

of such an appeal to the past should certainly not be underestimated. Yet the value of this CD lies most perhaps in those moments within the Reimann and Wolf performances when the artists transcend their own categories and succeed in releasing Eichendorff's rampant imagination into the present.

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### Fauré

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- CD 1 The Complete Songs Vol. 1 Au bord de l'eau  
 CD 2 The Complete Songs Vol. 2 Un paysage choisi  
 CD 3 The Complete Songs Vol. 3 Chanson d'amour  
 CD 4 The Complete Songs Vol. 4 Dans un parfum des roses

Stella Doufexis, Felicity Lott, Geraldine McGreevy, Jennifer Smith *sop*; John Mark Ainsley, Jean-Paul Fourchécourt *ten*; Christopher Maltman, Stephen Varcoe *bar*; Ronan O'Hora, Graham Johnson *pf*

Hyperion CDA67333 (Vol. 1: 69 minutes: DDD), CDA67334 (Vol. 2: 68 minutes: DDD), CDA67335 (Vol. 3: 73 minutes: DDD) and CDA67336 (Vol. 4: 67 minutes: DDD)

Notes and translations included. £13.99 each

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Hyperion's release of a series dedicated to Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924) honours the legacy of the composer whose sixty-year career produced over one hundred *mélodies* now at the core of French vocal literature. Didactic as well as artistic, *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* joins other sets in the Hyperion French Song Edition, such as those devoted to Emmanuel Chabrier and Ernst Chausson, which offer aural portraits as enlightening as they are compelling. Common to these recordings, as well as Hyperion's forty-disc *Franz Schubert: The Complete Songs*, is Graham Johnson, whose sterling pianism distinguishes every track.

For casual listeners and the newly initiated, *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* amply demonstrates there is more to the composer's art than the notorious 'Après un rêve' (1877; Vol. 2) and the justly famous 'Clair de lune' (1887; Vol. 2), 'En sourdine' (1891; Vol. 1), and 'Soir' (1894; Vol. 4).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Hyperion's four-disc set also offers a multifaceted view of Gabriel Fauré himself. Along with the sixty songs from the first two phases of his career, as well as the cycles of his later years, a number of rarities provide personal glimpses.

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<sup>1</sup> Dates are from the catalogue in Jean-Michel Nectoux's indispensable *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life*, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 525–58, as opus numbers and publication years may mislead; volume numbers refer to the recordings under review.

Among these are the charming 'Puisque j'ai mis ma levre' (1862; Vol. 3), 'Tristesse d'Olympio' (c. 1865; Vol. 3), and 'L'aurore' (c. 1870; Vol. 4), which reveal a nascent artist who, under the tutelage of Camille Saint-Saëns, developed his skills and confidence by daring to set the pre-eminent literary figure of his day, Victor Hugo. An arrangement of the carol, 'Il est né, le divin enfant' (1888; Vol. 2), summons an image of the longtime choirmaster and organist at the Parisian church of the Madeleine, while the 'Vocalise-étude' (1906; Vol. 4) reminds of the broad-minded composition professor who taught Maurice Ravel and Nadia Boulanger. 'C'est la paix' (1919; Vol. 1) sketches the harried Conservatoire director whose office obliged him to set the winning entry from a *Le Figaro* poetry competition at the end of the Great War. And selections from Fauré's incidental music to *Shylock* (1889; Vol. 3), *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1893; Vol. 3) and *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1898; Vol. 4) depict a thoughtful musician taking tentative steps toward the operatic stage, a path that led to success with *Pénélope* (1913). Of course, there is much more here that instructs and touches.

For serious musicians and committed Fauréans, *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* profiles a remarkable creative life. Unlike the comprehensive chronological compilation of recordings made in the 1970s by Elly Ameling, Gerard Souzay and Dalton Baldwin that was released on CD by EMI France (ZDMD 7640792) in 1991, or the more eclectically ordered series by Sarah Walker, Tom Krause and Malcolm Martineau that began to appear in the mid-1990s on CRD Records (CRD 3476, CRD 3477, CRD 3478, CRD 3479), this Hyperion set from 2005 under review here groups Fauré's songs by four different themes, each chronologically sequenced. Consequently, it provides four fascinating perspectives on the composer's artistic evolution.

