tradition's footsteps³². Yet in the 1910s, if some of the elements of this tradition were considered as token by most French composers in certain specific domains (declamation and prosody, for instance³³), the opposite was still the norm in instrumental music of any description. Musical criticism was very much in vogue, and some composers only seemed too glad to air their acerbic views through a plethora of journals and publications³⁴. A favourite sport consisted of declaring orchestral works otherwise considered not without their own merits, as irretrievably un-French; the challenges faced by contemporary French composers in seeking the Holy Grail of 'classic' Frenchness were insurmountable. Concerns for the state of French music had even led to a number of 'enquêtes' (inquiries) or publications right from the early

³² for further reading on the political warfare between state institutions and anti-republican movements, see J.F. Fulcher: *French cultural politics*, chapters 1 & 2.

³³ Rolland's 1905 correspondence with a young Richard Strauss is particularly insightful regarding 'pure' French declamation. In sometimes heated exchanges, Rolland, who was helping Strauss come to terms with the idiosyncrasies of the French language for his opera *Salomé* (Wilde's play had been written in French), responded to his German friend's perplexity and frustration by referring him to the recent *Pelléas*:
Strauss: (...) 'Do you find it beautiful and poetic, this eternal monotonous triplet rhythm in Debussy's, always on the same note? To my German sensitivity, it is simply a twisting of the language by the musician. But, as you say, "we Germans are too arrogant". Thence I shall respectfully shut up. Yours', etc
Rolland: (...) 'You do not like Debussy's musical declamation, my dear friend? It is also a little dull for my taste. But it is perfect.'
in Cahiers Romain Rolland: *Richard Strauss et Romain Rolland, Correspondance-fragments de journal* (Albin-Michel, 1951), 54 & 58 (translation: A. Rao)

³⁴ Musicians who doubled as columnists or critics did so primarily to supplement their income, but also to publicise their opinions and aesthetic choices. Dukas, Schmitt, Guy Ropartz, d'Indy, Koechlin, Ravel and Debussy in the first decade or so of the century, and Darius Milhaud and Simone Plé a little later, all contributed extensively to French musical journalism. Debussy wrote for a number of publications, at one time under the pseudonym *Monsieur Croche - anti-dilettante*. His writings are always insightful and sometimes self-revealing, but generally caustic.

1900s.³⁵ Those had raised a multitude of questions on the French cultural situation vis-a-vis Germany that would be swept away by the tsunami of the Great War. Perhaps motivated by certain professional jealousies, personalities as antagonistic as Debussy's and Saint-Saëns's sometimes spoke in unison. Here, Debussy politely dismisses the opera *Ariane et Barbe-bleue* composed by his admirer and friend Paul Dukas between 1899 and 1907 as irrelevant:

Ariane et Barbe-bleue is a masterpiece, but it's not a masterpiece of French music... And the longer I live, the more I find we're wrong to forget our past and listen to foreign voices which don't perhaps sing as well in tune as our own! ³⁶

In the year Dukas started working on his opera, Saint-Saëns had also been critical of his *L'apprenti sorcier*, claiming that it dealt with a programmatic content that was void of clear moral message:

Enchanté que Dukas ait fait un joli morceau et qu'il ait eu du succès. Mais en principe je ne suis pas pour les morceaux qui racontent une histoire. Sous la *Danse macabre*, il y a les terreurs et les ironies de la mort; sous *Le rouet d'Omphale*, la séduction; sous *Phaéton*, l'orgueil (...). Je ne vois pas ce qu'il peut y avoir sous *L'apprenti sorcier* (...). Et là où il n'y a pas un sentiment à exprimer, je ne vois pas ce que vient faire la musique, à moins que ce ne soit de la musique pure, borne au culte et à l'expression d'un caractère esthétique.³⁷

Delighted that Dukas has written a pretty piece and that it was well received. But in principle, I do not approve of pieces that tell a story. Under the *Danse macabre*, there is the terror and the ironies of death; under *Le Rouet d'Omphale*, there is seduction; under *Phaeton*, haughtiness (...). I cannot see what there can possibly be under *L'apprenti sorcier* (...). And where there is no sentiment being expressed, I cannot see what music

³⁵ Among those were Jacques Morland's *Enquête sur l'influence allemande* and publications by Paul Landormy (*L'Etat actuel de la musique française*) and Georges Jean-Aubry (*La musique Française d'aujourd'hui*).
in C. Charle: *La Naissance des 'Intellectuels', 1880-1900* (Paris:Minuit, 1990), cited in J. F. Fulcher: *French cultural politics*, 106-107

³⁶ R. Nichols & F. Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 256. Letter to Vittorio Gui dated February 1912. Debussy had personally expressed his feelings to Dukas straight after the dress-rehearsal in 1907: 'Enthusiasm aside, my clear impression is of a certain implacability in the beauty of *Ariane* (...) and throughout, at every turning, the music dominates the words.' Five years later, the heightened chauvinism in Debussy's remark reflected his rather confused nationalistic concerns as the War got closer.

³⁷ T. Jones: 'Nineteenth century Orchestral and Chamber music', in *French Music Since Berlioz*. Letter to Durand, who published large amounts of French music, including Saint-Saëns, Dukas, Fauré, Debussy and Ravel.

could be doing unless it were pure music, a marker to the cult and the expression of some aesthetic trait.³⁸

Although by the time Debussy criticised Dukas the French debate on music had shifted away from the relative merits of 'pure' and 'programmatic' music, the stakes were substantially the same, since 'pure' music was considered, for better or worse, a vehicle of Viennese musical tradition. The music of Brahms, renowned for its utmost respect for traditional harmony and its emotional restraint, was particularly ridiculed, even by Ravel (arguably the most open-minded and least sectarian musician in France at that time). In the face of Debussy's and Saint-Saëns' sentencing, Dukas' lengthy procrastination and gestation process, which earned him a reputation as an overly self-critical composer, was self-explanatory.

These judgements indirectly confirm that French music could only really blossom through an injection of fresh ideas in the realm of chamber music, a genre which, ironically, Dukas never cultivated. When the music historian turned novelist and humanist Romain Rolland declared, in his 1908 study *Le Renouveau: Esquisse du mouvement musical à Paris depuis 1870*, that the Renaissance of French music would more likely take place in the domain of chamber music, he simply seemed to re-formulate the wishes of those of the SN's founding members; but, by citing Debussy's music as an example of the 'clarity, elegant simplicity, naturalness, above all grace and plastic beauty'³⁹, he indirectly gave the *coup-de-grâce* to the previous generation of composers: Bizet, Fauré, Massenet, and above all Saint-Saëns⁴⁰.

³⁸ translation: A. Rao

³⁹ G. Watkins: *Proof in the night, music and the Great War* (University of California Press, 2002), 98

⁴⁰ Rolland wrote in 1907: 'The concert of French music at the Sorbonne: Bizet, Lalo, Saint-Saëns, Fauré, seems to us quite bland and mediocre after the powerful, glittering music of the last few days [Dukas's *Ariane et Barbe-bleue*, Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and above all Strauss's *Salomé* which greatly impressed Debussy, Dukas and Ravel]. Besides, Saint-Saëns' music is of no interest whatsoever. He is acclaimed triumphantly. He has become the great musician of Universities. And those are where he is receiving laurels, now that musicians consider him virtually dead - more dead than Mendelssohn, -and maybe even than Brahms. It is strange that one could be talking about French music for hours, among musicians, without even thinking of uttering the name of Saint-Saëns.'
in Romain Rolland: *Correspondance, fragments de journal*, 166. (translation: A. Rao)

Rolland was certainly not alone in praising Debussy at their expense: authenticity of declamation, among other virtues, in the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* had also been perceived as refreshingly pure by rivalling critics of antithetical creeds, like Jean Marnold (a supporter of modernity in music who was close to Ravel but was also virulently anti-semitic) and the notoriously conservative Pierre Lalo⁴¹. Fittingly enough, the next few years would serve up some of France's best chamber music, although by then Rolland's prophetic judgement would be thrown off course by the political and social upheaval.

Despite the initial enthusiasm of the chief advocates of a so-called 'pure' French tradition' (notwithstanding d'Indy's tepid reaction⁴²), Rolland's bold claim that Debussy's music was the truest expression of musical Frenchness since the anti-German crusade of the 1870s would still be challenged during the decade of the Great War, despite having been endorsed by the more progressive musical movements of the previous decades, the *Debussystes* and the *Apaches*, a group of young independents that included the poets Leon-Paul Fargue, Tristan Klingsor, and a young Maurice Ravel (see Chapter 2, 29). Ironically, the man championed by Rolland did himself rally the nationalist cause, thus recalling Saint-Saëns's *anti-germanisme* from the 1890s which Rolland himself had already condemned as symptomatic of a loss of confidence in the musical

⁴¹ Pierre Lalo (1866-1943), the son of composer Edouard Lalo, was a music critic at the daily newspaper *Le Temps* from 1898 until 1914 and collaborated to the influential publications *Comoedia* and *Le Courier musical*. Close to d'Indy and the *Schola*, he was initially respectful of Debussy's achievements; in 1908, however, his views shifted and he condemned what he described as his 'affectation', in a review of *La Mer*: "instead of indulging in the free-flowing charm of his sensibility as before, M. Debussy seems to have wanted to control it and convert it into formulae -he wanted to write 'like Debussy' according to the rules and show how this should be done".
in *Debussy and His World*, edited by J.F. Fulcher: 'Le cas Debussy' by B. Hart (Princeton University Press, 2001), 366

⁴² '[Debussy's] works exist, we must therefore classify them. But where?'

in G. Macassar & B. Mérigaud: *Claude Debussy, le plaisir et la passion* (Découvertes Gallimard/Télérama, 1992), 54.

D'Indy made this comment back in 1901, on the subject of the *Nocturnes* for orchestra, two of which had been first performed in December 1900. D'Indy had actively tried to promote the young Debussy on his return from Rome, but their once amicable relations turned sour when Debussy ridiculed the dogmatic teachings at the *Schola Cantorum*.

values of the day⁴³. Had Rolland written his study in 1914, he may well, in fact, have cited the work of a younger French *avant-gardiste* in his search for the quintessence of classic Frenchness.

The magnificent *Trio en la* was composed by Maurice Ravel in 1914, perhaps at the insistence of two friends and colleagues, the great Rumanian composer and violinist George Enescu (1881-1955), a name closely associated with Ravel's chamber music, and the Italian pianist and composer Alfredo Casella (1883-1947) who made some minor revisions for the work's Premiere in 1915. It stands alone as the greatest French masterpiece ever written for that particular ensemble. As Fauré would point to Saint-Saëns' music when citing his inspiration for his Cello Sonata No.1 (see p.9), Ravel also acknowledged his senior's elegant contribution to the genre⁴⁴. The instrumental virtuosity, intensity and exceptional range of colours and textures of his *Trio en la* go well beyond Saint-Saëns, however, and indeed beyond the accepted 'native' ingredients that had been presumed to give a work its typical Frenchness.

Ravel's *Trio* nevertheless confirmed Rolland's assertion that the medium was ideally suited to vehicle fresh ideas and was thus likely to become more popular with French composers⁴⁵. Fauré, for one, hearing it for the first time at the

⁴³ Saint-Saëns' s view that the SN was dangerously close to repeating the errors of the past in letting German music 'take over' had led to his being outvoted as President of the SN in 1886, to be replaced by Vincent d'Indy. Rolland countered these notions in his lectures at the *Ecole Normale* in the early 1900s.

see Watkins: *Proof in the night*, 13-17

⁴⁴ The magnificent Trio in F major Op. 18 by Saint-Saëns, then only twenty-eight, had been the first major piano trio ever written by a French composer. Both he and Ravel drew on the rich symphonic possibilities of the medium while remaining faithful to the classicism of Mendelssohn and Schumann. Ravel's statement was rather tongue-in-cheek, however (it must have surprised many at the SMI) and is deftly qualified by Larner in *Maurice Ravel*, 150

⁴⁵ One composer from the *avant-garde* showed no real interest for chamber music, yet earned praises his distinctly French quality: Fauré's star student at the Conservatoire, Roger-Ducasse's 'refinement, ease and supple elegance, his most discrete and sensual luxuriance, go hand in hand with orderliness, measure and taste [were] typical of French art and culture. in L. Ceillier: *Roger-Ducasse, le musicien- l' oeuvre* (Durand & Cie, 1920), 2 (translation: A. Rao)

exceptionally rare concert of chamber music and songs presented in January 1915⁴⁶, deemed the work 'excellent'.⁴⁷

Mention has already been made of the functionality of chamber music in wartime, given the scarcity of performers. However, since Ravel had started work on the *Trio* in the winter months of 1913, some ten months before war broke out, this issue cannot have been a factor. Instead, his decision must be seen in the light of the resurgence of French chamber music, as witnessed by the respectable number of works by Magnard, Roger-Ducasse, Huré, Koechlin and Caplet from the 1910s, all of which, in various degrees, explored as yet uncharted possibilities for this medium⁴⁸.

Naturally the 1871 prerogative, namely to 'turn to the development of both chamber and symphonic music [with] the goal of bettering the Germans in their own abstract musical forms' (Fulcher), still applied in 1914, although the level of urgency had noticeably decreased: French composers had started to distance themselves from their German counterparts and were now looking inwardly for inspiration. Romain Rolland's vision of a re-generated, thriving and autochthonous music scene in France was about to become a reality.

⁴⁶ The concert had been presented by the SMI on 15 January 1915. Fauré, appointed *President d'Honneur* by its committee -which consisted almost entirely of former students of his- was also a frequent performer of his latest songs at these concerts; his first Cello sonata was performed at the only other wartime concert of note, presented by the SN on 10 November 1917. Fauré's attempt to merge these rival societies the previous year, an offer which had been flatly refused by Ravel, Koechlin and Vuillermoz (see p.21), possibly accounts for his choice of society on that occasion.

see Duchesneau: *L'Avant-garde musicale à Paris*, 72

⁴⁷ Nectoux: *Les voix du clair obscur*, 368. Letter to Koechlin, February 1915: "We had a little concert presented by Casella which gave us two premieres: an excellent *Trio* for violin, cello and piano by Ravel, and a *Suite of eight melodies that I composed recently on verses by Van Leberghe, Belgian poet (this is how they might be deemed current), titled 'Le Jardin clos'.*"

⁴⁸ Another major contributory factor to this chamber music spree, at least as far as the SMI members were concerned, was that the cost of programming orchestral works was considerable for a society which did not benefit from public funding (unlike the *Nationale*). As Duchesneau explains, the SMI concerts devoted to chamber music differed slightly from those from its rival, in that the formations could be traditional (string(s) and piano, woodwind and piano, quintets) but also quite unusual (Ravel's *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, for 2 flutes, 2 clarinets, string quartet, piano and soprano [same scoring as Stravinsky's *Japanese Lyrics*] or Caplet's *Prières* for voice, harp and string quartet). Caplet's *Impressions d'automne* from 1905 pre-date the activities of the SMI, but anticipate the experimental vein of those compositions with a most unusual line-up of saxophone, oboe, 2 clarinets, bassoon, 2 cellos, harp and organ (!).

1.3 The nationalist climate around 1914

In gestation for eight months or so, Ravel finally completed his *Trio* with great urgency in a few weeks between July and September 1914, when it became clear to him that he would have to enlist. In bar 59 of the last movement, he added a motif in the piano part reminiscent of trumpets sounding a call-to-arms, as if putting down a marker for posterity about unfolding events (Ex. 1.1). The ensuing sequence, a gradual build-up to a climactic re-statement of the augmented motif (over the shrill unison trills played by the strings), was so expressly heroic and martial-like that Ravel often berated performers who did not match his sense of anticipation.⁴⁹



Ex.1.1: Ravel's Piano Trio in A : *Finale*, bars 58-9, piano (Durand,1915-IMSLP)

In an uncharacteristic bout of patriotism, Ravel got so wound up by the destruction in the wake of the German Army's advance that he compared the conflict to 'a holy war' (see below). Two events from the early days of the War seem to have particularly traumatized him, and the rest of France: the tragic killing of composer Albéric Magnard, which prompted Ravel to remark that 'Like poor Magnard, [I have] written a trio: at least it's a start', and an act of huge symbolic significance on 21 September which prompted his indignation:

Oh God! To think that they have just destroyed Rheims Cathedral!... And that my physical condition will prevent me from experiencing the splendid moments of this holy war, and taking part in the most grandiose, the noblest action which has ever been seen in the history of humanity (even including the French Revolution)! ⁵⁰

⁴⁹ 'Ravel, we are told by the violinist Helene Jourdan-Morhange, was always frustrated by instrumentalists who could not get this concluding section to sound "trumpet-like" enough in performance.' Larner: *Maurice Ravel*, 151

⁵⁰ G.Watkins: *Proof in the Night*, 171, letter to Roland-Manuel. Debussy's reaction was equally outraged: "I won't get on to the subject of German barbarity. It has exceeded all expectations." in Nichols & Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 292 (letter to Nicolas Coronio, September 1914)

Born in 1865, Albéric Magnard was a composer of note whose style eschewed modernism but was still strikingly original. Steeped in German musical culture, he had written four great symphonies that had compelled Rolland to compare, perhaps unwisely, his orchestral music with that of Gustav Mahler in his 1905 article, *Musique française et musique allemande*. Although not very prolific, Magnard, a proud and independent spirit, had contributed to the French chamber music revival with a couple of sonatas, a string quartet, a quintet for piano and woodwinds and the *Piano Trio in F minor Op. 18* (to which Ravel was glumly referring). Early in September, sensing that the family manor at Baron, east of Paris, would come under German threat, he sent his wife Julie Creton and their daughters to a safe place: on the 3rd, having shot at approaching German soldiers and killing one of them, he perished in the fire they lit in retaliation, which also destroyed unpublished manuscripts. Although his killing was one of many, the manner of his death elevated him to martyrdom and precipitated a *Union sacrée* of previously bitterly divided musical circles.⁵¹

The outrage and stupor caused by the second of these atrocities, the bombing of a Cathedral so imbued with symbolism during September 1914, provoked condemnation and reaction that went far beyond the realm of regional politics. For artists and intellectuals in non German-speaking territories, this 'barbaric' act threatened not just the French nation, but the French *soul*, an entire civilisation steeped in Latin origins. Mobilisation became the only appropriate line of conduct, a call that was forcefully made by a number of French journalists in cahoots with right-wing nationalists (but not exclusively). The following exhortations are typical examples of this propagandist literature. The first, by art critic Clement Janin, was written as the introduction to the first Fine

⁵¹ The composer and music critic Gaston Carraud (1864-1920), in his biography of Magnard published posthumously in 1921, made a telling connection between the manner of his death and what he perceived as a higher moral and artistic ground that had its roots in French ancestry: [His death] *is the sign of something more beautiful and greater than the act: harmony, whence its priceless; a harmony that cannot be lived more exactly and which here ties together the artist's being, his art, and -to the last- his every move. It is an uncompromising art with a soul: the energetic, deep, affectionate soul which flowers from our land, the rightful and ingenuous soul of a man who, away from the battleground, alone in his home, seizes a weapon to defend it, like the sanctuary of his thought, of his family, and the microcosm of his country.*' in G. Carraud: *La Vie, l'Oeuvre et la Mort d' Albéric Magnard* (Rouart, Lerolle & Cie, 1921), 4 (translation : A. Rao). This contrasts with Ravel's grief and compassion; Magnard's defiance clearly assumed rather different meanings in the highly-charged climate.

Arts exhibition in the capital since the start of the war, the *Triennale* (during March and April 1916 as the Germans launched their attack on Verdun):

Ah! Quelle revanche, si l'historien qui écrira sur la lutte gigantesque et la vaillance épique de notre peuple, trouvait, ici ou là, le chef-d'oeuvre éclos dans la tempête et acclamé de l'avenir! Quel triomphe, s'il pouvait s'écrier: 'Pendant que les barbares détruisaient les cathédrales de Reims, de Louvain, de Soisson, Les Halles d'Ypres, le Beffroi d'Arras, la France, sentant s'exalter son génie, réparait ses désastres. Elle rendait à l'Humanité ce que celle-ci avait perdu!'

C'est pourquoi ce renouveau des préoccupations artistiques, quand la horde d'Attila est à quatre-vingt-dix kilomètres de la Ville- Lumière, quand celle-ci est obligée de s'éteindre chaque soir, pour atténuer la gravité des attentats, à quelque chose de très noble. Il a aussi quelque chose de très touchant.⁵²

Ah! What revenge, if historians who will write about the gigantic struggle and the epic bravery of our people, were to find, here or there, the masterpiece born out of the storm and celebrated of the future! What triumph, if they could exclaim: 'While the barbarians were destroying cathedrals in Rheims, Louvain, Soisson, the Hey-Market at Ypres, the Belfry of Arras, France, sensing its genius aroused, repaired its disasters. She was giving back to Humanity what Humanity had lost!'

Hence this revival of artistic endeavour, with Attila's hordes camp a mere ninety kilometres away from the City of Light, when it must put out its light in order to lessen the extent of the crimes, has something very noble, and something very moving about it.

The second, penned by the music critic Charles Tenroc at around the same time, was an attempt to rally French composers to the war effort, under the banner of the long-winded *Ligue pour la prépondérance de la musique française en France* ; this call to unite excluded those living in France but not naturalised in the previous five years, and composers of German or Austrian descent:

Le temps n'est plus où il était élégant de proclamer que l'Art n'a pas de Patrie - comme si l'Art ne remplissait pas un rôle économique et social - la moderne Allemagne s'était chargée, au surplus, de démontrer l'inanité de cette généreuse illusion (...) La Musique, plus atteinte encore que la Peinture par l'emprise teutonne, doit s'efforcer de réagir. Nos artistes ont le droit, je dirai même le devoir, de se regrouper comme les peintres et les industriels l'ont déjà fait. Ils ont le devoir impérieux de s'unir efficacement dans le but de lutter contre le retour des influences et aussi des erreurs dont ils ont subi les funestes conséquences⁵³.

⁵² C. Janin, introduction to catalogue *La Triennale, Exposition de l'art français* (Paris, 1916)- In K. Silver: *Esprit de Corps- The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914- 1925* (Thames & Hudson, 1989), 410 (translation: A. Rao).

⁵³ *La musique pendant la guerre*, in M. Duchesneau: *L'Avant-Garde musicale à Paris* (tr:A. Rao)

The days when it could elegantly be said that Art knows no country -as though Art didn't fulfil a social and economic role -modern Germany had taken care of this generous illusion. (...) Music, an even greater victim of the Teutonic stranglehold than Painting, must strive to react. Our artists have the right, I will even say the duty, to close ranks as painters and industrialists have already. It is their imperious duty to unite effectively with the purpose of fighting against the return of influences and the errors from which they suffered dire consequences.

Tenroc's rhetoric not only castigated what he perceived as slack on the part of French composers; it also cast a severe judgement on those composers who 'sympathised' with traditions from across the Rhine. His last sentence reads as an ominous warning, a chilling 'reminder' of the fate of Albéric Magnard who, as a Wagnerian composer, had committed the cardinal sin and paid for it with his life.

