

7 Renaissance and change, 1848 to the death of Debussy

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Background

France's revolutions were far from over in 1848. The 1789 Revolution continued to be revisited as conservative and revolutionary factions fought for the right to define the nation's government. The restored Bourbons had fallen in 1830, because they became identified with the *ancien régime*, to be followed in 1848 by the collapse of the July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe I after his government attempted to restrict suffrage. Paris became a city of barricades, from which Chopin and many others fled. In the end another dynasty triumphed, first that of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte as president of the Second Republic and then, after a *coup d'état*, as Emperor Napoleon III in 1852, initiating the Second Empire. The defeat by the Prussians in 1870 marked the end of the Second Empire and start of the Third Republic. The Revolution had finally ended.

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921) reflected on music of the 1850s. Italian opera dominated and 'Verdi's sun ... was rising above the horizon ... nothing existed beyond French opera and oopéra-comique', which included foreign works. Melody was valued above all else. Nevertheless, in the margins 'was a small nucleus ... attracted by music that was loved and cultivated for its own sake, and who secretly adored Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven'.¹ The poverty of non-operatic musical life up to the 1860s can be glimpsed in a random sampling of Charles J. Hall's chronicle of first performances. For 1866 we find operas, operettas and ballets by Léo Delibes (1836–91), Édouard Lalo (1823–92), Charles Lecocq (1832–1918), Jacques Offenbach (1819–80) and Ambroise Thomas (1811–96); an oratorio by Théodore Dubois (1837–1924); and a cantata by Charles-François Gounod (1818–93); but just one instrumental work, Saint-Saëns's three Organ Rhapsodies, Op. 7.²

Ranked high among the key players in the period prior to the renaissance of French instrumental and non-operatic vocal music, Gounod stands out. In the 1850s he was the successful composer of religious choral works, two symphonies and some songs, but his operatic breakthrough awaited *Faust's* triumphant reception in the 1860s. He learned much in 'attendance [at] Mme Viardot's salon'. Pauline Viardot (1821–1910), singer, pedagogue and

composer, 'not only inspired composers such as Chopin, Berlioz, Meyerbeer, Gounod, Saint-Saëns, Liszt, Wagner and Schumann with her dramatic gifts but also collaborated on ... roles created especially for her'.³ Viardot's fecund knowledge of musicians, literature and art 'encouraged the flowering of an emerging talent'.⁴

Nineteenth-century salons were a vital counterpoint to the dominance of the opera house and a major contributor to the renaissance of French music, which was hastened by waves of nationalism prompted by the 1870 humiliation. Alongside the salon, educational institutions, concert societies and other institutions – some are discussed below – paved the way for French music to become its own mainstream, indebted to but distinct from developments elsewhere. By the end of the century France was the powerhouse for a changing cosmos, heard initially in the modernism of Claude Debussy (1862–1918) and later in Stravinsky and the premiere, in Paris, of *Le sacre du printemps* (1913).

Institutions and a great event

Educational, literary, publishing and other institutions provided a strong foundation for the production of operas and, as the century progressed, the proliferation of other genres. France was and remains an institutionally minded country, where generous patronage and a sense of cultural mission underpin progress in the arts.

Although a few composers might look to alternative institutions for their tuition, the Paris Conservatoire was still the rite of passage for most. It is often criticised for its emphasis on dramatic music, but for instrumentalists the standards were exacting, and a first prize placed one's career on a certain footing. Although the teaching was conservative and the emphasis operatic, Debussy was surely stimulated by the teaching he received there from the likes of César Franck (1822–90) and Ernest Guiraud (1837–92, creator of the recitatives in *Carmen* and completer of *Les contes d'Hoffmann*).

Thomas ruled over the Conservatoire from 1871 until his death, when he was replaced by Dubois, a composer, organist and teacher. Dubois might have enjoyed many more years as director had it not been for the determination that Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) showed to win the Prix de Rome. From 1900 to 1905 he made five attempts, resulting finally in the *Affaire Ravel*, when the erstwhile Conservatoire student failed to get beyond the first round. The musical world was upset by his rejection; Dubois resigned.⁵ In spite of his lack of ambition, Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924) was invited to take over the directorship. He embarked on reform, which included separate professors for counterpoint and fugue,

more emphasis on ensemble classes and compulsory attendance at Louis-Albert Bourgault-Ducoudray's history class for all students of composition and harmony. Students now engaged with music of the past in a way redolent of the Schola Cantorum (see below).⁶

Given the emphasis on opera and stage at the Conservatoire, the École Niedermeyer (École de Musique Religieuse) was a robust alternative, which fostered an array of talented pupils from its establishment in 1853 by Louis Niedermeyer (1802–61). His foundation had important allies in the Catholic Church, who welcomed Niedermeyer's desire to re-establish church music in its classical forms. The regime included solfège, harmony and counterpoint, with emphasis on practical organ and piano-playing. Although students were steered away from Romantic music and towards Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and the more conservative works of Mendelssohn, the harmony teaching was unusual, for it included providing accompaniments to modal Gregorian chant. Saint-Saëns came there after Niedermeyer's death in 1861; he officially taught the piano but unofficially mentored in composition.

A full-scale Palestrina revival had been in evidence at least since mid-century, when a 'cluster of cathedrals in the east', Autun, Langres and Moulins, adopted this repertoire.⁷ Rather than the renewal of religious choral music being based on the Franco-Flemish tradition, Italian music, paired with Gregorian chant, won through. In 1890 Charles Bordes (1863–1909) became *maître de chapelle* at Saint-Gervais in Paris, from where he continued the revival of Palestrina and other 'then unknown polyphonic composers'. This musical antiquarianism permeated many facets of musical life, especially with Vincent d'Indy (1851–1931) at Bordes's side. The outcome was a sort of Parisian Counter-Reformation in the Société Schola Cantorum, founded by Bordes, d'Indy and Alexandre Guilmant (1837–1911) in 1894. Policies included the 'return to Gregorian tradition in the performance of plainsong . . . and the creation of a modern church style founded upon the technique of Palestrina'.⁸ In 1896 the institution of the Schola Cantorum was founded in Paris, with extensions in the provinces. Pupils would receive a thorough grounding in composition, counterpoint, organ, solfège and more. One can easily detect in d'Indy's historically biased approach the mind of the modern musicologist, for he believed that in order to undertake the present, students must understand the past.⁹

Pupils of the Schola Cantorum included Edgard Varèse (1883–1965), an important French composer whose career mainly resided in the United States.¹⁰ One of Varèse's teachers at the Schola was Albert Roussel (1869–1937), an example of the practising composer favoured by d'Indy.

The Prix de Rome, organised and judged by the music section of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, endured from 1803 to 1968, with breaks for the

world wars. Although it was intended to further French culture, winners were sent for two years to Rome, where they resided in the magnificent Villa Medici. Composers had to display knowledge of the academic ground rules; those who succeeded were 'sequestered for four or five weeks to compose an operatic scene'.¹¹ Many of the winners had no obvious afterlife beyond this prize, and some major composers, including Saint-Saëns and Ravel, failed to get it, but others did, among them Berlioz (in 1830), Gounod (in 1839), Georges Bizet (1838–75; in 1857), Jules Massenet (1842–1912; in 1863) and Debussy (in 1884). Once in Rome, winners were required to send back *envois*. In 1884, the *envois* included a symphonic poem, a scherzo, an orchestral suite and an orchestral fantasy with solo violin. From 1883 a statute guaranteed the performance of one work at the Conservatoire, to be chosen by a panel.¹²

As the century progressed, there was an ever-richer choice of concerts. François-Antoine Habeneck conducted the first concert of the Société des Concerts at the Paris Conservatoire on 9 March 1828.¹³ Programmes favoured the German repertoire, especially Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Weber, but as the century wore on, Berlioz and Saint-Saëns became occasional treats. Audiences wanted Beethovenian symphonies, not the programmatic or three-movement cyclic works of contemporary French composers. The 1875–6 season revealed growing historicism in the inclusion of works by Handel, Lully, Emilio de' Cavalieri and Bach, but modern French music was represented only in symphonies by Edmé Deldevez (1817–97) and Louis-Théodore Gouvy (1819–98) and in Saint-Saëns's symphonic poem *Le rouet d'Omphale* (1871).¹⁴ All seats were subscribed, so visitors, students and so on stood little chance of getting in unless there were returns.¹⁵