Volume 1, *Au bord de l'eau: At the water's edge*, named for the *mélodie* of 1875, features works with references to tears, as well as the sea. The title of Volume 2, *Un paysage choisi: A chosen landscape*, comes from the opening line of *Clair de lune* (1887) and signals songs with natural scenes. Volume 3, *Chanson d'amour: Song of love*, gathers vignettes such as its title song (1882), which range from naïve affection to ecstatic passion. Finally, Volume 4, *Dans un parfum de roses: Amid the scent of roses*, derives its appellation from the eighth *mélodie* of *La chanson d'Eve* (1910) and presents songs that mention scents and flowers.

Of course, other groupings of Fauré's *mélodies* are possible – perhaps around the themes of 'woman', 'night', 'dreams', 'time', or 'transcendence' – and some placements seem personal; *Lydia* (c. 1870), with its exquisite balance of intense ardour and Parnassian reserve, as well as its references to a hidden lily and its divine fragrance, could fit in Volumes 3 or 4, as well as 2. Nevertheless, Graham Johnson's imaginative scheme illuminates essential aspects of Fauré's personal aesthetic and consistent sources of inspiration that we have always sensed, but never heard so well expressed.

Conspicuous within *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* is the unique nature of the composer's repertoire. Although Fauré's *oeuvre* belongs to a venerable tradition that includes contributions by Gounod, Debussy, Ravel and Poulenc, it differs significantly from their music in style and substance. And while his *mélodies* may appear in recital alongside works by Schubert or Schumann, they differ profoundly in character and content. Indeed, the vocal demands essential to the authentic performance of Fauré's *mélodies* are strikingly different from those of lieder. Thus, *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* may offer the most to those interested in the Fauréan vocal art, and particularly those who would interpret Fauré's music.

Fauré often wrote for singers he knew, tailoring melodic lines to their strengths and limitations. In later years these included professionals such as Jane Bathori

(1877–1970), Claire Croiza (1882–1946), and Charles Panzéra (1896–1976). However, gifted amateurs inspired and interpreted him through much of his career; these included Emma Bardac (1862–1934), who later married Debussy, and Maurice Bages (1862–1908), a young government official who introduced some of Fauré's most celebrated works, including *Cinq mélodies de Venise* (1892) and *La bonne chanson* (1894). Fauré's admission, 'It is amateurs who understand and express me best,' indicates he felt the technique and attitudes of contemporary opera singers – there were few art song specialists then in Paris – distorted his music.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, only a very few of Fauré's *mélodies*, such as 'Le voyageur' (c. 1878; Vol. 2) and 'Fleur jetée' (1884; Vol. 3), demand 'operatic' amounts of volume and presence, and none really require the virtuosity of *bel canto* or the power of *déclamation lyrique*. And while many songs received their public premieres at concerts of the Société Nationale de Musique – held in venues such as the Salles Erard, Gaveau and Pleyel – most of Fauré's *mélodies* were composed with more intimate spaces in mind – the artistic salons of the Princesse de Polignac and Comtesse Greffulhe, among others, where those amateurs felt more comfortable.<sup>3</sup> In such salons, the type of projection required for large auditoria was unnecessary, and because the singers were much closer to their audiences – physically as well as personally – a wide range of nuance was customary.

Another factor in authentic performance of Fauré is vibrato. So basic to other styles of singing that it becomes subconscious, vibrato is too much in a Fauréan *mélodie* if more than a touch on long tones, and wholly inappropriate if it becomes a constant waver or sentimental warble. Fauré's early interpreters did not over-use it, partly because of limited technical training, but more out of respect for the melody and poetry of his songs.

The voices of those amateurs varied greatly by type.<sup>4</sup> Hyperion and Graham Johnson clearly have recognized this, for in *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* we hear eight singers instead of just two. Among interpreters of Fauré, the richer timbres of sensitive mezzos and altos seduced in smaller rooms where strong lyric and coloratura sopranos might overwhelm. Similarly, clear tenors and agile baritones persuaded where their brighter, bolder brethren would exaggerate.

Beyond the factors of volume, vibrato and vocality, those of rhythm and tempo are integral to the interpretation of Fauré's *mélodies*. For instance, the 'melodic' and 'full' types of rubato are foreign to authentic Fauréan style, as Claire Croiza and Marguerite Long, among others, have attested.<sup>5</sup> Rather, fidelity to notated durations, plus a steady tempo, are essential to realizing the rhythmic complexities Fauré wove into his aural fabrics. And the 'long line', so often said to characterize Fauré's music, also arises from faithful adherence to the score.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to what one may imagine, it does not arise from a performer's suppressed caesuras and

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré: His Life Through His Letters* (London: Gordon and Breach, 1984): 252.

