

lines (p. lxxvi) to the effect that terms such as 'Op. 15/2' and 'Op. 35/3' denote respectively the second piece from op. 15 and the third movement of op. 35, or detailed Glossary explanations (pp. lxxix–lxxxiv) of such items as 'Bar(s)' (4 lines of explanatory text), 'Bifolium' (7 lines), 'Cover' (9 lines), 'Label' (5 lines), 'Plate number' (11 lines), 'Printed' (3 lines), 'Shelfmark' (4 lines) or 'Staff' (8 lines)? Three Glossary definitions, though, are crucial, distinguishing 'First edition' from 'Reprint' (a reimpression from the same plates, amended or not) as opposed to 'Second, third, etc. edition' (involving re-engraving of the music), even if the joint case could arguably have been made in less than their 78 lines of text (almost three-quarters of a page). Trimming just the Glossary could instantly have made the book eight pages thinner (given the seven blanks that follow its last few line entries on p. 909); other minor tightening could have edited out redundancies such as 'It goes without saying that', 'not to mention' or 'It should be noted [/] pointed out that' (pp. xxi, xxiii, xli and xlvi).

That said, the prose is mostly lucid, given the staggering degree of detail, even if it more often than not bypasses the music, and only a few small errata emerge. The main one (kindly confirmed in communication by Dr Grabowski) concerns the commentary (p. 288) on two redundant bars in the finale of the op. 35 sonata that appear in the first French print then vanish from reprints: for '(p. 18: systems 4 & 5 contain 5 bars each, with two statements of bs 46 and 47 respectively; system 6 contains 4 bars)' we should read '(p. 18: systems 4 & 5 contain 5 bars each; system 6 contains 4 bars (bars 47 & 48 are redundant))'. This is one of the places where only the first English edition presented the correct musical reading from the outset, unlike the first German edition, which never corrected the fault; Mikuli's 1879 edition reports in a footnote that Chopin marked the correction in some pupils' exemplars that are now lost. Again, this larger 'horizontal' aspect to the reading is left unmentioned in the book under review, lying outside its remit. A few minor editing or stylistic blips affect nomenclature (BnF competes with F-Pn on different pages as a location label, the anglicized 'Milan' is used, but the Italian 'Roma' on p. 901, and there is an apparent confusion of usage between 'England' and 'Great Britain' on p. xxii column 2); and on column 2 of p. xxiv the phrase 'the Songs' would better accompany the first rather than second mention of Op. 74. For a book of this size, though, the general accuracy is remarkable. Although its relevance to performers is limited, the book is an essential tool for anyone involved in editing either Chopin or chronologically related repertoire.

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Graham Johnson, *Gabriel Fauré: The Songs and their Poets*, with translations of the song texts by Richard Stokes, Guildhall Research Studies 7 (London and Farnham, UK: The Guildhall School of Music & Drama and Ashgate, 2009). xxviii + 460 pp. £45.00.

At some level, it is something you always knew, but never quite put into words: Fauré's songs are nothing if not a tool of seduction. Figuratively, for us all – who has not fallen prey to their charm? But also literally, as Graham Johnson so convincingly demonstrates, as he rhymes us through the litany of young women who charmed Fauré and whose charms he sought to win with his songs.

Known as much for his discretion as for that charm, Fauré maintained a love life that was something of a public secret – equally known and un-discussed. Like the composer himself, Fauré's biographers have largely demurred from naming the names and telling the secrets. Enter Graham Johnson, for whom those names are an integral part of the story and an integral storyline in the composer's repertoire of over one hundred songs.

Fauré's career of song composition as an act of flirtation is nowhere more clearly put than in Johnson's discussion of *L'Horizon chimérique*, the composer's swan song and a reflection on the Great War. This oddly valedictory cycle is among the very small number of songs he wrote specifically for a male singer and shows a different compositional voice from his habitually feminine *mélodies*. Regretting that Fauré did not write more for the masculine voice, Johnson hypothesizes that Fauré's attraction to the female voice was a manifestation to his attraction to women. This is an implicit theme throughout Johnson's catalogue, but one that he articulates only briefly and fully near the end of the book:

For most of his life his songs, apart from their matchless musical value for their own sake, had always been superbly adaptable instruments of a kind of refined seduction, the calling cards of a subtle suitor, a means of staying close to a singer in order to admire her musicality and to revel in the unique female sound and aura of the soprano or mezzo voice. ... Performing songs with women meant rehearsing songs with women and rehearsing songs meant goodness knows how many other opportunities for intimate colloquy and private discussion (p. 364).