Tenroc, unsurprisingly, found little support outside the small circle of the *Ligue* committee members, namely Saint-Saëns, the afore-mentioned Dubois and d'Indy, whose dogmatic *Schola Cantorum*, the *Conservatoire* nemesis, had grown into a powerful instrument of anti-Republican protest. When summoned to give his support to the *Ligue*, Ravel gave the following reply, which must have summed up the opinion of the majority:

It is of little importance to me that Monsieur Schoenberg, for example, is of Austrian nationality. He is still a high-quality musician whose very interesting discoveries have had a beneficial influence on certain allied composers, even some of our own. I am delighted, moreover, that Messieurs Bartok, Kodaly, and their disciples are Hungarian and that they show it in their music with such zest.⁵⁴

The brouhaha that had greeted the performance of six piano pieces by Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly (1882-1967) at the inaugural concert of the *Société Musicale Indépendante* on 20 April 1910 was surely still fresh in his

⁵⁴ G. Larner: *Maurice Ravel*, 156

mind⁵⁵. Another *SMI* concert, during which the audience was asked to guess the composers of the works, probably conjured up similar feelings; it was at this 1911 concert that his *Valses nobles et sentimentales* for piano, premiered on the occasion, had caused a fair amount of confusion. A supposedly knowledgeable audience ventured some wild guesses, none more so than that of Kodaly which, no doubt, referred to the earlier scandal.

Ravel was also keen to pay respect to Arnold Schoenberg, whose music had stirred the minds of a portion of the musical *avant-garde*. In an interview from the 1930s he spoke highly of the Austrian iconoclast and of the influence his music had on him, well into the following decade :

You should never be afraid of imitating. I joined the Schoenberg school to write my *Poèmes de Mallarmé*... If it didn't quite turn out as 'Schoenberg' it is because, musically, I am not so averse to the 'charm' element, something he avoids to the point of asceticism, of martyrdom even⁵⁶.

Unsurprisingly, these admiring comments attracted the wrong sort of attention, and Ravel was duly informed that performances of his music would thence be severely restricted, a threat that did not bother him in the least. Tenroc's 'dire consequences' in reprisal of musical anti-patriotism were not limited to French composers; they extended to foreign composers who had a privileged relationship with France yet displayed signs of modernity that brought their music dangerously close to enemy lines. These nothing-short-of-xenophobic

⁵⁵ Carraud gave the following account of this *SMI* inaugural concert: '(...) outside their presence [Fauré's song cycle *La Chanson d'Eve* was still acceptable music to Carraud] the intermittent seriousness might have allowed some joker to translate *SMI* with Society for Worm-like Music. I won't even mention the hilarity provoked by the alarming piano pieces of M. Zoltan Kodaly. But the empty and lifeless intricacies of M. Maurice Delage's melodies are unfathomable (...). And who wasn't reminded of prize-giving ceremonies as, for starters, two nice young men played, on four hands, a *Chorale* by Liszt; then two little silly girls of six and ten (...) perform idem *Ma mère l'Oye*, by M. Maurice Ravel; and M. Ravel himself tinkle the ivories with a little old tune by his good fellow-student from the next grade, M. Debussy?' Another critic, Louis Vuillemin, supporter of the *SMI*, thought differently: 'The *SMI* last night made its first baby noise. Well, let us shout it loud and clear: the baby is in good health (...) This christening of the *SMI* lacked nothing. Not even a few whistles and laughter. The singularly audacious pieces by Zoltan Kodaly were their cause. Nobody will be surprised to learn that they were somewhat premature, and that the presence of the chief agitators from the *Schola Cantorum* was a sure omen. It might have been wiser, on the part of these inveterate opponents to the *SMI*, to spare it such an exceptionally high-profile debut. But the 'Scholistes' are not accustomed to find tactical subtleties in the land of Palestrina.'

in Duchesneau: *L'Avant-garde musicale à Paris*, 73 (translations: A. Rao)

⁵⁶ Lerner: *Maurice Ravel*, 137

sentiments even tainted Debussy's judgement of Stravinsky, whose savage orchestral scores he had previously admired.⁵⁷ Perhaps harbouring some ill-feeling towards the Russian⁵⁸, Debussy saw his opportunity to bring down his gifted rival a peg or two, as he was putting the finishing touches to his own *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp* in October 1915:

One asks oneself these days in whose arms music might be falling. The young Russian school is stretching hers, but, as I see it, they've become as un-Russian as could be. Stravinsky himself is leaning dangerously towards Schoenberg, though he remains the most wonderful orchestrating expert⁵⁹.

True, the days when Debussy's music was causing scandal to match his colleague's were long gone. Debussy's mixed emotions concerning the Russian genius emanated from the fact that, although he was prone to give in perhaps too easily to the underhanded tactics of ultra-nationalists, his own aesthetic was also changing rapidly and irrevocably at that time (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1).

Although the plea for a combative *Union sacrée* fell largely on deaf ears, Tenroc's exhortations may have played a part in the French government taking an interest in a project of merger of the two main rival musical societies, the SN and the SMI⁶⁰. The person overseeing the project was the pianist Alfred Cortot. In charge of state propaganda in music, this celebrated artist was close to d'Indy (both were passionate *Wagnériens* and anti-semitic), Fauré, Saint-Saëns, and Ravel, as well as a champion of Franck's chamber music and the

⁵⁷ Debussy's admiration for Stravinsky had peeked in 1912 when he praised heap on *Petrushka* in a letter from April: "There's a sort of sonorous magic about it, mysteriously transforming these mechanical souls into human beings: it's a spell which, so far, I think you're alone in possessing. And there is an orchestral assuredness such as I have encountered only in *Parsifal* -I'm sure you'll understand what I mean!" (that last reference was probably not without some double entente).

⁵⁸ Stravinsky's commissions from the *Ballets Russes* had been literally making an awful lot more noise than his own ballet *Jeux*, premiered virtually the same week as *The Rite of Spring* in 1913.

⁵⁹ R. Nichols & F. Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 304 & 270. Letter to Robert Godet from October 1915. In a letter to Caplet dated May 1913, Debussy had already quipped about Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*: 'It is extraordinarily wild and scary ["farouche"]... As you might say, it's primitive music with all modern conveniences!'

⁶⁰ see *La tentative de rapprochement entre la Société Nationale et la Société Musicale Indépendante*, in M. Duchesneau: *L'Avant-garde musicale à Paris*, 98-100

author of a comprehensive survey of French piano music, *La musique française de piano*.⁶¹

Like Tenroc before him (but for entirely different reasons), Cortot, after some encouraging signs early on, failed to rally the support of SMI members Maurice Ravel, Charles Koechlin and Emile Vuillermoz. Fauré, who had been nominated as President of the newly formed society in order to 'lure' his former students into joining, had perhaps hoped to build bridges between a young *avant-garde* that regarded him as their natural predecessor and a conservative 'rear-guard' that made him one of their own; a committed Republican, he certainly endorsed the process of reconciliation initiated by Cortot on behalf of the *Ministère des Beaux-Arts* and President Poincaré, even though it is unlikely that he would have held high hopes for it ⁶². All these efforts were thwarted in part due to 'differences of aesthetics' but also, remarkably in those years of *Union Sacrée*, to the persisting chasm between the SN and the SMI ⁶³.

One particular initiative that did garner genuine support from all sides was that of the *Festivals de Musique Française*, which aimed to gather the greatest number of composers in aid of those who had been mobilised. These concerts, often organised *ad hoc*, brought to the fore the great potential for compassion within French music circles, and, without quite filling the void, provided memorable occasions and much needed entertainment for a population bereft of *joie de vivre* at the time.

⁶¹ A. Cortot: *La musique française de piano*, 4 vols. (Paris: Rieder, 1930)

⁶² Fauré, like his pupil Ravel, had refused to submit to the extreme views of Tenroc's *Ligue* but had accepted in principle, to replace d'Indy at the helm of the newly united society. As the following quote suggests, however, d'Indy may have been slightly disingenuous in offering Fauré his position (Fauré himself may have been circumspect about asking Ravel Schmitt and Vuillermoz to join the new committee):

'It didn't catch in the least, Ravel, Koechlin, Grovlez, Casadesus and Co have refused in the name of their "aesthetic" ??? "that cannot be the same as ours". I confess that I found that so funny that I'm still laughing about it.'

in J.M. Nectoux: *Gabriel Fauré, Les voix du clair-obscur*, 397 (translation: A. Rao)

⁶³ For a comprehensive survey of the irreconcilable differences that opposed the members and sympathisers of both societies, see M. Duchesneau: *L'Avant-garde musicale à Paris*, 80-84.

Having seen 'how the issue of national identity was being fought on musical terrain and especially how the revival of early music in the *fin-de-siècle* - often read as a preparation for the vigorous rise of Neo-Classicism in the mid-1910s and the 1920s- was, in fact, deeply rooted in the nationalist concerns of the pre-war decades' (Watkins)⁶⁴, it is now necessary to examine the self-preservation tactics of the *avant-garde* in a culturally and ideologically hostile environment.

⁶⁴ *Proof in the night*, 18

CHAPTER TWO

SERENADE

Against the backdrop of nationalist rhetoric, inimical attitudes towards modernism took centre-stage. The music of Debussy and Ravel, already at the epicentre of the war of words between conservative and progressive camps known as the '*guerre des chapelles*'¹ would face an even greater challenge after September 1914, when a momentous shift away from the aesthetic of sensuality and charm that had hallmarked their works and those of their elder, Gabriel Fauré, brought about a transformation of their musical language.

The relentless attack on modernism by both mainstream and extreme critics and the verbal or musical responses from the *avant-garde* will be dealt with in sections 2.1, when the controversy was on purely aesthetic grounds, and 2.2, when these tensions were exacerbated by the conflict. Section 2.3 will examine the attitudes of Pablo Picasso and Igor Stravinsky, two pivotal figures from the Parisian scene at the time, in particular the former's artistic treatment of traditional masks from the *commedia dell'arte*, and the latter's musical offensive against German music and the stylistic weaponry used to that effect.

¹Debussy's music in particular polarized critics after the premiere of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in May 1902. The admiring critics (Marnold, Vuillermoz, Laloy, la Laurencie, Dukas, Jean-Aubry) gathered under the umbrella of '*Debussysme*', while staunch traditionalists who actively fought against State intervention in French musical life (Sérieyx, de Breville, Orban, Daubresse, Chantavoine) rallied around d'Indy's circles at the Schola Cantorum, and were therefore considered as '*Scholistes*'. Ravel, Vuillermoz, Delage, the Spanish pianist Ricardo Vines and the poets Tristan Klingsor and Leon-Paul Fargue also admired Debussy and Russian music (their 'pass-word' was a theme from Borodin's Second Symphony) but, mindful of political hijacking by both Left and Right, positioned themselves outside this cleavage under the name '*Apaches*' from around 1903.

For further readings on the 'War of the Chapels', see C. Goubault: *Les Chapelles musicales en France ou la querelle des 'gros-boutiens' et des 'petits-boutiens'* (*Revue internationale de musique française* Vol.5 -1981, 99-100) and J.F. Fulcher: *French Cultural Politics and Music*; on the *Apaches*, see J. Pasler: 'A Sociology of the *Apaches*: "Sacred Battalion" for *Pelléas*' at www.musicweb.ucsd.edu/Pasler-Apaches-2007.pdf, accessed 3/08/2013)

2.1 'Down with "Kubism" ' : the war on Modernism

In the early years of the war, painters and musicians found themselves thrust in ideological minefields. Their work was now the object of increasing scrutiny, well beyond the confines of its natural scope, and its symbolic and metaphorical quotient increased proportionately. On the positive side, this meant Art was now a matter of national priority; this rise in status had a profoundly cathartic effect on those creative minds who were prevented from joining the army, as their artistic contribution was now considered an integral part of the war effort². Conversely, working under the radar of a mighty anti-modernist lobby, artists came to a crossroads: they could either endorse or critique the prevalent nationalist discourse. The second option, though subversive in character, was also compassionate in essence, since it adequately portrayed the horrors of war: 'Cubism's dissonant, visually explosive style was an especially appropriate language in which to describe the destructive powers of modern warfare'³.

If certain composers were brave enough - and articulate enough- to express their dissent at the ambient cynicism and xenophobia, for artists to openly advocate plurality of expression during the war was certainly a risky choice. Even between like-minded individuals, tensions could run high: in 1917, the painter Robert Delaunay, foremost Cubist painter from the early days of the movement, criticized Picasso for 'dabbling' with Classicism, sensing an element of betrayal: 'Having left behind Cubist incomprehensibility, he accommodates himself marvellously with his so-called classic period and drawings which have neither father nor mother'.⁴

² The following exchange between the painter Henri Matisse and his friend in high places Marcel Sembat caught this shift in attitude 'on-the-spot'. Matisse's anxious queried: '*Derain, Braque, Camoin, Puy, are at the front, risking their skin...We [Matisse and another painter, Albert Marquet] have had enough of staying behind...How can we serve our country?*', to which Sembat replied: '*By continuing, as you do, to paint well.*' in R. Escholier: *Matisse ce vivant* [Paris, 1956] -translation: A. Rao), cited in K. Silver: *Esprit de Corps*, 410

³ *Ibid*, 84

⁴ *Ibid.*, 431 letter to Albert Gleizes (September 1917). Also

In fact Cubism had been the object of such derision and diatribe in the nationalist press that both Picasso and Delaunay could be forgiven for their stances (Picasso for seemingly deserting the Cubist cause, Delaunay for denouncing him as traitor). At the start of the war, French caricaturists ran hundreds of propaganda images that were implicitly linking Cubism to the German cultural arsenal. One particularly truculent example was the work of one Léka, a French caricaturist whose amusing pseudonym (*les "K"*) poked fun at those political and cultural derivatives associated with the Kaiser's regime by French wartime propaganda. Naturally, 'Kubism' was one of them⁵.

Cubism, as it happens, was not a product of German pre-war culture but had instead exploded on the Parisian art scene between 1910 and 1912, through the congruence of the Spanish (Picasso, Gris) and French (Braque, Metzinger, Gleizes, Duchamp) *avant-gardes*. Their contrasting -sometimes conflicting - styles brought about a fragmentation of the movement which further alienated a French public already challenged by the complex and highly symbolic abstraction and extreme angularity. Cubism was viewed so suspiciously in wartime that the German-named Jewish art dealers Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and Wilhelm Uhde had their important collections of Cubist paintings 'confiscated as enemy goods by the French government'.⁶ The simplistic notion that all Cubist art was of German origin, or that, conversely, German art was necessarily Cubist, was certainly not upheld by the average French connoisseur or intellectual; this did not, however, diminish the ardour of French critics in pouring their scorn on the movement⁷.

⁵ Silver: *Esprit de Corps*, 10-11

⁶ In England, the founder of the Proms and patron of the Arts, Hospitals and the London Underground Sir Edgar Speyer, of German Jewish origins, bowed to extreme political pressure and was forced to flee on charges of high treason.

The 'enemy property' confiscated by the French and British governments also extended to important musical landmarks: the *Bechstein Hall* built by the Berlin piano manufacturing firm in 1901 at Wigmore St, London, was seized and closed in 1916 along with the 137 *Bechstein* pianos at the Company's showrooms, after the passing of the *Trading with the Enemy Amendment Act*. It was renamed *Wigmore Hall* the following year.

⁷ "Madame Aurel, a popular critic of the period, referred to Cubism, Futurism, and Orphism collectively as 'this convulsed art, for which Gleizes, Metzinger, Apollinaire, and Boccione, and not long ago Severini, established the rules with the most erudite malice, this art which, although born in this country, is no more French for that...'"

Silver: *Esprit de Corps*, 11

Before the war, the musical *avant-garde* had also been targeted by nationalist critics, who made it their duty to disparage works that displayed modernist tendencies. The politicization of the *milieu* had meant that musical criticism was often heavily pregnant with either right-wing or socialist doctrines; and for composers, the semantics of music and form-related concerns were equally loaded with ideological connotations⁸. The SMI breakaway from the SN underlined this state of affair: traditionalist members of the SN adhered on the whole to the nationalist doctrines professed by the political Right, while their more progressively-minded colleagues tended towards left-wing idealism⁹. Yet harsh criticism of the kind that greeted Debussy's *La Mer* in 1905¹⁰ or Ravel's *Histoires naturelles* in 1907 cannot always be viewed in ideological terms and nor can it accurately determine their authors' political affiliations. For instance the critics Camille Mauclair (1872-1944), Pierre Lalo (see p.20) and Gaston Carraud (see p.25), had proven affinities with, respectively, the *Dreyfusard Left*, the Centre and the *Anti-Dreyfusard Right*.



Fig.2.1: Camille Mauclair
(www.upload.wikipedia
retrieved 7/07/2013))



Fig.2.2: Pierre Lalo
(www.museum.fc2web.com
retrieved 11/09/2013)



Fig.2.3: Gaston Carraud
(www.cleopatrasvoice.com
retrieved 20/07/2013)

Yet all three made a similar journey, from followers of the symbolist movement and early admirers of its musical incarnation (Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*) in the early 1900s, to a unilateral (Carraud, Mauclair) or partial (Lalo)

⁸ see J. Fulcher: *French Cultural Politics*, Chapters 2 & 3.

⁹ Duchesneau: *L' avant-garde musicale à Paris*, 80-1

¹⁰ see B. Hart: Le "cas" Debussy, in *Debussy and his World*, ed.by J.F. Fulcher (Princeton University Press, 2001), 366

endorsement of ultra-nationalist anti-semitic agendas condemning modernist trends in the Parisian *avant-garde*, including Debussy, during and after the war.

Carraud, almost the exact contemporary of Debussy and, like him, winner of the *Prix de Rome* (1890), was initially an ardent supporter, praising what he perceived as the progressive nature of *Pelléas*:

This music [*Pelléas*] makes not the slightest concession to tradition, convention or custom; it repudiates all that is hackneyed, showy, or commonplace; it seems to roam with the same vagabond freedom as thought itself; and yet it has a proportion, a balance and a progression of its own¹¹.

Likewise, Lalo's great fondness for *Pelléas* was still undiminished by 1908 when his review in *Le Temps* 'elegantly' dispelled the rumours that Debussy had copiously borrowed from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, whose music, it was suggested, he had come across while in Russia as a student back in the early 1880s: 'Pelléas and Boris have some successions of chords in common and some orchestral sonorities, that's all... Debussy's music is organized with harmonious refinement while Boris is full of disorder and chaos...'¹² And Maclair, perhaps the most prolific critic of his generation, was just as enthusiastic about the opera as he had been about Maeterlinck's play, and found in Debussy the ideal musical expression of his own 'love of beauty'¹³.

By the end of that decade, however, these critics' appreciation of Debussy's innovations and stylistic freshness had considerably diminished. The creations of two of Debussy's *Images* for orchestra in February (*Iberia*) and March (*Rondes de printemps*) of 1910 provoked mixed reactions. Lalo's was particularly harsh, and while Carraud and Jean Marnold took notice of Debussy's 'new style', Maclair's judgement must have been colored by his recent condemnation of the latest 'propensity towards modernist overvaluation' (D. Jarassé). In January 1913, Debussy himself conducted the first performance of the complete set of *Images* with the Colonne orchestra; critics on the whole seemed favorably disposed towards the work, but 'Maurice

¹¹ B.L. Kelly: *Pelléas, the Press, and World War I*, in *French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870-1939*, ed. by B.L. Kelly (University of Rochester Press, 2008)

¹² F. Lesure: *Claude Debussy*, 301

¹³ D. Jarrassé: *Etude critique*, www.inha.fr (retrieved 1/07/2013)

Ravel nonetheless took pen to paper in order to sharply denounce the trio of the old guard [Carraud, Lalo & Mauclair], as intractable as ever' (F. Lesure):

Vous avez bien compris, vous qui, bêtement, vous laissez aller au charme éclatant, à la fraîcheur exquise des *Rondes de printemps*; vous qui vous sentez étreindre jusqu'aux larmes par cette ruisselante *Ibéria*, par ces *Parfums de la nuit*, si profondément émouvants; par cette magnificence harmonique si neuve, si délicate; par toute cette intense musicalité; vous n'êtes qu'un littérateur, ou un peintre. Et vous entendez bien ce que ces termes ont de méprisant [...] Seuls, M. G. Carraud, à qui nous devons trois mélodies et un petit poème symphonique, M. C. Mauclair qui, précisément, s'est fait connaître par des oeuvres littéraires et picturales, et M. P. Lalo, qui n'a rien produit du tout, sont des musiciens et des sensibles.

You understand very well, who foolishly let yourself be charmed by the exquisite freshness of the *Rondes de printemps*, who felt overcome with tears at the rustling sounds of *Iberia*, at those *Parfums de la nuit*, so deeply moving, at this harmonic magnificence, so new, so delicate, at all this intense musicality, that you are nothing but a *littérateur* or a painter. And you know how contemptible these words sound [...] Alone Mr G. Carraud, to whom we owe three melodies and small symphonic work, Mr C. Mauclair who actually got his fame from literary works and paintings, and Mr. P. Lalo who never produced anything at all, are musicians and sensitive souls¹⁴.

This reaction from a composer who had himself often received unsavoury comments (some of it from Debussy's own pen) is a shining exception to the general apathy that plagued musical criticism before the war.¹⁵ The infamous sabotage of the inaugural concert of the SMI of April 1910 by *Scholistes* has been mentioned earlier; away from heated concert venues, reviews of the music subsequently published were still not overly enthusiastic. Here is the eminent founder of the *Revue Musicale*, historian and musicologist Jules Combarieu¹⁶ on Ravel's *Ma Mère l'Oye* for piano for four hands (July 1910):

We have announced, in our last number, recent publications from Durand; (...) as they say, there is a bit of everything for everyone. The first is *Ma Mère l'Oye*, five 'pièces enfantines' for piano for four hands, by M. Ravel. The titles are pretty; the style is perhaps less child-friendly, rather one could say this is refined childishness and affected

¹⁴ F. Lesure: *Claude Debussy*, 361 (translation: A Rao)

¹⁵ 1910 was also the year of the publication of 'Le cas Debussy' by C.-F. Caillard & J. de Berys

¹⁶ Jules Combarieu (1859-1916), like a number of French scholars and intellectuals, had studied in Germany under Bach-specialist P. Spitta before founding the *Revue d'histoire et de critique musicale* in 1901, later to become *La Revue musicale* to which d'Indy and Debussy contributed.

simplicity. We are a long way from Bizet's *Scènes d'enfants*, so earnestly rhythmical, so strikingly colourful. But then, who will bring back Bizet? (July 1910)¹⁷

Though not entirely inaccurate in his judgement, Combarieu clearly misses the point. Ravel's child music is not pictorial, nor does it seek to prettify childhood in the manner of Schumann or indeed Bizet: it is modern *because* it dispenses with the adult perspective altogether and 'aligns' the depth of intensity and seriousness with that of a child. *Petit Poucet* and *Les entretiens de la Belle et la Bête* do not sound joyously childish: their veiled melancholy and undeniable affectation is closer to Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince* than Francisque Poulbot's postcard children. Wilde may well have inspired *Le jardin féérique*, the last of the five pieces; indeed Combarieu's tepid review recalls Romain Rolland's greeting Strauss's *Salomé* based on Wilde's play, premiered five years earlier, with a mixture of awe and disgust¹⁸. Both Combarieu and Rolland, without question two of the most progressively minded musicologists of the era, did at times struggle to keep abreast of the *avant-garde*.

