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In Search of a Style:

French Violin Performance from Franck to Ravel

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

by

Ji Young An

2013

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

In Search of a Style:

French Violin Performance from Franck to Ravel

by

Ji Young An

Doctor of Musical Arts

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Robert Winter, Chair

My dissertation focuses on issues of French sound and style in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French violin repertoire. As a violinist who studied at the Paris Conservatory, I have long been puzzled as to why so little had been written about something that everyone seems to take for granted—so called French style.

I attacked this elusive issue from three perspectives: 1) a detailed look at performance directions; 2) comparisons among recordings by artists close to this period (Jacques Thibaud, Zino Francescatti, as well as contemporary French artists such as Philippe Graffin and Guillaume Sutre); and 3) interviews with three living French violinists (Olivier Charlier, Régis Pasquier, and Gérard Poulet) with strong ties to this tradition. After listening to countless historical recordings, I settled on three pivotal works that illustrate the emergence and full flowering of the French style: César Franck's Violin Sonata (1886), Claude Debussy's Violin Sonata (1917), and

Maurice Ravel's *Tzigane: Rapsodie de Concert pour Violon et Piano* (1924). Each of them presents specific challenges: notational and stylistic issues in Franck's Violin Sonata, Debussy's performance directions in his Violin Sonata, and notational and interpretive issues in Ravel's *Tzigane* that led to a separate, orally-transmitted French tradition.

While a detailed survey of three iconic works cannot speak for an entire era, my study is the first to address in depth issues that any violinist contemplating a performance of these works must face. At the same time I believe that the focus on performance—the ultimate goal of all music making—will be of interest to many serious music lovers.

The dissertation of Ji Young An is approved.

---

Guillaume Sutre

---

Neal Stulberg

---

Malina Stefanovska

---

Robert Winter, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles  
2013

To my beloved husband, Henry Shin

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
List of Musical Examples .....	vii
Glossary .....	ix
Acknowledgements .....	xi
Vita .....	xii
Chapter I. Setting the Stage: <i>Fin du Siècle</i> Paris .....	1
Chapter II. Shape and Style	
César Franck (1822-1890): Sonata for Violin and Piano (1886) .....	12
Claude Debussy (1862-1918): Sonata for Violin and Piano (1917) .....	21
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937): <i>Tzigane</i> (1924) .....	27
Chapter III. Performing Franck's Sonata for Violin and Piano (1886) .....	38
Chapter IV. Performing Debussy's Sonata for Violin and Piano (1917)	
What is the "French sound?" .....	51
The French Sound and Debussy's Performance Directions .....	53
Phrase Markings in Debussy's Violin Sonata .....	61
Chapter V. Performing Ravel's <i>Tzigane: Rapsodie de concert for violin and piano</i> (1924) ...	67
Postlude .....	80
Appendix .....	83
Bibliography .....	96

## LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example 1: Franck Violin Sonata, I, mm. 1-4 .....	14
Example 2: Franck Violin Sonata, I, mm. 5-6 .....	14
Example 3: Franck Violin Sonata, I, mm. 31-33 .....	15
Example 4: Franck Violin Sonata, III, mm. 93-95 .....	16
Example 5: Franck Violin Sonata, II, m. 44 .....	17
Example 6: Franck Violin Sonata, IV, m. 99 .....	17
Example 7: Franck Violin Sonata, III, mm. 101-109 .....	18
Example 8: Franck Violin Sonata, IV, mm. 143-169 .....	19
Example 9a: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 5-8 .....	24
Example 9b: Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 9-12 .....	24
Example 10a: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 42-43 .....	25
Example 10b: Debussy Violin Sonata, II, mm. 23-24 .....	25
Example 11a: Debussy Violin Sonata, II, m. 1 .....	25
Example 11b: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 216-219 .....	25
Example 12a: Debussy Violin Sonata, III, m. 24 .....	26
Example 12b: Debussy Violin Sonata, II, mm. 130-132 .....	26
Example 13a: Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 106-107 .....	26
Example 13b: Debussy Violin Sonata, II, mm. 112-113 .....	27
Example 14a: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , mm. 1-4 .....	29
Example 14b: Paganini 24 Caprices Op. 1 for Violin Solo, No. 19, mm. 27-30 .....	29
Example 15a: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , 5-6 a. R. 21 .....	30
Example 15b: Paganini 24 Caprices Op. 1 for Violin Solo, No. 24, Var. 9 .....	30
Example 16a: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , 13 a. R. 2 .....	30
Example 16b: Paganini 24 Caprices Op. 1 for Violin Solo, No. 24, Var. 11 .....	31
Example 17a: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , R. 4 .....	31
Example 17b: Paganini 24 Caprices Op. 1 for Violin Solo, No. 6, mm. 1-2 .....	31
Example 18: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , Theme A, mm. 1-2 .....	33
Example 19: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , Theme B, m. 9 .....	33
Example 20: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , Theme C, mm. 15-17 .....	33
Example 21: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , R. 6 .....	34
Example 22: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , Theme D, R. 17 .....	34
Example 23: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , Theme E, R. 20 .....	34
Example 24a: Franck Violin Sonata, I, mm. 5-6 .....	39
Example 24b: Franck Violin Sonata, I, mm. 63-64 .....	40
Example 25: Franck Violin Sonata, II, mm. 14-23 .....	42
Example 26: Franck Violin Sonata, II, mm. 67-79 .....	44
Example 27: Franck Violin Sonata, III, mm. 1-4 .....	45
Example 28: Franck Violin Sonata, III, mm. 32-36 .....	46
Example 29: Franck Violin Sonata, III, mm. 59-62 .....	47
Example 30: Franck Violin Sonata, IV, mm. 1-2 .....	48
Example 31: Franck Violin Sonata, IV, mm. 79-80 .....	48

