

ARTICLES

'Striptease' as Ideology

Steven Huebner
McGill University

Abstract

Vincent d'Indy's *Istar* (1897), a set of variations for orchestra, commands attention for its unusual ground plan: the variations proceed from complex textures to simple ones. Analysis reveals how certain melodic and harmonic details unfold at larger structural levels. *Istar's* symmetries and organic construction are set in the context not only of previous variation sets but also of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, a symphonic poem of similar dimensions that was premiered shortly before d'Indy composed his piece. Resemblances between the two works suggest that d'Indy may have intended *Istar* as a response to Debussy. Juxtaposition of Debussy and d'Indy provides insight into the different connotations of modernity at the *fin de siècle*. *Istar's* programme and compositional strategies reflect d'Indy's firm historicism and commitment to tradition. Yet the work was received as experimental and daring in its day. In its materials *Istar* paradoxically illustrates a 'backward progression': its stylistic allusions move backward in time, yet the tonal direction aims forward towards the concluding tonic. Such idiosyncrasies provide insight into d'Indy's aesthetics and ideology, which sought to conflate commitment to progress with adherence to Faith.

'Striptease'

'Who the devil will understand this strangely put together piece? Maybe you.'¹ Thus Vincent d'Indy to the Belgian lawyer and critic Octave Maus in 1896 about his efforts on a set of 'Assyrian variations'. D'Indy sounded no more sanguine in a letter to Guy Ropartz around the same time, but did buoyantly admit that he found the project 'amusing'.² And to his father he wrote 'no one will understand anything, because these are variations in reverse where the

¹ 'Je pioche mes variations assyriennes, déjà très avancées. Elles se présentent bien, mais qui diable pourra bien comprendre ce morceau bizarrement bâti? Toi peut-être.' From letter fragment cited in Madeleine Octave Maus, *Trente années de lutte pour l'art 1884–1914* (Brussels, 1926), 214.

² 'ça m'a énormément amusé à écrire'. Letter of 15 Sept. 1896, cited by Léon Vallas, *Vincent d'Indy* (Paris, 1946–50), 2: 237; the letter is at Bibliothèque nationale, Mus., Vincent d'Indy, I.a.s. 181. Here d'Indy also wrote: 'Je n'en suis pas mécontent, seulement ce contentement me restera personnel (et avec quelques amis), car je doute fort qu'un public quelconque comprenne la façon insolite dont mon morceau est bâti.'

theme only appears at the end'.³ The result was *Istar*, a short symphonic poem styled 'variations symphoniques' that traces the gradual denuding of the eponymous Babylonian goddess as she seeks to rescue her lover in the underworld. Despite d'Indy's early trepidations about variations that wend their way from complex to simple textures, *Istar* did well. Following a premiere at the Concerts Ysaÿe in Brussels on 10 January 1897 and a performance one year later at the Concerts Colonne, d'Indy often programmed *Istar* when he appeared as a conductor. By 1912, the musicologist Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi characterized it as one of his best-known works.⁴ The year before d'Indy had offered it to the dancer Natalia (aka Natasha) Trouhanova, a close acquaintance of his good friend Paul Dukas, for choreographic interpretation at a 'Concert de danse' in Paris (alongside renditions of instrumental works by Schubert, Chopin and others).⁵ The critic Robert Brussel (another intimate of the Dukas circle) greased the publicity wheel.⁶ When financial backers emerged and the impresario Jacques Rouché lent his formidable organizational skills, Trouhanova programmed *Istar* in a show with more elaborate sets and costumes in 1912.⁷ Sergei Diaghilev had of course already set a high standard for sheer cultural impact among 'tout Paris' with his Ballets russes, and it was in this exciting context that Trouhanova (a renegade from Diaghilev's company herself) energetically created a landmark event in the history of French ballet: in addition to *Istar*, her 1912 performance featured the premieres of Paul Dukas's own *La Péri* and Maurice Ravel's recasting of his *Valses nobles et sentimentales* as *Adélaïde ou le langage des fleurs*, as well as a revival of Florent Schmitt's *La Tragédie de Salomé*. During the 1920s, Ida Rubinstein frequently brought *Istar* to the Opéra stage; French orchestras played d'Indy's variation set regularly; the New York Philharmonic programmed it no fewer than 17 times between 1927 and 1933 (with several conductors); and Pierre Monteux familiarized audiences in San Francisco with it after 1936. And, then, along with most of d'Indy's *œuvre* in the late twentieth century, *Istar* placidly drifted into obscurity.

D'Indy's biographer Léon Vallas described *Istar* as something of a flagship piece for the composer and his acolytes, on a par in this respect with the Second Symphony of 1903 (also rarely performed today).⁸ Such emblems were the aesthetic and ideological bricks of d'Indy's Schola Cantorum, a music school of national, even international, importance. Brian Hart has recently drawn attention to the ideological significance of the Second Symphony, and Jane Fulcher has modified his conclusions and adapted them to a larger study of contemporaneous French cultural politics and music.⁹ *Istar* will provide a touchstone for

³ Letter to his father, 17 Sept. 1896, in Vincent d'Indy, *Ma vie*, ed. Marie d'Indy (Paris, 2001), 548.

⁴ Review of Trouhanova, Concerts de Danse, *Comœdia illustré*, 15 May 1912.

⁵ Performances took place on 3 and 9 May 1911 at the Châtelet theatre with the Colonne orchestra.

⁶ See Brussel's major article 'Préambule pour deux concerts de danse', *Le Courrier musical*, 1 May 1911.

⁷ Performances took place on 22, 23, 25 and 27 April 1912 at the the Châtelet theatre with the Lamoureux orchestra.

⁸ Léon Vallas, *Vincent d'Indy*, 2: 237.

⁹ See Brian Hart, 'Wagner and the Franckiste "Message-Symphony" in Early Twentieth-Century France', in *Von Wagner zum Wagnérisme: Musik, Literatur, Kunst, Politik*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Manuela Schwartz (Leipzig, 1999), 315–37; and Jane F. Fulcher,

my re-examination of these broad connections between d'Indy's compositional practice and his aesthetics and ideology. A natural foil for that re-examination, especially as it relates to perceptions of modernity at the *fin de siècle*, will be a work premiered just two years before d'Indy began his variations, a symphonic poem of similar length also enlisted for ballet that became as famous as *Istar* is little known: Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*.

But what about d'Indy's sexy subject matter? Given tastes of the *fin de siècle*, a lascivious heroine might scarcely raise eyebrows were it not for d'Indy's public image as a model of Catholic probity, a solemn patriarch of the Schola. His *Cours de composition musicale*, the central text of the Schola, could hardly be said to betray a salacious undercurrent.¹⁰ Perhaps a private *homme sensuel* lurks between the staves, suggests Andrew Thomson, another of the composer's biographers.¹¹ Perhaps. On the other hand, Thomson also invokes Roland Barthes, who, in a well-known structuralist analysis of striptease, concludes that ritual gesture and fetishization of the naked body actually neutralize erotic effect.¹² We might add commodification to the list. But even dispensing with Barthes as a guide, few listeners will be disposed to hear sensuality ooze from the rim of the final marmoreal rendition of d'Indy's theme. If anything, the first variation of *Istar* sounds more erotically charged than the end. That may be an implicit point of the piece, as we shall see, but one that surely drains the tease from the striptease. For it is not entirely clear that striptease is the best cultural (I use the word in its largest sense) analogue to d'Indy's project. *Nota bene*: my title encases the word in scare quotes. The heroine's shedding of clothing article by article finds resonance in d'Indy's ideological and pedagogical programme – and one would be hard pressed to make the case that real-life strippers intend to appeal to the mind.

