

after Joachim's death in 1907.²³ Clive Brown points out that the style of today's performers of Brahms's music is quite removed from how Brahms himself would have heard his works, played by Joachim. To gain a deeper perception of Joachim's style of performing is therefore just another important step toward understanding Brahms's string chamber music.²⁴

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Claude Debussy (1862–1918) might well have chosen to dedicate the score of his first quartet 'À mon cher maître César Franck' if artistic kinship alone were in question – and had Ernest Chausson's friendship, musical encouragement, and almost certainly his financial and social standing not loomed large. Debussy planned to dedicate the work to Chausson (1855–99), whose salon he frequented along with the luminaries Stéphane Mallarmé, Isaac Albeniz, Ivan Turgenev and Claude Monet, and who figured prominently as his mentor of the early 1890s. However, Debussy and Chausson encountered a significant rift (its nature seemingly not to be known) over the quartet as its composition evolved, and he turned the dedication to the members of the Ysaÿe quartet, who premiered the work. The impact of Franck (1822–90) – in general and on Debussy in particular – is underestimated, and the musical presence of Chausson in the work's genesis becomes an intertext between the two. The Société nationale becomes the fourth member of the quartet – Franck as the president of the Société from 1886 until his death in 1890, Chausson was its secretary from 1886 until his death in 1899, Debussy was a member from 1888, and the premiere of this and other substantial early works took place there.

The cyclic structure favoured by César Franck, altered sonata form and development techniques, and prominent chromaticism all contributed to a general idiom linking Franck, Chausson, and Debussy, particularly around 1890. The musical language of the *Quatuor* is freer, and the resulting sound more conspicuously modernist, than that of Franck: Debussy's modal harmonies and melodies, dissonant chord progressions chosen solely for their hedonistic beauty, parallel fifths, and tonal side-slippage extend beyond the language of his predecessor. Nor does Debussy engage in chromatic alterations of tonal functions, which might seem Germanic, as did Franck, for Debussy's thought already superseded functional tonality. It may be significant that Debussy studied composition at the Conservatoire not with Franck but with Ernest Guiraud, a soft aesthete who if anything propelled Debussy's accomplishment by permitting his adventurousness. Chausson studied with Massenet, but like Debussy, he attended Franck's improvisation classes, which several Conservatoire students

²³ Milsom, *Theory and Practice*, 26.

²⁴ Brown, 58.

characterized as *de facto* composition lessons. Such musical elements strongly appealed to Chausson, appear plentifully in his writing, and musically drew him and Debussy together. One sees decisive modelling on Franck in cyclic form and tonal uses by Debussy in the *Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre* (1890). When in his 1890 symphony Chausson reacts to the 1888 Franck Symphony in D minor, Roger Nichols hears Chausson becoming the 'younger brother' of Franck.¹ Both compositions are hinged on the tonalities of D and B-flat, the Franck proceeding in three movements, D minor, B-flat minor/major and D minor/major. The Chausson symphony (his only work in the genre) is also in three movements, and proceeds by the keys B-flat, D minor/major and B-flat minor/major. In the *Quatuor* Debussy is in the neighbourhood, always expanding, though not far if one considers the tonal extension he is enforcing by now. The quartet movements proceed by 1) G-phrygian/ B-flat/ G modal; 2) G major/E-flat /G; 3) D flat/ C-sharp, F-sharp/ D-flat; and 4) D-flat/ (common A-flat) G phrygian/ C-sharp minor/ G chromatic/ G. All three works employ cyclic form, which by 1890 is firmly if elusively identified with Franck.