Example 32: Franck Violin Sonata, IV, mm. 116-117 .....	48
Example 33: Franck Violin Sonata, IV, mm. 185-186 .....	48
Example 34: Franck Violin Sonata, IV, m. 37 .....	48
Example 35: Franck Violin Sonata, IV, mm. 1-5 .....	49
Example 36: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 84-87 .....	54
Example 37: Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 89-95 .....	55
Example 38: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 24-25 .....	58
Example 39: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 72-73 .....	59
Example 40: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 136-141 .....	59
Example 41: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 211-212 .....	60
Example 42: Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 85-88 .....	60
Example 43: Debussy Violin Sonata, II, mm. 60-62 .....	61
Example 44a: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 5-8, Debussy's phrase markings .....	63
Example 44b: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 5-8, Poulet's bowings .....	63
Example 45a: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 120-127, Debussy's phrase markings .....	63
Example 45b: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 120-127, Poulet's bowings .....	63
Example 46a: Debussy Violin Sonata, II, mm. 112-113, Debussy's phrase markings .....	64
Example 46b: Debussy Violin Sonata, II, mm. 112-113, Poulet's bowings .....	64
Example 47a: Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 29-34, Debussy's phrase markings .....	64
Example 47b: Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 29-34, Poulet's bowings .....	64
Example 48a: Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 91-96, Debussy's phrase markings .....	65
Example 48b: Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 91-96, Poulet's bowings .....	65
Example 49a: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 102-106, Debussy's phrase markings .....	65
Example 49b: Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 102-106, Poulet's bowings .....	66
Example 50: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , m. 1 .....	68
Example 51: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , m. 3 .....	68
Example 52: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , m. 5 .....	68
Example 53: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , mm. 9-14 .....	68
Example 54: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , R. 21-2 a. R. 22 .....	72
Example 55: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , R. 14 .....	74
Example 56a: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , R. 21 .....	76
Example 56b: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , R. 21, altered version - Graffin .....	76
Example 57: Ravel <i>Tzigane</i> , 7-10 a. R. 24 .....	77

## GLOSSARY

### **Détaché**

A direction to draw the bow firmly on the string using separate bow strokes.

### **Harmonics**

A series of pitches that accompany the fundamental frequency. On stringed instruments harmonics are produced by lightly stopping the string at various points along its length.

### **Jeté**

French for “thrown,” referring to a bouncing bow stroke that starts from above and is dropped onto the string.

### **Left hand pizzicato**

Using one of the fingers to stop the string while another one plucks the same string.

### **Legato**

The smooth connecting of notes to one another.

### **Pizzicato**

A direction to pluck the strings of bowed instruments with the fingers of either the right (most commonly) or left hand.

### **Portamento**

A term originating in vocal music and signifying a sliding from one note to another.

### **Portato**

Originally noted in German as “das Tragen der Töne” [Daniel Gottlob Türk], meaning to play very *legato* with a slight additional emphasis on each note.

### **Ricochet**

A bow technique whereby the bow is thrown onto the string, using the energy from the bounce to play several notes within the same stroke.

**Spiccato**

Playing a succession of notes using the natural bounce of the string to go from one note to the next.

**Sul Ponticello**

A direction to draw the bow near the bridge, producing a metallic and somewhat eerie sound.

**Sur la touche**

A direction for stringed instruments to draw the bow near or on the fingerboard, producing a flute-like tone.

**Vibrato**

From the Italian “to shake,” referring to the technique on string instruments of stopping the string and undulating the finger back and forth in order to intensify the sounding note.

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## Chapter I – Setting the Stage: *Fin du siècle* Paris

Although the chain of treaties and diplomatic initiatives that ultimately led to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 reads like a crossword puzzle, the war proved in many respects to be the inevitable outcome of historical antipathies between France and Prussia that dated back to the reign of Napoleon I. The French- and German-speaking cultures had been at odds in one way or another since the sixteenth century, and the famous Ems Dispatch that provoked France to marshal its troops served only as the match on the gasoline.

Prussia, assisted by its North German Confederation members and the South German states, roundly defeated France, ending the reign of Napoleon III and with it the Second French Empire. Yet this military defeat turned out to be the most important catalyst leading to French cultural domination by the late 1880s. Nowhere in the annals of history has a culture come to dominate cuisine, fashion, theater, painting, literature, conversation, and, of course, music so swiftly following an ignominious military defeat as the French. Anyone of French descent born after 1870 would be aware only of France's enviable position as the cultural capital of the Western world.

A central part of this resilience was the unswerving French belief in *le bon goût* ("good taste"). While the aesthetics of taste were very much on the minds of nineteenth-century philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, *le bon goût* had been recognized in France since at least the sixteenth century. Although its primary application throughout most of the nineteenth century remained to visual arts, its capacity to nurture and shape the French concept of identity or character—national character—remained a strong element.

In popular culture the French domination of painting is the best known. The genesis of Impressionism actually dates back just prior to the Franco-Prussian War with the likes of Claude

Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Camille Pissarro. Bored with the representational art of the previous decades, and fascinated by the reflections of light on water, painters found innovative ways to portray light through the use of pastel and non-standard colors, omitting almost entirely the darker tones. Soon they branched out to apply these innovative notions of light to other dimensions of nature, such as trees, clouds, and hills.<sup>1</sup>

France experienced its Golden Age, *La Belle Époque*, roughly between 1890 and 1914 (the outbreak of the First World War). Full of both optimism and prosperity, France flourished not only in art and literature, but also achieved significant advancements in fashion, technology, and science. These were most apparent to the outside world in two celebrated *Expositions Universelles* held in Paris in 1889 and 1900. The *Exposition* of 1889 saw the construction of the Eiffel Tower as its grand entrance. Coincidentally, the Moulin Rouge and its daring cabaret (best known for the seductive can-can) also opened for the first time in 1889.