Given that the critics and fellow-composers on 'neutral ground' were at times perplexed by Ravel's and Debussy's latest offerings before 1914, it will hardly surprise that relations between musicians of diverging aesthetics became downright septic. The octogenarian Saint-Saëns sent his views on *En blanc et noir*, a set of three pieces for two pianos from 1915, to Fauré:

We must at all cost bar the door of the Institute to a gentleman capable of such atrocities, fit to be placed beside cubist paintings¹⁹.

It is unlikely that Saint-Saëns managed to sway his conciliatory colleague with such incendiary words, but his letter reveals the extent of his anxiety concerning the spread of modernism, the cosmopolitan aspect of which he viewed with great suspicion. No doubt hurt at the thought that his music, hailed in Britain

¹⁷ *La Revue musicale -Internet Archive*
(www.archive.org) retrieved 20/06/2013

¹⁸ "(..) the atmosphere in it is sickening and bland; it wreaks of vice and literature." in *Romain Rolland et Richard Strauss: Correspondance, fragments de journal*, 87

¹⁹ G. Watkins: *Proof in the night*, 100

and America, had become irrevocably old-fashioned in France, Saint-Saëns, like others from the old guard, was waging his own war armed with sectarian rhetoric. If his sentiments were, by themselves, not likely to alter the course of Western music, they nonetheless represented the opinion of a powerful minority in France, and the vast majority abroad, including German-speaking countries²⁰. It was time for the *avant-garde* everywhere to re-invent itself, and for its members to make calculated choices. Before considering the responses from two major figures of modernism who were working in Paris at the time, it is necessary to mention one particularly ill-fated case of artistic *Union sacrée*.

2.2 'The tact to know how far one can go too far': Cocteau's *Parade*

Spats between musicians and critics reached a new low during the *Parade* scandal. While musical creations may have been severely limited during the war, giving critics precious little to 'feed' on, the uproar that greeted the ballet's Première in May 1917 and the copious amount of negative press it immediately received more than made up for it. A collaborative work written for Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, *Parade* boasted an impressive creative line-up: writer, critic, artist and self-appointed defender of the *avant-garde* Jean Cocteau (1889-1963) provided the storyline; *agent-provocateur* Erik Satie (1866-1925) was the truculent composer; Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) painted the decor (a chance peeking at circus entertainers relaxing backstage behind an emblematic red curtain) and designed the costumes, while the Russian Ballet Master Léonide Massine was in charge of the corps de ballet.

²⁰ Edward Elgar summed up English circumspection regarding Cubism in his letter to Marie Joshua from September 1918, when he was about to complete the Violin Sonata which he thus described: "I fear it does not carry us any further but it is full of golden sounds and I like it, but you must not expect anything violently chromatic or cubist."

Edward Elgar: letters of a lifetime, ed. J. Northrop Moore (Clarendon Press, 1990), 325
As far as the exponents of the most radically 'altered' Western music (Schoenberg and the 'Second Viennese School') were concerned, the cultural environment was as hostile in their native Austria as anywhere. Even as the war ended in November 1918, the measures they took to protect the integrity of their works in performances indicate their extreme isolation, as proves this 'self-defense' manifesto from "(...) the display of irrelevant virtuosity and individuality, and the attainment of a purely personal success (...) will be rendered automatically impossible by the exclusion of all demonstrations of applause, disapproval, and thanks." A. Berg: *Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen* (Society for Private Musical Performance), *statement of Aims*, in R. Taruskin: *Music in the Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 351



Fig.2.4: Picasso's stage curtain for *Parade* (Centre Pompidou, Metz, France, 2012-public dom.)



Fig.2.5: Cocteau by Picasso, 1916
(www.pinterest.com, 1/07/2013)



Fig.2.6: 1918 score of *Parade* (Editions Salabert), with the subtitle '*Ballet réaliste*'
(www.en.wikipedia.org, 1/07/2013)

Cocteau was the project's mastermind. Aged only twenty-seven in 1916, the ambitious young director had built an impressive network of artistic connections among writers, painters and musicians. Multivalent, Cocteau sought to further enhance his reputation by publishing *Le Mot*, a forum of ideas he co-edited with the illustrator and caricaturist Paul Iribe. In the first issue from November 1914, he articulated the need to promote an art that would be new, incisively modern yet patriotic and respectful of 'classic' French tradition. His entreaty from January 1915, an article titled 'Between Taste and Vulgarity' coined the slogan that heads this sub-chapter and begged the reader to 'follow *Le Mot* on the roads of France'²¹. The following July, his enlistment temporarily stopped his literary efforts and definitively ended *Le Mot*. In 1916, having spent much of the previous winter on the front as an ambulance driver, he felt the time was right to produce entertainment with a different vibe, one that would put aside artistic coteries and celebrate modernity in a patriotic fashion... This artistic *Union sacrée*, Cocteau later recalled, was also explicitly political:

I understood that there existed in Paris an artistic Right and an artistic Left, which were ignorant or snooty towards each other for no valid reasons and which it was perfectly possible to bring together. It was a question of converting Diaghilev to modern painting, and...the modern painters, especially Picasso, to the sumptuous decorative aesthetic of the ballet; of coaxing the Cubists out of their isolation, persuading them to abandon their hermetic folklore of pipes, packages of tobacco, guitars and old newspapers... the discovery of a middle-of-the-road solution attuned to the taste for luxury and pleasure, of the revived cult of French 'clarity' that was springing up in Paris even before the war... such was the story of *Parade*.²²

The idealistic nature of the project no doubt appealed to Satie, who then cast a rather isolated figure, artistically speaking. In coaxing this eccentric figure, Cocteau took a risky gamble: impervious to mainstream bourgeois aesthetics, Satie, a member of the French *Parti Socialiste* since the assassination of the socialist leader Jean Jaurès, a week before war broke out, was in militant mood²³.

²¹ Silver: *Esprit de Corps*, 414

²² *Ibid.*, 125-6

²³ Satie joined the *Parti Socialiste* on 31 July 1914, the day the Socialist leader and social 'conscience' of the political establishment was shot. On Satie's social work in the Paris district of Arcueil-Cachan, see Fulcher: *French Cultural Politics*, 204

What Cocteau did not foresee and might not have perceived, so subtle was its articulation, was the satirical manner with which both Satie and Picasso interpreted their young impresario's politically naive frame-work. Although 'realist' in principle, the work contained an abundance of symbols and double-ententes that countered this label and belied Cocteau's apolitical agenda²⁴. Satie's 'dislocating' music²⁵ and Picasso's transgression of nationalist symbols - less riotous than the music but no less provocative- did not simply remove all bourgeois conventions. In contrast with Diaghilev's other ventures, *Parade* had challenged, in the space of a mere fifteen minutes, the very nature of the genre and had gone to the heart of wartime social and cultural dissociation, even if it had done so playfully and humorously.



Fig.2.7: Erik Satie by Pablo Picasso²⁶



Fig.2.8: Erik Satie by Jean Cocteau²⁷

Cocteau's initial storyline, 'a parable of the travails of the *avant-garde*, whereby the public is not interested in making the effort necessary to appreciate new (and true) art' (Silver), offered in truth little chance of success; coinciding

²⁴ Picasso's cubist (ie. extravagantly shaped) costumes were so strangely 'dissonant' against the more naturalistic curtain as to suggest, in his own words, "characters who would become in fact the false reality ON STAGE, the real dancers being reduced to the size of puppets (by the characters so solemnly depicted in the curtain)". The curtain's style was illusionist in this context.

²⁵ J. Fulcher: *The Composer as Intellectual- Music and Ideology in France, 1914-1940* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 78

²⁶ www.artmodel.files.wordpress.com/2010/03satie_picasso.jpg, accessed 1/07/2013

²⁷ www.pinterest.com/composers/erik-satie/, accessed 1/07/2013

developments on the world-stage made it impossible to avoid a scandal. In the context of the revolutionary tide sweeping through Russia (France's ally against Germany) and fears that it might pull out of the war (justified, as it turned out) the fair-ground parable was greeted to shouts of 'boches' or 'métèques' (an extremely pejorative term describing non-nationals working in France): if the red curtain and mechanical sounds were designed to draw the audience towards socialist utopia and the bizarre cubist accoutrements of the actors meant by Picasso as a joke on himself, the hostile crowd made it clear to the artists that there was no mistaking its bias.

The main target was unquestionably Satie. Incensed by a tasteless review of the ballet by one Jean Poueigh, he returned the compliment with this answer: 'Monsieur et cher ami, you are an asshole, but an asshole without music', hand-written on a postcard²⁸. Charged with defamation as the postcard had not been sealed, Satie was sentenced to eight days in jail (July 1917), despite the best efforts of his defense and the support of Braque, Apollinaire and others.

Much like his erstwhile friend and mutual admirer Debussy, Satie would repeatedly endure sometimes truly obnoxious criticism for his reprobate anti-conformist attitude; unlike him however, this rough treatment at the hands of the 'loathsome' *Establishment* only spurred his sense of vindication. The curious satisfaction that went hand in hand with professional disappointment may have contained an element of 'saving face', for Satie was no doubt conscious of the fact that his more recent music was equally marginalized by the more potent conveyors of modernism, notably Ravel.²⁹ When Ravel refused the *Légion d'Honneur* in 1920 for reasons not entirely clear, Satie declared that 'though Ravel did not accept the *Légion d'Honneur*, all his music does'³⁰. Moreover,

²⁸ Silver: *Esprit de Corps*, 165

Scatological jibes were not common in those days; however Proust's comparing of Debussy's *Images* for orchestra (1910) to *musical farts* ('*des pets musicaux*') almost rivals Satie.

²⁹ From 1912, Satie's early works for piano featured prominently in concerts organized by the SMI and frequently performed by Ravel's close friend Ricardo Vines. Sensing that his own aesthetic was moving away from that of his SMI admirers, Satie had started to distance himself from Ravel well before the Parade scandal.

³⁰ Satie in *Le Coq*, May 1920. According to Ravel student and friend Manuel Rosenthal, Ravel had been offended by the leaking by politicians of his decision to enlist, back in 1914, which he had kept from his mother. Satie may not have been aware of this; in any event, his quip was intended to cause Ravel discomfort. In Lerner: *Maurice Ravel*, 171

having served as corporal in the first months of the conflict, Satie may have harboured some resentment towards Ravel's nomination for the illustrious accolade. Having previously endured Debussy's jealous feelings (most notably in 1913, when both had set to music three poems by Stephane Mallarmé, two of those identical, at precisely the same time), Ravel once again showed the tact to 'take it on the chin'. His taste for Satie's music most probably took a blow as well.

As for Debussy, his friendship with Satie had been strained since the latter's enrolment in d'Indy's *Schola Cantorum* in 1905, a move which had caused consternation (not just in *avant-garde* circles)³¹. Plagued by health issues, he was struggling to complete his sonata for violin and piano at around the same time as the rehearsals for *Parade* were about to take place. With his friend's career seemingly in the ascendancy and his own so precariously in the balance, Debussy was not in the mood to emote with Satie about this latest musical pandemonium. Satie's letter to Emma Debussy from March 1916, after a visit to the couple, is fraught with tension: 'Truly, it is better for "the Precursor" to stay away from now on -at home.Yours, Satie. P.S.: (...) I love you all -a lot.'³² There is evidence that Debussy did attend the *Ballets Russes* performance on 25 May, where he would have heard *Parade* amidst a range of Russian works. His total silence, either before or after that date, speaks volumes.

Perhaps the most damning opinion of all came again from Delaunay, precisely because of his Cubist credentials. After a performance of the ballet in Barcelona, in November 1917, he wrote to fellow-cubist Albert Gleizes: 'I have told you regarding *Parade*. It's an absolutely crazy story -no success here, not even curiosity for this hysterical thing, that's the best way to describe it... hysterical - painting from a sick mind - tortured...'³³

The time for artistic friendships had ended: just as Debussy felt it impossible to follow Satie in his experiment in social critique, Delaunay, at least in his

³¹ For interpretations of Satie's anti-conformist 'messages', both in his music and in his actions, see J. Fulcher: *French Cultural Politics*, 198-202

³² Lesure: *Claude Debussy*, 401

³³ Silver: *Esprit de Corps* (see p.30:Delaunay's scornful dismissal of Picasso's 'classicist' period)

correspondence, disowned the work of the most eclectic of *avant-gardistes* and master of artistic renewal, Pablo Picasso.

2.3: Artistic masquerade: the U-turn of the Parisian *avant-garde*

Beyond the provocative features (the dominant *rouge*, the monkey atop a tricolor ladder, the blackamoor waiting on the European gathering and the strange cubist-like expression on the face of the Spanish guitarist in the middle) Picasso's stage curtain from his Illusionist period (see Fig.2.4 above) offered the audience a voyeuristic glance into the communal spirit of the *avant-garde*. Central to this vision was the dressing-up of the cast as figures of the *commedia dell'arte*, adapted for the occasion to reflect the concerns of the day. The reference to the world of pantomime, not explicit in Cocteau's script, had a dual purpose of drawing the audience in with a reassuringly familiar line-up and satisfying what had become a virtual necessity: a 'parading' of the Latin roots of the artwork.

Countless studies have been devoted to the cult of Pierrot in Western art from the 1870s to the early twentieth century. In France where the figure first came to prominence in Molière's *Don Juan* (c.1670), a revival of Pierrot's fortunes had already taken place back in the 1840s. Over three generations of comic actors and mimes toiled to restore its prestige. By the 1900s it had 'contaminated' every section of the artistic community. The greatest paradox about the fascination of both public and art-world with the character was that, although unmasked, it assumed complete anonymity and indulged in excesses. The effect was farcical because of Pierrot's ingenuousness, and apparent credulity and gullibility. Because he was un-masked and 'pure' of heart (hence dressed in white) Pierrot took a special place in the sentiments of artists and poets.

Picasso's life-long association with the world of Pantomime is well-known. it peaked, however, to the extent of a veritable cult between 1905 and the early 1920s. The four paintings below (Figs.2.9-2.12) are evidence of the turbulence facing the *avant-garde* during the period under consideration in this study.



Four Pantomime paintings by Pablo Picasso that highlight his intense relationship with the characters and illustrate his startling stylistic development between 1913 and 1920.

From top left, anti-clockwise: Fig. 2.9: *Personnage arlequinesque (Arlequin)*, 1913; Fig.2.10: *Harlequin*, 1915; Fig. 2.11: *Pierrot*, 1918; Fig. 2.12: *Pierrot et Arlequin*, 1920 (each painting represents a distinct creative phase: 'synthetic' Cubism, Illusionism, Classicism, Surrealism)

(www.picasso.com, 23/07/2013)

Like many of his fellow Cubist painters, Picasso moved rapidly away from monochrome and almost purely abstract canvasses to more palatable paintings after 1914. Savvy use of the French national colours (red, white and blue) answered the call to patriotism by the dominant Right, and helped to ease his situation; as a non-national and Cubist founder, he had been *de facto* implicated in the 'degeneration' of French Art. He defied his detractors with vibrant optimism in 1915 (Fig.2.10). Against a tricoloured pile-up in the shape of the Eiffel Tower, the typically-patterned body of Harlequin is holding an unfinished monochrome painting. Its head (note what remains of the previous figure's mustache) is actually missing: we are looking at an illusion, a *trompe-l'oeil*, an amputated vision, to use a wartime cliché.

The need to appeal to a broader audience must not be seen as an artistic compromise on Picasso's part, however. As with the *Parade* curtain it anticipates, the 1915 *Arlequin* is still 'pure Picasso'.

After *Parade*, Picasso temporarily renounced all forms of abstraction. The art dealer Uhde gave this vignette from that troubled period of the Spaniard, not a million miles away from the despondent Pierrot of 1918 (Fig.2.11)³⁴ whose 'Cubist' eye is very similar to that of the Spanish guitarist from *Parade* (see Chapter 3, Fig.3.10):

Picasso ran down the staircase, embraced me emotionally and led me in a room containing some of his paintings. I came face to face with a large portrait in the so-called "Ingres" style (...) Could it be that, in times when men were ruled by hatred, when latin vigilance, in self-awareness, was rising menacingly against the metaphysical vapors from Germany, he felt that a crowd was pointing accusatorially at him, castigating his innermost feelings perceived as German-friendly, charging him with conniving with the enemy? Did he suffer from moral isolation in a foreign country? Did he try to position himself on the French side, and did these paintings attest to the strife of his soul?³⁵

³⁴ In *Esprit de Corps*, 129, Silver thus describes a realist drawing of the same life-like character: "neither Saltimbanque nor circus clown, but a carefully turned out 'jeune homme bourgeois'. (...) we sense in him a sadness that is internal rather than social in nature." He then assesses the significance of the Italian Pantomime for Picasso at this crucial junction with great acumen (p.130): "While Picasso's recent involvement with the ballet was certainly the most direct influence on this renewed interest in theatrical types, the conventional illusionistic mode of these works, along with their lack of implied social protest, brought them extremely close to an acceptable affirmation of French wartime values." Though not the mainstay of Parisian musical circles, this perception can hardly have been unique to the painting community.

³⁵*Ibid.*,429

Overall, in the context of his exuberant experimenting, Picasso's Classicist phase of 1917-18 was unquestionably a setback. He nonetheless quickly returned to his former aesthetic, and followed his own advice to young Cocteau from a few years previously: 'work with three colours; too many colours make Impressionism'. The colours displayed in the 1920 painting *Pierrot et Arlequin* (Fig.2.12) seem to vindicate the idea that Picasso finally did let go of that burdening Frenchness: this time, the poster-like image shows only traces of nationalist symbolism (the tricolour at the bottom centre); instead, a smiling *Pierrot* dressed in Spanish colours (gold and red) is leaning over to its friend, a red-cloaked Harlequin whose traditional diamond-shape attire has been replaced with an integral red outfit strewn with black and white patches, perhaps wounds inflicted by the mace of its companion. Did Picasso also fight back his inclinations towards socialism at the time? Picasso did become actively involved in Communist activities from the end of the *Second World War*, by which time his opinions on what should constitute an artist's prerogatives had hardened considerably: 'no, painting is not made to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war that attacks and defends against the enemy'.³⁶ The time for Pantomime had past...

One composer who drew from pantomime while simultaneously engaging with militant perspectives was another foreign artist and figure-head of the French *avant-garde*: Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971). Although, like Picasso, considered a *métèque* by some,³⁷ Stravinsky's artistic latitude was greater than his Spanish counterpart because he was Russian, therefore a 'brother-in-arms' of the French (at least before 1917). His works for the *Ballets Russes* from 1910 through to 1914 (including his opera *The Nightingale*, also backed by Diaghilev) had cemented his place as one of the most influential artists in Paris.

The war abruptly interrupted his extraordinary run of success. Stravinsky's first wartime effort was a desultory March -or rather the memory of one- for piano which the American author and benefactor Edith Wharton included in her 1916

³⁶ G.R. Utley: *Pablo Picasso - The Communist Years* (Yale University Press, 2000), 219

³⁷ Stravinsky was actually a resident of Switzerland up until 1920, when fashion designer Coco Chanel helped him find a permanent accommodation in France.

fundraiser for the 'American Hostels for Refugees' and the 'Children of Flanders Rescue Committee', *Le Livre des Sans-foyer*.



Fig.2.13: Stravinsky's *Souvenir d'une Marche boche*, inserted in E. Wharton's 1916 *Book of the Homeless* between the portrait of Cocteau by Leon Bakst, designer for Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* (left) and Jean Renoir's *Portrait of His Son, Wounded in the War* (right), all from 1915. (www.libraries.mit.edu, '150 Years in the Stacks: Year 56-1916: The Book of the Homeless edited by Edith Wharton-retrieved 22/07/2013)

Stravinsky was unequivocal about his hatred of all things German, and appears to have relished the artistic challenges ahead: 'Lord, what a terrible and at the same time magnificent period we are living through...My hatred for the Germans grows not by the day but by the hour.' *Souvenir d'une Marche boche* perfectly illustrate these primeval feelings.³⁸ The skeletal structure of its opening bars,

³⁸ Watkins: *Proof in the Night*, 140. Stravinsky's letter to Leon Bakst dated 20 September 1914. An entry in a sketchbook from 1917 also illuminates his rejection of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, a work he was no doubt familiar with as it toured virtually the same European cities as his own *Firebird* and *Petrushka* in the second half of 1912, during which he was putting the finishing touches to *Le Sacre du Printemps*. This entry leaves no doubt as to the nature of his musical distaste of German music: "The soul of latins is closer to us slavs than the soul of Anglo-Saxons, not to mention the Germans, those human caricatures. The Germans are wunderkind, but they are never young. The Germans are überwunderkind, since they will never be old either." (in *Proof in the Night*, 132)

In his *Chroniques de ma vie* from 1935, Stravinsky again referred to *Pierrot lunaire*: "I was not in the least enthusiastic about the aesthetic of this work". This comment is a lot more restrained than the sketchbook entry, reflecting an easing up of wartime rancour and, in the thirties, his own interest in some of the techniques chartered by Schoenberg.

which can be discerned in Fig.2.13, simultaneously evokes and removes traditional elements of Austro-German heritage from this musical caricature, to great comical effect. The mindless repetition of the descending scale motif mocks the 'odious' style of Wagner's *Meistersinger* fanfare, also in C major and that sports the same rhythmic bombast³⁹:



Ex.2.1: bars 38-43 from Wagner's opera *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (piano score -IMSLP)

Just as provocatively, the stripping down of musical material to its bare essentials evokes the piano music of Erik Satie.⁴⁰ As a caustic piece of anti-German propaganda, the crudely-named March does sit rather awkwardly in the company of charcoals and watercolours of dignified grace. No doubt Ms Wharton, like Diaghilev with *Parade*, had envisaged an artistic contribution to the War effort of less caustic nature. However, she probably understood that, beyond its farcical façade and concomitant with the disorientation she was experiencing herself in that period, the *Souvenir* planted the final nail in the nineteenth-century coffin. In fact, after 1914, Stravinsky did find himself isolated, as the tide of compliments that had greeted his meteoric rise started to turn. In

³⁹ in *Proof of the night*, Watkins makes the point that the *Souvenir* mocks the rising arpeggio and cadential progression of the opening theme from Beethoven's *Finale* from the Fifth Symphony. It cannot have escaped Stravinsky, however, that Beethoven was 'beyond range' since his status had been elevated to that of Hero of Humanity by his friend, admirer and fellow Swiss-resident Romain Rolland. Besides, what better target than the man who had taunted France with his 1871 *Lustspiel*?

⁴⁰ Stravinsky did dedicate the third of his *Trois Pièces faciles* from 1915-16 to Satie, which he appropriately described as 'the ice-cream wagon Valse'.
Watkins: *Proof in the Night*, 132

private (but Stravinsky did get word of it), Debussy again chastised his fellow *avant-gardiste* as he had Ravel and Dukas some years earlier.