A turning point in the history of French concert life arrived in 1852 when the young conductor Jules-Étienne Padeloup organised a group of musicians to form what became known as the Société des Jeunes Artistes du Conservatoire. Lasting nine years, the series featured 'classics' as well as recent compositions. Building on the precedent that Habeneck had established, this orchestra helped consolidate French appreciation for Viennese symphonic repertoire as well as that of Mendelssohn and Schumann. High costs and dwindling revenues, however, led Padeloup to rethink his approach, and in 1861 he began a series entitled the Concerts Populaires de Musique Classique.¹⁶ The concerts were held in a large amphitheatre, the Cirque Napoléon (subsequently renamed Cirque d'Hiver), and made orchestral music available to a much larger and socially diverse public. The Cirque's capacity of over 4,000 made it possible to charge lower admission prices, attract enormous crowds and earn a handsome profit. Although works by Gounod, Saint-Saëns and Berlioz received performances, the

majority of the repertoire was drawn from the German canon, with Beethoven taking pride of place.¹⁷

In the 1860s and 1870s the dominance of the Société des Concerts was further challenged by two other societies: the Concerts Colonne at the Théâtre du Châtelet (starting as Concert National, from 1873) and the Concerts Lamoureux (from 1881). D. Kern Holoman writes: 'The newer associations, being hungrier, were more progressive [than the Société des Concerts] on several fronts . . . they found programming niches the Conservatoire concerts seemed to overlook: Colonne . . . with Berlioz's *Damnation de Faust*; Lamoureux with Wagner.'¹⁸ Édouard Colonne's orchestra played works by Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Fauré, d'Indy, Gustave Charpentier (1860–1956), Debussy, Ravel, Charles-Marie Widor (1844–1937), Paul Dukas (1865–1935) and Emmanuel Chabrier (1841–94). While Charles Lamoureux's orchestra was pioneering in its advocacy of Wagner, it also gave some significant French premieres, including that of Debussy's *La mer* in 1905.

The Société Nationale de Musique (1871–1939) was an early fruit of the profound reaction to the Franco-Prussian War. It also marked a response to the foreign emphasis of the Conservatoire and other institutions, hence the decision of its founders Romain Bussine and Saint-Saëns to commission only French works. The original prospectus proclaimed a determination to 'favor the production and diffusion of all serious works; and encourage and bring to light . . . all musical experiments . . . [provided] they reveal high artistic aspirations'. In 1882 the patronage of the society was limited to French composers involved in the organisation. Membership was conditional upon submission of works and sponsorship of existing members. It was 'serious, albeit parochial'.¹⁹ Concerts came round at least six times a year, with financial constraints dictating that chamber programmes dominated.

The Société Nationale was vital to the rebirth of French music, and its importance led to political shenanigans surrounding Franck. D'Indy was the most influential member of his circle, which included the composers Ernest Chausson (1855–99) and Henri Duparc (1848–1933). He took over the presidency in 1886. D'Indy was an internationalist, so he proposed the inclusion of foreign works. Faced with a coup, Saint-Saëns left the organisation he had created.²⁰ The 'progressive' internationalists got their way. The first major beneficiary of the changes was Grieg, whose string quartet was performed at the first concert of the new season on 8 January 1887.²¹ Nevertheless, national music still benefited most. The majority of Franck's and Fauré's chamber works received their premieres with the Société.

Staged to celebrate the anniversary of the Revolution and attended by more than 30,000,000 people, the Exposition Universelle of 1889 (one of several held in Paris in the nineteenth century), which saw the creation of

the world's 'highest iron tower' (the Eiffel Tower), was one of the greatest confluences of art and technology in the nineteenth century.²² French composers' penchant for the exotic was excited by dancers and musicians from Java, and a pair of orchestral concerts introduced works by Russian nationalists. Debussy whiled away many hours in the Dutch pavilion, where he heard gamelan music (its influence can be heard most obviously in 'Pagodes' from *Estampes* for piano).

Wagner and 'Frenchness'

Paradoxically, Wagner's formidable presence in this period was as much an enabling force as a disabling one: his power to attract and repulse like no other composer galvanised French music. In his lavishly eccentric book *L'esprit de la musique française (de Rameau à l'invasion wagnérienne)*,²³ Pierre Lasserre devotes himself in successive chapters to Grétry; Rameau; 'The modern Italians'; Meyerbeer; Wagner, the poet; and Wagner, the musician. Even more peculiar is the fact the book was written during the First World War, when Wagner was excluded from musical venues. Lasserre provocatively denies Wagner's music its German-ness without going so far as to bestow upon him honorary French-ness, which 'would be to overlook huge differences of taste and style. With Frenchmen the musical rendering of things is subtle, sober, dainty, vibrant, lively, stripped and free from excess of matter, full of rhythm.'²⁴

Lasserre encapsulates some of the anxiety and excitement that France's extraordinary encounter with Wagner entailed. The defeat in the Prussian war had been accompanied by some provocative literary activity by Wagner, which made it very difficult for state-funded opera companies to mount his works, so for many years Wagner's music was almost forced underground; but French composers, poets and intellectuals happily lapped at the master's feet in Munich, Bayreuth and elsewhere. Wagner first came in through the salons, then gradually via new orchestras, and finally the sluices were opened late in the century when he was feted in the opera houses.

The *Revue Wagnérienne* (1885–8) appeared when the battle for Wagner was all but won. It is of great significance as enshrining an early blast of Symbolism in its publication of the eight Symbolist sonnets by Stéphane Mallarmé and others in January 1886, before Jean Moréas's *Le Figaro* manifesto. It is also 'an invaluable documented journal of Wagnerism in France'.²⁵

For French nationalists, Wagner was a positive force, a means of liberation, of aspiring to lofty ideals, even though the catalyst was foreign.

D'Indy headed the Wagner movement in the latter part of the century, and used his Schola Cantorum to promote his ideals.

There were constant fears that Wagner's influence would suffocate the revival of a true French music; yet even assiduously Wagnerian works, such as Franck's *Les Éolides* (1876), which was written in the wake of an encounter with the *Tristan* prelude, and Chausson's gorgeous orchestral song cycle *Poème de l'amour et de la mer* (1892), possess French qualities. In both the harmony caresses Wagner's *Tristan* and there are meandering chromatic bass lines, but the melodies are rhythmically regular for the most part and thus free from Wagner's musical prose, and there is a native quality of clarity and sensuality. Remarkably, Wagner's influence aided the rebirth of French music, and when French composers were ready to move beyond it, they did.²⁶

Franck and his school

Franck's family moved from his birthplace Liège in 1835 to Paris, where he studied with Antoine Reicha (1770–1836) for ten months (he taught Berlioz, Liszt, Gounod and George Onslow, 1784–1853). After his family secured citizenship he was admitted to the Conservatoire in 1837. Among his first important compositions are the *Trios concertants* (piano trios), Op. 1 (1842).

His stop-start career as a composer led to long periods of inactivity until quite late in his life, but more stable was his work as an organist, especially after his appointment to the newly built Sainte-Clotilde. He supplemented his income with teaching posts before he succeeded François Benoist (1794–1878) as professor of organ at the Conservatoire. By this time Franck was attracting disciples – the *bande à Franck*. Duparc, one of the most celebrated composers of *mélodies*, was prominent among them; he was joined by d'Indy, who entered Franck's organ class in 1872. These classes had great influence in propagating a certain musical style, including the acceptance of Wagner's and Liszt's influence; wide-ranging chromaticism, mostly within the major-minor system; a heightened expressiveness; a concomitant openness to the erotic; and cyclic form.

Franck's output before his emergence in the 1870s as a key figure included chamber music, the oratorio *Ruth* and various sacred works, but it is his music from 1871 onwards, starting with the oratorio *Rédemption* (1871–2, final version 1874), that has secured his position as one of France's greatest composers. His works include the symphonic poems *Les Éolides* and *Le chasseur maudit* (1882), the *Variations symphoniques* for piano and orchestra (1885), a Symphony in D minor (1888), a

Piano Quintet (1879), Violin Sonata (1886) and String Quartet (1889), the oratorio *Les béatitudes* (1879) and the opera *Hulda* (1885).