At the Exposition of 1900, which alone counted almost 50 million visitors,<sup>2</sup> French bow maker Alfred Joseph Lamy (1850-1919) received a Gold medal (he had received Silver in 1889) for his superb craftsmanship.<sup>3</sup> The sense of adventure and progress continued unabated following the two Expositions. In his essay *Can-can and Flappers*, Philippe Julian notes that “the four years leading up to the 1914 war were exceptionally brilliant ... there had never been so many

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<sup>1</sup> Lionello Venturi, “The Aesthetic Idea of Impressionism,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 1, no. 1 (1941): p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Hebe Dorsey, *The Belle Époque in the Paris Herald* (London, 1986), p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> François Xavier Tourte (1747-1835) invented the modern bows that enabled new forms of expression and articulations and facilitated the use of *legato*. Since then, French bow makers became popular. Some of Tourte’s improvements include a better incurved shape of the stick for better balance and weight, refining the shape of the head, and the installation of the screw in the nut to reduce the tension in the hair.

new and sparkling spectacles, such unexpected colours and sounds.”<sup>4</sup>

Until the First World War, French music flourished predominantly in musical salons<sup>5</sup>—a tradition dating back to the eighteenth century. Aristocrats such as Princesse Edmond de Polignac (1865-1943) often organized and gathered artists from all disciplines—painters, writers, and musicians, to name a few—to their spacious residences to display and share new works.

Hebe Dorsey describes salon life in his 1986 book *The Belle Époque in the Paris Herald*:

“The salons gave an accurate idea of who was who in the Belle Époque and of how people entertained themselves ... There was a constant round of musicales, five o’clocks [i.e. events commencing at 5 p.m.], dancing lessons, charity bazaars and amateur theater. The level of taste and quality was considerable and important artists paid great attention to the leading hostesses, who acted as influential patrons of the arts.”<sup>6</sup>

At these events, many composers, including Fauré, Franck, Debussy, and Ravel, found themselves premiering short atmospheric works for solo piano or a small chamber group such as violin and piano.

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The three composers who form a primary focus of this study—César Franck, Claude Debussy, and Maurice Ravel—were profoundly influenced by the bustling creativity of the time. Soon the tenets of Impressionism began to impact music. French composers were now especially

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<sup>4</sup> Philippe Julian, “Can-can and Flappers,” in *La Belle Époque*, ed. Enzo Orlandi (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1978), p. 108.

<sup>5</sup> Cécile Tardif, “Fauré and the Salons,” in *Regarding Fauré*, ed. and trans. Tom Gordon (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Dorsey, *The Belle Époque in the Paris Herald*, p. 89.

keen to break away from German traditions of form and harmony, especially the suffocating influence of Wagner. Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) was the first pioneer in this new kind of French music. As Joseph de Marliave, a French musicologist and the husband of the famous pianist Marguerite Long, asserted in the *Études Musicales* in 1909:

“Si la musique française a reçu depuis quelques années une orientation différente et pris pour ainsi dire de nouvelles habitudes, c’est à Gabriel Fauré qu’en revient la gloire. C’est lui qui réalisa avec la discrète précision qui seule convient à ce genre les premières touches de l’Impressionnisme musical.”<sup>7</sup>

[“If French music has taken a different direction as well as new habits in recent years, it is to Gabriel Fauré that we owe that achievement. With discrete precision that only suits this genre, he created the first touch of Impressionistic music.”]

After the Franco-Prussian War, Fauré composed his innovative Violin Sonata in A major (1875-1876) and the Piano Quartet in C minor (1876-1879), breaking away from German models with a vengeance, replacing them with softer, less forward-driving harmonic progressions and sonorities.

Ten years after Fauré introduced his Violin Sonata to the world, César Franck (1822-1890), an organist, pianist, and distinguished composition professor at the Paris Conservatory, deepened the French sense of stylistic independence with his acclaimed Violin Sonata in A major (1886). Franck was born in Liège, a city described by Vincent d’Indy as “peculiarly French, not only in sentiment and language, but also in its external aspect.”<sup>8</sup> Born of Germanic parents, Franck learned to balance—and later turned to his advantage—the twin cultural forces at work in his musical imagination.

Although exposed to French culture since birth, Franck’s unequivocal French influence

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<sup>7</sup> Marguerite Long, *Au piano avec Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: René Julliard, 1963), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Vincent d’Indy, *César Franck*, trans. Rosa Newmarch (London: John Lane, 1910), p. 29.

commenced at age 14 when his family immigrated to Paris in 1835 to further their son's musical studies; only a year later he became a naturalized French citizen.<sup>9</sup> At the Paris Conservatory Franck studied piano under Pierre Zimmermann, composition under Aimé Leborne, and organ with François Benoist, "winning distinction in all."<sup>10</sup> Although subtle Wagnerian influences can be heard in some of his works, writers have characterized Franck as "neither denouncing nor slavishly imitating [Wagner]."<sup>11</sup>

Despite his immense contribution to the development of French instrumental music—such as the Piano Quintet in F (1880), the Violin Sonata (1886), the Symphony in D (1888), and the String Quartet (1890)—Franck received scant recognition during his lifetime. According to Vincent d'Indy, one of Franck's Conservatory colleagues mocked Franck's Symphony when it premiered in 1889:

“That, a symphony? ... who ever heard of writing for the *cor anglais* in a symphony? Just mention a single symphony by Haydn or Beethoven introducing the *cor anglais*<sup>12</sup>? There, well, you see—your Franck's music may be whatever you please, but it will certainly never be a symphony!”<sup>13</sup>

D'Indy relates further that when Franck organized a private performance of *Les Béatitudes* at his house, only Edouard Lalo and Victorin Joncières stayed until the end. The Minister of Fine Arts decided to not show up at the last minute even though Franck had chosen a date that would perfectly suit the Minister's availability. The Directors of the Paris Conservatory also did not

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<sup>9</sup> John Trevitt and Joël-Marie Fauquet, *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “César Franck.”