However compellingly Johnson makes this point, the book is far more than a triangulation of the composer, his songs and the women who coaxed them from his pen. The book's actual subtitle, *The Songs and the Poets*, identifies the central focus of this richly contextual collection of information gathered together by a pianist/coach who has spent a lifetime with the Fauré repertoire. Filling a critical lacuna long felt in the Fauré literature, Johnson's book will be celebrated by singers, pianists and the legions of music lovers who have succumbed to the charm of Fauré's *mélodies*. A member of the faculty of the Guildhall School and a renowned accompanist, Johnson has produced the missing 'companion' to the Fauré song repertoire: a compendium of fascinating and well selected information on the contexts, poets, patrons and performers of Fauré's beloved repertoire for voice.

The appeal of the book notwithstanding, its publication in a series entitled 'Research Studies' is slightly misleading. By the author's own admission this is not a monograph grounded in original research. No new ground is broken here. Rather it has gathered information from the bounty of authoritative sources, including the writings of leading Fauré scholars from Vladimir Jankélévitch and Jean-Michel Nectoux to Carlo Caballero, plus a wide array of French social and literary historians and many of the wittiest and most observant diarists of Fauré's own day.<sup>1</sup> The intended readership for this book is as broad ranging as are the sources from which the information is drawn. While the first intended reader is clearly the student or performer approaching the Fauré song repertoire, Johnson has gone out of his way to make the book friendly to the interested music lover.

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<sup>1</sup> See: Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Fauré et l'inexprimable* (Paris: Plon, 1974), Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life*, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Carlo Caballero, *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

There are, for example, no musical examples in the book, a decision that vastly extends its readership (and keeps its weight under 2 kilos). That decision also means that some potentially instructive points (e.g., a comparison of Fauré's early style to the late songs of Neidermeyer) are weakly made. It also means that some of the finer points of Johnson's insights are not as specific as they might be. As though in compensation, the book offers an extensive iconography of not only Fauré, but also his poets, his singers, and a generous serving of relevant lexicographical illustration – rare and beautifully designed volumes of poetry and first editions of Fauré's songs.

The strict chronological structure of the book, discussing each song in its presumed order of composition, cannot avoid becoming formulaic. Each of Chapters 2 through 14 carves out a chunk of years distinguished by some commonality and begins with a sketch of what was going on in Fauré's world at the time, serving up fascinating historical vignettes from social history, literature and the other arts. From this contextual sketch, the focus narrows to Fauré's own life, frequently with a notable attention to the women in his life at that time. The songs are then considered individually, beginning with a translation of the text<sup>2</sup>, followed by a positioning of the individual song in the context just set, an encapsulated early performance history, a discussion of some of the interpretative challenges in the song in question, an identification of the dedicatee (inevitably another attractive female patroness or singer), and an extended discussion of the poet and the position of the poem in his or her work. Johnson concludes with a personal assessment of the song, especially in the case of those songs that he views to be under represented in the current repertoire.

The result (almost) transcends its status as an extensively annotated list by the sheer interest of the writing.<sup>3</sup> Often chatty in tone (and spiced with healthy servings of salon gossip), the predictable structure is redeemed by the liveliness of the information, particularly the adroit and faintly scandalous sketches of the poets – unfamiliar terrain for most singers and pianists.

The great value in Graham Johnson's *Gabriel Fauré: The Songs and their Poets* lies less in its usefulness as a compendium of all things song, than in those larger themes that thread their way through the lists. Three stand out: first, the focus identified by the subtitle, the poets themselves; second, the aforementioned women who so frequently inspired the settings of the poems; and finally, Johnson's intimate knowledge of the songs in performance: the wisdom of his fingers. Each of these topics merits brief consideration.

The subtitle does not misrepresent the case: it is the poets rather than the poetry that commands the author's attention. Graham does note Fauré's frequent excisions and edits to the poems themselves, but does not seem to dwell on what

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<sup>2</sup> The usefulness of having a single source of translations into English of all of the texts to Fauré's songs is indisputable, and Richard Stokes' translations are integral to Johnson's discussions of each song. However, the translations themselves are marked by some unevenness in quality and a lack of consistent tone and purpose. While many are quite serviceable, others are somewhat over-the-top; for example, the translation of the words 'je reste' in 'Le Papillon et la fleur' as 'fixed to earth am I'. While suffusing the translation with pre-Parnassian excess may have some justification, the translation is not really faithful to the original.

<sup>3</sup> Actually a double list, since Johnson passes chronologically through the repertoire twice, once in the main body of the text and a second time with a discussion, aimed principally at pianists, of ideal tempi and other performance indications in Chapter 16.

these changes are about; they are observed, but left unanalyzed. It is rather the poets, their politics and their biographies which offer fascinating context to Fauré's text choices: the amiable and versatile Théophile Gautier, the socially unacceptable Jean Richepin, the gothic Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, the Sapphic baroness Renée de Brimont. In a few cases, the biographies of the poets and Fauré intersect, but mostly we are treated to the literary/political context of the poet's lives as a counterpoint to Fauré's text choice.