Martin Cooper chastises Franck for a lack of emotional restraint, which suggests stronger affinities with Germanic traditions than with the balance between expression and form that is so characteristic of Saint-Saëns.²⁷ One should also recall distinctly French moments, such as the exquisite use of canon in the last movement of the Violin Sonata, which, coupled with a melody of rare grace and expressive simplicity, invites comparison with remoter French traditions.

D'Indy is one of several composers who was almost fanatically attached to the example and personality of Franck. He composed extensively for the stage, orchestra, voices (sacred and secular works), chamber ensembles and keyboard. In addition, his wide-ranging and influential *Cours de composition musicale*, completed posthumously (1903–50), is one of the most influential pedagogic works of the period.

Saint-Saëns and his circle

In 1848 Saint-Saëns entered the Paris Conservatoire, where he studied organ with Benoist and composition and orchestration with Fromental Halévy (1799–1862). His early works reveal strong traces of the Viennese classics, not least in the opening of the Symphony in A (1850), which uses the fugal do–re–fa–mi of the finale of Mozart's 'Jupiter', albeit in a non-contrapuntal context. The second movement bathes in the melodic legacy of Beethoven's Elysian slow movements, especially that of the 'Emperor' Piano Concerto. His early works are consistent with much of what was to follow in the way they seize upon basic building blocks of music to shape movements. This in itself would not create a satisfying basis for a creative artist, but Saint-Saëns combined this facility in handling musical materials with a capacity to fuse these materials into irresistible gestures – fusions of, say, melody and texture, such as we encounter in the second movement of the Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor (1868).

With its birdsong, ponderous reworking of Offenbach's most famous can-can, exquisite cello solo for the swan and bursts of musical humour, Saint-Saëns's *Le carnaval des animaux* (1886) is a fine example of the composer's 'Parisian streak of urchin impudence'. Saint-Saëns refused to have it published in his lifetime, as he 'feared . . . it would harm his reputation as a serious composer'.²⁸

Early on, Saint-Saëns's circle embraced figures such as Gounod, Viardot, Rossini and Berlioz, whom he admired greatly. Throughout his early career Saint-Saëns espoused the musical avant-garde, for he brought

Liszt's symphonic poems and other works to the attention of French audiences and promoted Wagner.²⁹ In 1861 he became a teacher at the École Niedermeyer, where we find hints of a circle of younger composers growing up around him. First there was André Messager (1853–1929), who became a major composer of opera and ballet; then there was the sixteen-year-old Fauré, who remained a lifelong friend.

Fauré became a boarder at the École Niedermeyer in 1854 and stayed there for eleven years. It is believed that, alongside the counterpoint teaching, the unusual approach to the harmonisation of modal chant at the school shaped Fauré's compositional style.³⁰ A series of organist posts followed his departure from the school with the *premier prix* in composition for his *Cantique de Jean Racine* (1865). His organist posts culminated in his appointment as chief organist at the Madeleine in 1896. That he had finally moved into the forefront of French music, after years on the sidelines, is attested by his surprising appointment to the directorship of the Paris Conservatoire.

Fauré's compositional voice speaks little of the influence of Wagner and only occasionally of the German and Viennese classics so beloved of Saint-Saëns and Franck. Most of his output comprises song, solo piano works and chamber music. Exceptions include two operas, some highly characterful incidental music (including music for *Pelléas et Mélisande*, 1898) and a tiny number of orchestral works. Even the highly successful Requiem (1877, 1887–93), one of several sacred works, was conceived as a chamber work, and its scoring augmented to full orchestra only in 1900. His 'taste for musical purity and sobriety of expression' led him to condemn the more popular musical manifestations of his day, such as verismo.³¹ As well as in the Société Nationale, Fauré's place for many years was, therefore, the salon.

Ravel is generally paired with Debussy, often under the confusing heading 'impressionism', but many aspects of their work should encourage a clear separation of the two. Born in the Basque village of Ciboure, Ravel, like Debussy, entered piano and harmony classes at the Paris Conservatoire in 1891. Failing to win any prizes, he was dismissed in 1895, but he returned in 1897 to study composition with Fauré and counterpoint with André Gédalge (1856–1926). Although he had already composed several works that have remained in the repertoire, his academic career was dismal. Unlike Debussy, who worked well within the system, Ravel was an outsider. Nevertheless, his attachment to Fauré and the classicising nature of works like the String Quartet, Piano Trio and G major Piano Concerto bring him closer to Saint-Saëns's sphere.

Ravel's music encompasses both the opulence of the ballet *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912) and the leanness of his piano suite *Le tombeau de Couperin*

(1917), which looks back to the eighteenth century. His musical language evinces facets of ‘modernism’, including bitonality, but in many works he keeps a clear tonal trajectory in spite of his extensive use of dissonance, and his forms are often conservative. Melody is central to much of his music. He was, in short, quite distinct from Debussy and Stravinsky in the development of modern music, though his early classicising was prophetic of post-First World War neoclassicism. His output embraces piano music, opera, ballet, chamber works, vocal music, orchestral works (including the song cycle *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, inspired by Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire*) and choral music. Although he did not write a symphony, *Daphnis* is subtitled *Symphonie choréographique*, and is divided into three parts, like many French symphonies.

Debussy

Debussy came through the same system as many other French composers.³² He was educated at the Paris Conservatoire, tried for and finally won the Prix de Rome and joined the Société Nationale, which arranged the premiere of his crucially important *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* in 1894.³³ He eventually conquered the operatic firmament with *Pelléas et Mélisande* (first performed 1902), based on Maurice Maeterlinck’s Symbolist drama (1892).

Debussy’s early works – those composed before the breakthrough of the *Prélude* – tend to be treated rather casually in much of the literature, which is a shame, for many are highly original. They evince signs of radicalism in harmony and form. We may see the prolific succession of works from around 1892 to around 1914 as typical of a middle period, and his final works, from the summer of 1915, when he wrote the Cello Sonata, as a turning away from extra-musical preoccupations to a more abstract art.

Discussions of Debussy sometimes give the impression of him as highly intuitive; his intellectualism, if acknowledged, is likely to be envisioned as his experimentalism. However, his Conservatoire training emerges constantly, and the more one probes, the more interested Debussy seems to have been in compositional process. We catch this in his use of Golden Section; its frequent discovery in his music belies the notion that such close coincidences with Pythagorean form could have been accidental.³⁴ Then one finds passages of counterpoint in many works, including the early *Petite suite* (1889), where he ingeniously combines themes (as did Berlioz). There are also works in which he takes sonata form and subverts it, suggesting that he revoked formal musical rhetoric. In

his later music, for example 'Gigues' (1912, from *Images*), a layering of fast- and slow-moving music produces intricate rhythmic textures. One might hear an effortless unfolding of ideas, but behind them an acute intellect was at work devising new tonal formulations, rhythmic structures and so on.

Richard Parks explicates Debussy's harmonic language in terms of four separate genera: diatonic, whole-tone, octatonic and chromatic. In the song 'Recueillement' (1889, from *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*) he finds diatonic, octatonic and whole-tone collections, some separated by 'modulation'.³⁵ That Debussy integrates these diverse materials is undeniable; how he does it continues to excite theoretical debate.

Debussy's name sits alone, for it is hard to speak of a circle. Debussy's influence on other composers seems to have been – at least in the period under review here – superficial and sporadic. Aspects of his music reverberate, including some chord progressions, the whole-tone scale and his orchestral style. Olivier Messiaen (1908–92) sometimes seems closest in spirit. After the Second World War his contribution to modernism was better understood and, to a limited extent, emulated.