<sup>10</sup> Julien Tiersot and Frederick H. Martens, “César Franck (1822-1922),” *The Musical Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1923): p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> W. Wright Roberts, “César Franck,” *Music & Letters* 3, no. 4 (1922): p. 318.

<sup>12</sup> Cor anglais is the French term for English horn.

<sup>13</sup> d'Indy, *César Franck*, p. 54.

show up, and the few gentlemen of the press “fled in a few minutes from this region.”<sup>14</sup> Most shockingly, d’Indy asserted that “no official deputation from the Ministry or the Department of Fine Arts accompanied the body of César Franck to its last resting-place.”<sup>15</sup> “Even the Conservatoire, which reckoned him among its professors, neglected to send a representative to the funeral.”<sup>16</sup>

Such unfair treatment of one of the greatest composers and a good-natured man resulted largely from fear and jealousy of his considerable talents. According to Ernest Newman, Franck was “big enough to arouse the suspicious fears” but had no desire to fight for his rightful place. Newman stated that “the leading French musicians of the time, especially those holding official positions, were insensately jealous of [Franck] and unkind to him.”<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, Franck’s nationality created prejudice against him. Although he was naturalized French at an early age, Franck’s contemporaries always identified him as “un des plus grands musiciens flamands [one of the greatest Flemish musicians].”<sup>18</sup> In an interview with Paul Landormy, Debussy specifically excluded Franck from the circle of contemporary French composers:

“César Franck n’est pas français, il est belge. Mais oui! Il y a une école belge .... L’action de César Franck sur les compositeurs français se réduit à peu de chose; il leur a enseigné certains procédés d’écriture, mais leur inspiration n’a aucun rapport avec la sienne.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59.

<sup>17</sup> Ernest Newman, review of *César Franck*, by Vincent d’Indy, *The Musical Times* 51, no. 804 (1910): p. 77.

<sup>18</sup> Claude Debussy, *Correspondance 1872-1918* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), p. 1951.

<sup>19</sup> Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 272-273.

[“César Franck is not French, he is Belgian. Of course! There is a Belgian school ... César Franck’s action on French composers does not amount to much; he taught them certain writing procedures, but their inspiration has nothing to do with his.”]

Achille-Claude Debussy (1862-1918) imparted a strikingly new identity to French music. As a refugee of the Franco-Prussian War and seeing France fall to Germany’s guns at age nine, Debussy naturally developed a sense of national pride and anti-German feelings.

From a young age Debussy was exposed to many different cultures. During the summers of 1880-1882 he visited Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck—the wealthy patroness of Tchaikovsky—who was suitably impressed by Debussy’s musical talents. In the summer of 1880, Debussy joined Madame von Meck’s family at Interlaken, Switzerland and traveled with them through Paris, Rome, and Naples. He also visited her in Moscow and Vienna.<sup>20</sup> As the recipient of the prestigious *Prix de Rome* in 1884, Debussy spent almost two years at the Villa Medici in Rome.<sup>21</sup>

Like many young French musicians, Debussy went through a “Wagner phase” that lasted into his thirties, including trips to Bayreuth in 1888 and 1889. Several years later, he became disillusioned with the Wagner craze.<sup>22</sup> In 1940, Oscar Thompson discussed Debussy’s feelings about Wagner:

“... Debussy told Guiraud that he did not feel tempted to imitate what he admired in Wagner. Music, for [Debussy], was intended to express the otherwise inexpressible. He liked to think of Euterpe [the Muse of flute playing and lyric poetry in Greek Mythology] ‘as if emerging from the shadowy regions to which she would from time to time return.’ He would have her ‘always discreet.’ The

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<sup>20</sup> Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His life and mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 41-42.

<sup>21</sup> For the record, Debussy did not enjoy his experience in Rome and complained about the weather, the Villa’s ugliness, and his pretentious colleagues.

<sup>22</sup> Robin Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1979), pp. 18-19.

very boldness and bigness of Wagnerian utterance, as he was beginning to find, was antithetical to his own reticence and his craving for subtlety in the expression of the emotions.”<sup>23</sup>

Far and away, Debussy’s most important musical development was his discovery of the Javanese Pavilion at the *Exposition Universelle* in 1889, which he is reputed to have visited more than two dozen times. Still in his twenties and reeling from his recent visits to Bayreuth, Debussy found in the myriad colors of soft but precise gamelan percussion a source of non-Germanic inspiration that offered him musical sustenance for the rest of his life.

Analogous to the Impressionist movement in art, Debussy’s sensibility and refinement in harmony and sound appear in a multitude of ways. Just as an Impressionist painter works with different kinds of light on a single subject—Claude Monet painted his *Water Lilies* [Nymphéas] in his garden at Giverny some 250 times under different lighting—Debussy also “painted” his musical motives with an extraordinary range of timbres and harmonies. His constantly shifting tone colors in soft dynamics—even within the same motive—makes his music float as smoothly as Monet’s *Nymphéas*. Replacing leading tones with parallel chords, pentatonic scales, smooth dynamic transitions, subtle tempo changes, and the colors of seventh and ninth chords, Debussy’s music is permeated with a dream-like, floating atmosphere free of Germanic teleology.