Enseignement

As we have seen, d'Indy confessed that the *Istar* project amused him. For all the sobriety of the *Cours de composition* such remarks dot his correspondence, particularly when he faced substantial compositional challenges. Romain Rolland sensed as much when he uncharitably alluded to *Istar* in *Jean-Christophe* as a 'joujou très savant' (a very crafty toy), the product of sterile experimentation, a complicated little machine.¹³ Although rhetoric, implied narrative, and affect were as inseparable from considerations of structure and coherence for d'Indy as for most other nineteenth-century composers of instrumental music, that he wore technical ingenuity on his sleeve did not serve his reputation well outside

French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War (New York, 1999), 65–6.

¹⁰ Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale*, ed. Auguste Séjourné and Guy de Lioncourt, 3 vols (Paris, 1: 1899; 2/1: 1909; 2/2: 1933; and 3: 1950).

¹¹ Andrew Thomson, *Vincent d'Indy and His World* (Oxford, 1996), 113.

¹² Roland Barthes, 'Striptease', *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London, 1972), 84–7.

¹³ 'L'autre échafaudait des variations sur un thème, qui ne se montrait qu'à la fin, descendant peu à peu du compliqué au simple. C'étaient des joujoux très savants. Il fallait être à la fois très vieux et très enfant pour pouvoir s'en amuser.' Romain Rolland, *Jean-Christophe* (Paris, 1931), 1: 690–91.

Scholiste circles. (His example would seem to validate the inclination of most nineteenth-century composers to remain pointedly vague about the ‘notes themselves’, especially their own notes.) Balanced assessments of d’Indy, however, should recognize his fundamental commitment to *enseignement* (teaching) encapsulated in key epithets at the beginning of the *Cours* (and often elsewhere): Art is a ‘way of life for the soul [un moyen de vie pour l’âme], that is, a way to nourish the soul to foster its progress’. And: ‘the way of progress [read: ‘commitment to progress’] ... is always an essential condition of *enseignement* that we will discover at the foundation of all art.’¹⁴ To Rolland, a piece such as *Istar* seemed like novelty for the sake of novelty, hardly an idiosyncratic assessment in the period. *Vide* d’Indy’s anxiety. *Vide* also the remark of the influential and progressive critic Adolphe Jullien that d’Indy was ‘an inquiring artist much taken with new developments’, a characteristic critical response to *Istar* at the time.¹⁵ But d’Indy manifestly conceived forward thinking as wedded to moral, spiritual, and technical *enseignement*. He argued that experimentation should be far more than a sterile exercise, that it should challenge and fulfil the soul – a result possible only if said experimentation were historically grounded.

One way that *Istar* is so grounded is as an exemplar of the venerable genre of theme and variations. D’Indy outlines three categories in his chapter on variation forms in the *Cours*: ornamental, decorative, and amplified.¹⁶ In the first, themes are decorated with ornaments and passagework; in the second, melodies remain more recognizable but are subject to harmonic and contrapuntal variation; in the last, melodic and/or harmonic details in the theme trigger new enlargements and elaborations. Although he recognizes that these techniques often rub shoulders in the same piece, especially in nineteenth-century music, d’Indy organizes his repertorial examples in a rigid typology. The *variation amplificatrice* clearly occupies the summit of variation practice in his system of values. Exemplary works of this type analysed by d’Indy include Beethoven’s Diabelli set and the variation movements in the late quartets, Schumann’s *Etudes symphoniques*, Franck’s *Trois chorals*, and *Istar*, the last extended analysis in the chapter.¹⁷ Examples by Brahms get cursory mention in the category of *variations décoratives* (one obvious problem with d’Indy’s blunt scheme). Contemporaneous *variations amplificatrices* by Reger and Richard Strauss, including

¹⁴ D’Indy, *Cours*, 1: 9–10.

¹⁵ Adolphe Jullien, Review of *Istar*, *Le Journal des débats*, 23 Jan. 1898. Reviews by Maurice Kufferath, *Le Guide musical*, 17 Jan. 1897; Fernand Le Borne, *Le Monde artiste*, 23 Jan. 1898; Hugues Imbert, *Le Guide musical*, 23 Jan. 1898; Henri Barbedette, *Le Ménestrel*, 23 Jan. 1898; Auguste Mercadier, *Le Monde musical*, 30 Jan. 1898.

¹⁶ D’Indy, *Cours*, 2/1: 435–87.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 484–6. Other published analyses of *Istar* include Vallas, *Vincent d’Indy*, 2: 236–41; Norman Demuth, *A Course in Musical Composition* (London, n.d.), 2: 56–61; Peter Cook, ‘Vincent d’Indy’s *Istar*’, *Music Review*, 52 (1991): 237–45; Damien Ehrhardt, ‘Zwischen Symphonie und Drama. Die Programmmusik und ihre Gattungen bei Vincent d’Indy’, in *Pluralismus wider Willen? Stilistische Tendenzen in der Musik Vincent d’Indys*, ed. Manuela Schwartz and Stefan Keym (Hildesheim, 2002), 45–8. Demuth, Cook, and Ehrhardt closely follow d’Indy’s analysis but do not go much beyond it. Nor do they position *Istar* in a wider context, although Cook does discuss the Babylonian myth upon which the piece is based. Ehrhardt points out that Schumann also positions the theme at the end of a variation set in his early *Beethoven-Variationen*, but notes that this work was unlikely to have been an influence on d’Indy because it had not been published by the time *Istar* was composed.

Don Quixote, are summarily dismissed as repositories of *lourdeur germanique* and shallow pictorial effects, a critical view not likely to find many adherents today. It is difficult to avoid the impression that d'Indy (or his editor Auguste Sérieyx) presented his own work as the culmination of a mighty historical trend. The *variation amplificatrice* not only makes much greater demands on 'invention' than the other techniques of variation, but also provides 'an almost unending path that has been hardly explored in the domain of musical composition'.¹⁸ Composers attentive to progress, he seems to imply, would do well to follow his lead.

D'Indy carefully distinguishes 'amplification' from 'development', a difference important to his variations in reverse. In the latter, themes 'act', become dismembered, and move from one state or condition to another; in the former, themes remain 'in repose', regardless of how complex the changes. He claims broadly that 'in the final analysis, in symphony as in literature, development and amplification provide the main tools used in the art of composition'.¹⁹ Setting aside the reductive quality of this assertion, which betrays the origins of the *Cours* in classroom teaching, d'Indy's reference to literature reinforces the narrative implications of his definitions of amplification and development. Amplification explores depth, the fabric of the moment and quality of a character. Development engages change and momentum, the plot. D'Indy pointedly called his *Istar* variations 'symphonic', suggesting that the piece employs forward driven developmental technique in addition to amplification. We might extend this even further in terms of d'Indyan thinking.²⁰ Progress (equals development) is vital, but so too are depth and quality (equals amplification) of principles sanctioned by History. Works of art should not only reflect kinetic historical evolution, but also immutable values, which include 'amplifications' of enduring syntactical principles.