Survey of key genres and works

Chamber music

By the end of the century the string quartet had acquired a special status as the chamber music combination that composers aspired to conquer.³⁶ On the way we encounter two string quartets by Alexis de Castillon (1838–73), composed before 1867 (Op. 3 No. 1) and in 1868 (Op. 3 No. 2). Beethovenian roots are revealed in the adventurous part-writing, sudden shifts of tempo in movements and detailed motivic working. It was not until the renewal of instrumental genres in general that new forces were to shape the string quartet.³⁷

These forces included the adoption of cyclic techniques in such works as Franck's String Quartet (1889), with its rich polyphony and melodic expressiveness. Sylvio Lazzari (1857–1944) had already moved in this direction in his String Quartet (1888), albeit in a subtler manner than was soon to be the norm. He adumbrates the melodic content of the slow movement at the end of the development section of the first movement, and the rondo finale incorporates varied 'recollections of the preceding movements . . . transformed by the technique of variation'.³⁸

Other quartets of this period are either cyclic in the Franck manner or in the style of Castillon and the German tradition. Debussy's lack of enthusiasm for the German tradition is encapsulated in his overt application of Franck's cyclic principle in his String Quartet (1893). His precedent

was taken up in Ravel's String Quartet (1903), where we find Classical formal transparency alongside rhapsodic freedom and exotic textures, as well as the cyclic principle. In contrast, the somewhat austere and rather hard-written String Quartet of 1903 by Albéric Magnard (1865–1914) returns to Beethovenian roots.

Composers found mixed combinations liberating after the limitations of the string quartet. Among those that distinguish the flowering of French chamber music in the later nineteenth century, combinations with piano and strings are the most successful. Onslow often seems to expand outside the string quartet, as in his wide-ranging Piano Trio in F minor, Op. 83 (1853), whose first movement lives up to its marking of 'Allegro patetico'.

As often happened before the Société Nationale, Saint-Saëns gave the first performance of his Piano Trio No. 1 in F at one of his regular soirées in 1864. In every movement the composer hits upon a happy combination of melody and texture and rhythmic inventiveness, as in the hemiola rhythm of the principal theme of the sonata-form first movement. Long passages in one key contrast with sudden chromatic excursions, often for just a few bars; this comes to a head in the recapitulation when the second subject is initially presented in D \flat major. The slow second movement has a Baroque quality in its formality and double dotting, indicative of Saint-Saëns's preoccupation with the past. Beethoven's scherzos resonate in the third movement, and the rondo finale mixes Gallic refinement, particularly in the delicate interaction of main melody and accompaniment at the start, and virtuosity.

Fauré's Violin Sonata No. 1 in A (1876) is described by Robert Orledge as 'one of the first landmarks in the renaissance of French chamber music'.³⁹ The four-movement work was wildly successful and showed the general direction in which French chamber music was heading, not least in its virtuosity. Although the sonata is in A major, Fauré's elliptical harmonic and melodic style is in evidence. The piano alone adumbrates the principal theme at the start, playing a 'lesser' version of it, which is then given a more distinctive outline but with the same rhythm when the violin first enters in bar 23. Bars 1–22 end on the mediant C \sharp minor, and the violin enters on the harmonic progression c \sharp –D–E–D, which denies the dominant of A its voice-leading role, clouding one's sense of key. Fauré's oblique harmonic writing in part of the principal theme is summarised in Example 7.1.

Fauré was moving far from traditional harmonic practice, and his rhythmic structures were similarly innovative. The Scherzo, an Allegro vivo in 2/8, sparkles in a manner worthy of Mendelssohn. It plays with phrase lengths and groupings, 3–3–3–3–2–3–2–3; accents on the second quaver further enrich the scintillating rhythmic play, which is matched

Example 7.1 Fauré, Violin Sonata No. 1, first movement, bars 22–33, harmonic reduction

The image shows a musical score for Example 7.1, which is a harmonic reduction of Fauré's Violin Sonata No. 1, first movement, bars 22–33. The score is presented in two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff contains a series of chords, with bar numbers 22 through 33 indicated above the notes. The bass staff contains a single melodic line. Below the bass staff, Roman numerals are placed under each bar to indicate the harmonic structure: III, IV, V, IV, V, (vi), II, (v), and iIII.

harmonically by a descending harmonic progression from the tonic A major, down through triads of G major, F major, V^7 of $E\flat/V^7$ of A, and $E\flat$ major (bars 13–31). The rondo finale's main theme is one of Fauré's most haunting creations, whose whimsical character can best be grasped in performances that follow the marking 'Allegro quasi presto'.

Just a few years later the first work of Franck's chamber music triptych arrived, the Piano Quintet in F minor. The Société Nationale premiere had Saint-Saëns largely sight-reading the part. He felt a 'growing sense of horror . . . [the] emotional fervour offended his firmly-held principles of taste, balance and proportion', which led him to walk off the stage at the end, leaving the manuscript and its dedication to him on the piano, and the applause unacknowledged. The break with Saint-Saëns's concept of Frenchness was a deliberate move against 'the superficiality of French tradition'.⁴⁰ We hear this in the chromaticism, the escalating repetitions of themes (using model and sequence in the *Tristan* manner) and the incorporation of rhetorical devices associated with longing. In spite of the quintet's emotional fervour, the first movement is firmly in sonata form. It is bound together both by the type of motivic working one associates with the German tradition and by cyclic recurrences of themes, such as the reprise of the first movement's subsidiary theme in the closing bars of the finale.

We pass over chamber works by Fauré, Lalo, Saint-Saëns, Roussel, Franck, Florent Schmitt (1870–1958), Joseph-Guy Ropartz (1864–1955), Magnard, Gabriel Pierné (1863–1937), Castillon, Chausson, Guillaume Lekeu (1870–94) and others to consider two contrasting trios by Ravel and Debussy that represent their composers' mature styles. Ravel's Piano Trio (1914) was premiered by the Société Musicale Indépendante, which had been founded to promote music of all nations, styles and genres in 1909. It is in four movements, all with ties to Classical models. Nevertheless, this is a work of burgeoning modernism. One encounters it in the irregular time signatures, such as the 8/8 of the first movement (with the beats grouped 3–2–3), the changes of metre in the finale (5/4–7/4–5/4) and the superposition of metric structures in the Scherzo. Harmonics and other effects exhibit a concern for extending the sound canvas. And the harmonic style

is more dissonant than anything we find in Fauré and Debussy. Even so, Ravel maintains the Classical rhetoric of form and harmony. In spite of the fact that none of this music can be called 'tonal' in the sense of it being major or minor – his tonic notes are almost always approached through a flat leading note below or a semitone above (as in the Phrygian scale) – his bass lines are often adapted from common-practice tonality.⁴¹ At the end of the tonal argument of the first movement, in bars 77–96, we hear a bass line that proceeds in fifths, A–D–G–C, where the movement closes a few bars later (i.e. in C – whatever key this trio is 'in', it is not A minor!). This directional bass line, coupled with a level of consistency in rich harmonies – often compilations of thirds up to ninths, elevenths and beyond, generally favouring semitones rather than tones – gives Ravel's harmonic world a greater homogeneity than Debussy's.

Ravel's formal procedures are faithful to Classical and Romantic models. The first movement is in sonata form with a transition to the subsidiary theme based on a climactic drive to a varied restatement of the first subject, now *fortissimo*, in bars 17 ff., after the manner of the 'Eroica' and other first movements. A contrasted subsidiary theme is presented at bar 35, albeit in the tonic A mode. He follows Tchaikovsky's example in starting the recapitulation on the crest of a climax, allowing a highly reduced version of the transition to mark the start of the section, which brings us quickly to the second subject in bar 83. Rhetorical gestures proliferate in the finale, where the main theme is developed with repetition, variation and sequence, leading at the end of each section to climactic moments marked with string trills and piano chords, *toujours ff*. The cyclic work is held together by the use of the auxiliary figure of the main theme of the first movement in each succeeding movement.

Debussy's Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp (1916) is the second of what were to have been six sonatas; it comes between the Cello Sonata (1915) and Violin Sonata (1917). Its 'classical grace and elegance' have often been deemed to evoke Couperin, but as Edward Lockspeiser writes,

the clarity and the merciless precision of detail in both the solo and the ensemble writing is so poignantly expressive that the composer was himself forced to declare . . . that the music . . . is 'so terribly melancholy that I can't say whether one should laugh or cry. . . I am horrified by a deliberate disorder, which is nothing but aural bluff, and also by those eccentric harmonies . . . How much has to be explored, and discarded, before reaching the naked flesh of emotion!'⁴²

The 'deliberate disorder' might describe the almost cinematic montage of fragmentary material, with little of the ordered development of Ravel. Moreover, Debussy's thematic ideas are arabesques, with occasional short

motifs that stand out, such as the opening of the Interlude. Further enhancing the calculated disunity is the endlessly changing harmonic vocabulary, including seconds, triads, sevenths, occasional progressions reminiscent of the part-writing of common-practice tonality, parallel triads and seventh chords, whole-tone and other 'non-tonal' chords and more.