The shared love of Debussy and the Impressionist painters for nature also deserves mention. Much of Debussy’s output—including the *Nocturnes* (1899), *Jardins sous la pluie* (1903), *La Mer* (1905), *Voiles* (1910), *Le vent dans la plaine* (1910), *Brouillards* (1913), *Feuilles mortes* (1913)—describe or address nature. Debussy wrote in 1903:

“Music is a mysterious form of mathematics whose elements are derived from the infinite. Music is the expression of the movement of the waters, the play of curves described by changing breezes. There is nothing more musical than a sunset. He who feels what he sees will find no more beautiful example of development in all

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<sup>23</sup> Oscar Thompson, *Debussy, Man and Artist* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1940), p. 89.

that book which, alas, musicians read but too little: the book of Nature.”<sup>24</sup>

Debussy’s immersion into the Impressionist aesthetic amidst *La Belle Époque* proved extraordinarily fortunate for him. As Philippe Julian wrote in his essay *Can-can and Flappers*, Debussy was “part of the Belle Époque inasmuch as [his] estheticism extended over a society for which beauty was the prime consideration.”<sup>25</sup>

Born in the village of Ciboure in France’s Basque region, Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) absorbed both French and Spanish influences. In Ravel’s own assessment, he possessed a sensitivity “to every kind of music,”<sup>26</sup> which mirrors the remarkable array of styles and sounds in his music. The *Exposition Universelle* in 1889 exposed the youthful Ravel to new and exotic scales, which were later used in his Overture to *Shéhérazade* (1898), *Tzigane* (1924), and even the scherzo to the Piano Concerto for the Left Hand (1930).<sup>27</sup>

Although Debussy and Ravel influenced each other, their musical philosophies differed profoundly. Debussy stated in 1904 during an interview with Paul Landormy that French music, “c’est la clarté, l’élégance, la déclamation simple et naturelle; la musique française veut avant tout, *faire plaisir* [it is clarity, elegance, simple and natural declamation; French music wants to please before anything else].”<sup>28</sup> For Debussy, music “doit humblement chercher à faire plaisir

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<sup>24</sup> Léon Vallas, *The Theories of Claude Debussy*, trans. Marie O’Brien (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Julian, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: man and musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 131.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>28</sup> Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, p. 272.

[must humbly try to please]”<sup>29</sup> and “l’extrême complication est le contraire de l’art [extreme complication is the opposite of art].”<sup>30</sup> By contrast, Ravel stated in a 1924 interview that “the most interesting thing in art is to try to overcome difficulties.”<sup>31</sup> In an unpublished letter Ravel expressed his excessive attachment to perfectionism:

“Mon objectif est donc la perfection technique. Je puis y tendre sans cesse, puisque je suis assuré de ne jamais l’atteindre. L’important est d’en approcher toujours davantage.”<sup>32</sup>

[“My objective, therefore, is technical perfection. I can strive unceasingly to this end, since I am certain of never being able to attain it. The important thing is to get nearer to it all the time.”]

D’Indy’s critiques about Ravel’s music—“overly refined, pithy, and lacking in genuine emotion”<sup>33</sup>—may not be such an exaggeration. Ravel’s music is in general more virtuosic and the textures more sharply chiseled than Debussy’s. While Debussy relied on intuition without reference to conventional rules, Ravel’s compositional style was more economical and even witty, aiming for balance and perfection. Arbie Orenstein summed up the differences in his *Ravel: Man and Musician* (1975):

“... the creative personalities of Debussy and Ravel were widely divergent. Debussy’s productivity was effusive, uninhibited, and opened up fresh paths, whereas Ravel’s small output, emotional reticence, and innovation within tradition were coupled with an unrivalled technical mastery of his craft.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>31</sup> André Révész, “The Great Musician Maurice Ravel Talks About his Art,” in *A Ravel reader: correspondence, articles, interviews*, ed. Arbie Orenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 433.

<sup>32</sup> Maurice Ravel and Roland-Manuel, “Lettres de Maurice Ravel et documents inédits,” *Revue de Musicologie* 38, no. 113 (1956): p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> Orenstein, *Ravel: man and musician*, p. 31.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

Although Ravel had a profound admiration for Debussy's music, he was not impressed by Debussy's orchestrational techniques. Ravel even criticized Debussy's orchestration of his masterpiece *La Mer* to Henri Sauguet, adding that he would re-orchestrate *La Mer* if he could find the time.<sup>35</sup> After Debussy's death, Ravel became the leading composer in France, defining himself as a nationalist and classicist:

“Unlike politics, in art I'm a nationalist. I know that I am above all a French composer: I furthermore declare myself a classicist. I also know that I have the virtues and defects of French artists. We neither want nor do we know how to produce colossal works; we are always somewhat cerebral, but within these limits we very often reach perfection. I consider sincerity to be the greatest defect in art, because it excludes the possibility of choice...”<sup>36</sup>

The last sentence of the quote—“I consider sincerity to be the greatest defect in art, because it excludes the possibility of choice”—expresses the ambivalence of Ravel's musical philosophy. By “sincerity” Ravel meant direct, personal, highly emotional involvement with the music. Wagner drags us into his dramas whether we wish to join or not. To a composer of Ravel's refined tastes, this was self-indulgent and in bad taste. By the “possibility of choice” Ravel meant that if you follow only your raw emotions you can pursue only one path. Instead he preferred to detach himself enough from his own creative process so that he could consider a wide range of compositional choices at any given moment. While this distinction between the German and French aesthetic might arguably be applied to several French composers including Debussy, in Ravel this distinction reaches its highest degree of perfection.

The music that issued from Franck, Debussy, and Ravel was profoundly influenced by the strong cultural and political currents outlined above. Without this new sense of French identity we would not be talking about a new French style, the subject of the following chapters.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>36</sup> Révész, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

## Chapter II – Shape and Style

While an understanding of compositional strategies and styles in no way amounts to a plan for performance or a firm grasp of French music *per se*, this kind of knowledge serves as a prerequisite for understanding the new French style that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. All three composers in this study grew up in the shadow of Wagner and Bayreuth, and all three made their own peace with the dominant German style as they went their own ways. The first two works discussed in this study—the sonatas for violin and piano by Franck and Debussy—both come from the last years of their composers’ lives. Ravel’s *Tzigane* was written near the midpoint of his career. Thus, only 38 years separate three works whose earliest and latest composer were born 53 years apart. While their styles differed considerably, all three—as the following pages attempt to document—gave birth to new dimensions of French style that still color French music today.