Analysis

It is a clever paradox that d'Indy amplifies and develops by placing his theme at the end. (According to these parameters, some might say that the piece seems more appropriately to illustrate *de-amplification* – but that would do justice neither to the musical techniques nor to d'Indyan ideology.) The three main building blocks of *Istar* are what d'Indy calls the 'motif d'appel' (the Summons), which initiates the unison melody on the muted horn at the beginning of the work, shown in Ex. 1a, a March theme that follows shortly thereafter in Ex. 1a, and the theme itself, shown in Ex. 1b in its final unison manifestation. The Summons and March appear not only at the beginning but also between many of the variations; moreover, they bring the work to a close following the unison statement of the theme. *Istar*, daughter of Sin, follows a call to search out her beloved 'Fils de la Vie' (Son of Life) in the nether regions. She must pass through seven doors – hence seven variations – and at each the gatekeeper

¹⁸ D'Indy, *Cours*, 2/1: 447.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 448.

²⁰ For concise surveys of d'Indy's constructions of history see Thomson, *Vincent d'Indy*, 77–95; Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford, 1999), 301–16.

Ex. 1 Musical materials in *Istar: Summons, March and Theme* (Music by Vincent d'Indy © 1897 by Editions Durand, by kind permission of Editions Durand.)
 a. Summons, March

Tres lent. ♩ = 50

1 hn. 2 3 3 4 5 ob. cl.

mf Summons *dim.* *pp*

6 7 8 *p.vla.* March *sfz*

9 *p* *cresc.*

b. Theme

1 tutti (♩. = ♩)

f et bien chante *sfz*

10 *p*

15 *cres - cen - do* *sfz* *f*

20 *cresc.* *ff* *mf*

removes something from her body: first a tiara, then earrings, pendants, breast ornaments, belt, neck and ankle bracelets, and finally 'le dernier voile qui couvre son corps' (the last veil covering her body). The Summons and March suggest movement from door to door (development) and each variation, temporary stasis (amplification).

The theme itself (Ex. 1b) subdivides loosely into three phases. The initial segment is in F major (preparatory bass motion assures that the prevailing key is not A minor) with modal mixture of the flattened mediant and submediant. In the twelfth bar the addition of E flat followed by G flat implies a modulation to the Neapolitan area. The new G flat tonic prevails until the nineteenth bar of the theme (with enharmonic spellings as shown). Other harmonizations are obviously possible. (In the preceding variations, d'Indy sometimes harmonizes the theme to extend the Neapolitan area to this point, sometimes not.) The end of bar 19 brings a new phase, a strong sense of return (bars 19–21 = bars 1–3) followed by closure in F, actually delayed until several bars after the example. Istar, then, reveals herself not as a mere four-square tune implying a simple harmonic scheme of the kind so often seen in variation sets, but (to extrapolate) as a figure intrinsically moving and profound. The rhythmic and phrase structural character of her theme have all the marks of a post-Wagnerian composer who militated against quadratic organization and local-level rhythmic symmetries, a kind of monophonic *unendliche Melodie*. Nevertheless, the third part of the theme does project greater closure because of the symmetries produced by strong downbeat articulations of four-bar units (bars 20 and 24), restricted use of syncopation, and more focused tonal direction.

The theme shares its initial cell with the three-pitch Summons motif (G–F–D \flat) heard at the beginning of the composition (Ex. 1a), an organic connection that belongs more to the world of the symphony than to variations. The muted horn solo is tonally unstable and invites a number of harmonizations, for example a large dominant of A flat in bars 1–2 resolving to tonic at the beginning of bar 3 and followed by a tonicization of an A major Neapolitan (another connection to the theme). Whatever progression one chooses to hear, the E–A fifth produces a chromatic tint. Extracting C as a passing tone, the first two bars also outline a half-diminished harmony, and at the moment that low strings and wind clarify the F minor/major tonic in bars 4–5, a half-diminished chord sounds as the first harmony (an appoggiatura to the tonic). The march then rotates around the F tonic, including a sultry emphasis of the tritone in bars 7–8 (F rising to C \flat) and an exotic slip through the Neapolitan (once again).

Figure 1, a detailed ground plan of *Istar*, illustrates how these materials unfold. As I have already noted, the Summons (which always sounds with the same pitches G–F–D \flat) and March insinuate themselves among the variations for programmatic reasons. Because of the motivic congruity between the Summons and the beginning of the theme, some of the early variations that spin out the G–F–D \flat motif (particularly the third and fourth) sound as much like development as amplification. Indeed, d'Indy does not draw a clear line between the two techniques, as I have already suggested. In another instance (Variation 2) it is the March that develops a figure initiated during the preceding variation. One might also characterize the evolving tonal trajectory as developmental because (unusually for a variation set) each variation is in a different key, metre, and tempo.

Fragments of the theme appear furtively in early variations but the melody makes itself heard for the first time only in Variation 5. The harmonic plan of the theme, however, governs from the first – more or less, for contrary to the description in the *Cours* the return to the tonic key does not occur in an analogous place in each variation. A strong root-position tonic sounds for the first time only at the beginning of the third phase in the scherzo-like fourth variation. And although d'Indy uses the characteristic shift to \flat II in the first variation

Bars	Material	Tempo	Key/Metre	Comments
1–4	Summons	$\downarrow=50$	f, 4/4	pitches G–F–D \flat continued into a 4 bar unison melody (Summons motif will always appear with the same pitches)
5–18	March	f, 4/4	f, 4/4	with exotic scalar inflections (C \flat , F \flat) and suggestions of $\flat\Pi$
19–32	Var. 1	F, 4/4	F, 4/4	one possible harmonization of theme; melody not heard harmonic plan: Return passing Neapolitan pre-dominant cadence I_6 (vii 7) ii ϕ –ii $\frac{7}{4}$ –V $\frac{9}{2}$ /V $\frac{9}{4}$ –V $\frac{7}{2}$ /bII–bII–V $\frac{9}{2}$ /V $\frac{9}{4}$ i $\frac{6}{5}$ –V $\frac{9}{4}$ /ii ii–vii 7 /V–V–i
33–41	March	f, 4/4	f, 4/4	functions as modulatory bridge, but begins with characteristic progression: i–ii ϕ $\frac{7}{4}$
42–55	Summons			whole-tone harmonization D \flat , E \flat , F, G, A, B (collection contains dominant and leading tone of following key, as well as initiating $\hat{6}$)
42–55	Var. 2	$\downarrow=72$	E, 6/4	variation of head of theme melody (=Summons) and other melodic details; harmonic amplification of theme (e.g. stays in $\flat\Pi$ area longer)
56–64	March	$\downarrow=88$	E, 6/4	continued development of chromatic figure initiated in preceding variation
	Summons			G–F–D \flat incorporated into altered dominant seventh harmony (f–A–D \flat –E \flat) of next key D-flat dissonance becomes consonant as third degree of ensuing \flat
65–80	Var. 3	$\downarrow=50$	b \flat , 12/8	Summons motif spun out with material from march (move to $\flat\Pi$ maintained, but no return to tonic) rhythmic motif of next variation gradually introduced (metric modulation)
	Summons			pitch G sounds as appoggiatura over D \flat and led to F (to make V of next key)

81–100	Var. 4	♩=160	F \sharp , 5/4	free development of Summons (=head of theme melody); move to \flat II maintained but this time followed by strong articulation of return to tonic
101–14	March		F \sharp , 15/8	metric modulation from preceding; modulates into whole-tone area and develops in similar style to preceding variation
	Summons			whole-tone setting (with dominant and leading tone of following key)
115–37	Var. 5		c, 3/4	melody heard for the first time but broken off after move to \flat II
138–63	March	♩=52	c, 6/4–3/2	development as broad lyrical melody in style of preceding variation
	Summons			climactic point of preceding symphonic surge; pitch G as leading tone of next key
164–82	Var. 6	♩=72	A \flat , 4/4	theme melody heard complete with characteristic \flat II modulation (but slightly different harmonization from Var. 1); four-part quartet-like texture
	Summons			worked into prevailing texture and first heard in A flat; then furnishes rhythmic trigger for next variation (now D \flat heard as C \sharp leading tone)
183–205	Var. 7	♩=72	d, 2/2	melody heard complete, two-part texture, motoric dotted rhythms
	Summons	♩=50		initial tempo, G–F–D \flat incorporated into V ¹¹ /F
206–32	Theme	♩=♩	F, 6/4	(two bars=one bar of Var. 1), unison
233–44	Summons			Summons is goal rather than pivot; mixture with elements from theme
245–57	March		F, 12/4	over walking bass, diatonic progressions, including terminal vi–ii–V–I

Fig. 1 *Istar*: Overview

and each one beyond, details of voice leading and approach to the Neapolitan always change, as do other harmonic details – all instantiations of what he would have called harmonic amplification.