Debussy's forms are as elusive as his tonal structures. The first movement, *Pastorale*, conceals aspects of sonata form, but the fragmentary nature of the material and frequent tempo modifications make the boundaries hard to distinguish. At rehearsal cue 2 the music rests on the 'dominant', but in place of a development, the music flies off with an A^b major key signature, 'Vif et joyeux'. The return to the main tempo, 'Lento, dolce rubato', signals a recapitulation, but the material is presented in a reordered sequence. Parks considers the formal plan of the sonata as close to Debussy's ballet *Jeux* (1912) in that 'its structure builds through a series of contrasting passages and is more additive than hierarchic'.⁴³ In this Debussy epitomises an anti-rhetorical stance that is as far removed from the classicising forms of Saint-Saëns, Fauré and Ravel as his tonal structures are from his key signatures.⁴⁴

Instrumental music

The last decades of the nineteenth century were a great age of organ music. Saint-Saëns's *Trois rhapsodies sur des cantiques bretons* (1866) are indicative both of the pervasive influence of traditional music (and the exotic) in French music and of the composer's engagement with the organ. In the latter part of the first rhapsody, wide-ranging arpeggiations in the right hand for flute stops suggest orchestral aspirations in the writing. Other works by Saint-Saëns speak of the Bach revival, which affected many composers, and resulted in works like the two sets of *Trois préludes et fugues* (1894 and 1898). Saint-Saëns even emulates Baroque notation by omitting articulative markings.

The magnificent instruments being built by Aristide Cavallé-Coll (1811–99), with their seamless *crescendo* and orchestrally conceived stops, led to organ composers seeking the dimensions and impact of the symphony: Widor wrote ten organ symphonies (1872–1900), though it is the exuberant Toccata of Symphony No. 5 (1879) that is most often played today rather than the more obviously symphonic movements.

Franck's organ music, like that of Saint-Saëns, is permeated by Baroque influences. In the third of the *Trois chorals* (1890), in A minor, he begins with a toccata texture, which alternates with an exultant chorale. At the climax of the work the two ideas are combined. Before the long ascent to the transcendent climax, Franck incorporates a slow central

section in A major ripe with sliding chromaticism and harmonising a meditative melody for an oboe and trumpet stop combination. The influence of the Baroque chorale prelude is heard in numerous works; we find it, for example, in Saint-Saëns's often Brahmsian Piano Quartet in B \flat (1875). The use of chorales and chorale-like themes is also common and provided composers with a ready means to achieve ambitious closing summations.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century prominent composers such as Dukas, Roussel, Debussy and Ravel proved indifferent to the organ and the maintenance of its repertoire fell to more peripheral figures, including Guilmant and Louis Vierne (1870–1937).

In contrast, almost all composers contributed extensively to the piano literature. Curiously, given the interest Saint-Saëns displayed in Classical forms, almost all of his mature piano works are single-movement works or suites, such as the four-movement Suite in F, Op. 90 (1891), in which he time-travels back to the Baroque eighteenth century. The movements are Prélude et fugue, Menuet, Gavotte and a fugal Gigue. Harmonically and in other ways this is late nineteenth-century music, but the texture and characterisation are of the past. Such historical expressions abound: they include Debussy's *Pour le piano* of 1901 (Prélude, Sarabande, Toccata) and Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin* (Prélude, Fugue, Forlane, Rigaudon, Menuet, Toccata).

The avoidance of the Classical sonata in French piano music is apparent in Franck's output, which features two remarkable three-movement works with only vestiges of the sonata: *Prélude, choral et fugue* (1884) and *Prélude, aria et final* (1887). An exception was Dukas, whose Piano Sonata (1900) is one of the most ambitious works of its time. Dukas encompasses clear Classical forms in a work that stands 'on the threshold of dramatic music' in its intensity of expression and surging Romantic writing.⁴⁵

Fauré wrote prolifically for piano. Drawing on neither Classical forms nor the descriptive piano piece, his output is closely related to Chopin's, which is reflected in the fact that his mature piano works are mostly entitled 'Nocturne', 'Ballade', 'Prelude', 'Impromptu', 'Barcarolle' and 'Valse-caprice'. The relationship to Chopin is apparent in the Nocturne in B \flat , Op. 37 (1884), particularly in the syncopated chordal accompaniment and arpeggiated embellishment of the first cadence. As in Chopin's Nocturne in F, Op. 15 No. 2, the slowish opening tempo gives way to a dramatically contrasted faster central section. The subtlety of Fauré's style is shown in the Nocturne No. 6 in D \flat , Op. 63 (1894), where the melody is subjected to a delicate rubato by placing the second note, the quaver, of a dotted-crotchet-quaver figure in 3/2 on the second note of a triplet group,

Example 7.2 Fauré, Nocturne No. 6 in D \flat , Op. 63, bars 1–3

which makes the quaver arrive a fraction earlier than it would in 3/2 time without the triplets (see Example 7.2).

Nowhere is Fauré's individuality more marked than in his undermining of the major-minor system. The Nocturne No. 11 in F \sharp minor, Op. 104 No. 1 (1913), starts on a 6/4 chord. The first root-position tonic chord we encounter is in bar 5, approached by an E minor chord with added sixth. Such individual, oblique progressions are balanced at a few structural moments by often conventional dominant–tonic progressions, as in bars 7–8, where there is a perfect cadence in C \sharp minor.

Many of Saint-Saëns's piano works bear generic titles, such as *Six études*, Op. 52 (1877), *Valse canariote* (1890) and *Berceuse* for duet (1896). Some have descriptive titles – a characteristic even more manifest in Chabrier, Debussy and Ravel. Chabrier's *Dix pièces pittoresques* (1881) are an early harbinger of French modernism. Rollo Myers wrote that the 'astonishing thing about [them] is that, while appearing superficially to be little more than rather high-class *salon* music they are seen on closer examination to be a veritable treasure-house of new and ingenious harmonic and rhythmic *trouvailles*'.⁴⁶ *Pièce pittoresque* No. 4, 'Sous bois' ('In the woods'), opens, *Andantino*, with a murmuring semiquaver bass figure over which a widely spread melody unfolds with arpeggiated grace notes. Although it is harmonically simple, complexity is achieved through variety of articulation and metrical and rhythmic manipulation, resulting in cross-rhythms. The piano language of the early twentieth century is not far away.

Not long after Chabrier's influential work, Debussy wrote an early masterpiece entitled 'Clair de lune' as part of the *Suite bergamasque* (c. 1890, revised 1905). Its delicate manipulation of the 9/8 metre and diaphanous *pianissimo* textures are only part of its attraction; it also gives an early indication of the redundancy of common-practice voice leading

in his music; although many of its notes belong to $D\flat$ major, the leading note has lost its attraction. With it goes the resolving pull of the dominant seventh, a point demonstrated in bars 8–9, where a dominant seventh chord on $A\flat$ is followed by its tonic $D\flat$. At no point does one get a sense of this C leading to $D\flat$; rather, the emphasis is on the tonic-chord pitches F and $A\flat$ in bar 9. Here, in embryo, we find Debussy's system of chord succession, which makes him the most radical of French composers and offers a striking alternative to the atonality of the Second Viennese School, for Debussy still ends most of his works on a major or, less often, minor triad.