### César Franck (1822-1890): Sonata for Violin and Piano (1886)

“Nothing in the world could have done me greater honor or given me more pleasure than this gift. But it is not for me alone. It is for the whole world. My part will be to interpret it with all the art, at my command, and I shall be helped by the profound admiration I have for the work of César Franck, so far insufficiently recognized. Whenever I play this work I shall be thinking of this happy day, and the art and the affection which Franck has put into this music will spread its glow over our family life.”<sup>37</sup>

— Eugène Ysaÿe, on the Franck Violin Sonata

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<sup>37</sup> Antoine Ysaÿe and Bertram Ratcliffe, *Ysaÿe: His Life, Work and influence* (London: William Heinemann, 1947), p. 49.

At a youthful age 64, César Franck composed his Sonata for Violin and Piano in 1886. He dedicated it to his friend, the celebrated violinist Eugène Ysaÿe, presenting it to him as a gift on the occasion of Ysaÿe's wedding to Louise Bourdeau in Arlon on September 28, 1886.<sup>38</sup> Deeply moved, Ysaÿe sightread the Sonata at his wedding, accompanied by French pianist Marie Bordes-Pène.<sup>39</sup> Following the wedding, the Sonata received its first public performance on December 16, 1886 at the *Cercle Artistique* in Brussels. While the work did not garner initial success, its greatness finally broke through in a concert at the Twenty Club in Brussels on February 7, 1888.<sup>40</sup>

Taking his structural cues from German traditions, Franck composed three of the four movements using classical forms. The first movement, *Allegretto ben moderato*, is a sonata form with a secondary key area in the traditional dominant. An elusive, shadowy development section can scarcely be distinguished from the close of the exposition. The minor-mode second movement, *Allegro*, is in a full-blown sonata form with the secondary area in the conventional relative major and the tonic major in the recapitulation—to which Franck appends a coda. The *Recitativo-Fantasia* third movement is the least traditional, though it is built around the operatic styles of recitative and aria. The *Allegretto poco mosso* finale follows a rondo form with exquisite canonic motives exchanged between the violin and the piano. The Germanic influence on Franck extends also to the regularity of the phrase structure—for example, most of the themes in the first movement are eight measures long.

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<sup>38</sup> R. J. Stove, *César Franck: His Life and Time* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2012), p. 256.

<sup>39</sup> Lev Ginsburg, *Prof. Lev Ginsburg's Ysaÿe*, ed. H. R. Axelrod, trans. X. M. Danko (New Jersey: Paganiniana Publications, 1980), pp. 53-57.

<sup>40</sup> Ysaÿe and Ratcliffe, *Ysaÿe: His life, Work and Influence*, p. 165.

Where Franck's French voice manifests itself is in his harmonic language, and this dimension conceals adroitly many of the Germanic features noted above. For example, the dominant ninth chords in the piano that open the Sonata (Ex. 1) create a suspended, almost mysterious atmosphere that leaves the music floating without any need of a strongly articulated tonic.

Ex. 1 (Franck Violin Sonata, I, mm. 1-4)

**Allegretto ben moderato**

Violin

Piano

*pp*

Franck further reverses the normal balance between primary and secondary themes. His primary theme is played entirely by the violin in *pp* dynamics and with a soft, sweet character (Ex. 2).

Passion and *forte* are reserved for the secondary theme in the solo piano (Ex. 3).

Ex. 2 (Franck, I, mm. 5-6)

*molto dolce*

*pp*

Ex. 3 (Franck, I, mm. 31-33)

The musical score for Ex. 3 (Franck, I, mm. 31-33) is presented in three measures. The first measure features a treble clef with a whole note F4 and a bass clef with a whole note F3. The second measure features a treble clef with a half note G4, a half note A4, and a bass clef with a half note G3, a half note F3. The third measure features a treble clef with a half note B4, a half note C5, and a bass clef with a half note G3, a half note F3. The tempo/mood markings are 'a tempo' above the first measure and 'a tempo, sempre forte e largamente' above the second measure.

Equally noteworthy is the type of coloristic chromaticism that marks the opening theme of the second movement. The steady upward chromatic ascent (and ensuing descent) evoke a kind of manic energy rarely heard in Wagner. Franck replaces goal-orientedness with a restlessness that pervades the entire movement and blurs the otherwise conventional structure. The second theme comes and goes without a single F-major chord in root position. Whereas Wagner invoked chromaticism to intensify the harmonic pull, Franck invokes it to propel the music forward without any sense of external restraint. This plays itself out in the remarkable coda, where the chromaticism of the opening theme is reworked to a dramatic fever the listener might have thought impossible.

Franck's oft-noted use of cyclicism, while German at its roots, employs this process in a unique fashion that was soon emulated by Debussy and other French Impressionist composers. For example, the tender theme of the first movement returns in the open-ended third movement as a dreamlike reminiscence (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4 (Franck, III, mm. 93-95)

The manner in which the *dolcissimo* theme floats from the upper to lower register in an almost halting delivery evokes a profound sense of nostalgia. While it might bear a passing resemblance to certain Wagnerian aspects of the *Leitmotif*, this kind of usage in a purely instrumental work is new to French music.

Similarly, the slow, almost trance-like passage at mm. 59-68 in the third movement (reiterated at a different pitch in mm. 81-88), with its minor-mode coloring, finds its fulfillment as the major-mode B-Section (mm. 38 ff.) of the finale. Franck's approach to cyclicism is therefore intimate and deeply personal rather than dramatic or confrontational. The same is true of the dramatic recall of the opening theme at m. 44 of the second movement (Ex. 5)—serving simultaneously as a bridge to the secondary key area—or the subtle, understated recall at m. 99 in the finale of the same theme (Ex. 6). While in some sense unifying, their primary function is to evoke an emotional response.

Ex. 5 (Franck, II, m. 44)

*sempre forte e passionato*

*sempre forte*

Ex. 6 (Franck, IV, m. 99)

*p subito*

*p subito*

Finally, the angular *Largamente* melody at mm. 101-109 in the *Recitativo-Fantasia* (Ex. 7) receives its expressive fulfillment starting at m. 143 in the finale (Ex. 8). This interlocking network of cyclic relationships goes far beyond anything that Beethoven or any of his successors had attempted.