Variation 6 brings thick four-part chromatic part writing and Variation 7 two-voice texture in dotted rhythms. Denudation does not always occur progressively before this, perhaps providing less of an erotic charge (metaphorically speaking) than is suggested by the programme. For example, the theme is scarcely more palpable in Variation 3 than in Variation 2. Notwithstanding the strong root-position harmony at the return in Variation 4, this feature is dropped in the next two variations, which do, however, present the melody itself in a more complete form.

The Summons figure (G–F–D \flat) signals the beginning of each variation. In all cases it functions as a pivot, one usually underlined as a point of crisis and musical tension. When it appears after the unison theme at the end, however, it participates in a grandiose affirmation of the tonic F and sounds like a resolution of the previous more unstable manifestations. In this broad way, then, the Summons has a sense of direction: tonal uncertainty to tonal clarity. In between, the invariable set G–F–D \flat appears in different functional contexts (some of which are anticipated by the various ways in which the opening gambit can be harmonized). Fig. 1 includes descriptions of these harmonizations. Particularly striking is the realization of the whole-tone implications of the set on two occasions (G–F–D \flat extended to G–F–E \flat –D \flat –B–A before Variations 2 and 5), although even here the pitches of the motif have tonal functions in the key of the next variation. As for the March, it anchors the tonic at the beginning of the composition, framing the first variation in relatively unchanged form. Afterwards, the March often shares the affect and figuration of the preceding variation and, as already noted, even seamlessly emerges from Variation 2. At the end, the March enters into the diatonic spirit that reigns at the conclusion of the theme and the final reiteration of the Summons; indeed, the final cadence of the unison theme stands in abeyance until the last sounding of the March.

As a final note on the musical materials considered in relative isolation, the tonal plan of *Istar* (shown in Fig. 2) deserves some attention, especially because d'Indy's own account of it in the *Cours* is somewhat inaccurate. From the tonic F minor the music slips down to E major in the second variation, the furthest sharpward modulation ('movement towards light') that he deems feasible in his description of the expressive impact of modulations in the first book of the *Cours*.²¹ This anticipates the same striking tonal shift at the beginning of his later *Jour d'été à la montagne* where a radiant B major dawn emerges from C minor night, and perhaps offers a programmatic clue: *Istar* as light in the gloom of the underworld. *Istar* continues as a systematic unfolding of three modules: a tritone separates each variation within a module and a major third separates each module. This symmetrical arrangement allows the important $\flat\parallel$ modulation heard locally in each variation to be highlighted on the larger structural level because an entire variation in F sharp (= G flat) sounds in an F tonic piece, placed at the temporal centre and marked by the quickest tempo. In between the outer posts of tonic f/F, the modulation scheme includes all six pitches of the whole-tone scale, another reference to local-level detail (albeit not the same whole-tone collection heard before Variations 2 and 5). The first and third

²¹ D'Indy, *Cours*, 1: 123–32.

introduction and Variation 1	f/F
Variation 2	E
Variation 3	b \flat
Variation 4	F \sharp
Variation 5	c
Variation 6	A \flat
Variation 7	d
Theme	F

Fig. 2 *Istar*: Overview of key scheme

modules contain keys that d'Indy accepted within the orbit of the tonic in his typology of modulations, the middle module keys at further remove (inasmuch as they relate to the major mode tonic, in relation to which d'Indy held the minor dominant as distant).²² The piece thus follows a curve where keys distant from the tonic occur at the centre and then move closer to it.

In sum, in addition to highlighting the \flat II area, d'Indy brings tritone modulations to centre stage in *Istar*. Yet in the *Cours* he scarcely contains his contempt for both of these modulation strategies in the work of others, even taking Saint-Saëns to task for shifting to \flat II in the second movement of his Organ Symphony.²³ To defend the tritone modulations of *Istar*, he argues unconvincingly that they produce an expressively 'neutral' or static effect: such abrupt moves between the sharp and flat sides (that is, between light and shade) cancel each other out because tritone-related keys are equidistant from both directions on the circle of fifths. Such tonal stasis reinforces his principal character, argues d'Indy. To reformulate: it amplifies rather than develops.²⁴ Because not all the modulations in *Istar* are by tritone, however, it also seems persuasive according to d'Indy's criteria to understand the tonal plan as a judicious mixture of development (the major third shift between each module) and amplification (the tritone modulations within each module). By these terms, the tritone relationship makes for an updating of the traditional variations-in-same-key approach, neutral modulation now replac-

²² In the *Cours* analysis of *Istar* it is claimed that all the variations are in keys closely related to F minor. That is the case for all of them except Variation 4 in F sharp major. In other words, in the case of a minor mode tonic, the minor dominant falls within the range of close modulations. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that the piece is directed toward a major mode conclusion.

²³ D'Indy, *Cours*, 2/2: 167–8.

²⁴ 'Chacune de ces sept Variations est dans une tonalité voisine de celle de *fa*, et l'ordre de ces tonalités procède par modulations à la *sixième quinte* (quarte augmentée), afin que tout se rapporte au principal personnage, sans changements trop brusques accusant un excès d'ombre ou de lumière: ces modulations, en effet, comme on l'a vu ci-dessus (p. 258), sont *neutres*.' D'Indy, *Cours*, 2/1: 486.

ing actual stasis. This tonal relationship also ‘composes out’ that sexy F–C♭ bass slide in the opening March (Ex. 1a), thus ensconcing part of Istar’s character in the very structure of the composition.

Context

As ‘bizarrement bâti’ as it is, d’Indy would have been dismayed by any suggestion that he wrote *Istar* in a vacuum. D’Indy marvels at Beethoven’s ingenuity in the Diabelli set, extracting enormous variety from such slight material and continually reinterpreting the theme’s feint to the subdominant. This may have been something of a model, conscious or unconscious. Variegated moves to ♭II in *Istar* provide a similar ‘hook’, always immediately recognizable but also subject to harmonic embellishment. Perhaps the complexity of chromatic palette, the radically different texture in each variation, and the delay in revealing the theme motivated the relatively unorthodox (by d’Indy’s standard) ♭II relationship: the more variegated the materials and obscure the melody, the more striking the unifying modulation required. As for modulation from variation to variation, Beethoven produced another forebear in his op. 34, where the sequence follows descending thirds. Notwithstanding this innovative tonal plan, for d’Indy these are merely decorative variations without real amplification of the thematic and harmonic material.