Debussy, like Ravel in his *Miroirs* (1905) and *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908), wrote piano music with descriptive titles. The two series of piano *Images* (1905, 1907), *Children's Corner* (1908), two books of twelve *Préludes* (1910, 1913) and several other works all seem to evoke something. Only in his two books of *Études* (1915) do abstract musical considerations consistently figure in the titles ('Pour les cinq doigts', 'Pour les tierces'); a similar title in the *Préludes* (Book 2, No. 11), 'Les tierces alternées', is a rare exception. Almost all aspects of Debussy's style are found in the piano preludes. In '... Voiles' ('Veils', Book 1, No. 2), the tonal world has been reduced to two pitch collections, the whole-tone scale on C in the outer sections of this ternary work and the black-note pentatonic collection in the B section. Musical 'development' is determined by rhythm, register, textural density, ostinato $B\flat$ and other parameters. In 'Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir' (*Préludes*, Book 1, No. 4) the referential pitch collection is an A major triad. A dominant on E is absent until the final cadence, but even though a V^7 chord is followed by I in A, there is no voice-leading connection between them, and a $D\sharp$ is prominent in the closing bars (Debussy preferred to use a tritone between scale-steps 1 and 4 in his scales rather than the perfect fourth of the major-minor modes, and in many works scale-step 7 is lowered, though not here). Elsewhere in this prelude chords move by parallel movement, such as the chromatic dominant sevenths over an A pedal in bars 3–4. Formally, the piece is articulated by a variation of the opening material a semitone below the tonic, which hints at a ternary form, but a straightforward categorisation is impossible.

Ravel's three-movement suite *Gaspard de la nuit* is based on poems by Aloysius Bertrand. The first, 'Ondine', recalls the influential water music of Ravel's *Jeux d'eau* (1901). 'Scarbo', the last movement, is notorious for its technical difficulty – an attribute that Ravel actively sought. It places his music in the tradition of Liszt and Balakirev. In contrast, there is a small number of classicising works, including the attractive *Sonatine* (1905).

The symphony

The immersion of French composers in Beethoven is attested by Gounod: 'Beethoven's symphonies I knew by heart . . . we [Gounod and Ingres] spent the greater part of the night deep in talk over the great master's works.'⁴⁷ Gounod wrote a pair of symphonies (1855) that paid tribute to Austro-German composers: there are elements of Haydn and Schumann, neither of which overshadow Gounod's 'Gallic sensibility'.⁴⁸ More distinctive is Bizet's tuneful Symphony in C (1855), composed at the age of seventeen while under Gounod's tutelage at the Conservatoire. It has been regularly performed since its first performance in 1935.

Between Saint-Saëns's Symphonies Nos. 2 (1859) and 3 (1886), which marked the turning point for the revival, there was considerable activity, especially in the traditions of the 'dramatic symphony' and 'ode symphony'. Composers included Benjamin Godard (1849–95), Augusta Holmès (1847–1903) and possibly the century's most successful female composer, Cécile Chaminade (1857–1944). Amid symphonies with titles like Godard's *Symphonie gothique* (1883) are conventional, abstract works.⁴⁹

With Saint-Saëns's Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 78, France started to produce works to rival production in Vienna and elsewhere. Many compositional choices native to the symphonic poem inform the symphony, which enable him to circumnavigate some challenging aspects of symphonic writing, and reveal his debt to Liszt. As Saint-Saëns remarks in his programme note for the premiere, the symphony follows the example of his Piano Concerto No. 4 (1875) and Violin Sonata No. 1 (1885) in being bipartite, though each part comprises two movements. Although the composer was impatient of 'endless resumptions and repetitions' (as he wrote in a programme note),⁵⁰ in the first movement there is a clearly articulated return to C minor and the principal theme at rehearsal cue M after several bars of dominant preparation (in other words the start of a recapitulation). However, after a reprise of the first subject and transition to the second, the music starts to transition to the D^b major Adagio. This undermining of the recapitulation recalls symphonic poems in which features of sonata form are cherry-picked. In his analysis of the triumphant finale, a movement swept along by the glory of the Romantic organ and a tinkling, four-handed piano part, Saint-Saëns makes no attempt in his programme note to fit his work into sonata form, preferring the language of the symphonic poem in his discussion of an 'episode, quiet and somewhat pastoral in character' (first at rehearsal cue V). In fact, the finale omits a full recapitulation of its famous principal theme; instead Saint-Saëns builds up the tension by a series of thematic and timbral transformations, bringing the work to a conclusion of unprecedented splendour.⁵¹

Saint-Saëns makes full use of cyclic procedures in this symphony. The first subject of the first movement, closely related to the opening of the *Dies irae* chant, becomes a triumphal hymn after the C major chords set the finale in motion, and the main theme of the slow movement forms part of the elaborate transition to the finale that interrupts the usual cycle of repeats in the Scherzo.

The next symphony to grace the world stage was less successful, but Lalo's *Symphony in G minor* (1886) has retained a modest place in the repertoire. The brief slow introduction of the symphony introduces the motto theme, which sounds shockingly like the opening of Brahms *Piano Concerto No. 2* (first performed 1881), and there are occasional echoes of his *Academic Festival Overture* (first performed 1881). Wagner is also present, especially in the chromatic harmony, but Lalo's brightly lit, rhythmic manner is pervasive.

More influential than either of these symphonies was Franck's *Symphony*, which became a seminal work for French music. It is in three movements with the central slow movement incorporating, as Franck put it, 'a very light and very gentle' central section, which belongs 'to the scherzo genre'.⁵² The symphony epitomises Franck's cyclic procedures. The opening motif of the introduction of the first movement is heard again, transformed, at the start of the slow movement, which is representative of 'the dense network of ideas that marks the *Symphony* from the outset'.⁵³ Even more remarkable is the manner in which the sonata-form finale recalls material from previous movements, which, as Franck put it to his students, 'do not appear as mere citations . . . they take on the role of new elements'.⁵⁴ Frequently reviled for its organ-like orchestration, the symphony seems to have been orchestrated in a way that perfectly realises the sculptural qualities of its melodic lines, and the manner in which these lines rise with nearly mystical yearning from the bass register to the treble is superbly realised in the instrumental mixture.

In 1890 Chausson contributed a decidedly Franckian symphony, and in 1896 Dukas concluded his *Symphony in C*, which also adopted the three-movement Franckian mould.⁵⁵ However, if we go back a few years we find a hybrid symphony that exudes more charm and invention than most: d'Indy's *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français* (*Symphonie cévenole*), Op. 25 (1886). The symphony is bound together by the cyclic use of a shepherd's song. D'Indy considered the scoring Wagnerian, but an unusual feature is the presence of a virtuoso piano part in an obbligato role.

Many more French symphonies were to follow, including four each by Magnard (c. 1890, 1893, 1896, 1913) – described by Malcolm MacDonald as 'the last significant examples of the Franck–d'Indy tradition',⁵⁶ albeit in

four movements with remarkably individual scherzos – and Roussel (1906, 1921, 1930, 1934). Some later works avoid the word ‘symphony’, often preferring ‘symphonic’ in some form. In its embracing of the three-movement design and the cyclic principle, and its incorporation of elements of a first movement, a scherzo and a rondo-like finale with a grand-slam conclusion, Debussy’s *La mer* (1905) is in the newly minted tradition of the French symphony.

Other orchestral music

The symphonic poem prospered as long in France as in Russia, Germany and other countries. Saint-Saëns composed four in a short period, including the remarkably colourful *Danse macabre* (1874) and the Lisztian *La jeunesse d’Hercule* (1877). Franck’s most ambitious contribution is *Le chasseur maudit* (1882), one of many nineteenth-century depictions of the wild hunt.