And what lives these were! In two chapters that focus on Paul Verlaine, Johnson provides fascinating (and almost salacious) insights into key figures in Fauré's life at the time: the patron – la Princesse Edmond de Polignac (as she would become, the heiress Winaretta Singer as she had been), the poet himself – Paul Verlaine and the mistress/muse Emma Bardac (who would become the second Mme Claude Debussy). These stories, fascinating in and of themselves, provide revealing insights into Fauré's own complex personal and emotional life. Johnson offers a detailed background on the poems of *La Bonne chanson*, which Verlaine wrote during his courtship of Mathilde Mauté. Despite their ill-fated marriage and Verlaine's deluded entry into it (assuming it would cure him of his instability, his alcoholism and his homosexuality), the poems are seen as sincere in their effusion and mark for Verlaine a departure from the stylist writing of *Fêtes galantes* and other similar poem cycles. With hindsight, others have seen them as something else: Johnson cites Robert Orledge's characterization as a 'wish-fulfillment fantasy' (p. 225).

From the rich delineation of context, Johnson offers excellent discussions of the individual songs in *La Bonne chanson*, as in the case of 'Avant que tu ne t'en ailles', where he vividly explains the eccentric musical structure in a very insightful reading of the poem. Not for the only time, but in a very effective way, Johnson also draws an astute comparison to Hugo Wolf's song composition of the same era with specific reference here to the *Italienisches Liederbuch* (p. 235–6). Johnson deconstructs *La Bonne chanson* sensitively. Its complexity, its maturity, its daring, its unrivalled fidelity to the poetry, its 'symphonic' coherence, the unusual degree to which it reveals the composer and its near universal inaccessibility to the listener is the stuff of rich paradox:

But if the listener is unaware of what this reconciliation between content and form is costing the composer and his performers, *La Bonne chanson* can easily appear to be simultaneously overwritten and underpowered, hardly a winning combination for the innocent ear. A piece of music such as this that bristles with technical difficulties and gleams with the ebullience of idealistic love can seem far less demonstrative in the concert hall than expected (p. 246).

Reading Johnson's book it is impossible to escape the fact that the influential women in Fauré's life are legion in number. A few – his erstwhile fiancée Marianne Viardot; his wife, the unfortunate Marie Fremiet, and his own Mélisande, Emma Bardac – are official stories in the Fauré biography, but Johnson introduces us to many more. The feminine influence is not restricted to the sequence of mistresses. Johnson, for example, establishes the twin and balancing influences of Marie Clerc and Pauline Viardot during the 1870s, a critical juncture in the composer's life. Clerc, with maternal concern about Fauré's lack of ambition, pushed the composer on to accomplishments. Viardot sought to draw him into the sphere of operatic and commercial success. The polarity of these interests and influences is well laid out, even if it doesn't quite materialize in the vocal repertoire. Viardot's commercial and operatic bent is seen in some of the songs – especially the duets written for her

daughters, and the turgid 'Après un rêve', but the one truly successful song of the period, 'Au bord de l'eau', is not seen to reflect the countervailing pressures of Mme Clerc to achieve in a more serious realm of composition.

Johnson's case for the critical role that women played in Fauré's song production is sealed when he makes the seemingly obvious, but infrequently remarked, observation that when the woman in the composer's life was a singer there was an outpouring of song. When not, he turned his compositional attention to other genres, as was the case during the turn of the century period of 1893–1904, a time during which his principal mistresses (Adela Maddison and Marguerite Hasselmanns) were pianists and he wrote a great deal of music for piano (p. 272).

Within its broad function as a song companion, Graham Johnson's *Gabriel Fauré* makes its most original contribution through the insights that are transcribed from the pianist-author's knowledgeable fingers. The examples throughout the book are numerous. In discussing 'Nell', for example, he observes:

When pianists first encounter these rippling semiquavers in G $\cong$  major (the fingers of both hands are made to caress the black notes, making occasional sorties into the region of the whites) they discover a complex musical language – impossible to sight-read – that masquerades as insouciant simplicity. Each beat of the second and third bars is marked by a bass line that descends via the little finger of the left hand – a perfect mingling of harmony and concealed, or rather implied, counterpoint (p. 121).