Fig.2.14: Debussy and Stravinsky in 1911, photograph taken by Erik Satie
([www.google](http://www.google.com) images, retrieved 3/08/2013)

This time, his irritation was not so much caused by musical considerations than by his younger rival's 'cockiness':

He says: my *Firebird*, my *Rite*, like a child says: my top, my hoop. And that's exactly what he is- a spoilt child who, from time to time, cocks a snook at music. He claims to be my friend because I helped him climb on a ladder from which he now hurls hand-grenades - not all of which explode.⁴¹

This patronising opinion was formed in attenuating, precarious circumstances (illness, financial strain, tension within his marriage), but was principally motivated by the fact that 'Stravinsky's explosive entrance onto the musical scene had taken place in France, and that his enlistment in the promotion of French Neoclassical values was already under way'.⁴²

Debussy was not alone in contesting the reputation of the mighty Russian as leader of the musical renaissance in France. In a collection of thoughts gathered and published soon after the *Parade* debacle, Cocteau, cut to the

⁴¹ Nichols & Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 310. Letter to R. Godet from January 1916

⁴² Watkins: *Proof in the Night*, 89

quick, brought down in one shot the aesthetics of both *Pelléas* and *The Rite of Spring*:

Pelléas, that is yet again music one listens to with one's face in one's hands. Any music one listens to with one's face in one's hands is dodgy. Wagner - that's the guy who wrote music one listens to with one's face in one's hands.

One cannot quite get lost in Debussy's fog like one can in Wagner's fog, but one can take ill in it.

The stage corrupts everything and even Stravinsky. I do hope that this sentence will not in the least harm our loyal friendship; but it is useful to warn our young compatriots (...) I consider the *Rite of Spring* as a masterpiece, but I do find the atmosphere during its performance akin to the religious complicity, the hypnosis of Bayreuth. (...) Could it [also] be music one listens to with one's head in one's hands?⁴³

This jingoistic publication bore the highly evocative title *Le Coq et l'Arlequin*. Published in 1918 before the armistice, it defended Satie's music (and manners) and attacked the 'virtues' of Debussy and Stravinsky in a rather desperate attempt to set the record straight. Unlike Picasso, Cocteau perceived Harlequin as ambivalent and two-faced, a symbol of the hypocrisy -or disingenuousness at any rate- of the *Debussystes* and modernists, who hailed their music as quintessentially Latin, or influentially French. His book proposed to re-evaluate Satie's merits, making him the leading French composer of the day. Cocteau also went on to decry the prejudice and contempt of the Montmartre painters towards the *Ballets Russes*; notwithstanding Picasso's involvement with *Parade*, the afore-mentioned 'guitar-strumming, pipe-smoking and old-newspapers-collecting' Cubists, on the whole, tended to 'condemn its luxuriance' which they construed as *snobisme*⁴⁴.

What *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* did, beyond the controversial pell-mell, was to cement its author's sense of kinship with the foremost members of the Parisian *avant-garde*. When the considerable talents of France's leading 'métèques', Picasso, Stravinsky and Diaghilev were brought together shortly after the war, Cocteau

⁴³ J. Cocteau: *Le Coq et l'Arlequin, notes autour de la musique* (Editions de la Sirène, 1918), 27

⁴⁴ K. Silver: *Esprit de Corps*, 108

again surely played a part. By then, France had emerged victorious from the Great War. The collaboration for the 1920 ballet *Pulcinella* centred, predictably enough, on the Italian Pantomime. Stravinsky's use of Italian pre-Classical repertoire gave the ballet its 'Neo-classic' tag, although he berated the label as 'a much-abused expression meaning absolutely nothing'⁴⁵. Thus steeped in 'early' music tradition, *Pulcinella's* down-sized instrumentation and rhythmic verve still sound excitingly modern. Even though nationalist rhetoric had abated considerably, the old reliance on Latin traditions was still a matter of priority for a cautious *avant-garde*. The lessons of *Parade* had not been forgotten.

Picasso's involvement with the Pierrot myth, unlike Stravinsky, Satie or even Cocteau, was not just aesthetic or political. Common to many visionaries in an era of repressed immorality and stifling social conventions was his attraction to a promiscuous lifestyle. Through his unconventional behaviour, Picasso, like Debussy, ultimately personified one of the strongest attributes of Pantomime, but with this subtle difference: for him, the correspondence between behaviour and artistic creativity is clearly defined by conscious awareness; for Debussy, this correspondence was much more transient and, since it was never fully articulated either in public or in private, in all likelihood far less conscious.

Having considered the many dynamics at work leading up to and during World War I and the multiple fronts on which war was fought by the artistic *avant-garde*, it is now possible to examine and interpret the musical responses of Debussy, Ravel and Fauré in selected works while maintaining the focus on the prevalent artistic usage of consecrated traditions: the French Baroque Masters and the Italian pantomime.

⁴⁵ *Igor Stravinsky-Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, accessed 4/08/2013

CHAPTER THREE

FINALE

Throughout the turmoil of the Great War, the Italian pantomime offered artists a safe haven, both in terms of creativity and behaviour, since its tradition was rooted in latin origins. After initial reactions of extreme patriotism that spurred a frenzied search for truly indigenous expression necessarily came a period of reflection, often resulting in relative sterility. Facing this uncertain predicament, Debussy, Ravel, Fauré and their European colleagues cast lonely figures in search of an artistic *raison d'être*: Pierrots, burdened with self-doubt after a period of anger.

The association of the character Pierrot with twentieth-century composers was made, for one, by André Schaeffner in his 1951 article *Variations Schoenberg*. After an extensive survey of the 1912-13 near-misses of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, whose *Pierrot lunaire* and *Petrushka/Firebird* (respectively) were being performed in the same European cities a few days apart, Schaeffner then concluded: 'It was thus given to the Russian Pierrot and to the Viennese Pierrot, born a year apart, to follow each other for a short time and, by their contrast, to render almost palpable the antinomy between two conceptions of music.' This association implicates their breaking of new stylistic ground rather than their personae, but it is true that their position on the crest of modernity rested partly on their ambiguous relationship with tradition and a certain taste for the macabre. Both were able to 'act' their roles with consummate ease.

If they did not quite match these giants in terms of stylistic overhaul and demeanour, the sense of musical lineage of the three French composers was no less strong. Section 3.1 examines Debussy's connections with Goya, Chopin and Watteau; sections 3.2 and 3.3 will respectively focus on Fauré's evolving musical style in his two sonatas and two pieces from the *Tombeau de Couperin* which best illustrate Ravel's deceptive wartime political correctness.

3.1 Debussy as *Pierrot* : early avatars and wartime symbolism

Concerning his private life, judgements of improper conduct were pronounced fairly regularly during his life. An inveterate flirt armed with a lethal cocktail of musical mastery, poetic intelligence and sophisticated charm, Debussy, through the poems of Verlaine and Mallarmé, had found a wealth of symbolic connections between himself and Pierrot from very early on. His constant sentimental attachments to the wrong sort of women -some already married (Marie Vasnier, his future wife Emma Bardac), some hopelessly naive and uncomplicated (Gaby Dupont and her best friend Lily Texier, his first wife)- lent these poetic musings a particularly truthful ring. The first love triangle of the type portrayed in the *commedia*, that of the *femme volage*, her young 'Lothario' and the cuckold husband started in 1881 when Debussy worked as accompanist to Marie-Blanche, wife of Eugene Vasnier, building contractor (who seems to have encouraged them both). He was nineteen, she a thirty-two-year-old mother of two. This lasted a number of years during which time young Achille⁴⁶ became increasingly aloof. Former Conservatoire student and friend Paul Vidal thus describes Debussy in 1884, a year before Debussy joined him at Villa Medici as a fellow winner of the *Prix de Rome*:

I once saw his mother accuse me of being his accomplice in this business [his affair with Marie Vasnier]; he would use me as a decoy, the tears I saw [Mme Debussy] cry over her son's behaviour are not likely to make me see him in a sympathetic light, at this moment. (...) I do not know whether his selfishness can be overcome. He is incapable of making any sacrifice. His parents are not wealthy, instead of using the money he earns from lessons to help them out he buys himself books or knickknacks, spirits, etc. (...) He has not developed any sense of morality, he is just a sensualist⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ Debussy had been christened Achille-Claude after his godfather, a wealthy furniture dealer of Spanish origins named Achille Arosa, who was then secretly seeing the young godmother Clementine de Bussy, the composer's aunt. Arosa's situation was much more enviable than that of the father, Manuel, who was later arrested and sentenced to a year in jail for his involvement in the ill-fated Commune in 1872; the toys he received from Arosa were about the only ones he got.

Debussy signed his name Achille until December 1889, then Claude-Achille until June 1892. F. Lesure: *Claude Debussy*, 13

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 71

Of the twenty-odd songs Debussy wrote for Ms Vasnier's extremely high soprano voice, which include *Les Baisers* and *Les Baisers d'amour* (respectively by the poets Banville and Bouchoir) among other blatant proofs of their relationship, perhaps the most accomplished is Mallarmé's *Apparition*, composed in February 1884⁴⁸. Dated 1863, the poem, like the song, was the fruit of a twenty-year-old's imagination, and there is little doubt that it was likewise addressed to an older, wiser woman ('I thought I saw the fairy topped in brightness Who once visited the beautiful sleeps from my spoilt childhood'). Mallarmé sets a scene of 'crying seraphs' extracting 'white sobs' from their 'dying viols', and artfully combines great sadness with a state of ecstasy close to drunkenness: 'My dreaminess artfully inebriated on the vapours of sadness'. This emotional detachment verging on disconnection is another characteristic of Pierrot that Debussy must have perceived as entirely his own.

Debussy's sense of wonderment at the Symbolist poetry of Mallarmé, Verlaine and Baudelaire inspired and informs not just his songs but also his piano music, where his reading and understanding of this Symbolism is even more penetrating. His extracting bits of verses from their poems, occasionally, using them as titles to his own pieces, allows us to glimpse the extent of his literary sensitivity: more than translating a reader's experience into music, Debussy rather transcends this experience as he 'zooms in' on a specific moment of the poem and, from this highly personal vantage point, explores often unsuspected regions. Although *Apparition* is replete with seemingly irresistible titles -as was, for instance, Baudelaire's *Le Balcon* and *Harmonies du Soir*, its very first words, '*La lune s'attristait*' ('the moon became sad'), may have heralded a series of Pierrot-related pieces.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The manuscript bears the date '8 february 1884', two days before one of the four '*Concordia*' concerts that featured Marie Vasnier and Debussy as her accompanist. The '*Concordia*' was an amateur society founded in 1880 by a wealthy engineer and his wife (also a singer); its purpose was to promote ambitious choral works by great composers, either French or German. Debussy was the 'official' accompanist, earning 455 Francs a year. There he caught the attention of the society's President, Charles Gounod, who would later help him secure the *Prix de Rome*.

⁴⁹ There were of course earlier candidates for this claim: at least five poems which he had set to music for his captivating mistress in 1882 (aged twenty-two). Those were: *Pierrot*; *Serenade* and *Fête galante*, all by Theodore de Banville (1823-1891); *Fantoches* and *Clair de lune*, both by Paul Verlaine (1844-1892). Nevertheless, those Vasnier songs were discarded by the composer and are still unpublished. The two poems by Verlaine were clearly of significance beyond his affair: when they appeared in his first series of *Fêtes galantes* which he composed in the early 1890s, they were set to completely different music.



Fig.3.1: Marie-Blanche Vasnier
by J.E. Blanche (1861-1942)
(www.photo.rmn.fr, 8/07/2013)



Fig.3.2: Rosalie (Lily) Texier
www.jochenscheytt.de/debussy/debussyallg/frauen, 4/08/2013



Fig.3.3: Emma Bardac in 1913
www.diomeda.com, 9/07/2013)

The hypothesis linking Debussy's musical 'pantomiming' and the circumstances surrounding the composition of these 'Vasnier' songs is confirmed by the dedication of the last three of his *Fêtes Galantes* to Emma Bardac in June 1904, precisely the time when their intense courtship was furtively sealed. The poems by Verlaine were carefully chosen: *Les Ingénus* ('The Sweet and Innocent' -see p.72); *Le Faune*, which aptly mirrored the feelings of excitement and foreboding of Claude and Emma; and *Colloque sentimental* ('Lovers' tête-a-tête) which, musically at any rate, tied the *Fêtes* together in quoting, in the final bars, the nightingale tune from *En Sourdine*, the first of the three Verlaine poems Debussy had set to music twelve years or so before. Another song to a poem by Tristan L'Hermite (1601-1655), *Le Promenoir des deux amants*, sealed this relationship⁵⁰ with an evocation of the ocean views from Jersey, where he and Emma took 'refuge' during the Texier scandal. Whether or not Fauré was aware of this relationship between Debussy and his own former muse, his

⁵⁰ The verses selected by Debussy (one, two and four) are the only ones around the theme of water: the ocean views from Jersey, Pourville and Dieppe, the couple's retreat between August and September 1904, would not only restore peace of mind, they would also inspire his next masterpiece: *La Mer*. Interestingly, Debussy had taken with him the scores of *Masques* for piano AND the *Fêtes galantes* songs for correction, thus again opening the door to Pierrot.

disparaging comments on the pieces for Harp and orchestra (*Danse sacrée & danse profane*) he heard a few months after the affair became public knowledge (November 1904) belied his respect and admiration for Debussy, as well as his customary sense of diplomacy.

At first glance, the years spanning the Great War throw few such examples of Debussy's delving into the Pierrot myth. Works for one or two pianos (*En blanc et noir* from June-July 1915, *Douze Etudes* from the following months) and the three sonatas make the bulk of his output. His other compositions are mainly circumstantial: three short piano pieces (*Berceuse Héroïque*, later orchestrated, and *Elégie*, from November 1914 and December 1915 respectively, and a little gift to his coal-merchant made during the particularly harsh winter of 1916-17, which is headed by a quotation from Baudelaire's *Le Balcon*: 'Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon', "The evenings a-glow with the ardour of the coal'); *Ode à la France*, an unfinished choral piece saluting his country's bravery; a touching song he set to his own lyrics: *Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maison*, also from December 1915. Since all these works were composed with the expressed desire to contribute to the war effort, one would assume them to be fairly removed from the jest and affectation of Pantomime. Yet, in at least three of them, one finds a definite connection, confirmation that the presence of Pierrot was never too far from Debussy.

Completed after a relatively long period of inactivity, *En blanc et noir* was initially conceived as a set of three *Caprices*. Debussy mentions them sparingly in his correspondence; a letter to Durand from July 1915 when the Debussys had returned to their elected retreat by the sea (Pourville) contains the following, an allusion to Spanish artist Francisco de Goyá's paintings of the atrocities of the Napoleonic war (actually committed by French soldiers): 'I must confess I've made a slight change to the colour of the second of the *Caprices* (*Ballade de Villon contre les ennemis de la France*); it was too profoundly black and almost as tragic as a 'Caprice' by Goyal'.⁵¹ The allusion to Goyá's late dark phase suggests that the eventual 'White and black' title was already in gestation.

⁵¹ Nichols & Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 297. Letter to Durand from July 1915



Fig.3.4: *El Tres de Mayo 1808*, by Goyá (1808), © Museo Nacional del Prado
(www.franciscogoya.net, public domain -21/07/2013)

Because of its radically modern style, *En blanc et noir* has attracted considerable scholarly interest. The somewhat enigmatic headings taken from the poetry of Renaissance's *enfant terrible* Francois Villon and a coarse ('*rude*' in the score) irruption from the Lutheran choral '*Ein feste Burg*' have acquired new significance due to the discovery of Debussy's intimate knowledge of *La Guerre* (War), a programmatic choral work by French Renaissance composer Clément Janequin (1485-1558). This research, however, has not convincingly explained the obvious dichotomy between Debussy's professed anti-*boche* and therefore anti-modernist agenda and his unrestrained use of dissonance and formal looseness⁵².

Saint-Saëns' s malevolent words on that subject have already been stated (see p.34). His misnaming the set '*Noir et blanc*' did perhaps reflect 'a familiar moral judgement'⁵³, but a genuine amount of confusion is also credible; after all, to a native French speaker, these words are naturally pronounced in that order, as they are in English. Whether it referred to piano keys, to popular newspaper

⁵² In particular M. Wheeldon who seems at a loss to extricate some semblance of logic: 'The epigraph may simply refer to old age and nostalgia for the past, whether it represents that of Capulet or Debussy himself. If the second movement offers a wartime narrative, does the first depict a prewar musical sensibility?' She then ends disappointingly: 'But the ambiguity of meaning(...) should also signal the possibility that an overarching occasion may simply not exist. For one of the fundamental characteristics of the occasional piece is that it needs to be recognized as such in order to fulfil its function. From this point of view, Debussy's original title "*Caprices en blanc et noir*" may point to the more whimsical relationship of these movements to each other. (...) And while the central movement -which Debussy once called a "*French Caprice*"- happens to resemble a public occasional piece, this resemblance may not suffice to qualify the entire composition as occasional.'

M. Wheeldon: *Debussy's Late Style* (Indiana University Press, 2009), 46

⁵³ Watkins: *Proof in the Night*, 93

caricatures of Willette⁵⁴ or to black and white films (an idea supported by the frequent juxtaposition of contradictory elements and their abrupt, film-like, sequencing, especially in the second piece⁵⁵), the title does sound like a misnomer. One interpretation does seem to fit, however: the French tend to omit the verb when alluding to how they dress, or how something is painted, simply retaining the preposition *en*. Seen in this light, a Pierrot masquerade is a distinct possibility, since the outfit corresponds to those very colours: predominantly white with black features, a perennial symbol of its tragicomical nature (as implied by Debussy in his letter to Durand quoted above).

The heading of the first 'Caprice', '*avec emportement*', makes Debussy's position vis-a-vis the *avant-garde* and its detractors quite explicit :

Qui reste à sa place
Et ne danse pas
De quelque disgrâce
Fait l'aveu tout bas

-- Barbier & Carré, *Romeo et Juliette*

Who stays in their place
And does not partake
Of some loss of face
Confession he makes⁵⁶

Debussy's quote is carefully chosen, for not only did he exhort himself, as *avant-gardiste*, to enter the fight and, by the same token, combat his own artistic sterility, he did so in the form of an eighteenth-century quatrain. The line of conduct it implied can be summed up thus: firstly, the formal freedom, sensibility

⁵⁴ Adolphe Willette (1857-1926) was one of France's best-known illustrator and caricaturist between the 1880s, when he presented himself at the legislative elections with an anti-semitic mandate, and the 1920s. Described as a 'modern Watteau' (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1911 ed.). His style combined unmitigatedly populist rhetoric with Parisian charm; his Pierrot-related drawings were particularly potent during wartime (see Fig.94: *La Chanson de Pierrot*, in Silver: *Esprit de Corps*, 130)

⁵⁵ See J. Dunsby's essay 'The poetry of Debussy's *En blanc et noir*' *Analytical Strategies and Musical Interpretation: Essays on Nineteenth- and Twentieth- Century Music*, edited by Craig Ayrey & Mark Everist (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 149-67. Also his remark: "The closing pages of 'En blanc et noir' are stark indeed... I am indebted to Craig Ayrey for pointing out the possible connection between [Debussy's title] and chiaroscuro, which is in French 'le clair-obscur'." (156)

⁵⁶ translation: A. Rao

and stylishness of the harpsichord Masters from the Golden Age of French music (those he called ‘*nos clavecinistes*’ in the preface to his *Etudes*⁵⁷) would provide the framework for the development of his own modern language; secondly, he could now couch his musical language using techniques not unlike Schoenberg’s or Stravinsky’s and still retain a distinctly French quality⁵⁸.

In respect of the first point, Debussy was brimming with a sense of connection to the spirit of Rameau, Couperin and a certain Destouches of whose music he almost claimed to have exclusive knowledge⁵⁹. Rameau’s harpsichord music had been restored its *lettres de noblesse* twenty years earlier (1895) under the supervision of Saint-Saëns for Durand, who was yet to become Debussy’s exclusive editor. This publication acquired a much greater significance for Debussy at a time when he was seeking to perpetuate this tradition. On a purely semantic note, Debussy abandoned his usual poetically-charged titles in favour of the Baroque traditional headings. In addition, the revision of Chopin’s work for solo piano he had undertaken at Durand’s request since February had provided a fresh stimulus for the realisation of large-scale projects. He could now officially proclaim his musical ‘ancestry’, as he states in letters to Durand from 28 August (‘You haven’t given me an answer about the dedication [of his *Twelve Etudes*]: Couperin or Chopin?’) and 1 September (‘Despite my respect for Saint-Saëns’s old age, what he says about Chopin’s pedalling isn’t entirely true. [...] I

⁵⁷ The Preface to the 1916 Durand Edition is essentially concerned with fingerings, or rather the absence thereof. Debussy justifies his choice, after jesting about modern editions and Mozart’s using his nose, by invoking the example of “*Nos vieux Maîtres, -je veux nommer ‘nos’ admirables clavecinistes-*”, [who] *never gave fingering indications, no doubt trusting their contemporaries’ resourcefulness*’. (translation: A. Rao)

⁵⁸ Lesure: *Claude Debussy*, 383. In his last interview, conducted by the critic and writer M. D. Calvocoressi around May 1914 for an American publication (*The Etude*), Debussy spoke about Schoenberg in relatively respectful terms: “*I do not really follow the news. There comes a time in life when one feels the need to focus and I now have made a point to listen to music as little as possible. Take Schoenberg, for instance. I have never heard any of his works. My only interest being about what had been written on him, I decided to read a quartet by him, but I still haven’t managed to do it.*” Debussy therefore obliquely conceded that Schoenberg’s reputation -if not his music- had aroused some interest in him; admitting the latter was obviously not an option.

⁵⁹ ‘*Why are we so indifferent towards our own great Rameau? And towards Destouches, now almost forgotten? And to Couperin, the most poetic of our harpsichordists, whose tender melancholy is like that enchanting echo that emanates from the depths of a Watteau landscape, filled with plaintive figures? When we compare ourselves to ether countries -so mindful of the glories of their pasts- we realize that there is no excuse for our indifference. The impression one is left with is that we scarcely care at all for our fame, for not one of these people is ever to be seen on our programs(...)*”
C. Debussy: *Debussy on Music*, edited by A.A. Knopf (University of Michigan, 1977), 273

feel Saint-Saëns forgets that pianists are poor musicians, for the most part, and cut music up into unequal lumps, like a chicken.')⁶⁰.

The second issue was also a matter of great importance to him: much as his nationalist creed forbade the notion of outside 'influences', the third Caprice was dedicated to none other than his 'friend' and leading iconoclast Igor Stravinsky. Arguably, the epigraph '*Yver, vous n'êtes qu'un vilain*' answers the winter-related poetry of Stravinsky's *Three Japanese lyrics* from 1913: the second of those speaks of 'chinks of prisoning ice' that, breaking loose, aspire to being the 'first white flowers of joyful Springtime'⁶¹. What is more revealing still is the fact that a rare letter to Stravinsky dated October 1915 (at least three months after the completion of *En blanc et noir*) bears no mention of it:

(...)Personally, I've spent over a year unable to write anything. It's only in the last three months, staying in the house of friends by the sea, that I've been able to think in music once again. (...) I've actually written nothing except 'pure' music; twelve *Etudes* for piano; two sonatas for various instruments, in the old French style which was kind enough not to make *tetralogical* demands on the audience⁶².