D’Indy would doubtless have been flattered by a characterization of *Istar* as a conflation (and harmonic updating) of approaches in these two Beethoven sets.²⁵ The combination of variation technique with symphonic writing also had prominent Beethovenian precedents in the finales of the ‘Eroica’ Symphony and the Ninth. Curiously, the discussion of the ‘Eroica’ in the *Cours* makes little of this problematic.²⁶ And even more curiously, the analysis of the last movement of the Ninth describes it (merely) as a theme followed by seven variations.²⁷ D’Indy uses the word ‘développement’ only once in connection with the movement, to describe the music of the slow section ‘Seid umschlungen Millionen’, an idiosyncratic observation given that the (earlier) passage following the B flat march variations is more obviously developmental. In short, the *Cours* does not account for Beethoven’s symphonic variation movements as hybrids of variation and sonata-allegro procedure, the normative analytical approach today.²⁸ Not so with the chronologically more proximate model of Franck’s *Variations symphoniques* (1885) for piano and orchestra, where d’Indy persuasively maintains that the first of two themes is spun out in traditional variation format and the second is given over to sonata-allegro procedure. That said – and again somewhat surprisingly – the *Cours* treads gingerly around the term ‘développement’ in its brief outline of Franck’s piece. The exposition, development, and recapitulation of Franck’s second theme are each called variations of that theme, whereas clearly much modulation and fragmentation occur. Likewise for the introductory section of

²⁵ For a general discussion of Beethoven as model for d’Indy see Ruth Seiberts, *Studien zu den Sinfonien Vincent d’Indys* (Mainz, 1998), 85–90.

²⁶ D’Indy, *Cours*, 2/2: 127–8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 146–7.

²⁸ For an overview see James Webster, ‘The Form of the Finale of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony’, *Beethoven Forum*, 1 (1992): 25–62.

the *Variations symphoniques*, which d'Indy calls an 'exposition' of the themes in embryonic state. It seems more like an example of a late nineteenth-century initiating section that functions as a development.²⁹

Although d'Indy's theoretical observations may be questioned, these pieces made compelling antecedents to *Istar*. Yet, unlike d'Indy's variations in reverse, they are not accompanied by texts. In writing about the symphonic poem in the *Cours* d'Indy observes that verbal programmes legitimate certain licences of form and modulation.³⁰ In a letter to Calvocoressi several years later, he suggested that programmes could lead to renewal of musical form, a proposition that extends back to early proselytizers for Music of the Future. Nevertheless, he added that this was acceptable only if a certain 'balance' were maintained between the 'poetic idea' and the 'musical execution', and that this required artists who were 'strong and conscientious'.³¹ In the *Cours*, we learn that Berlioz, for example, did not fit the bill. He was all orchestral colour, without a healthy substratum of compositional craft.³² In the case of *Les Eolides* by the much-revered Franck, however, d'Indy forgives the interplay of tritone-related keys, something that his mentor 'would never have allowed himself in a symphonic work other than a "poem"'.³³ This indulgence may lie behind tritone modulations in *Istar*, but in general we need not attribute the unusual form of *Istar* to the compositional freedoms allowed by programme music. Indeed, the tenor of d'Indy's pedagogy – especially his severe criticism of Berlioz – suggests that he would have seen the equating of a piece of programme music with the putative formal rigour of 'absolute music' as laudable.

In the *Cours*, d'Indy had some kind words for Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and *Nocturnes*, though not without an important qualification that effectively neutralized his praise: they contain themes of a 'superior quality' and demonstrate the particular *génie* of the composer, but unfortunately offer 'no real *enseignement* from the compositional point of view'.³⁴ He implied an aesthetic dead end, a theme that his acolytes amply developed by castigating Debussian concentration on harmonic colour for its own sake. But it was, of course, Debussy's *Prélude* that ultimately became recognized as the benchmark of cutting-edge developments in the French symphonic poem at the *fin de siècle*, not *Istar*, despite its experimental, unusual, and 'difficult' character. This historical fate, along with d'Indy's telling critique and the close proximity of their composition, bring debates about modernity in French music of the 1890s into focus, give them musical flesh and bones. So do some of the striking parallels between the two pieces. As president of the Société nationale, d'Indy must have already known Debussy's work as he set about writing *Istar* in 1896, because the *Prélude* was premiered by that organization on 22 December 1894. Although neither extant documents nor internal musical evidence permit an assessment of the degree to which d'Indy consciously conceived his short symphonic poem

²⁹ D'Indy, *Cours*, 2/1: 482.

³⁰ The chapter is in *Cours* 2/2: 297–332.

³¹ Letter to Michel Calvocoressi, 16 Apr. 1908, Bibliothèque nationale, Mus., Vincent d'Indy, l.a.s. 74.

³² D'Indy, *Cours*, 2/2: 315.

³³ *Ibid.*, 325.

³⁴ '[ils] portent la marque du véritable "génie" de l'auteur, encore qu'il n'y ait pas, à proprement parler, d'"enseignement," à en recueillir, au point de vue de la composition.' *Ibid.*, 322.

as a response to Debussy, an impulse to juxtapose the two works fairly leaps from the historical context.

Both pieces begin with solos, the famous flute melody in Debussy, muted horn in d'Indy. A filled-in tritone figures prominently in both initial melodic gestures and a half-diminished chord sounds as the first harmony in each. Given these similarities, the differences are striking. Whereas d'Indy instantly tethers his half-diminished to tonic harmony as an appoggiatura, Debussy's chord sounds on the oboes and clarinets as a C sharp minor triad with added sixth in a more ambiguous tonal context: the next harmony (produced by chromatic shift around common tones) is a dominant seventh over B \flat that does not resolve. Instead, the leading tone D turns into the root of a seventh harmony that underpins a restatement of the opening melody. Debussy finally finds the tonic E major (in bar 21) for a new added-sixth harmony (not connected to half-diminished sonority this time because major) and reiteration of the opening chromatic melody at its original pitch-level. He meanders leisurely. D'Indy asserts his tonic quickly and unambiguously. Debussy's peregrination involves one of the most noteworthy features of the piece: the opening melody returns often at the same pitch level with ever-changing harmonies. D'Indy, it will be recalled, repeatedly brings back his Summons motif at pitch and also in changing harmonic guises. Once again, commonalities articulate differences. Instead of Debussy's colourful luxuriance, d'Indy's consistent reharmonizations of the Summons function as pivots along a symmetrical grid of modulations in a 'symphonic' process.

Following the introductory passage centred on the Summons and March, d'Indy triggers his first variation with tonic added-sixth harmony in a wash of tremolo strings and cascading winds and harps (as opposed to more conventional added sixth created by the first inversion of the supertonic seventh chord). Pierre de Bréville would characterize the sound of the variation as 'flottante' (floating),³⁵ a word used often used by contemporaries to describe Debussy's music. One might even be tempted to call this variation 'impressionistic' were it not for much-discussed problems with this style of critical appropriation from the visual arts. Debussy's added-sixth major harmony radiates a kind of antique pastoral paradise. D'Indy's harmony may also be said to radiate – the heroine's splendour, surely – but, more important, it is also motivic: add a fourth voice (as root) to the major mode version of the Summons figure (and beginning of Istar's melody) and the result is a major mode added-sixth chord (B \flat –D–F–G). Not only does d'Indy begin his first variation with one of the iconic sonorities of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* – Debussy seems ever so reluctant to leave that chord at the end of his work – but the sonority also marks the shift to the Neapolitan area in this variation. The melody on the trombone in the same variation seems redolent of Debussy's middle section (compare 'X', Ex. 2a–b). Whereas d'Indy's trombones mark the shift to the Neapolitan G flat in Ex. 2a with a lyrical strain that fills in the Summons motif, Debussy's winds and strings spin out a bel canto-like melody in D flat, gesturally and structurally the most conventional moment of his score (Ex. 2b shows the beginning of the eight-bar 'antecedent' of the large 'period' that extends from bar 55 to a cadential arrival in bar 74). Scale degrees in both melodies match, as

³⁵ Bréville is cited by Louis Laloy in 'Vincent d'Indy', *La Revue musicale*, 15 Dec. 1903.