It is no exaggeration to say that Franck's Violin Sonata became the model for cyclic techniques in French instrumental music. Many of Franck's contemporaries were influenced by this work, especially Debussy, whose hyper-cyclic 1893 String Quartet could not have been written without the shining example of Franck—and this in spite of Debussy's dismissal of Franck as a French composer.

Ex. 7 (Franck, III, mm. 101-109)

The image displays a musical score for Ex. 7, consisting of three systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line (top staff) and a piano accompaniment (middle and bottom staves). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is marked with various dynamics and performance instructions.

**System 1 (mm. 101-103):**  
Vocal line: *f molto largamente e drammatico*, *cresc.*  
Piano line: *f largamente*, *cresc.*

**System 2 (mm. 104-106):**  
Vocal line: *fff*  
Piano line: *fff*

**System 3 (mm. 107-109):**  
Vocal line: *sempre rall.*, *sempre fff*, *molto rit.*, *dim.*  
Piano line: *sempre fff*, *molto rit.*, *dim.*, *[sempre rall.]*

Ex. 8 (Franck, IV, mm. 143-169)

*Sua ad lib.*

*ff*

*ff*

*più f*

First system of musical notation. It consists of three staves: a single treble clef staff at the top, and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) below. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The top staff contains whole rests. The middle staff has a series of chords and eighth notes. The bottom staff has a series of eighth notes.

8va ad lib.

Second system of musical notation. It consists of three staves. The top staff has a melodic line with the instruction *sempre ff grandioso*. The middle staff has a more active melodic line with the instruction *sempre ff grandioso*. The bottom staff has chords and rests. A dotted line is present below the bottom staff.

Third system of musical notation. It consists of three staves. The top staff has a melodic line. The middle staff has a more active melodic line. The bottom staff has chords and rests.

Fourth system of musical notation. It consists of three staves. The top staff has a melodic line. The middle staff has a more active melodic line. The bottom staff has chords and rests. The instruction *sempre ff* appears in the bottom right of this system.

## Claude Debussy (1862-1918): Sonata for Violin and Piano (1917)

Debussy originally planned to compose a series of *Six Sonatas for various instruments*. The first sonata was for Cello and Piano (1915); the second was a Trio-Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp (1915). The Sonata for Violin and Piano followed in third place. Debussy had planned to write a fourth Sonata for oboe, horn and harpsichord, a fifth for trumpet, bassoon and clarinet, and a sixth sonata, which would be composed for all of the instruments used in his previous five sonatas.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, he was unable to accomplish this goal, as he died from rectal cancer on March 25, 1918, less than a year after completing the Violin Sonata.

The Sonata was premiered in Paris on May 5, 1917 at the Salle Gaveau, with French violinist Gaston Poulet and Debussy himself at the piano.<sup>42</sup> Debussy, deeply affected by the advent of World War I, expressed his patriotic feelings by signing on the title page: “Claude Debussy, Musicien Français.”

Composing the Violin Sonata proved a struggle for Debussy. In a letter to his publisher Jacques Durand dated February 1917, he said:

“Veuillez m’excuser... j’ai dû profondément remanier ce terrible final! Il se ressentait trop de l’inquiétude ambiante. ...”<sup>43</sup>

[“Please excuse me... I had to deeply alter this terrible finale! It expressed the ambient anxiety too strongly ...”]

In a letter to Paul Dukas at the beginning of April 1917 he wrote:

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<sup>41</sup> Marianne Wheeldon, “La Sonate cyclique,” *The Journal of Musicology* 22, no. 4 (2005): pp. 644-645.

<sup>42</sup> Claude Debussy, *Correspondance 1872-1918*, ed. François Lesure and Denis Herlin (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), p. 2104.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2080.

“... je suis entre mille ennuis divers et une douzaine de façons de terminer une *Sonate pour violon et piano* qu’un Dieu plus méchant que malin m’a poussé d’écrire... je n’en sors pas.”<sup>44</sup>

[“... I’m between a thousand various troubles and a dozen ways to finish a Sonata for violin and piano that a god meaner than the devil pushed me to write... I can’t get out of it.”]

It is not clear whether Debussy was finally satisfied with his Violin Sonata or not. He expressed his dissatisfaction to his friend Robert Godet on Jun 7, 1917:

“Your enthusiasm over the Violin Sonata will, I’m afraid, be abruptly dampened when you actually have it in your hands...much as the gods may approve your attitude, if you want to stick to it you would perhaps do better not to look through the score! I must admit I wrote this sonata only to get rid of it, and because I was spurred on by my dear publisher. ... This sonata will be interesting from a documentary point of view and as an example of what an invalid can write in time of war.”<sup>45</sup>

Nonetheless, in a letter to Jacques Durand a week later (on Jun 14, 1917):

“... j’ai trouvé la *Sonate pour violon et piano*, et malgré ma triste humeur: c’était tout de même de la joie...”<sup>46</sup>

[“... I found the Sonata for violin and piano, and despite my sad mood: it was still a joy...”]

Debussy’s creation of a series of sonatas was in fact an unexpected development. During a conversation in 1910 with his friend, the American violinist Arthur Hartmann, Debussy stated firmly:

“Monsieur—for the last time—never—*mais jamais de la vie* [but never in my life]—shall I write a sonata! That I leave to the good *boches* [slang for Kraut, or German] carpenters—*comme* [like] Monsieur Brahms and his clique!”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Debussy, *Correspondance 1872-1918*, p. 2092.

<sup>45</sup> Claude Debussy, *Debussy letters*, ed. François Lesure and Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 327.

<sup>46</sup> Debussy, *Correspondance 1872-1918*, p. 2120.

While Debussy's growing distaste for the dominant German style doubtless stunted his interest in composing works with "sonata" in the title, he ended up re-inventing no fewer than three times his own French take on the "sonata," beginning with the Cello Sonata of 1915.