Why Debussy deliberately omitted the Caprices is not entirely clear. Certainly they do not belong in the same category as the 'pure' music' he mentions. But they were a statement of intent and, as such, carried an element of defiance, if not downright provocation⁶³. An earlier passage from the same letter illuminates this, and Stravinsky cannot have missed the double-entente: 'My dear Stravinsky, you are a great artist! It's a fine thing to belong to one's country, to be attached to the earth like the humblest of peasants! And when the foreigner sets foot on it, all the talk of the internationalists has a bitter taste!'

⁶⁰ Nichols & Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 301

⁶¹ These three short songs were respectively dedicated by Stravinsky to Maurice Delage (in homage to his *Quatre poèmes Hindous* from 1912-13), Florent Schmitt and Maurice Ravel, whose *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* is scored identically. It cannot have escaped Debussy that all three were prominent members of the SMI. Did he perceive a closing of ranks among modernists from which he felt excluded? The answer seems explicit in the third Caprice.

⁶² Nichols & Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 309

⁶³ The dedication seems to reciprocate Stravinsky's 1913 dedication of his extraordinary five-minute cantata *The King of the Stars*, composed in 1911-1912, which Debussy politely acknowledged despite being sceptical that it might ever be performed. The work, scored for a gigantic orchestra comprised of extra percussions and trebled woodwinds and brass, was indeed first performed more than forty years later.

With *En blanc et noir*, Debussy had finally set himself a clear artistic path. The work is fecund with ideas that became developed in his next projects; at long last, Debussy could quite legitimately stake his position at the vanguard of musical progress by way of a nationalist musical discourse that, unlike Stravinsky, did not stoop to the level of anti-German caricature.

For all its relevance as Debussy's *alter-ego*, both in personal and musical terms, Pierrot turned up quite against his wishes almost a year to the day from the Stravinsky letter and the *Sonata for cello and piano* which had then just been completed, the first instalment of his cherished project of six sonatas '*pour instruments divers*'. Debussy wrote to Durand of a certain Louis Rosoor, cellist⁶⁴, who had worked with him on the Cello Sonata on 11 October 1916 near Bordeaux where Debussy was resting, saying how he 'made me feel sorry I'd composed a sonata [so that] I began to wonder whether my writing was at fault!'⁶⁵. Rosoor's playing was not the only cause of grief, however: a few days later, Debussy again wrote:

If the world is now coming to 4, place de la Madeleine [Durand's headquarters in Paris] to buy my music and treating it any old how, that doesn't worry me, but when self-styled 'virtuosi' spread error and desolation in so-called 'concert'-halls, I continue to find that irritating. But if you don't see anything wrong, we'll say no more about it⁶⁶.

It would appear that Rosoor, after his earlier visit, had taken it upon himself to give the sonata a nickname which he then printed on the concert programs at

⁶⁴ Louis Rosoor was a cellist of some note at the time of his meeting with Debussy. Born in Tourcoing in 1883, he had indeed studied at the Conservatoire of Lille, as Debussy wrote sarcastically in his second letter to Durand, but had been appointed *Professeur* at the Bordeaux *Conservatoire* as early as 1909. A member of several esteemed chamber music outfits, he collaborated with Fauré and d'Indy in the war years, introductions being perhaps helped by his former teacher André Hekking who knew them well. Rosoor's programmatic blunder was clearly not fatal to his concert career as he later became acquainted with or even partnered Ravel, Roussel, Ropartz, Schmitt, the celebrated soprano and Debussy's trusted singer Claire Croiza or the elderly pianist Francis Planté, another Bordeaux resident who became a regular partner of Rosoor, calling him his 'very own cellist' ("*pianiste attitré*").

Debussy attended two recitals given by Planté in September 1917 in St-Jean-de-Luz and wrote admiringly about him in one of his last letters to Durand (*Debussy Letters*, 331). Planté's consultation with the composer on his *Reflets dans l'eau* and *Mouvement* was in all likelihood a much happier affair than Rosoor's had been the previous year.

[www.fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Rosoor_\(violoncelliste\)](http://www.fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Rosoor_(violoncelliste)), accessed 2 August 2013

⁶⁵ Nichols & Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 319

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

his subsequent recital(s), and that Debussy had complained to Durand about this. The nickname, *Pierrot fâché avec la lune*, did not seem so inappropriate to Durand that he felt the adventurous cellist must have it removed from his programs and the matter was dropped. The apocryphal synopsis was indeed more reminiscent of a Willette cartoon than of symbolist preciousity: "*Pierrot wakes with a start, shakes off his torpor. Abruptly he serenades his sweetheart, who, in spite of his entreaties, remains unmoved; he consoles himself for his lack of success by singing a song to liberty.*"⁶⁷



Fig.3.5: a drunken Pierrot dances beneath the moon, drawing by Willette from January 1885 (*Pierrot lunaire* (book)- Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, retrieved 20/08/2013)

Perhaps realising its market value, Durand thus unwittingly allowed the nickname to gain authority with scholars until Francois Lesure categorically refuted its authenticity. For Debussy, this propagandist fabrication went counter to his 'pure music' aspirations and was undoubtedly a major irritant. Equally annoying was the implied attack on Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* from 1912, a work which had attained something of a cult status among SMI members, Ravel included⁶⁸. Although Debussy shared none of the fascination for the Austrian's 'cabaret de luxe' (Boulez), his striving for cutting-edge modernity brought home the need to stretch the range of sonorities and techniques of the cello in much the same way as Schoenberg had done, particularly in the movement where the spotlight is brightly on it and is also called *Serenade*.

⁶⁷ F. Lesure: *Claude Debussy*, 564

⁶⁸ Ravel had intended to feature his *Trois Poèmes de Mallarmé* alongside it and Stravinsky's *Three Japanese lyrics* as early as 1913, 'un projet mirifique d'un concert scandaleux' at which the foreign works would have people 'howling' and the third-his own work- would 'appease and people will come out humming tunes-'. He then added: 'I would like to respectfully inform my honourable colleagues of my knowing [*Pierrot lunaire*] from hearsay only. But it is our duty to have this work performed, for which, in Germany and Austria, blood is being spilled'. Duchesneau, *L'Avant-garde musicale à Paris*, 91 (translation: A. Rao)



Ex.3.1: Schoenberg's *Serenade* from *Pierrot lunaire*, bars 1- 3 & 11-5, cello (*Universal Edition*)

By 1916, in any case, Schoenberg had become *persona non grata*; Debussy too regarded his music as a symbol of German war-Kultur and would have been troubled to see his Sonata thus associated with an enemy work, albeit antagonistically⁶⁹. Had he been aware of the personal circumstances surrounding the composition of the ground-braking *melodrama*, Debussy might have been even more alarmed, as for Schoenberg too, the eternal triangle of the *commedia* evoked painful memories⁷⁰.

It is quite possible that Rosoor's rhetoric got uncomfortably close to something the composer was at pains to conceal. But there is also the possibility, however remote, that Debussy may have hinted at this subtitle himself, in a manner not

⁶⁹ After Giraud's extensive 1884 collection (*Pierrot lunaire* contains fifty poems) became translated into German by Otto Hartleben (1892), the existence of no less than seven musical settings of several of those poems might have been known to Debussy, including Schoenberg's. Having attracted such interest from German-speaking composers, it is little surprising that the work acquired a particular resonance in wartime. The names Debussy-Ravel-Schoenberg were connected on at least one occasion before the war, when Ravel's defense of Debussy's *Images* (see above, 32) appeared in the same volume of *les Cahiers d'aujourd'hui* (April 1914) as a study on Schoenberg by Austrian composer Egon Wellesz which contains the following complimentary words on *Pierrot lunaire*: "In order to lend new accents to the irony and pain [of Giraud's somewhat dated poem], the small orchestra sparkles, sprinkles, sobs (...). There is almost an excess of intensity; this art is cruel, it leans on and tears up." in A. Schaeffner: *Variations Schoenberg (Contrepoints, Vol.7, 1951)*, 122 (translation: A. Rao)

⁷⁰ In 1906, Schoenberg, who was suffering from an intense bout of depression, consented that his wife Mathilde take a lover in the person of expressionist painter Richard Gerstl, with whom both had been studying painting and who lived in the same block. When Mathilde eventually left Gerstl to live back with her husband, the young painter took his own life. in J. Dunsby: *Schoenberg Pierrot lunaire* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) Suicide was also the option taken by Debussy's first wife Lili Texier who fired a gunshot in her stomach in an attempt to draw the attention of her estranged husband, at the time of his affair with Emma Bardac. Another striking parallel between the two composers was the moonlike imagery contained in some of their titles: Debussy called the second of his *Images* for piano (second set, 1904): *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut* ('And the moon goes down on the temple that was'), a title suggested to him by his friend Louis Lalo - appropriately, since it dated from the time of his affair.

dissimilar to that with which he conducted the Budapest Symphony Orchestra during a concert in December 1910:

(...) the concert went well, especially Iberia. And, may I say, sorting out Iberia in two rehearsals represents quite a considerable effort. I'm not asking that this signal feat be engraved on the marbles of eternity but, even so, it's not an every day undertaking; my nerves are in pieces. Remember, these people could only understand me through an interpreter (...). I left no means of communication unexplored, though: I sang, I made Italian pantomime gestures, etc. It was enough to soften the heart of a buffalo.⁷¹

Yet another pointer towards the presence of pantomime in the Cello Sonata is the array of *pizzicato* techniques Debussy employs in the *Serenade* and the *Finale*. Plucking cello strings was not then considered very effective since gut strings produce a slightly more muffled sound. Yet Debussy somehow conjures up the most extravagant (at times barely manageable) situations for the player, almost in an attempt to extract a certain physical gesture or a pose.

Ex.3.2: Debussy's Cello Sonata:
Serenade, bars 9-12, cello
(Urtext Edition by O. Mandozi, 2012-
IMSLP)



Ex.3.3: Cello Sonata: *Finale*, bars 151-3



This combination of visual and musical elements can quite justifiably be interpreted as cubist, since the cellist is simultaneously the agent and the object in the way that early Cubism considered its subject-matter in its totality (juxtaposing all angles at the same time). The plethora of *Pierrots* and *Harlequins* painted at the time naturally featured not cellos but guitars, or more precisely mandolins (like the four-stringed instrument held by the Harlequin in Picasso's curtain for *Parade* [Fig.3.8]), also associated with serenading rituals. Debussy's transformation of the cello into a guitar-like hybrid, if not entirely fashionable, was definitely modern and ahead of its time⁷². The two cubist paintings below (Fig.3.6 & 3.7) illustrate just how blurred the line was between these instruments and their 'traditional' purpose or meaning: Severini's masked *pulcinelli* do indeed serenade using bowed double-basses, in his analytic cubist

⁷¹ Nichols & Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 231. Letter to J. Durand.

⁷² see also J. Dunsby: *Schoenberg Pierrot lunaire*, 25-6

painting from 1937 (Fig.3.6), and Braque's violin from his synthetic cubist phase is really a guitar (Fig.3.7).⁷³



Fig.3.6: *Composizione con pulcinelli* by Gino Severini (1937) (www.christies.com, 30/07/2013)



Fig.3.7: *The Violin Valse* by Georges Braque (1913) (www.georgesbraque.org, 30/0/2013)

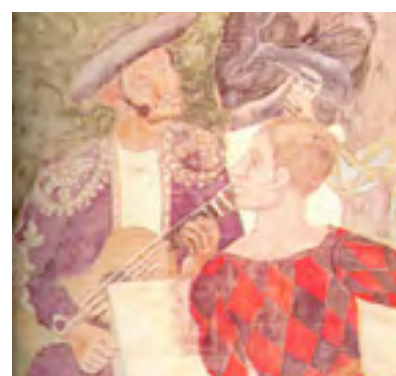


Fig. 3.8: *Parade curtain*, detail (www.radford.edu, 30/07/2013)

In any event, and whatever its musical or autobiographical merits, the Pierrot allegory invented by the 'self-styled' Rosoor hit a nerve with the composer, already besieged with health, marital and financial problems. His indignant reply to Durand was not dissimilar to the explanation he gave to Marguerite Long on the significance of *Masques* for piano, from the summer of 1904 in Jersey with Emma:

I hear *Masques* -a tragedy for piano, one might call it- as a sort of transparency of Debussy's character... He was torn with poignant feelings which he preferred to mask

⁷³ Note the identical choice of colours to Picasso's *Personnage arlequin* from the same year (43, Fig.2.9). Braque and Picasso had been neighbours in Ceret, in the French Pyrenees, where they had worked hand in hand on Cubist theories until the outbreak of war.

with irony. The title *Masques* represents an ambiguity which the composer protested with all his might: "It is not the Italian comedy, it is the tragic expression of existence"⁷⁴.

The third musical manifestation of the Pierrot avatar is carefully concealed in the *Twelve Etudes*, composed almost immediately after *En blanc et noir* (completed before September, at any rate). The second (*Pour les tierces*) and fourth (*Pour les sixtes*) of the set deftly bring up to date the opening material from a movement from the *Suite Bergamasque* initially titled *Promenade sentimentale* but known to music lovers everywhere as *Clair de lune*⁷⁵, in the same key of D flat major:



Ex.3.4: *Clair de lune* from the *Suite Bergamasque*, opening (Fromont, 1905- IMSLP)

If '*Pour les tierces*', as the other *Etudes* from the first half of the book, offers much in the way of technical intricacy, the piece could not be further from the ironic tone of the first *étude*, '*Pour les cinq doigts*', to which Debussy referred, not without humour, as '*d'après Monsieur Czerny*'. Debussy keenly pointed out the effort, mental *and* physical, required to complete this batch:

I tell you, one needs the most implacable patience to copy out the study '*Pour les octaves*' or the one called '*Pour les degrés chromatiques*'! I realise there's no agony in it and that this is a very personal view.

⁷⁴ in M. Long: *Au piano avec Claude Debussy* (G. Billaudot, 1960), 150

⁷⁵ Written in 1890, the *Suite* underwent a series of alterations as it changed publishers' hands no less than three times; Debussy added to the confusion by describing it as a series of three movements, the third being named as *L'Isle joyeuse*. André Schaeffner, in his 1951 article *Variations Schoenberg* initially entitled '*Why Debussy didn't write Pierrot lunaire?*', dismisses the term *bergamasque* (used by Verlaine in *Fêtes galantes*) as an empty rhyme of no real significance, and advances that the *Suite*'s title alludes to Giraud's *Pierrot lunaire* (subtitled "*Rondels bergamasques*"), and the *Clair de lune* title to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The term also cropped up in 1910 when Diaghilev proposed the ancient Italian pantomime as the subject of *Masques et bergamasques* to Debussy, who was less than enthusiastic: "*they are talking of Italian XVIIIth century... for Russian ballerinas, that seems a bit contradictory to me.*" Fauré's stage music to the play of the same name by René Fauchois was written just after the war, a year after Debussy's death (see Section 3.2). According to Schaeffner, "*since Ambroise Thomas, any mention of the moon at the Conservatoire was ill-advised*".

A. Schaeffner: *Variations Schoenberg*, 120-1

For a long time the continuous use of sixths reminded me of pretentious young ladies sitting in a salon, sulkily doing their tapestry work and envying the scandalous laughter of the naughty ninths...So I wrote this study in which my concern for sixths to the lengths of using no other intervals to build up the harmonies; not bad! (Mea culpa...)

The six Etudes I have written so far are almost all 'on the go'; don't worry, there will be some calmer ones! I started with these because they're the hardest to write and to get some variety into... the easiest combinations of the original *datum* are soon used up. The other Etudes deal with the search for special sonorities, including 'Pour les quartes' in which you'll find unheard-of things, even though your ears are well accustomed to 'curiosities'.⁷⁶

It is clear from this that '*Pour les tierces*' was part of that first instalment sent to Durand: the perpetual motion of tightly woven semi-quavers (Ex.3.6) makes the most of the limited combinations available to the five fingers of each hand (running passages, turns, broken patterns, arpeggiated sequences) and the full 76 bars of the piece are certainly 'on the go'. On the other hand, the harmonic canvass is a lot looser than the *Etude* in sixths, arguably the most Chopin-like of the set. Pianist and musicologist Roy Howat identified *Pour les sixtes* as the first to be written, partly on that basis.⁷⁷ Chopin had been a considerable influence on young Debussy, who had performed no fewer than seven works by the Polish genius in his piano studies at the Conservatoire in the 1870s. However this argument is countered by the 'incursion' of a tritone in the earliest moments of '*Pour les cinq doigts*', '*Pour les tierces*' and '*Pour les sixtes*', respectively the first, second and fourth of the set.

⁷⁶ Nichols & Lesure: Debussy Letters, 300. Letter to Durand from August 1915. The "devilish cunning worthy of the Boches" Debussy mentions in relation of the shortage of manuscript paper is not known.

⁷⁷ "Passing details of Debussy's mature piano writing recall Chopin so often as to suggest how ingrained Chopin's music was in Debussy's ears (and fingers)".

R. Howat: "Chopin's Influence on the *Fin de Siècle* and Beyond" (in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* edited by J. Samson [Cambridge University Press, 1992], 256), cited in M. Wheeldon: *Debussy's Late Style*, 55.

Howat's comment actually appears to diminish the determining impact of one particular Chopin piece. The following account of Debussy's compositional processes by Robert Godet, a close acquaintance, seems to concur with the view that a particular reference may have only been of relative importance: "Debussy's hand-written scores were models of clarity and tidiness, the most elegant hand-writing in the world, without a trace of erasing. Now these were not copies but actual originals based on a very small number of fragmentary drafts - the only exception you will find shall confirm the rule... No composer wasted less paper. Debussy did not start to write until he had finished a work in his head, and without having recourse to instrumental help. On the other hand, the time of mental incubation... was generally very long... His greatest piano works were written without a single tangible document in sight, as if dictated."

Lesure: Claude Debussy, 467 (translation: A. Rao)

Clearly, written evidence does not exclude that progress had been made on other *etudes* at the same time as or prior to *Pour les sixtes*.



Ex.3.5: *Pour les cinq doigts*, opening (Durand, 1916-IMSLP)



Ex.3.6: *Pour les tierces*, bar 1



Ex.3.7: *Pour les octaves*, bars 1- 2

Nowhere in Chopin's Op.25 does one notice the presence of such an harmonic device, but John Clevenger observes that a concluding passage in the work of another staple Romantic composer from his student days, Schumann, may have provided the young pianist with his first initiation into dissonance⁷⁸. Since Debussy again varies the opening statement, although more discreetly, at the start of the fifth *Etude*, "*Pour les octaves*", it does seem as though he may have initially intended the sound of the augmented chord to spark off each *Etude*. This

⁷⁸ John Clevenger has established with remarkable precision the list of pieces learned by Debussy as a Conservatoire student and isolates Schumann's *Faschingschwank aus Wien* and Chopin's *Ballade n.1 in G minor* as possible sources of influence in his early days as composer. The *Finale* from Schumann's 'carnival gesture' "contains, at mm.297-304, a rather simple incipient instance of hexatonicism, based on an augmented triad, that is comparable to early usages of Debussy. The most prominent employment of hexatonicism of Debussy's early oeuvre, near the end of his 1883 song 'Pantomime', bears a striking resemblance to this passage of Schumann. It may therefore be plausibly asserted that this work of Schumann was a possible source of hexatonicism in Debussy's early oeuvre." Clevenger unfortunately misquotes his own very detailed chart of Debussy's progress as piano student, saying that Debussy prepared the *Finale* for the mid-year exam of 1879 when the chart clearly mentions the year 1876. Seven years would seem a rather long gap between his first encounter of the augmented triad in Schumann's piece and its inclusion in the Vasnier song. in *Debussy and His World*, edited by J. Fulcher : 'Debussy's Paris Conservatoire Training' by J. Clevenger, 315 & 318.

idea was then abandoned as he moved further away from conventional harmonic relationships in “*Pour les quartes*” which he described as containing ‘unheard-of things’.

Howat’s chronology is without doubt accurate in terms of notation but it would seem strange that a dissonant feature so prominent to the start of four *Études* should have been initially conceived in the one closest to Chopin’s style. Besides, the intervallic nature of an augmented triad is not evidently linked to the interval of a sixth, major or minor. More compelling is the musical evidence: the uncanny resemblance of its opening with that of *Clair de lune*, the third movement from the *Suite bergamasque* (Ex.3.5 above). The intrusion of the A natural in the left hand in bar two of ‘*Pour les sixtes*’ is more disruptive, as it both clashes with the dominant seventh arpeggio and upsets the apparent metre of the opening bar (Ex.3.8). Granted, the sound of the augmented triad at the start of *Clair de lune* is short-lived; its second bar is also that much more bearable as the upper thirds settle down to the next degree on the second beat, ‘resolving’ the dissonance into a quite benign diminished chord. Its presence in that piece, unlike the *étude*, is also unique: in the reprise of the theme, marked *ppp*, the D flat in the upper voice and the bass note A natural hardly clash at all (the A now part of a glistening seventh arpeggio in the left hand). But the aural sensation left by the hushed parallel sixths and the static impression conveyed by the start of the *étude* is unmistakably reminiscent of *Clair de lune*.