Debussy’s extraordinary *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* is based on Mallarmé’s poem and was originally intended to accompany a recitation. The poem evokes the erotic imaginings of a faun on a languorous afternoon. Lockspeiser describes it as a work that ‘reproduces the essentially fleeting qualities of memory, the myriad sensations of forgotten dreams pass through the score, and . . . what remains are the inexhaustible treasures of memory’s indefiniteness’.⁵⁷ This indefiniteness is expressed through the harmonic and rhythmic ambiguities of the opening flute solo and subsequent musical material; they are not resolved until the final bars of the work, when, unusually for Debussy, the E major triad is preceded by a dominant harmony – a dominant ninth (bar 105). As William Austin has demonstrated, this quality also extends to the form of the piece, whose ternary form defies precise specification; hence one reading gives section B¹ starting at bar 37 and B² at bar 55, while others find the subdivision at bar 31.⁵⁸

Pierre Boulez writes that ‘the flute in the *Faune* brings a new breath to the art of music . . . modern music began [with it]’. He describes how ‘form is turned on its head . . . lending wing to a supple and mobile expressivity’; and he notes the treatment of timbre, which prefigures twentieth-century music.⁵⁹ Debussy’s modernism climaxed in *Jeux*, a ballet commissioned by Serge Diaghilev. Herbert Eimert claims that ‘traditional theory is helpless in face of this work’. While motifs no longer work as motifs, but ‘play their part in the ornamental linear coloratura’, timbre ‘functions as another integral category of form’. It is as if *Jeux* is a precursor of 1950s electronic music. Debussy’s ‘Javanese counterpoint’ takes his gamelan-inspired heterophony to its furthest point in his music.⁶⁰

French orchestral music was strongly drawn to the exotic and picturesque. We find several rhapsodies and suites inspired by foreign lands. These qualities flourish in Lalo's *Rapsodie norvégienne* (1879); Saint-Saëns's *Suite algérienne* (1880); and Debussy's orchestral *Images*, especially the triptych's central piece, *Ibéria* (1910), which uses an extensive range of musical devices to evoke Spain. Ravel's fascination with musical travelogues and the exotic found early expression in the luxuriant textures and modal writing of his overture *Shéhérazade* (1898) and orchestral songs, also entitled *Shéhérazade* (1903), especially 'Asie'.

In comparison with the vitality of the symphony and symphonic poem in France during this period, the concerto presents a historical conundrum: dozens of concertos were written and performed, which suggests that the genre flourished, but very few have taken root in the repertoire. The point is illustrated by examining one very productive year, 1901, for we find a typical range of variations on the concertante theme here, all from composers who are little played today.

Théodore Dubois, Entr'acte et rigaudon de *Xavière* for cello

Baron d'Erlanger, Violin Concerto

Baron d'Erlanger, *Andante symphonique* for cello

Gabriel Pierné, *Poème symphonique* for piano and orchestra

Gabriel Pierné, *Morceau de concert* for harp

Henriette Renié, Harp Concerto⁶¹

Apart from several once very popular concertos by Lalo, including the *Symphonie espagnole* for violin and orchestra (1874) and the Cello Concerto (1877), the most durable contributions to the genre came from Saint-Saëns, who wrote five piano concertos, three violin concertos, two cello concertos and assorted works in (mainly) single movements with diverse titles.

The virtuoso concerto held sway for much of the nineteenth century in France, and its influence is felt in many of Saint-Saëns's works, but he avoided the extremes of this type in its skeletal form and overwhelming emphasis on the soloist. At the opposite extreme was the symphonic concerto, whose presence can be felt in the appellation of some of the works listed above and, for example, in the concertos of Henry Litolff (1818–91), whose five piano concertos are called *concertos symphoniques* (1844–69). Saint-Saëns shows the influence of both. The Piano Concerto No. 3 in E \flat (1869) is in three movements. The first modifies sonata form with a slow introduction that is repeated before the development; a cadenza directly follows this repeat. There are many changes of tempo from the development to the end of the first movement, but coherence is ensured by motivic development. From the outset the projection of virtuosity is never in doubt.

Vocal music

In the early nineteenth century French composers were mostly writing vocal compositions known by the designation *romance*. As the century progressed, and certainly by the fourth decade, it had been displaced by *mélodie*. The terms were often interchangeable, though *mélodie* suggests a greater degree of sophistication and freedom of form, especially in freeing itself from strophic setting, as in Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été* (1841, orchestrated and adapted for soprano in 1856); both imply 'the quality of graceful, tender lyricism'.⁶²

Saint-Saëns wrote numerous songs, most of which are now neglected, as are Gounod's. They are full of surprises, however, and should be considered alongside the *mélodies* of Fauré (totalling c. 100), Debussy (c. 90) and Duparc (13), which are held to epitomise the genre. In his *Chanson triste* (1872), Saint-Saëns enshrines the sensuality of the *mélodie* genre, alongside refinement, sensitivity to the nuances of the language and preference for the voice's middle range. Although the song is in C# major, it begins on a chord of A♯, which moves immediately to the tonic C#. This adds an exotic quality to the setting. In a later song, 'Guitares et mandolines' (1890), Saint-Saëns seems to echo Debussy's 'Mandoline' (1882) in the imitation of guitar playing and reference to popular song idioms.

Fauré's sensitivity to the poetry he set did not prevent his making judicious changes. Most writers consider 'Lydia' (c. 1870) his breakthrough song. Leconte de Lisle described Lydia's neck as 'fresh and pale as milk', which Fauré amended to 'so fresh and pale'.⁶³ The music has both simplicity and sophistication, and its beautiful melody evokes ancient Greece through its use of the tritone F–B♯ at the outset, as in the Lydian mode. At this stage, Fauré's music, though chromatic and often obliquely aligned with the tonic, nevertheless gives an unambiguous sense of F major. In his later songs, Fauré's language becomes ever more individual and remote from traditional harmonic practice.

For both Fauré and Debussy, the discovery of the Symbolist poet Paul Verlaine (1844–96) was crucial. Debussy's setting of 'C'est l'extase' in 1885–7 (revised in his *Ariette oubliées* of 1903) was followed in 1891 by Fauré in his *Cinq mélodies 'de Venise'* (see Example 7.3). The first two lines of the poem constitute a rhyming couplet:

C'est l'extase languoureuse, It is languorous ecstasy,
C'est la fatigue amoureuse, It is the fatigue of love,⁶⁴

which is closely reflected by Fauré in his ending of both lines with a falling major third. Fauré takes the tone of his setting from this opening. Characteristically, Debussy fragments the opening lines by differentiating 'languoureuse' and 'amoureuse', setting the latter to an erotic descending

Example 7.3 (a) Fauré, *Cinq mélodies 'de Venise'*, Op. 58 No. 5, 'C'est l'extase', bars 2–7
 (b) Debussy, *Ariettes oubliées*, 'C'est l'extase', bars 3–9

Adagio non troppo (♩=120)

dolcissimo *sempre dolce*

(a) Musical notation for Fauré's 'C'est l'extase'. It is in 3/4 time, E major, and begins with a *dolcissimo* marking. The melody is: C4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter). The lyrics are: C'est l'ex - ta - se lan-gou - reu - se, C'est la fa - ti-gue a-mou - reu - se.

rêveusement

(b) Musical notation for Debussy's 'C'est l'extase'. It is in 3/8 time, E major, and begins with a *p* marking. The melody is: C4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter). The lyrics are: C'est l'ex - ta - se lan-gou - reu - se, C'est la fa - ti-gue a-mou - reu - se.

semitone figure. This, in microcosm, offers an insight into the *mélodies* of the two composers, for while Fauré seems to create his songs out of a single affect, Debussy picks the poem apart, responding to individual lines with greater specificity. Debussy's development of a kind of 'moment' form is vividly characterised by Lockspeiser, who writes of his last set of songs, *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (1913): '[they consist] of an endless succession of tiny musical images – some no more than a trill, an arpeggio, or an unexpected change of rhythm'.⁶⁵ Fauré is fast detaching himself from the harmony of his more conservative contemporaries in 'C'est l'extase', but retaining dominant–tonic progressions at key points of articulation. Like him, Debussy retains the appearances of a key, E major, in that we find punctuating chords on the dominant and tonic, but here all resemblance to Fauré ends, for whereas we still find Fauré's harmony informed by tonal voice leading, Debussy's generally is not.⁶⁶

Fauré confined himself to four cycles in his final period: *La chanson d'Ève* (1910), *Le jardin clos* (1914), *Mirages* (1919) and *L'horizon chimérique* (1921). And the history of French song does not stop with Debussy and Fauré; Roussel, Poulenc, Ravel and others carried the torch well into the twentieth century.