Elsewhere the master accompanist draws on his experience with other song repertoires to highlight the genius of Fauré's writing for piano: 'The ingenious deployment of the fingers [in 'Larmes'] provides an unusual texture where the piano sound is both snatched away and insistent, like a stifled sob. (Wilhelm Müller's 'Wasserflut' from Schubert's *Winterreise* uses similar imagery from tears that turn into a river.)' (p. 174).

In his concluding two chapters, Johnson offers a peek into his studio, sharing well-practiced *bon mots* that have shaped generations of Fauré neophytes. For all the wit and arch pronouncements, the injunctions to singers and pianists sometimes come off as a bit school-marmish, when in fact the essential lesson here boils down to fidelity to the musical text/context: 'When singing or playing Fauré's *mélodies*, artists have to suppress their desire to stamp a piece of music with their own personality; they must be prepared to deliver the music that comes from the composer and goes to the listener, almost without the intervention of the middle-man' (p. 387).

The chapter is regrettably structured as a series of oppositions – somewhat manufactured in several cases, or not fully balanced and perhaps unnecessary. The subtlety of the *mélodie*, for example, can be communicated without necessitating a discourse on the bluntness of the *lied*. And yet Johnson repeatedly leans on slightly catty, straw-dog comparisons to score his points, as when he refers to 'lieder-singing faculties aching to lay siege to the music of another, less co-operative, culture' (p. 387). A constructed opposition between scholarship and performance gets aired through an overworked metaphor of the tactician (musicologists) versus the foot-soldier (performers). There are admittedly a small number of 'tactician-musicologists' whose theoretical approach to the material distances their discussions from the 'soldier-performer'. But given the degree to which Johnson has relied on published scholarship, this is an ungrateful metaphor to be flogging (p. 379).

Advocacy as much as scholarship, Graham Johnson's companion to the Fauré song literature will be especially welcome for the rich contexts with which he

surrounds this repertoire beloved by singers, students and amateurs, as well as for the insights offered by his knowledgeable fingers into the performance of this repertoire.

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Sylvian Kahan, *In Search of New Scales: Prince Edmond de Polignac, Octatonic Explorer*, Eastman Studies in Music, v. 63 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2009). xiv+389 pp. £40.00.

Paul-André Bempéchat, *Jean Cras, Polymath of Music and Letters* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009). xxviii+569 pp. £55.00.

This review concerns two recently published books dedicated to overlooked French composers, both of whom achieved renown in areas other than music during their lifetimes. The first man, Prince Edmond de Polignac (1834–1901) was born into an aristocratic family, albeit a disgraced one<sup>1</sup>. Unable to gain admission to the Paris Conservatoire, and with very few professional opportunities deemed ‘acceptable for a young aristocratic man’ he pursued a career as a ‘gentleman composer’ (Kahan, p. 18). The second subject, Jean Cras (1879–1932), was a scientist, an inventor, a distinguished Rear-Admiral in the French navy and a moral philosopher, in addition to being an esteemed composer. Cras, ‘during his lifetime, [enjoyed] the same stature and celebrity as Fauré, Debussy, and Ravel’ but ‘[s]ince his death, [both he] and his music have been almost completely overlooked’ (Bempéchat, front flap). By contrast, Kahan does not consider Polignac to be an ‘unjustly neglected composer’, mainly because his octatonic music, which is the focus of her study, ‘is, regrettably, not much more than a historical curiosity’ (Kahan, p. 3). She does suggest that his tonal music (which she, necessarily treats much more briefly than the octatonic music) ‘might justify the appellation’ (Kahan, p. 3).

The temperaments of the two men were also quite different. The aristocratic Polignac was plagued with an identity crisis. He was ‘a sickly and “delicate” son in a family of strong, brilliant older brothers’ and suffered ‘the additional turmoil of his sexual uncertainty’. His failure to meet the standard for admission to composition classes was due to both his limited talent and his poor showing in his courses (particularly his study of harmony with Napoléon-Henri Reber (1807–1880)). This latter may have been due in part to his ‘tendencies toward indolence’. (Kahan p. 18). Cras, on the other hand, was a man of determination and resolution: ‘resolutely French, resolutely republican ... resolutely Catholic and resolutely contemptuous of aristocracy,’ although Bempéchat attributes a sort of dichotomy to him:

Jean Cras cannot be qualified as a purely Breton composer; *in extension*, nor can his musical legacy be qualified as purely Breton. Given his adherence to musical

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<sup>1</sup> Kahan notes that the Prince’s father, Prince Jules de Polignac ‘had been condemned by the French courts to *mort civile*, a total privation of his civil rights’ and that, ‘as a consequence, [Prince Edmond’s] birth certificate and baptismal record identified him as ... son of the Marquis de Chalançon, “currently away on a trip.”’ (Kahan, p. 9)