Ex.3.8: *Pour les sixtes*, opening

The consecutive sixths do seem to progress with the diligence of ‘pretentious young ladies’ but Debussy was quick to *trip them up*, so to speak, anticipating the A natural by a beat, thus denying the element of surprise and restoring order to the confusing meter. Another striking import is the descending triplet passage

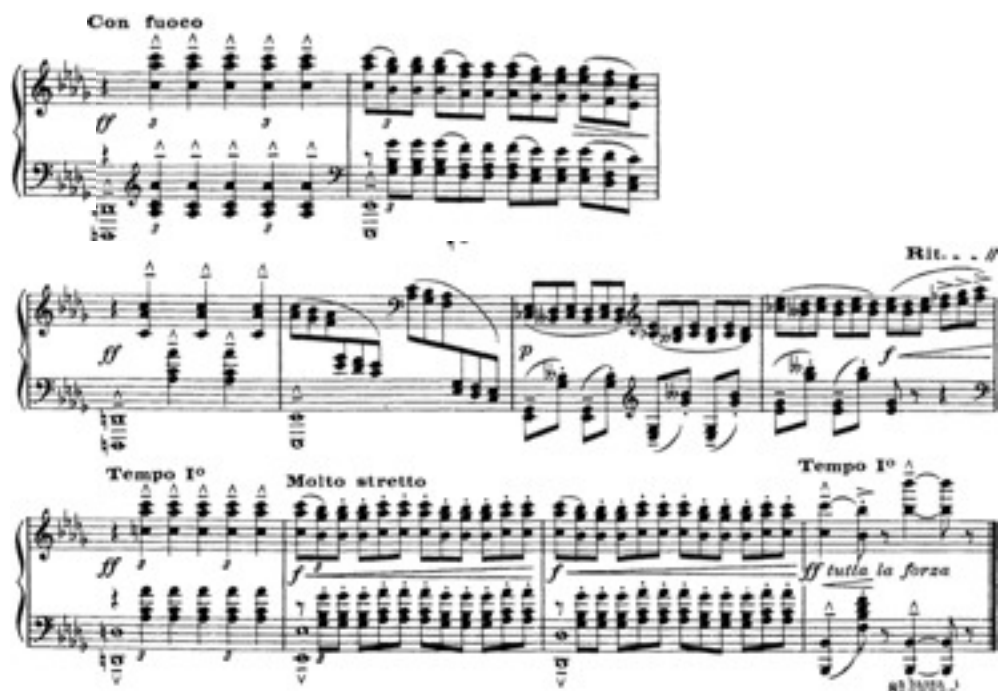
marked *Tempo rubato* that functions as dramatic transition between the stillness of the opening and the flowing, ‘nocturne-like’ section that follows (Ex.3.9). A similar passage matches this exact description in *Pour les tierces* (Ex. 3.10) before Debussy finally unleashes the full power of this triplet motif with an expression of tangible violence (*Con fuoco*) in the coda (Ex.3.11), thus trading the concept of ‘study’ for a Goyesque (or Schubertian) vision of terror:



Ex. 3.9: *Clair de lune*, bars 15 & 16



Ex.3.10: *Pour les tierces*, bar 13



Ex. 3.11: *Pour les tierces*, coda

Why Debussy should make such overt references to a piece composed some twenty years earlier is not entirely clear. His friend Robert Godet, in a study of the *Twelve Etudes* and their respective merits which he shared with him, tried to establish a correspondence of sorts between them and the Chopin studies; those for which he could find no antecedents, he simply marked: *Pas d'équivalent*.⁷⁹ The article did its utmost to elevate a much-admired friend to the rank of master composer, but Debussy needed no such favour: by invoking his own piano music, he effectively positioned himself twice in the French piano music lineage, keenly revisiting his earlier 'Chopin phase'. Having discussed at length the similarities between Chopin's and Debussy's pedalling and use of *rubato*, Chopin expert Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger concludes that 'because of these shared affinities, both composers treat the piano as essentially an instrument of the most intimate expression'. *Clair de lune* carried much of Chopin's inherited sensitivity, but Eigeldinger goes even further:

The close relation between the sound palettes of the two composers can be seen (or, better, heard) by juxtaposing the coda of the Nocturne Op. 27 No.1 with the opening bars of 'Clair de lune' from the *Suite Bergamasque*. The enharmonically equivalent keys in these passages make the affinity of the two composers even more palpable: the kinship of their tactile and auditory response is there for all to hear. It is almost as if Debussy had the sound of the Nocturne in his inner ear and under his fingers, simply 'omitting' the bass at the start but introducing it later (bars 29-30), at which point it becomes a true nocturne -uncannily similar to Chopin's Op. 27 No.2, in D flat major.⁸⁰

In 1915, Chopin's music, consciously or subliminally, evoked in him a time when his own piano music was afforded a dreamy quality that closely matched that of his Pierrot alter ego.⁸¹ The music of French harpsichord master Francois Couperin (1668-1733), notably his *Art de toucher le clavecin*, struck a very similar chord. Debussy's empathy with his delicate, idiosyncratic keyboard

⁷⁹ in "Chopin-Debussy par Robert Godet", presented by F. Lesure, *Cahiers Debussy, 1ère série, No.3* (1976). Cited in M. Wheeldon: *Debussy's Late Style*, Chapter 3.

⁸⁰ J.-J. Eigeldinger: 'Placing Chopin: reflections on a compositional aesthetic', in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, 135

⁸¹ A Pierrot-Chopin association already existed in Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* ('Valse de Chopin', n.5), an exact antithesis to Debussy's homage. Giraud's poetry had reduced the Polish master's music to an instrument of sentimental doom: "*Also ruht auf diesen Tönen ein vernichtungssüchtiger Reiz*" ('so there lurks within this music a morbid self-destructive charm'). Schoenberg had not been able to resist a sumptuous evocation of Chopin's virtuosic writing in the piano part under the line "*Heiss und jauchzend, süß und schmachtend*" (bars 27-9), where the waltz effectively climaxes, but Chopin's music was simply accessory to his character study.

writing made Couperin his alternative candidate regarding the dedication of his *Études*; the distinctly antiquated description of each *étude* instantly brings to mind the preciousness of the Baroque. Interest in French early music in general was essentially motivated by his nationalist creed, however; besides, Debussy would naturally have found it impossible to equate the sound of a harpsichord with the world of sonorities of the piano. He nevertheless considered writing for harpsichord some weeks later: a programme sheet sent to Durand announced his intentions to combine this instrument with oboe and horn for the fourth of his six sonatas for diverse instruments. Evidently, Debussy realised that his 'best shot' at a Couperin lineage resided in chamber music.

Debussy may have been less familiar with Couperin's music than he might have liked, given that this 'ancestry' was slightly more legitimate in a nationalist sense (Chopin only became French '*par adoption*'). But he could legitimately invoke an emotional connection with one of Couperin's great contemporary artists, a figure of great importance on a personal level and suitably *au goût du jour*.

Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) had been the toast of the Symbolist poets throughout the 1880s⁸². Ernest Hebert, the director of the Villa Medici during Debussy's Roman sojourn (1885-1887) and himself a painter⁸³, was instrumental in introducing the young *Prix de Rome* to Watteau, through the acquaintance of Count Primoli⁸⁴. Depictions of flirtatious scenes in pastoral settings had also penetrated the imagination of young Debussy through the poetry of Paul Verlaine (1844-96), whose poems *Fêtes galantes* from 1883 were directly linked to the celebrated *Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera*, Watteau's large-scale painting lauded by the *Académie Royale* in 1717⁸⁵.

⁸² "In [Watteau's] treatment of the landscape background and of the atmospheric surroundings of the figures can be found the germs of Impressionism".
in The Encyclopedia Britannica, eleventh edition (1911)

⁸³ Lesure: *Claude Debussy*, 77

⁸⁴ "Primoli (...) owned the largest collection of Watteau's paintings".
in A. Wenk: *Debussy and the Poets* (University of California Press, 1976), 234

⁸⁵ Shortly after the painting had been presented to the *Académie*, its original description had been modified into "*une feste galante*". Paintings of similar inspiration were subsequently described as *Fêtes galantes*.
in N. Sugiyama: *Les sculptures peintes dans 'les fêtes galantes' d'Antoine Watteau* (Graduate School of Letters, Nagoya University, 2006), 45-56

In his book *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, Arthur Wenk sheds light on the close relationship Debussy had with Watteau's artwork, noting that the musician actually outdoes Verlaine in unlocking the paintings' psychological secrets. A close examination of the song *Les Ingénus* from the second set of *Fêtes galantes* (1904) reveals a familiarity with the bucolic scenes of Watteau that prompted musicologist Georges Jean-Aubry to declare that "Watteau inspired the Debussy of *Fêtes galantes* even more than their author, Verlaine, and perhaps more than that poet could have inspired the musician without the help of that painter."⁸⁶ *Fêtes galantes* is, as already mentioned, a composite set: *En sourdine*, *Fantoches* and *Clair de lune* sound quite dated compared with *Les Ingénus*, *Le Faune* and *Colloque sentimental*, these last three offering a more subtle and personal reading of the poet, being intimately connected with his liaison with Emma [see p.64]).

Wenk argues that *Les Ingénus* is reminiscent of a scene in *L'Assemblée dans un parc*, which Watteau completed the same year as the *Pilgrimage* (Fig.3.9). This is true of a number of poems, however: there is little evidence that Verlaine's knowledge of Watteau extended beyond the *Pilgrimage to Cythera*, and his impressions of his artwork were at best second-hand through reproductions in Art journals or, at worst, through literary sources and contemporary poets⁸⁷. But *L'Assemblée* is so imbued with Watteau's characteristic mix of frolicking frenzy and heavy nostalgia as to make it a candidate of choice to understand the intentions of both poet and composer.

⁸⁶ A. Wenk: *Debussy and the poets*, 234

⁸⁷ the Watteau collector Louis La Caze bequeathed the Louvre museum his large stock of paintings after the publication of Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes* (1868). Verlaine was vague on the origin of his Watteau phase, in a conference address in Antwerp: "These verses, among others, showed a certain melancholic inclination, at times sensual or dreamily mystical, which, two years later, dressed up as characters from the Italian comedy and fairy images in the style of Watteau, confirmed perhaps more pleasantly, at least better made and more deliberately the verses from 'Fetes galantes', by then much appreciated." Poems on Watteau by Baudelaire (1857) and Théophile Gautier (1838) had exerted an equally profound influence on Verlaine (and Debussy too, by association).

in *Académie de Rouen: Verlaine, Fêtes galantes* (www.lettres.ac-rouen.fr), retrieved 20/08/2013
Verlaine's confused wording is berated by J.-B. Baronian, who cites evidence of ineptitude, incoherence and inaudibility right through his 1893 conference tour of Belgium.

in *Affreux, sale et mauvais: Verlaine, conférencier en Belgique* (www.arlfb.be/bibliotheque), *ibid.*



Fig.3.9: *L'Assemblée dans le Parc*, by Antoine Watteau (©Musée du Louvre, Paris)

Without question, Debussy's careful avoidance of tonal references operates in much the same way as the painting alienates the observer, on whom most figures literally turn their back. Equally frustrating is the scene involving the lady wearing the mask and the gentleman leaning towards her: whether she is teasing or genuinely threatened, Debussy revelled in this *equivoque* and created a musical ambiguity of his own, thus conferring a sharper significance to Verlaine's word. As he would in *Clair de lune* (for piano) and the *Etudes*, he had recourse to the augmented chord, elicited by the sound of the F-Db-A triad which closes the loop:



Ex.3.12: Debussy's *Les Ingénus*, opening, piano (Durand, 1904 [first edition]-IMSLP)

This hypnotic motif is repeated no fewer than eleven times, though Debussy intersperses a chromatic pattern of descending broken thirds in bars 4 and 10. He could almost claim for himself the closing line of the first stanza: “*et nous aimions ce jeu de dupes*” (‘and we loved this game of playing-pretend’) as he thwarts his listener by superimposing a further two realisations of the augmented triad, this time in both hands (Ex.3.13).

The image shows a musical score for four bars. The top staff is a vocal line with the lyrics "et nous ai - - mions ce jeu de du - pes." The bottom two staves are for piano accompaniment. The right hand plays a rising C major scale (C4-D4-E4-F4-G4-A4-B4-C5) across the four bars. The left hand plays a descending arpeggio of the same augmented triad (C4-E4-G4-F4-D4-B3-A2-G1) across the four bars. The tempo marking "a Tempo" is present above both staves.

Ex. 3.13: *Les Ingénus*, bars 16-19

The contrary motion of the vocal line and the rising C major scale captures the playful to-and-fro between the teasing lady and her courting companion to the right of the painting. Shortly after, the tonal vagueness of the opening motif (Ex. 3.12) is finally solved by the words “*Le soir tombait*” (‘the evening fell’). It is remarkable that Schoenberg, some eight years later, would set off *Pierrot lunaire* with a virtually identical pattern, almost entirely in the right hand of the piano and sporting the descending arpeggio figure of the same augmented chord:

The image shows a musical score for two parts. The top part is labeled "Rezitation." and has a tempo marking "Bewegt (♩ ca 60 - 70)". The bottom part is labeled "Klavier." and has a tempo marking "Bewegt (♩ ca 60 - 70)" and a dynamic marking "pp". The piano accompaniment features a descending arpeggio of the augmented triad in the right hand.

Ex. 3.14: *Pierrot lunaire*, opening, piano (Universal Edition)

Therein, perhaps, lies the true meaning behind Debussy's determined use of the augmented triad to kick-start his first batch of *Études*: if its blurred sonority so aptly captured the twilight from Watteau's paintings - itself loaded with Pierrot symbolism, the augmented chord then took on a particular significance in devising a Chopin tribute. Debussy, no doubt conscious of his own mortality by 1915, may have conceived his *Études* as a set of thinly disguised Nocturnes; from this vantage point, the notion that while writing a *Tombeau* to his spiritual mentor, he was really writing his own, is easily bridged. In any event, the spiritual presence of both Chopin (pianistically *and* structurally)⁸⁸ and Watteau, a clearly more-than-worthy representative of those he called '*nos clavecinistes français*'⁸⁹ in his foreword to the Durand edition of the *Études*, was a tremendous satisfaction, perhaps even comfort, to this complex and elusive but wonderfully moving musician, who could justly 'confess to being happy to have guided well a work which, without false vanity, will have a particular place'.⁹⁰

Although he only managed to complete three of his projected six sonatas, Debussy's instrumentation and choice of title for his movements all point in a similar direction. The bucolic world of Watteau, replete with guitar-strumming Dandies and mischievous flautists, was translated quite literally into sounds in the Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp; the possibilities offered by the other combinations (oboe, French horn and harpsichord; trumpet, clarinet, bassoon and piano) seem equally suggestive.

Debussy's initial response to the war had been one of defiance and, like Ravel and the vast majority of ordinary citizens, of excitement. By 1916, having gone

⁸⁸ According to Marguerite Long, who worked closely with Debussy in wartime (and with Ravel and Fauré too, of course), "he liked to say he wore out his fingers on the posthumous '*Étude in A flat*' of the Polish master."

in M. Long: *At the Piano with Debussy* (Littlehampton Book Services Ltd, 1972), 19
Roy Howat has also demonstrated a musical connection between *Pour les sixtes* and that same piece, Chopin's *Nouvelle étude*.
in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, 246-83

⁸⁹ Chambonnières, d'Anglebert, Lebègue, the Couperins, Dandrieu & Rameau, to cite a few.

⁹⁰ C. Debussy: *Correspondance*, ed. F. Lesure, D. Herlin & G. Liebert (Gallimard, 2005). Cited in M. Wheeldon: *Debussy's Late Style*, 58.

through successive stages of relative sterility and frantic creativity, he was finally able to articulate in simple terms the crux of his musical predicament in a letter to Emile Vuillermoz, the perceptive critic who was still one of his staunchest supporters: 'there's no way of writing war music in wartime. To be honest, there's no such thing as war music, as you know.'⁹¹

Having exorcised -but not without a struggle- the horrors of war in his piano music, the coast was now clear, so to speak, for him to 'map out' the future of French chamber music. His assessment that this should be 'of greater service to music' than another large-scale composition (see Chapter 1, p.12) was justified on the basis that without his contribution, the expression of such sensibility as that produced in him by Watteau's works would never be realised in music. Debussy need not have worried about the perpetuation of this lineage, or about the course of French music more generally. An expression of a different kind, just as eminently French and perhaps even more powerful, was to fill the sonatas of his respectable senior Gabriel Fauré, at precisely the time when his own prodigious inspiration started to fail him.

3.2: Fauré's wartime sonatas

In contrast with Debussy, Fauré never consciously embarked on a journey of self-discovery, let alone attempted to single-handedly influence the development of chamber music, as he started work on his Violin sonata Op. 108 between August and September 1916. That same year, however, he wrote a foreword to Georges Jean-Aubry's *La musique française d'aujourd'hui* where he aired his views on the burning subject of musical patriotism:

(...) Must we forget what our music owes to its exposure to the great German classics? [the author's bias] consists of solely treating as genuinely French the music derived from the traditions of Rameau and the harpsichordists of the 17th and 18th centuries. "What today's musicians wish for, he says, is an expression of infinite variety as opposed to the megalith of scholastic composition; they want freedom of expression, expressive music, a music of feelings: Couperin and Rameau did not wish for anything else." Could this

⁹¹ Nichols & Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 313. Letter to E. Vuillermoz from January 1916

statement, which seems to me very broad, not be a little narrow-minded? I must admit to not understanding how scholastic discipline can "restrict expression", (...) do the symphonic works of Saint-Saëns, Franck, d'Indy, Dukas, conceived in a mould of German origins, not contain taste, clarity and sense of proportions, qualities that are essentially French?⁹²

He then, in 'proper order' for 1916, proceeded to take issues with modernity in the guise of aesthetic movements considered above (see Section 2.1), without condemning it but stating the relativity of its significance:

For many months now a question has been asked: What will become of our Art after the war? (...) in the comfort of a continued, delectable peace that no one thought would end, a number of artists, consumed by the fever of the new, created in paintings -after Impressionism- Intentionalism, Cubism, etc., while some less audacious musicians tried to remove feeling from their works and to replace it with sensation, forgetting that sensation is actually the first manifestation of feeling⁹³.

Finally, he forestalled a sense of pessimism by endorsing Rolland's views on French music and what it ought to be (see Section 1.2):

Will the terrifying storm which we are going through bring us back to our senses and restore our common sense, that is our taste for clear-thinking, for pure and sober forms, earnestness, the scorn of loud effect, in short: all the virtues that can contribute to our *whole* art regaining its admirable character whilst remaining essentially French, whether it is profound or subtle? I more than believe it, I am certain of it⁹⁴.

Fauré had good reasons to be optimistic. The *Société Musicale Indépendante* (1909) of which he was *President d'Honneur* (see footnote 19, p.11), was a hub of creativity; most of its members were former students of his whose ethos had been shaped, to a large extent, by their apprenticeship at the Conservatoire. Yet his foreword sounds at times like a Master's attempt to keep his disciples in line. In a conference from February 1916, former student and friend Charles Koechlin, one of the young Society's most perceptive minds, had drawn with necessary diplomacy (in deference to the *Union sacrée* in force at the time) the dividing line between d'Indy's scholastic convictions which the *Debussyste* Jean-Aubry had attacked in his book, and the SMI's embracing modernity and

⁹² G. Jean-Aubry: *La musique française d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Perrin, 1916), *Préface* by G. Fauré

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* (all translations: A.Rao)

innovation. Although impressed by d'Indy's endeavour, Koechlin's praises do ring a little hollow:

Open [his] *Traité de composition*⁹⁵, study it carefully -you will be surprised and genuinely 'bowled over' at first by the amount of work, of energy and conscientious erudition that presumes the compiling of all the details, the dates, the names, the musical examples, the classifications, the 'diagrams', the theories and the meticulous analyses.⁹⁶

Koechlin then candidly questioned the relevance of it all:

The general ideas on Renaissance, Reformation, Judaic music, the classifying of the properties of the soul, all this is ultimately beside the point and, moreover, debatable.(...) It is as though one saw historical masterpieces, still alive and breathing, tied up and dissected on the operating table... Am I exaggerating? You shall judge for yourselves as you take the trouble of reading from beginning to end this worrying and so utterly scholarly *Treatise*.

Let us quickly dispel any misunderstanding: I do not fear the *knowledge* of works of art! (by that I mean knowing them almost from memory, having listened, understood and loved). Such knowledge is above all musical and cannot take away originality from a truly original mind. We are dealing here with something completely different. It is beyond me: my *musical feeling* cannot tolerate these dissections into fragments, these cells, themes, bridges. Such erudition scares me.-And I cannot but wonder: *what is it all for?*⁹⁷

It appears that, in his preface, Fauré took great care to distance himself from views which, although they had been endorsed somewhat simplistically by Jean-Aubry, were distinctly those of his erstwhile student. In marked contrast with Debussy, for whom he had the greatest respect, his enthusiasm for the early French tradition was not motivated by nationalist agendas. Although his training at the *Ecole Niedermeyer* had, in his own words, 'bathed' him in Early Music (see p.14) and his graduating piece, the *Cantique de Jean Racine* (1865), had been a paean to a great seventeenth-century dramatist, Rameau and the French harpsichordists were not paramount to his historical perspective, certainly in terms of 'pure' music.

Equally, Fauré's position regarding modernity appears rather ambivalent: he was an active participant at SMI concerts where the works of the *avant-garde*

⁹⁵ V. d'Indy: *Traité de composition* (Paris: Durand, 1903-1909). At the launch, d'Indy had castigated composers who did not follow what he considered a musician's absolute prerogative: thorough grounding in Gregorian chant, Greek modes and counterpoint.

⁹⁶ C. Koechlin: *Esthétique et langage musical*, ed.M. Duchesneau, vol.1 (Mardaga, 2006), 110

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 111 (translation: A. Rao)

were often torn apart by inimical critics; yet his foreword deplores the ‘removing of feeling’ displayed by some of his eminent colleagues in their music (Satie was an obvious case in point). It should be remembered that, as a veteran of French music, he was still on friendly terms with the senior members of the *Société Nationale* who would shortly elect him as President, replacing d’Indy (see p.29). He also continued to be Saint-Saëns’ valued friend and, upon completing his first Cello Sonata the following year, was only too proud to consider it a worthy successor to the work of his former mentor (see p.12).



Fig.3.10: Vincent d'Indy
www.fr.wikipedia.org,
 4/09/2013



Fig.3.11: Gabriel Fauré in 1907
www.en.wikipedia.org,
 4/09/2013



Fig.3.12: Charles Koechlin
www.fr.wikipedia.org,
 4/09/2013

The distance separating Fauré from Koechlin can best be measured by their diverging reactions, almost ten years before, to *Histoires naturelles*, five cheeky songs by Maurice Ravel, a composer they both held in the highest esteem. Koechlin related to the controversial Premiere (January 24, 1907) in the same conference address, one of two series of fifteen on “Contemporary French Music” he gave between 1915 and 1918:

The *Histoires naturelles* (...) were a big success with the independent public, but the clan of the *Schola cantorum* and their sympathizers persisted in their wild and sarcastic hostility(...)It is no longer music, they said, dreaming of lengthy sonata developments. And, I agree whole-heartedly, it is true that Franck’s wonderful Sonata [for Violin and Piano] is of a more ample beauty. But let it not be said that a boring five-bedroom house wins over the smallest Japanese *netzké*. -Moreover, anything appears easy once it has been worked out; only one forgets that it *had to be* worked out, and, to quote Racine -art is precisely about “making something out of nothing”⁹⁸.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 100 (translation: A. Rao)

His quoting Racine was perhaps intended as a gentle swipe at his former teacher. The aesthetic of the songs, especially their renouncing traditional lyricism in favour of short interjections in the manner of the creatures they spiritedly mimicked (Peacock, Guinea-fowl, Cricket, etc), was counter to the old-fashioned demand that music be treated as the noblest of the arts. Fauré, usually very supportive of Ravel, had declared after the Premiere: 'I like him very much but I wish he wouldn't set such things to music.'⁹⁹

Having thus established his middle-ground attitude (i.e respectful of conservative teachings while enthusing about exploring young talents), it is interesting to observe a common interest shown by Fauré and Debussy in wartime for music they had written not just before the war, but before 1900. For Fauré, it was material from earlier symphonic works that made a sudden reappearance, works he had subsequently destroyed or kept from the public but which he now felt compelled to 'recycle'. These were a *Suite d'orchestre* Op.20 (also called *Symphony in F*) he composed in his twenties -still unpublished despite the opus number- and the *Symphony in D minor* in three movements (*allegro deciso, andante molto moderato, final*) from 1884, which enjoyed a number of high-profile performances until the early 1890s when Fauré burned almost everything related to it, conserving only the first violin part (now stored in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*). This piece of 'salvage' yielded crucial evidence: the main theme from the *Andante* was retained virtually unaltered as the main theme for the *Violin Sonata's* second movement (also *Andante*- Ex. 3.15).¹⁰⁰



Ex.3.15: Fauré's Violin Sonata No.2 in E minor Op.108: *Andante*, opening, violin
(Durand, 1917 -IMSLP)

While the *Suite* Op.20 only re-emerged (partly) after the war in the shape of the *Gavotte* from *Masques et bergamasques* (1919), the *Symphony* did suggest

⁹⁹ G. Larner: *Maurice Ravel*, 96

¹⁰⁰ Fauré's son had recalled his father's use of this material in his 1929 biography but this was only substantiated in recent years.
P. Fauré-Fremiet: *Gabriel Fauré* (Paris-Rieder, 1929), 117

another work, the Sonata for Cello and Piano Op.109, started almost straight after the Violin Sonata was completed (August 1916). This time the jumpy and angular symphonic ‘quote’ (Ex.3.16) opened proceedings, played by the cello (bars 2-4) in a menacingly hushed tone (Ex.3.17). As he had for the Violin Sonata’s *Andante*, Fauré kept the original key (evidence that his musical ideas were inextricably linked to a particular range and colour) but modified the metre and rhythm. The result was a greater sense of urgency and tension as the pulse stops briefly over the tied F. He also dispensed with the premature and rather predictable I-V cadence of the Symphony’s theatrical opening. This allows the tension to build up sufficiently for a considerable expansion of the opening over the next nineteen bars.