Ex. 2 *Istar* and *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Music by Vincent d'Indy © 1897 by Editions Durand, by kind permission of Editions Durand.)

a. *Istar*, b. 23–26 (Var. 1)

b. *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, b. 55–60 (beginning of middle section)

indicated. D'Indy directs harmonic attention to a tonicization of the dominant whereas Debussy roams more freely.

Both composers also slip periodically into whole-tone colours (Debussy in a more pronounced way than d'Indy) and both posit the grammatical issue of integrating whole-tone material with more conventional syntactical premises. For example, for all the conventionality of the central lyrical melody in the *Prélude*, in its first four bars (the ones that do *not* line up with d'Indy's) Debussy alternates tonic and whole-tone harmony. Just before this lyrical central episode, Debussy assumes his most *Tristan*-like guise (bars 46–51) in a surging line triggered by half-diminished harmony, but unlike Wagner he undermines the melodic apex with a diminuendo that drifts into whole-tone chords. Now, before *Istar*, d'Indy was no stranger to whole-tone writing, for example in *Fervaal* and the incidental music to *Karadec*. Yet his use is always restricted and more grounded in tonal syntax than Debussy's. In *Istar*, the two whole-tone patches realize one of the many pitch implications of the Summons: the G–F–D configuration lends itself naturally to whole-tone 'filling in' and extension (G–F–E♭–D♭–B–A). When d'Indy does this during the kinetic passages between

Ex. 3 *Istar and Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune, conclusions compared* (Music by Vincent d'Indy © 1897 by Editions Durand, by kind permission of Editions Durand.)

a. *Istar, conclusion*

variations, he gives the scale a real tonal role by employing the whole-tone collection that contains the dominant and leading tone of the subsequent key. He would later create a similar conventional matrix for whole-tone material in the first movement of the Second Symphony (composed six years after *Istar*). The first of two cyclic motifs exposed in its slow introduction outlines a tritone, which, like the Summons in *Istar*, invites filling in by whole-tone steps. The sonata-allegro begins with a theme from which d'Indy extracts a pentatonic

En ralentissant beaucoup - - - - -

b. *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune, conclusion*

Molto lento e rit. al fine

motif for the bridge. As the bridge unfolds, however, d'Indy converts this pentatonic material into a whole-tone figure in order to accommodate the re-emergence of the cyclic tritone motif. Thus, d'Indy clearly did not find whole-tone patches inherently objectionable, but real *enseignement* (and its implicit ideology) required them to function logically in a larger whole, with logic defined by motivic and contrapuntal symphonic processes.

A comparison of the final bars of *Istar* and *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* is similarly revealing (Ex. 3a–b). Both composers conclude with strong tonal cadences. D'Indy ends with a dulcet celebration of the March figure over descending bass tetrachord, bell-like fanfare on the horns, and repeated final cadential pro-

gression (bar 5 and 6: vi–ii–V–I). Debussy brings back part of the initial melody in a turn to C major that functions conventionally as augmented sixth harmony (B \flat =A \sharp) in E leading to ii–V–I (just before the music shown in Ex. 3b). Such are the similarities between the post-cadential areas that d’Indy *almost* leaves the impression of consciously redeploing elements in Debussy’s piece. Following the cadence (that is, at the beginning of Ex. 3b) Debussy twice reiterates a chromatically modified descending tetrachord from tonic to dominant on the harp. We might hear d’Indy’s pre-cadential descending tetrachord from the tonic, also emitted in slow and even note values, as a diatonic ‘correction’ of Debussy’s hazier tonal course (compare bars 1 and 3 in Ex. 3a with bar 1 in Ex. 3b). To do this, however, is perhaps wilfully to disregard the ubiquity of descending tetrachords in the repertoire. Debussy’s horns and violins supply further post-cadential extension in the next bar, parallel thirds from the third scale degree and tonic that recall the initial flute melody. D’Indy seems to take apart these voices in his own post-cadential area, writing out the chromatic descent from the tonic on the trombone in bar 7, and adding the chromatic descent from the third scale degree in the next bar. Convention or intention? Whichever the critic chooses, it is undeniable that d’Indy affirms his tonic more clearly. Debussy leads his parallel thirds to a half-diminished harmony in the voicing of the Tristan chord at the beginning of Wagner’s prelude (bar 3 of Ex. 3b), thus restating the first harmony of the piece and underlining the connection to its Wagnerian forebear through revoicing. Debussy once wrote that the end of the *Prélude* represented ‘the last line of [Mallarmé’s poem] prolonged: “Couple adieu, je vais voir l’ombre que tu devins”’.³⁶ Desire lies suspended over final, delicate bars that brush against sound, silence, eternity, and Mallarméan *pureté*. The Tristan chord slips into a major-mode added-sixth harmony, which merges – barely – into the final pianissimo tonic chord. The melodic tritone (A \sharp –C–E) in the violins of bar 4 does not resolve, at least not in the same register. D’Indy’s piece also operates at a quiet dynamic level, seeming to evaporate into the ether. But desire has been fulfilled: the post-cadential chromatics are merely decorative, not as hermeneutically ‘marked’ as they seem to be in Debussy. All the tritones from earlier have vanished, subsumed in an affirmation of a tonic whose foundational role in the piece has been greatly ‘amplified’ but not threatened.

History, Modernity, Ideology

My discussion suggests that Debussy’s *Prélude* is more forward-looking than d’Indy’s *Istar* in pitch vocabulary, and without considering critical issues about where to locate the lyrical subject evoked eloquently by David Code in a recent study.³⁷ Code locates modernity in an experience of an ephemeral absence/presence of the lyrical voice, urging his readers to attend to the sensual timbral qualities of the composition over its syntactical advances. ‘Pitch-focused methodologies’ flatten music into ‘unevocative “writing”’³⁸ instead of urging readers

³⁶ Letter to Willy, 10 Oct. 1895, Debussy, *Correspondance 1884–1918*, ed. François Lesure (Paris, 1993), 114.

³⁷ For a sensitive analysis of the conclusion see David Code, ‘Hearing Debussy Reading Mallarmé: Music *après Wagner* in the *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*,’ *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 54 (2001): 493–548.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 548.

to the more challenging synaesthetic qualities of Symbolist 'writing'. It scarcely needs emphasizing not only that d'Indy, for his part, was a staunch believer in pitch-oriented methodologies, but also that he did not fundamentally question a romantic lyrical ideal: the full-blown lyricism at the end of *Istar*, as quiet as it is, 'completes' the piece's intrinsic 'subject', regardless of how precisely that subject is defined. All of this is broadly consonant with the grand narrative of Western music history, with Debussy as colossus and d'Indy a mere bit player. It is also consonant with the politically oriented analysis of Jane Fulcher that portrays d'Indy as single-mindedly absorbed with defending the traditions he inherited against the depredations of modernity. As I have observed, however, closer to the ground in the 1890s d'Indy did not cut the figure of a conservative. The press greeted *Istar* as an experimental challenge to listeners. One might say that History has taught us to know better, but this is largely a matter of discursive strategy and epistemological predisposition. Modernity may be viewed through lenses other than the legitimatizing spectacles of canonic narratives and narratives about canon. Modernist 'essences' seem as slippery as the object of the faun's desire. Hardly one-dimensional phenomena – say, hinged solely upon a disintegration of tonality or a challenge to romantic subjectivity or a concentration on timbre – perceptions about the new and progressive shifted more rapidly than ever before at the *fin de siècle*. And d'Indy's own position on the continuum between retrograde and progressive certainly changed over his career, a near-truism that Fulcher's account perhaps does not adequately acknowledge.