Conclusion

It seems extraordinary that some writers can still write begrudgingly of the music of this period. Louise Cuyler patronises Saint-Saëns's Third Symphony as 'a pleasant novelty' and bemoans Franck's Symphony's 'excessive length . . . tiresome repetition and interminable sequential procedures'.⁶⁷ Charles Rosen and Carl Dahlhaus were as bad. Martin Cooper, many years previously, set a different tone, as Jonathan Dunsby and Richard Taruskin have done in recent years. Apart from Debussy and Ravel, it seems, however, that Franck, Saint-Saëns, Fauré and many contemporaries still have to struggle for recognition. For those who engage with

it, this emerges as an immensely satisfying period in French cultural history, when music soared freely with the other arts.

Notes

- 1 Camille Saint-Saëns, 'Charles Gounod', in *Camille Saint-Saëns on Music and Musicians*, ed. and trans. Roger Nichols (Oxford University Press, 2008), 117–21.
- 2 Charles J. Hall (ed.), *A Nineteenth-Century Musical Chronicle: Events, 1800–1899* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 201.
- 3 Beatrix Borchard, 'Viardot, Pauline', *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online (accessed 22 May 2014).
- 4 Saint-Saëns, 'Charles Gounod', 121.
- 5 See Barbara L. Kelly, 'Ravel, (Joseph) Maurice', *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online (accessed 22 May 2014); and Robert Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré*, rev. edn (London: Eulenburg, 1983), 21–2.
- 6 Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré*, 22–3.
- 7 Katharine Ellis, *Interpreting the Musical Past: Early Music in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 72–3.
- 8 Norman Demuth, *Vincent d'Indy, 1851–1931: Champion of Classicism* (London: Rockliff, 1951), 13–14.
- 9 See Katharine Ellis, 'Defining Palestrina', in *Interpreting the Musical Past*, 179–207.
- 10 Otto Luening, 'Varèse and the Schola Cantorum, Busoni and New York', *Contemporary Music Review*, 23 (2004), 13.
- 11 David Gilbert, 'Prix de Rome', *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online (accessed 22 May 2014).
- 12 See Alexandre Dratwicky, 'Les "Envois de Rome" des compositeurs pensionnaires de la Villa Médicis, 1804–1914', *Revue de musicologie*, 91 (2005), 99–193.
- 13 D. Kern Holoman, *The Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, 1828–1967* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 524.
- 14 See too D. Kern Holoman, *The Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, 1828–1967*, <http://hector.ucdavis.edu/sdc/> (accessed 22 May 2014).
- 15 Holoman, *The Société des Concerts*, 91.
- 16 Elisabeth Bernard, 'Jules Pasdeloup et les concerts populaires', *Revue de musicologie*, 57 (1971), 150–78.
- 17 James Harding, 'Paris: opera reigns supreme', in Jim Samson (ed.), *The Late Romantic Era: From the Mid-19th Century to World War I* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 115–16.
- 18 Holoman, *The Société des Concerts du Conservatoire*, 257.
- 19 Teresa Davidian, 'Debussy, d'Indy and the Société Nationale', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 11 (1991), 286–7.
- 20 James Harding, *Saint-Saëns and his Circle* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1965), 174.
- 21 Davidian, 'Debussy, d'Indy and the Société Nationale', 288.
- 22 Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (University of Rochester Press, 2005), 1.
- 23 Pierre Lasserre, *L'esprit de la musique française (de Rameau à l'invasion wagnérienne)* (Paris: Payot, 1917). In English this became *The Spirit of French Music*, trans. Denis Turner (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1921).
- 24 Lasserre, *The Spirit of French Music*, 203.
- 25 D. Hampton Morris, *A Descriptive Study of the Periodical Revue Wagnérienne Concerning Richard Wagner* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 79–80.
- 26 See, for example, Robin Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London: Eulenburg, 1979).
- 27 Martin Cooper, *French Music from the Death of Berlioz to the Death of Fauré* (Oxford University Press, 1951), 31.
- 28 Harding, *Saint-Saëns and his Circle*, 168–70.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 49, 83–4.
- 30 There is an excellent discussion of the links between Saint-Saëns and Fauré's music in *The Correspondence of Camille Saint-Saëns and Gabriel Fauré*, ed. Jean-Michel Nectoux, trans. J. Barrie Jones (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 20–7.
- 31 Jean-Michel Nectoux, 'Fauré, Gabriel', *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online (accessed 22 May 2014).
- 32 An illustrated chronology of Debussy's life is located at www.debussy.fr/encd/bio/bio1_62-82.php (accessed 22 May 2014).
- 33 For complete concert listings of the Société Nationale and Société Musicale Indépendante, see Michel Duchesneau, *L'avant-garde musicale et ses sociétés à Paris de 1871 à 1939* (Sprimont: Mardaga, 1997), 225–327.
- 34 See Roy Howat, *Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 35 Richard S. Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 93–8.

- 36 For a survey of chamber music in this period, see Joël-Marie Fauquet, 'Chamber music in France from Cherubini to Debussy', in Stephen E. Hefling (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1998), 287–314; Serge Gut and Danièle Pistone, *La musique de chambre en France de 1870 à 1918* (Paris: Champion, 1978).
- 37 See Fauquet, 'Chamber music in France', 291–302, 307–11.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 307.
- 39 Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré*, 61.
- 40 Stephen Studd, *Saint-Saëns: A Critical Biography* (London: Cygnus Arts, 1999), 136.
- 41 For a detailed study of modal usage in French music, see Henri Gonnard, *La musique modale en France de Berlioz à Debussy* (Paris: Champion, 2000).
- 42 Lockspeiser is quoting a letter to Robert Godet of 4 September 1916: *Debussy, The Master Musicians*, rev. edn (London: Dent, 1980), 179–80.
- 43 Parks, *The Music of Debussy*, 126.
- 44 For a detailed study of Debussy's late style, see Marianne Wheeldon, *Debussy's Late Style* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).
- 45 Simon-Pierre Perret and Marie-Laure Rago, *Paul Dukas* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 416–17.
- 46 Rollo Myers, *Emmanuel Chabrier and his Circle* (London: Dent, 1969), 33.
- 47 Charles Gounod, *Autobiographical Reminiscences, with Family Letters and Notes on Music*, trans. W. Hely Hutchinson (New York: Da Capo, 1970), 62.
- 48 James Harding, *Gounod* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973), 90.
- 49 See Brian Hart, 'The French symphony', in A. Peter Brown and Brian Hart (eds), *The Symphonic Repertoire*, vol. IIIB: *The European Symphony from ca. 1800 to ca. 1930: Great Britain, Russia, and France* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 562–5.
- 50 Saint-Saëns's programme note is reproduced in *ibid.*, 566–70.
- 51 For a detailed reading of the symphony, see *ibid.*, 565–82.
- 52 Franck's concert note is given in *ibid.*, 594–6.
- 53 Timothy Jones, 'Nineteenth-century orchestral and chamber music', in Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter (eds), *French Music since Berlioz* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 84.
- 54 Hart, 'The French symphony', 596.
- 55 See *ibid.*, 611–36.
- 56 Malcolm MacDonald, 'Magnard, (Lucien Denis Gabriel) Albéric', *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online (accessed 22 May 2014).
- 57 Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 185.
- 58 William W. Austin (ed.), *Claude Debussy, Prelude to 'The Afternoon of a Faun': An Authoritative Score, Mallarmé's Poem, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism and Analysis*, Norton Critical Scores (New York: Norton, 1970), 71–5.
- 59 Pierre Boulez, 'Entries for a musical encyclopaedia', in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, ed. Paule Thévenin, trans. Stephen Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 267.
- 60 Herbert Eimert, 'Debussy's "Jeux"', *Die Reihe*, 5 (1961), 4, 19, 22.
- 61 Michael Stegemann, *Camille Saint-Saëns and the French Solo Concerto from 1850 to 1920*, trans. Ann C. Sherwin (Portland, OR: Amadeus, 1991), 284–5.
- 62 David Tunley and Frits Noske, 'Mélodie', *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online (accessed 22 May 2014).
- 63 Graham Johnson, *Gabriel Fauré: The Songs and their Poets* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 63–4.
- 64 Translation by Arachne, <http://bonne-chanson.blogspot.com/2009/11/cest-lextase.html> (accessed 22 May 2014).
- 65 Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 140–1.
- 66 For a detailed discussion of the two settings see Arthur B. Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 42–50.
- 67 Louise Cuyler, *The Symphony* (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park, 1995), 150, 153.