<sup>3</sup> See Cécile Tardif, 'Fauré and the Salons', in *Regarding Fauré*, ed. and trans. Tom Gordon (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1999): 1–14.

<sup>4</sup> See Jean-Michel Nectoux, 'Fauré: Voice, Style and Vocality', in *Regarding Fauré*, ed. and trans. Tom Gordon (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1999): 369–402.

<sup>5</sup> Hélène Abraham, *The Singer as Interpreter: Claire Croiza's Master Classes*, ed. and trans. Betty Bannerman (London: Gollancz, 1989), 79–80; Marguerite Long, *At the Piano with Fauré*, trans. Olive Senior-Ellis (London: Kahn and Averill, 1980): 66.

<sup>6</sup> Long, *At the Piano with Fauré*, 67–8; Don Campbell, *Master Teacher: Nadia Boulanger* (Washington: Pastoral Press, 1984): 108.

subdued cadences, or from elided phrases and extraneous portamenti. Instead, true Fauréan breadth emerges from inner momentum guided by unfolding expressive meaning.

Perhaps most crucial to the art of singing Fauré are diction, text, and expression. Claire Croiza declares that 'Fauré loved the poems he set to music',<sup>7</sup> so it is no exaggeration to say that poetry is paramount in a Fauréan *mélodie*, and *must* be in performance. Clear tone, proper pronunciation and perceptible punctuation are essential to communicate its subtle shades of meaning, as well as an awareness of historical context.

A distinctive dialect of spoken French arose among Parisian upper classes and the bourgeois who emulated them toward the end of the nineteenth century, and its presence remains alive within authentic performance of Fauré's *mélodies*. The semiologist Roland Barthes, who studied with Charles Panzéra, tells us that his teacher 'gave a mellow sheen to his consonants and an extreme purity to his vowels, which allowed him to substitute for vulgar expressivity of feeling a kind of musical clarity which had ... a truly sovereign nature'.<sup>8</sup> Barthes also reports that Panzéra recommended 'skating over' consonants, rather than over-articulating them, to enable the savouring of vowels in all their diversity, and cultivated a certain natural physicality of voice, a kind of vocal friction Barthes terms 'grain', all of which contributed to a style of singing closer to the ordinary speech of the day.<sup>9</sup> Indeed Barthes even goes so far as to assert: 'What has always struck me in Panzéra's voice is that through a perfect mastery of all the nuances imposed by a good reading of the musical text – nuances which require knowing how to produce *pianissimi* and extremely delicate "dis-timbres" – this voice was always secured ... Panzéra always sang with his entire body ... with the naked voice.'<sup>10</sup> Recordings of Panzéra's interpretation of Fauré's *La bonne chanson*, as well as *L'horizon chimérique*, which was dedicated to him, document a most sensitive, differentiated manner.<sup>11</sup>

The 'good reading' to which Barthes refers goes beyond rendering the four types of French rhyme (*pauvre, suffisante, riche* and *léonine*), as well as the assonant and alliterative relations so essential to the 'melodiousness' of the language, to recognizing the original poetic metric schemes that carry meaning by stressing and relating certain words, which may or may not correspond to musical emphases and connections in Fauré's songs.<sup>12</sup> Poetry was cultivated in the salons of Fauré's day, often recited in alternation with musical selections, and was more ubiquitous in Parisian daily life than we might imagine, appearing regularly in newspapers, journals and books. Thus, familiarity with its means surely is prerequisite.

Above all, a 'good reading' depends on a thorough grasp of the text and its poetic message, along with its subtle implications. While convincing realization of Fauré's *mélodies* may seem daunting, thoughtful preparation enables

<sup>7</sup> Abraham, *The Singer as Interpreter*, 80.

<sup>8</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Phantoms of the Opera' [Paris, 1974], in *The Grain of the Voice*, trans. Linda Coverdale (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985): 185.

<sup>9</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice' [Paris, 1972], in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985): 272–6.

<sup>10</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Music, Voice, Language' [Paris, 1977], in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985): 283–4.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Panzéra, *The Master of French Song*, Dutton Laboratories CDBP9726.

<sup>12</sup> See David Hunter, *Understanding French Verse: A Guide for Singers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

transcendent performances.<sup>13</sup> Many within *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* show such preparation, and some are superb.