Even if one accepts that Debussy's *Prélude* is *more* 'modern' than *Istar*, that does not of course mean that d'Indy's piece is anti-modern. Fulcher argues that the musical materials of the Second Symphony unequivocally communicate d'Indy's right-wing, traditionalist ideology: a musical motif representing 'tradition' struggles with, and finally triumphs 'predictably' over, a tritone motif that signifies 'modernity'.³⁹ At deep structural levels in tonal music, of course, tritones must 'resolve', and to the extent that d'Indy remained committed to projecting a single tonic in his musical compositions, Fulcher persuades. Historian Michel Winock has succinctly characterized the multifarious strands of right-wing thinking at the *fin de siècle* as 'holist' in contrast to 'individualist'.⁴⁰ Holist ideologies were committed to deeply ingrained 'truths', natural laws, inviolability of community, order, and historical authority. Many political, social, and economic pressures in France and elsewhere tended in the opposite direction at the *fin de siècle*. As Adorno might have it: projection of a single tonic, justified by centuries of compositional authority, makes a natural analogue to holist ideological impulses, dangling tritones a reflection of dangerous fragmentation and encroaching menaces to cohesion, social or otherwise. But it is not clear that modern music in the 1890s should be defined solely in terms of dangling tritones. There was a way – the way of the Second Symphony and, even more, of *Istar* – of *combining* tritones expressed at different structural levels with a commitment to tonic and of placing exegetical emphasis not on the inevitable 'triumph' of the latter but rather on clever cohabitation. This kind of critical proposition might still embrace change and even challenge the status quo. It would seem that 'progress' should be defined by ambient culture

³⁹ Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics*, 65.

⁴⁰ Michel Winock, *Nationalisme, antisémitisme, et fascisme en France* (Paris, 1990), 165.

in all its variety. French right-wing holistic thinking supplied a set of flexible parameters for aesthetic values and the management of progress, not a manual of legislated codes and syntactical laws concerned with quashing it.

Moreover, it is also worth recalling historian Carl Schorske's reminder that 'thinking with history' in the 'passage to modernism' could take either the form of borrowing materials from a past conceived as static or from one conceived as process.⁴¹ In music of c.1900, the latter attitude sometimes produces the phenomenon of the 'historicist modernist', in the happy turn of phrase that Walter Frisch has applied to music of Max Reger that joins hands with Bach.⁴² To conceive of history as process is not intrinsically dissonant with holistic thinking and also strongly implies a degree of progress. For all his championing of tradition and historically rooted aesthetic values, d'Indy implicitly affirmed a commitment to history-as-process both in his compositions and in the *Cours*. His integration of process with progress seems much like a spiral always turning back to touch base with the past, to cite Jann Pasler's apt image.⁴³ Forward movement occurred as long as he could conflate the spiral process with his historically grounded values. To return to the 'notes themselves': Brian Hart is most compelling in his account of d'Indy's Second Symphony when he notes that the *raison d'être* for its tritone passages may have more to do with a reflex to articulate new and interesting 'contrasting material' in the work than to mount a titanic challenge, doomed to failure, to forces of tradition.⁴⁴ With reference to *Istar* one might note that while the tritone inflecting the opening march disappears in the apotheosis, it remains in the final monophonic rendition of *Istar's* theme itself – arguably the essence of her character. And instead of avoiding whole-tone collections outright, d'Indy harnesses them to tonal thinking.

The mythical subject of *Istar* maps on to d'Indy's aesthetic project. Writing to Hugues Imbert in 1887, he waxed enthusiastic about the Babylonian art he had seen in London: 'Here I am back from London, still enthused by the Assyrian sculptures of the British Museum: what beautiful art and blatantly obvious life and truth in these *tableaux* from a civilization that equalled ours! ... I experience a much greater and more truly artistic impression faced with Assyrian art from the eighth century BC than before the art of Pericles.'⁴⁵ He contrasts Babylonian/Assyrian art with later classicism. D'Indy was unlikely to have been a staunch admirer of Mallarmé's decadent, Symbolist Hellenism in *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, but I cite Imbert's letter not so much to draw another comparison with Debussy's

⁴¹ Carl E. Schorske, *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism* (Princeton, 1998), 3.

⁴² Walter Frisch, 'Reger's Bach and Historicist Modernism', *19th-Century Music*, 25 (2001–2002), 296–312.

⁴³ Jann Pasler, 'Paris: Conflicting Notions of Progress', *Music and Society: The Late Romantic Era*, ed. Jim Samson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1991), 401–3.

⁴⁴ Hart, 'Wagner and the Franckiste "Message-Symphony"', 327. He emphasizes that the modernity-tradition argument was advanced not by the composer but rather by his pupil René de Castéra.

⁴⁵ 'Me voici de retour de Londres, dans l'enthousiasme des sculptures assyriennes du British Museum: quel bel art et quel flagrant délit de vie et de vérité dans ces tableaux d'une civilisation qui valait bien la nôtre! ... J'éprouve une impression bien plus grande et plus réellement artistique devant l'art assyrien du VIIIe siècle avant J.C. que devant celui de Péricles.' Cited in Vallas, *Vincent d'Indy*, 2: 238.

work as for the clues it offers about d'Indy's attraction to the *Istar* subject. Late medieval art, what the French often call *primitif*, ranked high in d'Indy's aesthetic pantheon because it privileged faith, spirituality, wonder, and sincerity over realism, because it palpably demonstrated 'depth'. For d'Indy, Babylonian culture was another manifestation of the *primitif* – spiritually grounded art that contrasted with a later superficial formalistic golden age of Greek civilization. The Babylonian period is to the century of Pericles as Gothic is to Renaissance.

Nothing wrong with characterizing Istar as sexy, but the vital point is that rather than building up a paroxysm of desire like Strauss with Salome, d'Indy projects her sensuality at the beginning, in the first variation, and then moves beneath the surface. The brief programme attached to the symphonic poem does not tell the whole story.⁴⁶ Ishtar was one of the major deities in ancient Mesopotamia in its different periods, variously a goddess of love or of war, and often with both these masculine and feminine traits combined. Her lover, the 'Son of Life' (Fils de la Vie) referred to in the programme (the upper-case letters suggest something of a Messianic figure), is the Babylonian god of fertility variously named Dumuzi or Tammuz. The descent of Ishtar into the underworld circulated as an independent story, one that made its way into the epic of the mortal Babylonian king and hero, Izdubar. Following her rejection by Izdubar, Ishtar travels to the underworld to reclaim her first lover Tammuz. But this is no easy quest. Allat, goddess of the lower regions, impedes entry into her realm by having her gatekeeper extract a price at each door:

And thus he strips the goddess at each gate,
Of ornaments upon her breast and feet
And arms, her bracelets, girdle from her waist,
Her robe next took, and flung the Queen undrest
Within a cell of that dark solitude.
At last, before Queen Ishtar Allat stood,
When she had long remained within the walls,
And Allat mocked her till Queen Ishtar falls
Humiliated on the floor in woe;⁴⁷

Ishtar, no striptease artist, is subjected to ritual humiliation. A rival goddess imprisons her. Nature on earth begins to wither. 'And women hate all men, and them deride' reads the epic. Soon, Papsukul, god of Hope, intercedes on Ishtar's behalf, forcing Allat to release the two lovers and restore earthly fertility.