Ex.3.16: Fauré's Symphony in D minor Op.40: *Allegro deciso*, opening, violins
 (J.-M. Nectoux: *Les voix du clair-obscur*, p.408)



Ex. 3.17: Fauré's Cello Sonata No.1 in D minor Op. 109: *Allegro*, opening
 (Durand,1918- *IMSLP*)

Common to the opening *Allegros* of both sonatas is a very deceptive rhythmic shift. In Ex.3.17, the stamping lone quavers (piano part, right hand) that mark every other beat are quite ineffective against the second-quaver chord; even

their accents fail to establish where the beat really is and actually strengthen the illusion of a perfect cadence, until bar 3 at any rate. The cello line struggles to restore some logic to the metre and only when the semi-quavers ‘gallop’ up their major-seventh arpeggio into the octave (A-A) is the momentum sufficient to create a *real* downbeat. The dramatic *forte subito* in the suddenly soaring cello line finally clears up any remaining confusion (bar 8). The rhythmic tension is thus released, but the movement now enters a phase of dynamic tension: both instruments remain loud for twenty-eight bars, the piano at first in pursuit of the cello (Ex.3.18), then ahead of it (Ex.3.19).



Ex.3.18: Fauré's Cello Sonata No.1: *Allegro*, bars 14-17



Ex.3.19: *Ibid.*, bars 24-27

The *fugato* element re-appears vigorously in bar 50 of the Sonata's third movement, with over twenty bars of canonic writing in the key of B minor.

This approach to chamber music was in total contrast with Fauré's model: in the Sonata in C minor Op. 32 by his old friend Camille Saint-Saëns, the cello and the piano are in constant partnership, as evidenced by the unison opening:



Ex. 3.20: Saint-Saëns' Cello Sonata in C minor Op.32: *Allegro*, opening (Durand, Schoenewerke & Cie,1873 -IMSLP)

Likewise, this sonata had not only been completed in a volatile climate (post-Franco-Prussian war in 1871, during the Parisian working-class rising known as the *Commune*), it also had personal connotations for Saint-Saëns who was mourning the death of a very close aunt.¹⁰¹ But true to form, Saint-Saëns' work reflected his convictions as to what a typical French *sonate should* sound like, and his emphasis on clarity and sense of proportions echoed what was fast becoming the clarion call of French musicologists. Although the patriotic sentiment was noticeably more fervent in 1917, Fauré's emotional perspective, self-confessed in his foreword, was actually very close to the German Romantics and most noticeably Schumann, whose tempestuous *Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck* from his Violin Sonata No.1 in A minor can be seen as an antecedent, psychologically-speaking. As for the strict counterpoint relished by Fauré in both these Sonatas, it should probably be interpreted as a token gesture of friendship to his other beleaguered friend Vincent d'Indy.

If some of the compositional techniques featured in the 1917 Cello Sonata appear antithetic to a nationalist rhetoric that advocated a return to the sources of French musical tradition, the Violin Sonata composed the previous year had exonerated the composer from unlikely charges of anti-patriotism, but in rather unconventional ways. As shown by his preface (See p.76), Fauré's sensitive nature, professionalism and continued devotion to the *Niedermeyer* ethos were his true guiding principles and he certainly did not shrink from the prospect of having to defend these beliefs. After all, Saint-Saëns himself had ostentatiously displayed his own love of Beethoven, Bach, Mozart or Mendelssohn throughout his Cello Sonata Op.32, even borrowing melodic material from Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* for its oratorio-like slow movement¹⁰². Nevertheless, it is possible to

¹⁰¹ Charlotte Masson was the composer's mother's aunt. Her help had been crucial in raising the child, whose father had died shortly after his birth, by introducing him to music, teaching him the piano, and nurturing his considerable gifts. Fauré's eldest son Emmanuel suffered a serious chemical infection in 1917, while working in a laboratory.

¹⁰² J. Grimshaw: *Sonata for cello & piano n.1 in C minor, Op.32- Camille Saint-Saëns | Details, Parts/Movements and recordings | Allmusic* (www.allmusic.com , retrieved 28/08/2013). Meyerbeer, along with Rossini and Cherubini, was part of the triumvirate of 'nefarious' foreign influences as perceived by Saint-Saëns, d'Indy, and their SN fellow- members at that time.

detect a slight concession to the likes of Jean-Aubry in the choice of a typical *louré* step to propel the *allegro non troppo* of his Violin Sonata Op.108.



Ex.3.21: Fauré's Violin Sonata No.2: *Allegro non troppo* (1st), bars 147-9

This quaver-crotchet combination, placed on the strong beat of the bar, can be found in countless *Suite* movements, albeit at a much slower tempo, such as Handel's untitled *galanterie* from his third *Water Music* Suite:



Ex.3.22: Handel's *Water Music* Suite n.3 in G major, *Entrée* (Bärenreiter Verlag, 1962-IMSLP)

Once again, however, Fauré expertly tricks the ear with metre changes, *hemiolae*, tied notes of irregular lengths or disappearing downbeats. This arsenal of rhythmic *trompe-l'oeil* might suggest a certain distance from Baroque models; indeed, following their Bayreuth ‘experience’ in the 1880s, Fauré and his friend André Messager¹⁰³ had made a somewhat irreverent use of ‘stock’ Baroque dance movements to poke fun at Wagner (whose music they nevertheless revered) in a Suite for two pianos which they enjoyed performing at SN evenings, no doubt to Saint-Saëns’ pleasure.



Fig. 3.13: André Messager, sketched by Gabriel Fauré
 (Piano music of Gabriel Fauré-Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia,
www.en.wikipedia.org , retrieved 28/08/2013)

More than these rhythmic idiosyncrasies, the choice of harmonies is often startling and singular. In the main, for instance, phrases tend to be launched with a dissonance (whole-tone scale, diminished chord) in the third movement (marked, like the first, *Allegro non troppo*). This is especially true of the sequential secondary motif (Ex. 3.23) where the dropping diminished fourth transmutes itself into a radiant tonic. Here, the augmented chord is blurring the picture from the onset, in contrast to Debussy who endowed it with an element of surprise, using it sparingly but persistently in his *Etudes*.



Ex.3.23: Fauré’s Violin Sonata No.2: *Allegro non troppo* (3rd), bars 21-23

¹⁰³ The composer and conductor André Messager (1853-1929) was an alumni of the *Ecole Niedermeyer* like Fauré, who was his one-time teacher in the 1870s. Both men came from provincial towns, were trained pianists and held the organ in various Parisian churches.

The cumulative effect of these accented discords (as opposed to passing phenomena) is that the movement's overall impression becomes one of tonal instability: dissonance has become the dominant feature, and therefore is not dissonant anymore. Saint-Saëns, for one, was at a loss to get to grips with this anathema. Already in October 1915, barely less than a year before the second Violin Sonata was completed, he had written almost apologetically to Fauré, upon receiving the song-cycle *Le jardin clos* (first performed, as mentioned above, along Ravel's Piano Trio-see Chapter 1, p.22):

My dear friend,

I have just read through *Le jardin clos*. Despite its apparent simplicity it does not make for very easy reading; but how attractive and absorbing it is! I shall need time for it to sink in fully.(...) I congratulate you for writing accompaniments expressly for the piano, and not grand orchestrations reduced for that instrument and unplayable (...). As for the words themselves, they are certainly pretty verses from the hands of a craftsman, but very often obscure; there are some things that I have found difficult to understand. As Christ said: it is not the Light that wanes, it is one's eyes that fail.¹⁰⁴

Despite all the courtesy in the world, Saint-Saëns could not disguise his perplexity, conveniently taking refuge behind fringe considerations such as text or instrumentation. It is easy to imagine his reaction to the sort of intricate writing displayed at the end of the Violin Sonata, when Fauré ambitiously juxtaposes the opening *louré* theme in triplet figures and a dotted rhythms sequence in common time (Ex. 3.24). For the ageing virtuoso, the experimental harmonies common to both Debussy's *En blanc et noir* and the music of his trusted friend must have made for uncomfortable reading.



Ex. 3.24: Fauré's Violin Sonata No.2: 3rd mvt, coda.

¹⁰⁴ J.M. Nectoux: *The Correspondence of Camille Saint-Saëns and Gabriel Fauré: Sixty Years of Friendship*, trans.. J. Barrie Jones (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004), 107 (last sentenced translated by A. Rao)

Seen in this perspective, Fauré's music meets that of Rameau, to whose harmonic innovations his contemporaries objected, finding them discordant and offensive.¹⁰⁵ Paradoxically, just when Debussy was going through his process of creating a sense of musical lineage, painstakingly forging links to the past, Fauré's departure from conventional chamber music patterns ensured that he, too, could legitimately claim his own portion of French musical heritage.

Both were also indebted to César Franck for the use of cyclical form (the heir of Liszt in that regard), which he had taken to new heights in his magnificent Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major (1886). Debussy's Sonata for Violin and Piano was especially troublesome in that regard, as he admitted himself to Durand in his 'Rosoor' letter from October 1916 (see p.60):

(...) Going for a walk recently, I found the 'cellular' idea for the Finale of the Violin Sonata... Unfortunately the first two movements don't want to have anything to do with it...Knowing myself as I do, I certainly won't force them to put up with an awkward neighbour.

This sonata, the third installment of the series, was also to be Debussy's last. Curiously, it was originally supposed to include a horn, thereby emulating the Trio by Johannes Brahms (Op.40) -perhaps inappropriately, hence his dispensing with the brass instrument. One is struck by Debussy's compositional process in this instance, seemingly working backwards. His Cello Sonata, composed with much greater ease, also exhibits cyclical features. One particular occurrence is the almost hysterical 'laughter' that erupts towards the middle of the *Serenade*, a cascade of *spiccato* notes played on the cello (Ex. 3.25), which Debussy then reinserts at the close of the *Finale*, now de-humanized and grossly mechanical, in the left hand of the piano (Ex. 3.26):



Ex.3.25: Debussy's Cello Sonata: *Serenade*, bar 25, cello

¹⁰⁵ Successive campaigns were mounted against Rameau, by partisans of very different movements: in the 1730s, the conservative followers of Lully, known as *Lullystes*; twenty years or so later, a young and aspiring Jean-Jacques Rousseau, self-appointed spokesman of the trendier Italian school, in what became known as the *Querelle des Bouffons*.

Ex.3.26: Debussy's Cello Sonata, *Finale*, bars 106-9 (Durand, 1915-IMSLP)

This subtle cameo doesn't quite take the importance of a truly cyclical organisation -that role is reserved to the *turn* that opens the sonata (Ex. 3.27), a Baroque gesture typically found in *Ouvertures à la française* which can be found almost note for note in the first Caprice from *En blanc et noir* (Ex. 3.28).

Ex.3.27: Debussy's Cello Sonata: *Prologue*, opening bars

Ex.3.28: Debussy's *En blanc et noir* for two pianos: *Avec empotement*, bars 146-51 (Durand, 1915-IMSLP)

Thus challenged by the demands of a genre which had yielded few masterpieces in recent musical history, both Fauré and Debussy, through consummate knowledge of antecedents and utmost respect of French musical traditions, were able to breathe depth and freshness into their wartime compositions. The contributions they made, almost simultaneously, to the violin and cello repertoire stand today as some of the most expressive and spirited ever written for those instruments. Although their estimation was mutual at that time (this had not always been the case), it is unfortunate that their respective situations did not allow them to fully appreciate each other's achievement. When the conflict finally seemed to come to an end, at the end of the Summer of 1918, Fauré was putting the finishing touches to a *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra. Jean-Michel Nectoux posited that its reflection of the events surrounding its composition was virtually unique in Fauré's output.¹⁰⁶ That is not to say that the war had not impacted on his creativity and genius, indirectly, admittedly, but powerfully enough to stimulate him to write four more great chamber music masterpieces, all of which, to some extent, were born out of the experience of living through the war. It is one of music's miracles that an aging composer living in complete deafness through such a traumatic experience could infuse these works with glowing serenity, thus providing a joyful counterpoint to Debussy's despondency, shortly after finishing his Violin Sonata:

I must admit I wrote this sonata only to get rid of it, and because I was spurred on by my publisher. [There are in it] traces of that Imp of the Perverse who urges us on to choose the very idea we ought to have left alone... This sonata will be interesting from a documentary point of view and as an example of what an invalid can write in time of war¹⁰⁷.

Posterity will now remember *Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon*, the beautiful little piano piece he gave to his coal merchant, as Debussy's ultimate musical thought, expressing, without a trace of ostentation, his own serenity as he entered the last year of his life. It seems fitting that this sentiment should

¹⁰⁶ J.-M. Nectoux: *Les voix du Clair-obscur*, 389: 'Sketched during the painful Spring 1918, as Paris was living under threat from German canons, the Fantasy Op.111 was completed in Evian at the beginning of September, just as the great offensive by Allied forces foretold an imminent victory. The climate of this work reflects quite literally the anxieties and the hopes of those months, the most exhilarating of the Great War, a fact exceptional enough in Fauré's music to deserve a mention'.

¹⁰⁷ R. Nichols & F. Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 327. Letter to R. Godet from June 1917.

rightfully replace the sense of gloom that accompanied his Violin Sonata a few months earlier, as it is fitting that he and Fauré should now both be celebrated for their conquering spirit.

3.3: Ravel's 'mad ideas'

As was already discussed in Chapter 1, Maurice Ravel was for the best part of the conflict entertaining the notion that one day, he would pilot his own fighter airplane. His fascination for mechanical engineering did not, like Edward Elgar who patented a number of inventions, extend to actually making things. This particular talent belonged to his father, Pierre-Joseph Ravel. Born in Switzerland on the shores of Lake Geneva, Pierre-Joseph was of French and Swiss origins; working as an engineer on railway sites, he often travelled through France and Spain before settling in Paris some time during the 1860s. He was working in Madrid in 1873 when he met Marie Delouart, a native of St-Jean-de-Luz in the Basque country who had been immersed in Spanish culture through frequent visits to the country's capital city. Ravel knew precious little concerning his parents' antecedents (his father was in his forties in 1875, the year of his birth), but the story of his father's 'great invention' must have been legendary in family circles, particularly after its fateful destruction in a Prussian bombardment while stored in the outskirts of Paris in 1870.¹⁰⁸ Undeterred, Pierre-Joseph devised another type of engine which he then went on to exhibit as part of a hair-raising circus act, the aptly-named Whirlwind of Death (disastrously causing the death of an unfortunate stuntman while staged in America in 1903). He was at last able to set up a manufacturing plant in 1905 in Levallois-Perret (Paris), which he eventually passed on to his younger son Edouard.

Through his father's blend of mechanical genius and showmanship, notwithstanding a lack of entrepreneurial talent, Maurice was not only pre-disposed towards technological progress, he also craved action. Stravinsky reportedly quipped about his clock-making' antecedents and Ravel himself was

¹⁰⁸ 'a steam generator heated by mineral oils and applicable to locomotion on ordinary roads' in G. Larner: *Maurice Ravel*, 15

surprised to meet a cousin who “I had left in the clock-making business, only to now find him playing first violin in the Geneva Theatre”, while on visit to his ancestral home, the Swiss town of Versoix.¹⁰⁹ Ravel’s equal fondness for his Basque origins and his clock-making ancestors equipped him marvellously and quite coincidentally, for the task of setting music to a one-act comedy by Franc-Nohain (Antoine Legrand): *L’heure espagnole* (1911). In another letter to the composer Maurice Delage from the same period, he penned the extraordinary impression left on him by the industrial landscape of the Ruhr, near Dusseldorf:

This is not, by some distance, the Rhine as I imagined it, tragic and legendary, for want of gnomes and Walkyries (...) For now it is just as nice, better maybe. After a boring day, on a very broad stretch of the river, passed desperately flat riverbanks, without character, one discovers a town of chimneys, of domes spluttering flames and rusty or blue smoke. It is Ahum¹¹⁰, a gigantic foundry where 24.000 workers toil day and night. (...) How to tell you the impression of those iron castles, those incandescent cathedrals, of the marvellous symphony of conveying belts, whistles, formidable hammer blows that wrap around you? Everywhere, a red, dark and glowing sky. [Ravel’s hostess during his cruise along northern Europe, Ida Godebski] was terrified and felt like crying. Me also, but with joy. How all this is musical! Consequently I do intend to use it.¹¹¹

Much has been made of the mechanical aspect of the *Boléro* and various other works; comments and analyses generally emphasise the impersonal nature of these metronomic frescoes of the industrial Age. The witness account Ravel gave of the Ruhr’s furnaces show a different side, at odds with the well documented assertion that, as Jane Fulcher writes, ‘Ravel’s cultural gestures, choices, and proclivities in the postwar period are as telling as his reading’¹¹² (he subscribed to a Socialist paper, *Le populaire de Paris*, which he read every

¹⁰⁹ *Cahiers Maurice Ravel*, vol.2 (Fondation Maurice Ravel, 1986),29. Letter to Maurice Delage, August 1906. Stravinsky said of Ravel, somewhat sarcastically, that he was “the most perfect of Swiss watchmakers”. Their first meeting had taken place in 1911 when Stravinsky had played him his earliest music from the *Rite of Spring*. After many years of mutual admiration during which they even collaborated on a project of completing the orchestration of Mussorgsky’s *Khovantchina* (March 1913), their relationship turned sour after 1919, when Ravel’s dealings with Diaghilev on the staging of *La Valse* were fraught with tension. for more on Ravel & Stravinsky, see J.-F. Monnard: *Les Séjours de Maurice Ravel en Suisse* (La Revue Musicale de Suisse Romande- vol.65/1, 2012)

¹¹⁰ A. Orenstein: *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New-York & Oxford, Columbia University Press, 1991),10, this name appears as *Haum*

¹¹¹ *Cahiers Maurice Ravel*, 20. Letter to Delage, July 1905.

¹¹² J.F. Fulcher: *The Composer as Intellectual*, 137

day¹¹³). On some level it would seem peculiar to infer that the composer, a committed *homme de gauche*, could have conceived *La Valse* (1919-20) and *Boléro* (1928) as metaphors for, respectively, the nostalgic sentiments stirred by a disappearing lifestyle and the relentless de-humanising process of the industrial age. Yet, as a young man, his emoting at the sight of a factory in full flow suggests that his fascination for the machine actually enhanced his left-wing convictions, and that the factory, far from proving alienating, was for him endowed with the same mystique as Bayreuth to a Wagner fanatic. In this sense, *Boléro* must represent an apotheosis, the ultimate musical illustration of the powerful synergy between the human and the mechanical¹¹⁴.

Another illustration of Ravel's apparent conflict of interest between his passion for the moving or inanimate object and his compassion for suffering humanity (particularly strong in the *Chansons Madécasses*, *Deux Mélodies Hébraïques*, and *Tzigane*) is the emotional detachment which pervades throughout the *Tombeau de Couperin*, a work whose dedication to close friends killed in battle indicates the personal poignancy. This detachment lies exactly half-way between his belligerent mood of 1914 (see Chapter 1, p.24) and his pacifist attitude post-1918 when, 'Like others with sympathies to the Left, Ravel perceived the war as having lasted too long, and with too much slaughter, and now distastefully being exalted in the name of "patriotism" (Fulcher).

The *Tombeau* was one of a number of projects Ravel was thinking of after he completed the Trio, but one of only two that came to fruition (the other being *Wien*, later named *La Valse* - the circumstances made the obvious connection with enemy nations undesirable): once he enlisted, he unfortunately could not

¹¹³ According to his friend and student Manuel Rosenthal, in D. Saudinos: *Manuel Rosenthal, une vie* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1992),95. Cited in J. Fulcher: *The Composer as Individual*, 362

¹¹⁴ G. Lerner posits, on the other hand, that *Boléro* is self-destructive in character and thus more convincingly read in a negative mode: 'Only 'L'heure espagnole' represents as vividly the two sides of a musical personality formed, as the composer said, by "the clicking and roaring of my father's machines" and "the Spanish folk songs sung to me by my mother". But in 'L'heure espagnole' they are in harmonious equilibrium, while in *Boléro* they are locked in conflict. (...) The genius of the work is not so much its scoring (...) as in the judgement of the precise moment when the conflict can no longer go on: as the long-term crescendo reaches its height and the orchestration its maximum aggregation, the friction between melody and mechanism finally causes ignition, the tonality lifts off from C major to E major and, as it falls back, the edifice collapses.'
Maurice Ravel, 203

find time to think, let alone compose. This ‘French *Suite*’ must have been in gestation shortly before the break out of war, for there appears to be little of its ultimate seriousness in his description to his friend and confidant, Roland-Manuel:

I have begun two series of piano pieces: 1) a French suite- no, it isn't what you think: *la Marseillaise* won't be in it, but it will have a *forlane* and a *gigue*; no tango, however. 2) a *Romantic Night*, with spleen, infernal hunt, accursed nun, etc.¹¹⁵

Glenn Watkins has explained the ‘tango’ reference as another of Ravel’s sarcastic turns, since this outrageously seductive dance had been banned by Pope Pius X in January 1914¹¹⁶. He also mentions that, far from complying with this extreme measure by the Catholic Church, Ravel was in his usual subversive mood when he ‘wrote to Godebski that he was transcribing a “Forlane” by Francois Couperin, which, he maliciously reported to Roland-Manuel, he would like to have “danced at the Vatican by Mistinguette and Colette Willy in drag”¹¹⁷. Thus, even though he too upheld nationalist agendas for a return to the forms and ideas from the French Baroque, Ravel’s own revival was typically loaded.

Forlane, the third movement of the *Tombeau* after a *Prelude* and a *Fugue*, is a fairly extended movement of great charm, subdued but full of wit. Unlike Couperin’s which concludes the *Suite*¹¹⁸, this *forlane* is situated near the middle of the work, similar to that in J.S. Bach’s *Orchestral Suite* n.1 in C major, BWV 1066. Ravel knew that the internal dynamic of a *Suite* made it necessary to place the fastest dance last; tail-ending the work with a lively *Toccata* meant that the *Forlane* had to be moved to an earlier slot. It might have been conceived to bring the *Tombeau* to an end at some stage. One of the very few occurrences of a contemporary French *forlane* was in Ernest Chausson’s

¹¹⁵ A. Orenstein: *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 72

¹¹⁶ see the transcript of the article in the New York Times from January 16, 1914: “POPE DENOUNCES ‘NEW PAGANISM’” in *Tango Corrupts Soul-Historic Newspaper Clip Denouncing Tango*, www.verytangostore.com (retrieved 30/08/2013)

¹¹⁷ Orenstein: *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 72

¹¹⁸ in the fourth of Couperin’s *Concerts Royaux* (1722), the *forlane* (seventh movement) came in last position.