1892 was a singularly important year, because it saw the beginning of Debussy's only completed opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, his germinal masterpiece the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, and his most important chamber work, the *Quatuor*. The string quartet in France was only in its naissance, with quartets of the Viennese classicists dominating the scene even though they were likewise relative newcomers on the Parisian recital stage. French composers were understandably reluctant, in the heady atmosphere trumpeting *Ars gallica* after the Franco-Prussian War, to take on a German property. Only three quartets, immediately preceding the Debussy, have remained in the repertory, those by Édouard Lalo (rev. 1880), Vincent d'Indy (1890) and César Franck (1890). But moreover, scholarship records that Debussy attended performances of string quartets by Grieg, Tchaikovsky and Borodin. The young composer's membership in and premieres at the Société de Musique, beginning in 1888, provided a point of departure for him, since certain of the *Ariettes oubliées*, *La damoiselle élue*, and the *Piano Fantasy* (scheduled but withdrawn by Debussy) were like the *Quatuor* significant moments in launching his career.

The letters of Debussy in the period² indicate that the composer began work sometime in the second half on 1892. Correspondence with Ernest Chausson documents the evolution of the work, with Chausson poised as the *inspirateur en progrès* and the original dedicatee. The editor, Douglas Woodfull-Harris, deduces that the work was finished sometime between 15 August and 13 October 1893, the date when he signed the contract with Jacques Durand for the score. Debussy made contacts about then with Eugène Ysaÿe to premiere the work with his quartet, the performance occurring on 29 December 1893 at the Salle Pleyel, the 234th program of the Société Nationale de Musique. The editor considers all evidence and concludes that the turn from Chausson to the members of the Ysaÿe Quartet as dedicatees sprang from a particularly critical remark by Chausson concerning form in the *Quatuor*. Debussy attempted in 5 February 1894 to heal the rift but did not succeed.³ The work received a highly positive response from

¹ BBC *Music Magazine* *Orchestral Choice* Jan 2007. http://www.arkivmusic.com/classical/album.jsp?album_id=143953.

² Claude Debussy, *Correspondance: 1872–1918*, ed. François Lesure and Denis Herlin (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2005).

³ Debussy, *Correspondance*, 192. 'I have to say... that being exiled from your friendship feels like an eternity, I am so attached to you! Do I really need to tell you

early audiences and players, and indeed those since, but the musical idiom dismayed some critics of the day and for some time to come.

For example, on 10 March 1902, Phillip Hale of the *Boston Journal* was dumbfounded when he heard the Kneisel Quartet perform, and Hale echoed the conservative Parisian critics of the 1890s: '[The Quartet] is a strange and bizarre work ... a hallucination characterized by leaping rhythms, violent shocks of harmony which recall the chromaticism of oriental tunes, and a curious assemblage of sonorities, some charming, some irritating... a hallucination... Is this indeed music?'⁴ But the next month when he heard the *Faun* on 5 April, Hale turned on a dime, having opened to the beauty of timbre and the rightness of empirical harmonic choices, and he perceived Debussy's symbolist intent and sensual language, the first notable American critic to do so: 'The piece is delicious music not merely because it is out of the common in vein of thought and in technic of expression, but because it is highly imaginative and ineffably beautiful'.⁵

If as this editor posits and this work of 1893 qualifies as Debussy's first masterpiece, then Woodfull-Harris presents an excellent point of departure with which the performer and scholar can trace its importance. While I concur that the Quartet has a particular significance, I cannot dismiss such primary works in Debussy's unfolding modernist statement as the early songs even if miniatures, the challenging opera segment *Diane au bois*, or the transcendent *La demoiselle élue*. The work is unique in Debussy's *oeuvre*, among many other prospects, because the composer assigned an opus number, as if raising its status to a "member of a *bona fide* composer's canon" or even—and this would not be beyond Debussy—poking a little fun at the stuffiness of how well art music thought of itself. Debussy in any case recognized the string quartet as the historic peak and proof of mastery, the "arrivist" quality that seems to say, "I have mastered the essence of the craft." Could it have been the rapprochement with Chausson's *standing* and the memory of Franck's design that led to such an opus number? Did he not promise Chausson, after the letter's critique, to write "a quartet only for you...and I will do my best to elevate my use of form."⁶ Ever evolving, Debussy used no opus numbers before or after, yet another reference to Père Franck and his elevation. The Debussy Quartet occupies a unique place in the literature for the composer and the genre. It documents his evolution in the immediate period alongside the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (for Pierre Boulez the 'beginning of modern music'⁷) and the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*