Ishtar undertakes an act of daring and heroism. She begins as the 'Queen of love', a Venus-figure, but beneath the external beauty lies a soul filled with compassion and a spirit of self-sacrifice. The progressive clarification of the theme in d'Indy's set of variations lays bare that soul, culminating in the purity

⁴⁶ Unfortunately I have been unable to locate the source that d'Indy excerpted for the programme, the so-called 'Epopée d'Izdubar'. Sources I have used are all thematically concordant with the programme. They include: William Moran, 'The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia', *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York, 1995), 2327–36; Thornkild Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, 1976); *Babylonian and Assyrian Literature, Comprising the Epic of Izdubar, Hymns, Tablets, and Cuneiform Inscriptions*, trans. Leonidas Le Cenci Hamilton, rev. edn (New York, 1901).

⁴⁷ *Babylonian and Assyrian Literature*, 92.

of a monophonic rendition of the theme – *primitif* and sincere. A close repertorial analogy is Orfeo at the River Styx in Monteverdi's opera, so well known to d'Indy. Whereas Istar dances, Orfeo sings. (Or, as an interpretation with a more feminist slant might have it: Orfeo appears at the river as an eloquent poet, Istar merely looks good.) In 'Possente Spirto' Monteverdi supplied an alternative highly ornamented melodic line for each of the strophic variations except the last, delivered in an unadorned manner. Charon has fallen asleep. No place for vocal fireworks here as Orfeo assumes his most heart-rending stance. With allowance made for differences between a vocally empowered male poet and d'Indy's disenfranchised dancing female heroine, d'Indy's variations do seem like an instrumental analogue to Monteverdi's strophic variations that conclude in simplicity. Setting aside *Orfeo*, it is also worth recalling that just before writing *Istar* d'Indy put the finishing touches on a work with a self-sacrificial female, the opera *Fervaal*. Indeed, the premiere of the symphonic poem in Brussels shortly before the opera might have been intended to enhance d'Indy's stature in the eyes of the Belgian public and press. Just as the beautiful, dark, exotic heroine Guilhen perilously travels out of her native habitat to be with her lover Fervaal – for which she will pay with her life – so too does Istar confront a hostile force, with happier consequences. Fervaal as proto-Messiah, Tammuz as a proto-Messiah who will be resurrected – the distance seems minimal. Whereas the last variation in *Istar* is monophonic, the display of compassion and altruism at the end of *Fervaal* generates a real chant with evangelical implication, the *Pange lingua*.

Istar's melody cannot be described as a pastiche of chant style. Nevertheless, it does seem like something of a late nineteenth-century chromatic analogue, displaying the metrical, rhythmic, and phrase-structural flexibility and freedom that d'Indy valued in the chant repertoire. It leaves the impression of an artificial historicist artefact: a bizarre conflation of two disparate epochs whose strangeness seems best explained by didactic impulse. Pierre Gariat, an obvious admirer of d'Indy, writing for the right-wing journal (and exponent of holist thinking) *Latinité* shortly before the composer's death, also drew a parallel to chant. In this case the imputed motif was not didactic. Passing d'Indyian aesthetics through a nationalist sieve, Gariat manages to position his subject, one of the great French Wagnerians, as the antithesis of Wagner:

Whereas one accumulates his materials to reach the maximum effect, the other proceeds in the opposite direction, moving from complex to simple following our own more noble and disinterested traditions. With Wagner, in effect, the work becomes more tormented as it reaches the end. With d'Indy, it becomes simpler, clearer, in order to conclude in that spiritual atmosphere of supreme purity and affective reconciliation that are, for all those of healthy origins, mirrors of perfection in the world. The end of *Fervaal*? A solo tenor in the echo of a faraway chorus. The end of *Istar*? An urgent affirmation of that medieval art of monody where the chord is excess. The end of *La Légende de Saint-Christophe*? A chorus from which the orchestra is excluded.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ 'enfin Fervaal est d'une esthétique rigoureusement opposée à celle du génie de Bayreuth: celle-ci accumulant les moyens pour atteindre le maximum d'effet ... celle-là procédant en sens inverse, s'acheminant du complexe au simple selon nos traditions plus hautaines et désintéressées. Avec Wagner, en effet, l'œuvre se trouble dans la mesure où elle se rapproche de ses fins. Avec d'Indy, elle se simplifie, se clarifie pour conclure

Seen against a foil of the usual quadratic themes used for nineteenth-century theme and variation sets, Istar's monophonic melody is fluid and unpredictable. Like chant – and appropriate to Istar's altruistic character – the melody does not draw attention to its 'surface' formal properties in its mission of *enseignement*. She may shed her clothing, but not her compassion. *Caritas* deserved better than a trivial tune, say a waltz by Diabelli. In d'Indy's way of thinking the chant repertoire was the *fons et origo* of salubrious aesthetic values in Western music precisely because it blossomed spontaneously out of Faith – and a sense of tonic.

Istar's structural rhetoric emerges from the premise of the programme. That rhetoric projects a reading of History consonant with holistic ideology, nothing less than peering into historical process by starting with modern music and working backwards. It is difficult to say whether d'Indy consciously intended a critique of some modern music, as I have already observed, yet the context and structure of *Istar* strongly invite such an interpretation. The first variation is the passage that sounds most up-to-date: its lush orchestration projects an added-sixth tonic harmony and a melody close to one in Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. The next variation has much more of a Wagnerian cast, complete with chromatic surges to melodic climaxes. This is already one step back in time. The variations do not follow this course systematically because they remain consistently wedded to chromatic language. But the theme does become 'clearer', and *Istar* comes to resemble conventional decorative classical-era variation sets. The penultimate variation spins out continuous dotted rhythms, a baroque-like procedure. Then, finally, monophony. And resolute, diatonic affirmation of the tonic. To address historical process by going backward is to remind that the past should be kept steadfastly in view. *Istar* exemplifies the lesson of the *Cours*. Modern style, like that exhibited by the first variation, was only worth its salt when grounded. *Istar* enacts this grounding, unfolding d'Indy's compositional ethos in real time. Yet not only is the character of the heroine amplified, she also moves forward through the developmental processes applied to the Summons and March music and a wide range of modulations. One of the most original and modern aspects of the piece is its amenability to metaphors of concurrent backward and forward motion. Within his brand of 1890s modernity d'Indy highlights tonality not as barrier to compositional imagination and aesthetic autonomy but as an infinitely reusable resource, like Faith, one that could sustain experimentation and challenges – even spiritual ones – to his listeners.

dans cette atmosphère spirituelle de *pureté suprême* et de conciliation sentimentale qui sont, pour tout être bien né, des miroirs de la perfection du monde. La fin de *Fervaal*? un solo de ténor dans l'écho d'un chœur lointain. La fin d'*Istar*? une affirmation impérieuse de cet art monodique médiéval ou l'accord est de trop. La fin de la *Légende de Saint-Christophe*? Un chœur d'où l'orchestre est exclus.' Pierre Giriat, 'Remarques sur l'œuvre dramatique', *Latinité* (Mar. 1930).