Among the latter are the ten exceptional offerings of Jean-Paul Fourchécourt. 'Mai' (1862?; Vol. 2) has a relaxed warmth, with Fauré's dynamic and tempo changes executed without exaggeration. A reading of 'Dans les ruines d'une abbaye' (c. 1865; Vol. 4), which curiously duplicates a song sung by Stephen Varcoe in Volume 2, is led faster than Fauré's *Allegro non troppo* would suggest, so much so that its tender allegory about birds in love nearly becomes anxious. Nevertheless, Fourchécourt admirably acquits himself under the circumstances via clear pronunciation and punctuation. By contrast, his rendition of 'Lydia' (c. 1870; Vol. 2) is among the slowest I have ever heard. Discrete differentiation of the vowels and meaningful colouration of telling words, as well as extraordinary breath control, sustain its long, lyrical lines. Fourchécourt's 'Aubade' (c. 1873; Vol. 4) and 'Nell' (1878; Vol. 3) boast eloquent lightness and finesse, while his interpretation of 'Chanson d'amour' (1882; Vol. 3) conveys the text's winsome infatuation by caressing its phrases without affectation. 'Les presents' (1887; Vol. 3) attains its earnest languor through pursuit of clarity and simplicity, as does 'Soir' (1894; Vol. 4), both achieving dramatic climaxes through respect for notated durations and dynamics, which lets the songs 'sing' for themselves. Finally, Fourchécourt's spirited 'Chanson' and 'Madrigal' from the incidental music to *Shylock* (1889; Vol. 3), surrounded by several instrumental selections arranged for piano duet, evoke some regret that he was not invited to interpret Fauré's well-known re-arrangement of *La bonne chanson* for string quintet, piano and voice (1898), which is inexplicably absent here.

Other performances within *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* elicit somewhat less enthusiasm, remaining respectable readings of Fauré's music rather than penetrating realizations of the composer's intentions. In particular, concerns for timbral, dynamic and linear continuity, as well as ample vocal sonority, seem to have kept some of Fauré's song cycles, including *Cinq Mélodies de Venise* (1892; Vol. 1), *Mirages* (1919; Vol. 1), *Le jardin clos* (1914; Vol. 2), and *La bonne chanson* (1894; Vol. 3), from their revealing their full potential. For instance, Felicity Lott's rendition of 'Mandoline', from the Venetian songs, does not attain the insouciant frivolity it might, while 'En sourdine' lacks some of the voluptuous seductivity it can impart, and 'Green' its fragile fervour, through pursuit of a traditionally 'beautiful' tone. Similarly, the mystery of 'A Clymène' and the passion of 'C'est l'extase' are attenuated because their texts are under-animated and under-differentiated. Generous, pulsing vibrato occasionally detracts from Stephen Varcoe's presentation of 'Mirages' (1919; Vol. 1), while degrees of distance and impersonality limit the intimacy of several songs in Jennifer Smith's reading of 'Le jardin clos' (1914; Vol. 2). And though Christopher Maltman's interpretation of *La bonne chanson* offers sharp diction, his brawny, burnished sound occasionally obscures the vulnerability and self-delusion of Paul Verlaine's poetry. In these and other of Fauré's cycles, the singer is obliged to become an actor in order to realize

<sup>13</sup> See Charles Panzéra, *L'Art vocal: 30 leçons de chant* (Paris, 1959); Charles Panzéra, *50 Mélodies françaises: leçons de style et d'interprétation* (Brussels, 1964); and Pierre Bernac, *The Interpretation of French Song* [1970], trans. Winifred Radford (New York, 1978), for illuminative sources. Recordings made in the 1950s and 1960s by Camille Maurane, a student of Claire Croza and a voice professor at the Paris Conservatoire, offer models of such sensitive interpretation; regrettably, those which have been reissued on CD more recently remain rare.

the drama that binds the *mélodies* together, a quality that does not always emerge convincingly in these performances.

A few selections in *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* unintentionally highlight essential aspects of Fauréan style. For instance, over-stressed consonants, particularly the sharply-rolled 'r,' may be heard in 'Seule' (1871; Vol. 1) and 'Tristesse' (1873; Vol. 2). Clearer punctuation may have been desirable in 'Sylvie' (1878; Vol. 3), while a steadier tempo and firmer pulse may have been called for in 'Accompagnement' (1902; Vol 1). And sharper dynamic level distinctions would have been welcome elsewhere. Nevertheless, Fauré is justly served by this collection.