that I was desolate for many days over what you said about my quartet.... I will write another quartet that will be only for you, and I will do my best to elevate my use of form.' Chausson's daughter Etiennette Lerolle-Chausson, writing to Edward Lockspeiser in 1959, confided that a form of financial double dealing on the composer's part as well as his short-lived engagement to the Chaussons' friend Thérèse Roger figured in the rift. See Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind* (London: Cassell, 1962): I; 129.

⁴ *Boston Journal*. Philip Hale wrote music criticism for the *Boston Home Journal* from 1889–91, the *Boston Journal* 1891–1903, and the *Boston Herald* from 1903 until his retirement in 1933. He also wrote editorials in the *New Music Review* anonymously for many years and annotated Boston Symphony concerts for 32 seasons.

⁵ James R. Briscoe, 'Debussy in Daleville: Toward Modernist Hearing in the U.S.' *Rethinking Debussy*, ed. Elliott Antokoletz and Marianne Wheelton (New York: Oxford, 2011): 227.

⁶ Debussy, *Correspondance*, p. 192.

⁷ *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, Stephen Walsh, trans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 259.

(1893–1902), which for Donald Jay Grout was ‘a monument to French operatic reaction to Wagner’.⁸

Discrepancies existed from the initial publication in 1894 between the score and the parts, the former corrected by Debussy but the latter not so. At a later point, Debussy made a large number of corrections and alterations in a copy of the first edition, which alterations have been incorporated in this Bärenreiter Urtext edition. The critical edition utilizes all sources including the composer’s letters, which offer a valuable insight into the genesis of the composition. The editor notes that the bulk of Debussy’s foremost compositions underwent extensive revisions, some of these documents have not been recovered, some witnessed destruction or loss of significant stages by Debussy himself, others encounter alternative versions vying for primary authority, and still others passed through the 1933 sale by the widowed Mme. Debussy absent tracing mechanisms. Taken together, these conditions create enormous difficulties for the editor. Other Debussy sources needed for critical editions fall reasonably well into place, but the *Quatuor* belongs clearly to the first order. Douglas Woodfull-Harris has painstakingly investigated each of these to which he could gain access, weighed all evidence such as the separate publication of score and parts – there is no autograph or proof copy of the parts in Debussy’s hand, and one must presume that a Durand or other professional copyist generated the string quartet parts. The editor moreover found it necessary to corroborate emendations likely in Debussy’s hand against other sources. Despite the Byzantine labyrinth he faced at times, he has produced a model of editorial scholarship.

That Bärenreiter has kept the price of the score and parts low – the score costs a bargain €15 per printed page – might serve two impressive purposes. It will encourage many libraries, more and more cash-strapped, to acquire a score of which they might already possess a copy ostensibly authentic, with the indication ‘édition originale’ distracting from the mandate of this critical edition. And second, by its reappearance in a version quite so fine, well laid-out, direct in the service of performance, and authoritative, Debussy’s artistry will be perceived more forcefully by a widening audience. The significance of this edition is keen, therefore: not only does it vividly portray a major creation of a young composer on the cusp of forming a new sound world, but by its scholarly prowess it convinces us unequivocally that French music with Debussy at the apex embodies an innovation plentifully potent to lead the century ahead.

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Hamish MacCunn, *Three Overtures: ‘The Land of the Mountain and the Flood’, ‘The Ship o’ the Fiend’, ‘The Dowie Dens o’ Yarrow’*, edited by Jennifer Oates (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 2010).

It is fair to say that the nineteenth-century Scottish composer Hamish MacCunn is not exactly a household name. For much of the twentieth century he was little more

⁸ *A Short History of Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947, revised 3rd edition 1988 by H.W. Williams): 581.