Quelques danses Op.26 for piano from 1896, where it indeed came last. There is absolutely no trace of any resemblance between it and Ravel's, however. Chausson's piece actually exhibits none of the usual features of that dance (dotted rhythms and strong quaver up-beats); its alternating three pairs of quavers with two pairs of three in 6/4 are more typical of the *habanera*:



Ex.3.29: Chausson's *Quelques danses* Op.26: *Forlane*, opening
(Editions Baudoux, 1896-IMSLP)

Did Ravel know of any *forlanes* before acquainting himself with that in Couperin's *Concert Royal*? The above letter to Roland-Manuel does mention a *gigue* but Ravel wisely reconsidered its place in the *Tombeau* since both dances are very similar in character and pattern (the metre of the *gigue* is actually shorter, making for a more rapid succession of downbeats). This begs the question: why should Ravel be so keen to make use of this dance? An interesting study by French musicologist Michel Faure revealed that in April 1914, an article had appeared in the *Revue musicale* which traced the origins of the dance from the time of Louis XIV. This article explained how, in Venice,

(...)prostitutes and daughters of gondoliers danced the *forlane*, teasingly lifting their dresses in order to reveal their shoulders and breasts, covered only by parceled embroidery. That the *forlane*, summoned by the Pope to eradicate the erotic tango, should itself be of licentious origin amusingly thumbs the nose at His Holiness.¹¹⁹

Faure also shed light on the 'drag in the Vatican' fancy, recalling a particularly raunchy scene from Colette Willy's 1906 cabaret which had caused a scandal of

¹¹⁹ 'Forlane: Origine et analyse de la Forlane du *Tombeau de Couperin* de Ravel', in *Musique et société: Michel Faure-Son regard sur l'Histoire sociale de la Musique*, 2009 (www.musique.histoire.free.fr), retrieved 30/08/2013

some magnitude within the Parisian *bourgeoisie* ¹²⁰.

As the war progressed, Ravel would have undoubtedly regretted that his *Forlane*, “pure Couperin” as his Trio had been ‘pure Saint-Saëns’ (in his own words), should carry such a saucy connotation, but the fact remains that some of the *Tombeau* ‘s exegesis could not have been further removed from the spirit of the 1914-18 holocaust. As Glenn Watkins eloquently puts it,

‘Ravel’s ultimate embrace of prelude, fugue, forlane, rigaudon and minuet, considered as a whole, signaled a wholesale reclamation of the *style ancien* that had been endorsed in France in the decades following the Franco-Prussian War and previously savoured by Ravel himself in the *Menuet antique* of 1895, as well as more recently in the “Menuet” of his *Sonatine*. (...)By the summer of 1917, when some 40,000 French troops became involved in a series of so-called mutinies, the French people were totally disillusioned with the protracted struggle. It was during this period that Ravel brought the *Tombeau* to its completion, and once finished he dedicated each of the suite’s six pieces to the memory of a friend who had died in the war.’¹²¹

Like the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, another pastiche from 1911, the *Forlane*’s exudes an air of bittersweet sadness, the source of which can be found in two compositional features already observed in Fauré’s sonatas from 1916-17. In another musical *trompe-l’oeil*, the persistent little quirky tune (Ex. 3.30) seems to skip a beat as it loops back on itself. Once again, it is launched over a couple of augmented triads but the definite resolution, which reaches almost comical proportions in the coda, where the descending arpeggio figures (alternating C,G#,F and D#,A#, G) rollick unceremoniously out of key (Ex.3.31). Once again, given its unlikely mixture of irreverence and tragedy, this piece alone qualifies its composer to the status of musical Pierrot.

¹²⁰ Colette (Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette, later Sidonie Goudekot- 1873-1954) was the wife of the notoriously amoral critic Henri Gauthier-Villars, known as Willy, who used her literary skills to further his reputation as a writer of erotic novels. Having left him for a series of liaisons with wealthy women, she co-starred with one of them in the scandalous *Rêve d’Egypte*, a pantomime she wrote for herself and performed at the Moulin Rouge and which the Police eventually closed down. She later picked Ravel, whom she had known from the time of the ‘Apaches’ (see Chapter 2, Introduction) to compose the music to her play, *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*.

¹²¹ Watkins: *Proof in the Night*, 174-5



Ex.3.30: Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin: Forlane*, opening (Durand,1918-IMSLP)



Ex.3.31: *Forlane*, bars 175-9

These harmonic anomalies are less functional and more cosmetic than in Fauré's works, but this serves Ravel's purpose admirably: the piece is only really a pastiche and its seriousness more ironic than genuine. Archaic formulae (ornaments, modal cadences, sequences, etc), which had already stylised the *Menuet* from the *Sonatina* some ten years before, now acquired an element of jest in the *Forlane*: after the riling of his *Histoires naturelles* and the all-too-frequent sniggering by prominent supporters of the *Schola* during SMI concerts, Ravel's thrill at irking these adversaries of the French musical youth was clear to see. Right from the beginning of the dance, Ravel pitches his 'dislocation' of the audience to a whole new level : although the E tonic is established from the first beat, the main tune (Ex.3.30) rises quickly to a D# over an A minor chord, a suspension known as the blue note in Jazz but whose exceptionally premature appearance spells confusion to the ear in this instance. Satie's influence on Ravel has yet to be fully appreciated, but this little piece of musical 'cross-

dressing' testifies admirably to their common taste for gentle provocation. Ravel's subtly integrated musical pedantry nevertheless outdid his senior's rather more obvious -if also more comical- use of scholastic *procédés*. This surely accounts for the relative lack of profundity of the work, despite its mournful heading. Ravel's critics, who were still numerous and particularly hostile in wartime, were quick to pounce on this after the armistice, when the *Tombeau* was finally performed. It was defended tooth and nails by its first performer who also was the widow of one of the dedicatees, Marguerite Long:

The dead are unhappy enough as they are. Is it necessary to dedicate laments to them for ever? When a musician of genius gives them the best of himself and at the same time something they would enjoy, isn't that the most moving tribute he can make?¹²²

Coming from the widow of one of the war's first victim, the heroic Marliave (see Chapter 1, p.9-10), this rallying round a composer whose music betrayed not even a hint of tragedy does seem surprising; at any rate, it gives an indication of the relative isolation Ravel was in at the time, both musically and socially.

She may have also shared his irritation at the political hijacking of wartime heroism. The extremely high number of nominations for the *Légion d'Honneur* (over two thousand) must have gone down well with the vast majority but Ravel was indignant at the news that he, too, had been nominated (at the initiative of his publisher Durand)¹²³. His estimation that this type of effusive celebration was entirely inappropriate and disrespectful of war victims, dead or alive, is not far from Debussy's bemoaning the need to produce musical testimonials in his reply to Durand's query about an occasional piece for King Albert's Book, a The fairly relaxed mood was soon to change, however, and the tragedy glanced at in the *Passacaille* of the Piano Trio become more penetrating in the next batch of works, *La Valse* from 1919, the Sonata for Violin and Cello from 1920-22 and the *Chansons Madécasses* from 1924.

Transgressing the idea of a war memorial was not purely circumscribed to the gentle *Forlane*. Watkins advances, most convincingly, the suggestion that the

¹²² G. Lerner: Maurice Ravel, 164

¹²³ J.F. Fulcher: *The Composer as Intellectual*, 139

Tombeau's final movement, the *Toccata*, was a vivid musical depiction of a flying machine: the 'Nieuport' biplane.¹²⁴ The arguments backing this hypothesis are certainly compelling, for not only did Ravel make this *Toccata* the *Tombeau's* *tour-de-force* (its very own Whirlwind of Death, for lesser pianists at any rate), he infused it with a sense of heroism and triumph that was in itself proof of the nature of his homage. Mention was made of his laborious efforts at the wheel of *Adelaide* (see Chapter 1, p.10) and the inclusion of a *moto perpetuo* in his wartime Suite does seem to clash singularly with the vision of his broken-down truck. Ravel's dreams of securing a place in the Air Corps owed as much to family pride and a need to vindicate the 'technical' side of his genetic inheritance as to a genuine appetite to join famous fighter pilots Guynemer and Roland-Garros in the pantheon of dead war heroes.

It is interesting to note that in complete contrast to the composer, the greatest 'Ace' of all, René Fonck (1894-1953) initially declined joining the burgeoning Air force, preferring to serve as a combat engineer in the trenches. Renowned for his lethal precision, Fonck downed no less than seventy-five enemy planes, often unassisted, surpassing the legendary Georges Guynemer (1894-1917) and going through his entire campaign unharmed. Ravel may have seen in Fonck a reflection of his own penchant for meticulous working methods above his taste for the theatrical, the heroic or the improbable.



Fig.3.14 & 3.15: French ace-pilots Georges Guynemer (left) and René Fonck

Guynemer, however, was the firm favourite with the crowds; his disappearance in combat in September 1917 caused consternation in France. Since his heroic death occurred around the time Ravel was working on the *Toccata*, it is possible

¹²⁴ G. Watkins: *Proof in the Night*, 189

that, although the work was dedicated to the memory Long's husband (no doubt in response to her enthusiasm for the work and her diligence in learning it), Guynemer was in fact the secret dedicatee of the *Tombeau's* last homage.

Completely eschewing the funereal soundings of a traditional *Tombeau*, the piece evoked Italian rather than French origins. Ravel's interest in the music of French harpsichordists Louis Couperin and Louis Daquin offers little scope for antecedents, for neither of these wrote any *toccatas*. Perhaps Daquin's *Le coucou* ('The Cuckoo') from his 1735 *Pièces de Clavecin, Troisième Livre*, gave him something to think about: in colloquial French, the bird's name also describes a less-than-reliable airplane. Pianistically, however, nothing ought to be more reliable than the sterling virtuosity needed for performing this *moto (quasi) perpetuo*. The relentless semi-quavers are virtually uninterrupted for the entire 256 bars, except for one short pause (over a demi-semi quaver rest!) thirty-five bars from the end, possibly due to engine failure or, more likely given the heroic nature of the crescendo, the holding of one's breath before taking a shot¹²⁵ (Ex.3.32).

Although Watkins is quick to relativise his own findings,¹²⁶ at least one other example of Ravel's propensity to establish a musical connection to the realm of the mechanical supports his argument: the *Perpetuum mobile* from his Sonata for Violin and Piano (1923- 27). Like the *Toccatà*, this demanding piece requires stamina, control and the utmost concentration on the part of the violinist, who now takes the lead in the act of *haute voltige*. From a mechanical perspective, the music is even more suggestive: in the opening transition from the previous movement (*Blues*), both instruments take turn in an attempt to 'ignite' the engine (Ex.3.33), a process that finally succeeds in launching the movement at the seventh attempt. Violinists often seize the opportunity to conjure up an even greater sense of realism to the scene, by playing their first *arco* notes (bar 8) not *sul tasto* (on the fingerboard) as Ravel suggests, but *sul ponticello* (on, or near, the bridge), resulting in an acid tone very suggestive of a faulty ignition.

¹²⁵ Watkins gives another extra-musical interpretation for this fermata: "the momentary but deliberate killing of the engine - a familiar manoeuvre known as a stall". *Proof in the Night*, 189

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

en dehors

p

mf en augmentant peu a peu

plus *f*

toujours plus *f*

Ex. 3.32: Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin*: Toccata, bars 192- 220

Ex.3.33: Ravel's Violin Sonata No.2 in G (1927): *Perpetuum mobile*: *allegro*, bars 8-16
(Durand & Cie, 1927 - IMSLP)

As the Great War entered its final year, Ravel was emotionally and physically exhausted. Already weakened by poor health, the shattering news of his mother's death in January 1917 had dealt the composer a major blow, and by the time he put the finishing touches to *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, his creativity deserted him completely.¹²⁷

It wasn't until June that he wrote was destined to be his only composition from 1918: *Frontispice*, a musical illustration of *Poème du Vardar*, S.P.503 by Italian luminary Ricciotto Canudo (1877-1923), a poet and film theorist who viewed cinema as a spiritual evolution¹²⁸ and later coined the term 'Seventh Art' in his 1923 *Manifeste du septième art*. Intended for the luxurious French publication *Feuillets d'Art* launched the following year (Fig.3.16), the association of Ravel's music with Canudo's poem was another example of the collaborative spirit that

¹²⁷ Ravel to Marguerite Long, summer 1918: "I have had some vile moments: I even thought at one time that I would never work again". in Lerner: *Maurice Ravel*, 165;
Debussy to Robert Godet, October 1917: "Music's completely abandoned me. Even if it's not a cause for tears, it's a trifle ridiculous, at least." in Nichols & Lesure: *Debussy Letters*, 333

¹²⁸ R. Canudo: *La Naissance d'un art-Essai sur le cinema* (1911)
in www.i.en.sarcelles.ac-versailles.fr

pervaded the Parisian *avant-garde* well into the last days of the war. Canudo had forged himself a reputation as critic and *chef de file* in 1913 with the twice-monthly review *Montjoie!*, an ambitious, eclectic and militant platform for writers and poets that was a forerunner of Cocteau's *Le Mot*. Ravel, a contributor to the equally upmarket *Les Cahiers d'aujourd'hui* before the war, must have found the proposition to feature in *Feuillets d'Art* appealing.



Fig.3.16: *Feuillets d'Arts*, the luxury periodical published by Michel Duffet between 1919 and 1922.



Fig.3.17: Ravel's *Frontispice* in the 2nd issue of *Feuillets d'Arts* (1919)

(www.musee-jardin-bourdelle.fr, 17/09/13)



Fig.3.18: Ricciotto Canudo (www.slideshare.net, retrieved on 17/09.2013)

Yet the extraordinarily modern music he wrote on that occasion was unlike anything he had composed before. Whether or not he was familiar with Canudo's wartime poetry, Ravel proceeded to set an extravagant number of numerological correspondences with the title's closing digits ('S.P.503 is the postal sector foe Canudo's combat division in the Vardar region of southern Macedonia' -Watkins¹²⁹). Perhaps the most intriguing one was the scoring for two pianos but *five* hands, eerily anticipating the one-handed piano work known as his *Concerto pour la main gauche* from 1929-30. A five-note *ostinato* D#-E-G#-F-A, around which revolve a myriad of musically unconnected figurations and bird-like motifs, runs through the mere *fifteen* bars of the piece. Its division

¹²⁹ *Proof in the Night*, 387

in three sections of five bars each gives an idea of Ravel's emotional numbness, at a stage when the conflict must have truly seemed interminable: the first section limits the number of entries to five (Ex.3.34), then all five voices are heard in a second section that soon threatens to descend into absolute cacophony (Ex.3.35); finally, peace is most abruptly restored as the second piano part now plays the *ostinato* in a calm procession of five-note chords (Ex. 3.36).

The image shows the opening of Ravel's *Frontispice*. It consists of two systems of piano parts. The first system is for PIANO I and PIANO II. PIANO I is in the upper register, starting with a *pp* dynamic. PIANO II is in the lower register, also starting with a *pp* dynamic and the instruction "un peu en dehors". Both parts feature a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 58$.

This image shows a continuation of the opening of *Frontispice*. It features a dense texture with multiple voices. The upper part has a complex, overlapping melodic line with many grace notes and slurs. The lower part continues with the eighth-note accompaniment. The dynamic is *pp*.

Ex.3.34: Ravel's *Frontispice* (1918), opening
(Editions Salabert, 1975 - IMSLP [public domain])

This image shows bar 9 of *Frontispice*. It is a highly complex texture with multiple voices. The upper part has a complex, overlapping melodic line with many grace notes and slurs. The lower part continues with the eighth-note accompaniment. The dynamic is *pp*.

Ex.3.35: *Frontispice*, bar 9

Ex.3.36: *Frontispice*, bars 11-15

Was Ravel composing music that is almost physically painful to listen to deliberately? Lerner makes a perfunctory mention of it in his biography¹³⁰, and the fact that the piece remained unperformed and unpublished until the second half of the twentieth century would seem to justify his assessment. On the other hand, Watkins finds the piece to be of great spiritual dimension, with its visions of ‘a bird trapped in a repetitive song, chirping obsessively but quietly above an undulating firmament’, an ‘Infernal Machine” (the almost automated *ostinato*) and ‘an unexpected choral hymn that rises and gradually swells before dissolving in a distant echo’¹³¹.

It is possible to interpret *Frontispice* as an experience half-way between those extremes. Certainly, given the weight of evidence in support of his immense frustration at not being able to fly, one must credit Watkins for pushing the ‘bird’ metaphor to its logical conclusion. Attractively enough, this would also make Ravel a precursor of Olivier Messiaen, whose many bird ‘sound bytes’ seem effectively descended from this piece. Even though Messiaen could not have seen or heard *Frontispice* until well after World War Two, his seminal *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps*, which he wrote in a Silesian ‘Prisoner of War’ camp in 1941, is strikingly reminiscent.¹³² It is certainly no coincidence that *Frontispice*

¹³⁰ “ (...) it was clearly not intended for performance: it is a collage of disparate strands of raw melodic material”. In *Maurice Ravel*, 165

¹³¹ *Proof in the night*, 389

¹³² In particular its first movement, where again five entirely separate layers of music are superimposed by the four instruments (piano, clarinet, violin and cello).

finally got its first performance in March 1954 at the initiative of Pierre Boulez, one of Messiaen's most high-profile students at the *Conservatoire* at the time. Lerner himself evokes some moving, if not terribly significant, moments in June 1916 when Ravel 'amused his landlady's children by making paper chickens and moulding ducklings out of crumbs of bread, (and) started notating birdsong' of which, he claims, 'nothing came'.¹³³

But this piece also gives a powerful impression that something has broken, that some mechanical malfunction is rotting the deep recesses of the 'Infernal Machine'. It is this image that most aptly describes the state of mind of the third Pierrot of wartime French music, a composer whose spirit had finally been broken and whose musicality had (temporarily) been turned to shreds. Piano-roll specialist Rex Lawson makes the interesting hypothesis that Ravel had in fact intended *Frontispice* for a recently designed mechanical piano called *pianola*, manufactured by the British firm Aeolian, and substantiates his argument with the help of Alfredo Casella's correspondence, the Italian composer and pianist who was close to Ravel (and probably too, to Canudo).¹³⁴



Fig.3.19: a presentation of the Pianola to the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, by its designer E.S.Votey
www.pianola.org, retrieved 18/09/2013



Fig.3.20: Cut-away view of an Aeolian Player Mechanism in 1914
www.pianola.org, retrieved 18/09/2013

¹³³ Maurice Ravel, 156

¹³⁴ R. Lawson: 'Maurice Ravel:Frontispice for Pianola', in *The Pianola Journal*, No.2, (The Pianola Institute,1989). in www.maurice-ravel.net accessed 07/07/2013

Aeolian had made approaches to Casella, Malipiero and Stravinsky, with a view to increase their marketing potential. Soon, these mechanical devices would lose ground on another technological marvel of the early 1900s, the gramophone. Their compositions and those Hindemith wrote for their competitors remained silent for the best part of the twentieth century.

If, as Lawson points out, 'multiple staves in descending order of pitch is the standard way of writing music for pianola'¹³⁵ and Ravel did indeed stay true to this procedure, then what should one make of the fact that, due to the type of suction power employed, this instrument was ineffective in situations that involved having to make either very gradual or very abrupt dynamic changes, the kind that Ravel precisely demands throughout *Frontispice*? For all intent and purpose, Ravel's wonderment at mechanical progress had abated considerably by the end of this traumatic period. It is quite possible that his early enthusiasm had finally given way to more sinister thoughts, and that the joyful spectacle of the Ruhr factories he had experienced more than ten years ago while cruising down the Rhine with the Godebskis was no more than a distant smoke, blown away by a cynical wind and the evaporation of his dreams. In *La Valse*, the work that finally lifted Ravel's composing spirit, one perceives the nostalgic yearning for an era gone by, an era memories of which, for those who survived the Great War, were now fading fast.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

The artistic climate in France during the Great War was largely fuelled by an overwhelming apathy towards Modernism, a concept decried as anti-patriotic and counter-intuitive to the Latin spirit. On reflection, it is one of the great ironies of that period that, after decades of campaigning for a return to traditional French values, in music and other arts, this obsessive drive towards the accomplishment of a truly national style (poorly defined though it was) should culminate in a vast quantity of patriotic works, either solemn or morale-boosting, so patently lacking in perhaps the most quintessential of all French qualities: originality.

For all their impassioned reactions to the mobilisation of the nation as a whole, Debussy, Fauré and Ravel vigorously resisted the trend common to many, even among the *avant-garde*, towards 'occasional' war music. Ultimately, their wartime compositions distinguish themselves by a certain detachment from the immediate horror or the ideological propaganda that framed their every day lives. In spite of their titles and even of their aim, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, *Berceuse Héroïque* or even *Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons* have as little in common with war music as their composers (Ravel and Debussy respectively) had with warfare. As early as September 1914, Debussy eloquently summed up this circumspection common to all three: 'Never, in any epoch have art and war made for good marriage. [Art] must take a stance without having the right to mourn'.¹ As for Fauré, his taking part in the 1870 prequel to the Great War had already sharpened his criticism of nationalist doctrines, declaring in as early as 1885: 'I cannot accept such subtleties [an 'essentially French' character] for this art that is called Music, whose first quality is to be a universal language or, rather, the language of a homeland so above all others that it is demeaned as soon as one portrays feelings or character traits relevant to this or that country.'²

¹ G. Watkins: *Proof in the night*, 90

² Nectoux: *Les voix du clair-obscur*, 150 (translation: A. Rao)

Nonetheless, there is no questioning the fact that these composers did indeed take a compelling 'stance', and it has been the object of this study to understand the nature of this stance. In part due to their independent natures, but also because of their superior artistry and unbending integrity, Debussy, Fauré and Ravel came to realise that the Great War represented, in creative terms, no more than a catalyst. This position somewhat on the margin of the conflict was the premise for the title of the study. Its aim, to justify the André Schaeffner metaphor (see Chapter 3, 51), necessitated a difficult journey through a complex, at times labyrinthine cultural and aesthetic state of affairs.

If war, the 'moon', was the undisputed object of these composers' anguish and resentment, it also created a funnel through which their musical language would eventually crystallise into an expression of serene beauty. For Debussy, the long illness that ended his life in March 1918, six months before the armistice, put pay to his dream of breathing new life into French opera, but the legacy of his *Etudes* and of his partially completed chamber music project is still palpable in contemporary works from France, Britain, Japan, Ireland, etc. For Fauré and Ravel, those five traumatic years also had a devastating impact on their constitutions, but, perhaps more importantly for our twenty-first century perspective, profoundly influenced the course of their art. Their postwar chamber music³, keeping the flame of Debussy's spirit alive, in a manner of speaking, best illustrates the true extent of their *Pierrot* nature: its aloofness and its spirit, its reserve and its passion, its resignation and its fire.

³ Fauré's second Quintet for Piano and Strings, Op.115 and his second Cello Sonata in G minor, Op.117 from 1921; his Piano Trio in D minor Op.120 from 1922-23; and his String Quartet in E minor Op. 121 from 1924. Ravel's Sonata for Violin & Cello from 1920-22; his *Chansons Madécasses* from 1924 and his Violin Sonata in G from 1923-27.

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