Indeed, performances of certain characteristic *mélodies* represent the composer quite laudably in *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs*. Jean-Paul Fourchécourt's interpretation of 'Lydia' (c. 1870; Vol. 2), a work Jean-Michel Nectoux describes as one of Fauré's 'first truly personal songs'<sup>14</sup> and Felicity Lott's rendition of 'Le Secret' (1881; Vol. 3), a composition Maurice Ravel considered 'one of the most beautiful songs of Fauré',<sup>15</sup> are among the most moving of the set. Also estimable are the offerings of 'Au cimetière' (1888; Vol. 1), by John Mark Ainsley, 'Prison' (1894; Vol. 2), by Christopher Maltman, 'Le pays des rêves' (1884; Vol. 4), by Geraldine McGreevy, 'Dans la forêt de septembre' (1902; Vol. 2), by Stephen Varcoe, and 'Le don silencieux' (1906; Vol. 3), by Jennifer Smith, all of which demonstrate that French need not be one's first language in order to interpret Fauré. Stella Doufexis is never heard in solo song within *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs*, but her delivery in the duets 'Tarentelle' (c. 1873; Vol. 1) and 'Puisqu'ici bas' (c. 1873; Vol. 2) with Geraldine McGreevy is brilliant, leaving one longing to hear more. Obviously the distribution of emblematic and exemplary performances in *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* makes recommendation of a single CD difficult. Fauréans, as well as institutions, will want all four, but the inquisitive may wish to consider Volumes 2 and 3.

Graham Johnson's accompaniments on *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* are models of Fauréan discretion and care. In particular, his ability to reveal the contrapuntal strands that guide the composer's luminescent harmonies – transmitted by fine recording of the piano – is admirable. Johnson's irreproachable musicality, as well as his demonstrated grasp of the literature,<sup>16</sup> may lead some to wonder why more engaging vocal recordings were not coaxed in a few instances. Perhaps singers who would record Fauré's *mélodies* today may need more sensitive microphone technique, perhaps emulating the 'close' approach of 'pop' singers, with appropriate adjustments made by recording engineers, to convey greater amounts of vocal nuance and integration with the piano that the composer's music requires.

Johnson provides copious notes in each CD booklet, including an account of the volume's theme, a timeline that highlights its *mélodies* in the context of the composer's life, and complete texts and translations that specify the date, dedication, key, metre, and tempo of each selection. While those new to Fauré's music surely will appreciate the accompanying discussions, some connoisseurs may be annoyed by certain opinions expressed in the first volume's notes, such as: 'In comparison with Schubert's lieder output ... Fauré's devotion to the medium seems rather less

<sup>14</sup> Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré: His Life Through His Letters*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Maurice Ravel, 'Les Mélodies de Gabriel Fauré', *La Revue musicale* 4/11 (1922): 24.

<sup>16</sup> Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes, *A French Song Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

ardent' (p. 2); 'The whole of his career may well seem to be a failure to those who do not value chamber music and song. Where are the successful operas, the symphonies, and the vast choral works which are the mark of an important figure?' (p. 4); and 'Fauré's own opera *Pénélope* (1907–1912) embraced a phlegmatic Hellenism' (p. 32) – which remind of the mid-century English-language writing on Fauré that patronized as it praised. Assertions that Fauré had 'relatively limited success in French musical politics' and 'never cared to master the Parisian networks as well as other aspiring composers' (p. 2) are not true. And phrases such as 'The composer, already merciless in terms of adapting poetry to his musical needs, cuts the second and fourth of Gautier's strophes' or 'shamelessly cuts Gautier's text' (pp. 12 and 14) communicate inaccurate views of Fauré's art and creative process. Myths and misconceptions – however innocent or innocuous – in a project of such obvious pedagogical value diminish its impact ever so slightly. In all fairness, however, few such instances may be found in the notes for Volumes 2–4 of *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs*, which feature greater objectivity and genuine enthusiasm.

The music of Fauré's late manner, written during the first quarter of the twentieth century, may be the most intriguing of his *œuvre*, but remains the most infrequently heard.<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Smith's reading of 'La chanson d'éve' (1910; Vol. 4), a cycle that re-imagines the first woman alone in the Garden, and Christopher Maltman's rendition of *L'horizon chimérique* (1919; Vol. 1), which metaphorically explores advancing age and the unknown beyond, provide persuasive evidence of the expressive potential within this segment of the composer's repertoire and suggest that singers in search of new challenges may wish to start there. In this way, *Gabriel Fauré: The Complete Songs* offers a vital contribution to the ongoing re-imagining of Fauré, as well as a splendid opportunity to become acquainted with his allusive art.

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### Moscheles

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<sup>17</sup> James William Sobaskie, 'The Emergence of Gabriel Fauré's Late Musical Style and Technique', *Journal of Musicological Research* 22/3 (2003): 223–75.