Indeed, Debussy's Sonata for Violin and Piano deviates decisively from German formal models. He replaces the polarized, tonally-based sonata style with an asymmetrical ternary form (A-B-A', with the final A foreshortened). The harmonic progressions do not present even elliptically the traditional tonal polarities of tonic and dominant. The first movement contains only one true dominant-tonic moment, at mm. 41-42, where the triple-stop in the violin and rare *sforzandos* in the piano come off more as a caricature of German procedure. An implied V-I progression in mm. 192-196 fizzles out when the piano part disappears where the tonic chord should have sounded.

And what are we to make of the relentless series of five arpeggiated harmonies on the major subdominant that brands the coda? It is again hard not to hear an ironic joke being made at the expense of the Beethovenian coda, which encapsulates an entire movement or even work. In Debussy's case, the wildly exaggerated major subdominant chord (heard already in the first few measures of the piece) that seems to promise great expansion fizzles out deliciously from pure exhaustion after five valiant but vain attempts by the violinist to make something monumental out of them.

Like Franck, Debussy gravitated toward cyclic procedures. Indeed, his cyclicism is unthinkable without Franck's example. His one overt usage—bringing back the opening theme of the first movement at the beginning of the finale (Exs. 9a-9b)—evokes exactly the kind of reminiscence quality we hear in the Franck Sonata:

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<sup>47</sup> Arthur Hartmann, "Claude Debussy As I knew Him" and Other Writings of Arthur Hartmann, ed. Samuel Hsu, Sidney Grolnic, and Mark Peters (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2003), p. 66.

Ex. 9a (Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 5-8)

*p dolce espress.*

*p poco marcato*

Ex. 9b (Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 9-12)

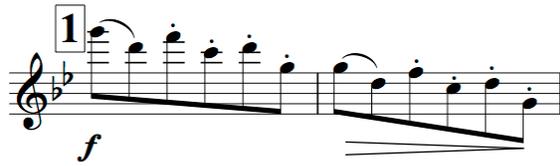
**Meno mosso (poco)**  
sur la touche

*pp dolce sostenuto*

**Meno mosso (poco)**

However, the remaining instances introduce a level of subtlety not considered by Franck. Here we can speak of family resemblances among intervallic motives. First, Debussy used cyclicism through rhythmic and textural similarities (Ex. 10a-10b):

Ex. 10a (Debussy, I, mm. 42-43)



Ex. 10b (Debussy, II, mm. 23-24)



Second, Debussy's motives link separate movements (I show three separate instances below).

The energetic violin's opening motive in the second movement (Ex. 11a) was introduced near the end of the first movement in the piano (Ex. 11b):

Ex. 11a (Debussy, II, m. 1)



Ex. 11b (Debussy, I, mm. 216-219)

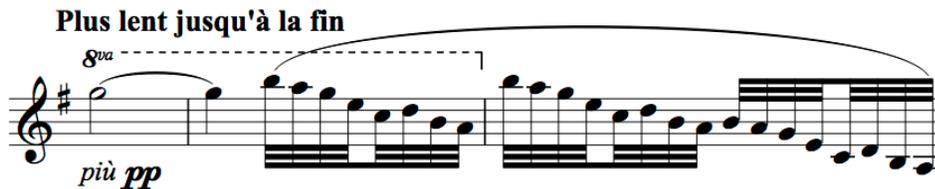


The Finale's exotic motive (Ex. 12a) derives in augmented form from the ending of the previous movement (Ex. 12b). From the group of eight notes (B-A-G-E-C-D-B-A) at Ex. 12b, Debussy reversed the first two notes, omitted the note C, and transposed everything down a fifth, to create the Finale's pentatonic motive (Ex. 12a):

Ex. 12a (Debussy, III, m. 24)

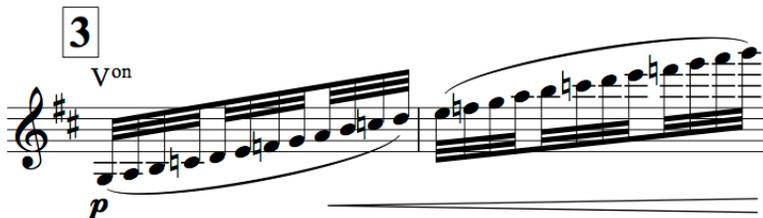


Ex. 12b (Debussy, II, mm. 130-132)

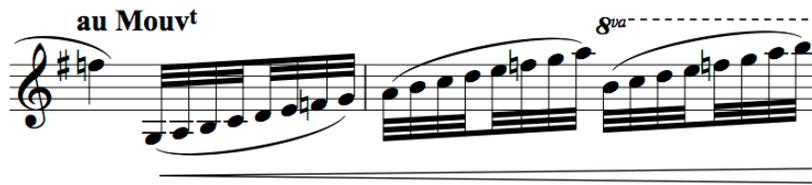


Except for the time signature, the Finale's fast 32<sup>nd</sup> note run (Ex. 13a) is virtually the same as the run in the second movement (Ex. 13b):

Ex. 13a (Debussy, III, mm. 106-107)



Ex. 13b (Debussy, II, mm. 112-113)



Debussy's subtle, occasionally atmospheric cyclicism throughout his Violin Sonata adds critically to the work's musical ambiance. The veiled references cause the sense of nostalgia bordering on loss to loom even greater. At the same time, of course, they provide the unifying glue for a sonata whose conventional shapes are otherwise blurred. Even though the Sonata consists of three separate movements, it works as one. Indeed, following the premiere Debussy wrote in a letter of September 1917 to his publisher Durand:

“Hier, concert Poulet. On a voulu bisser l' « intermezzo », ce à quoi je me suis formellement refusé, d'abord pour respecter l'unité de composition; donc, il fallait bisser la Sonate.”<sup>48</sup>

[“Yesterday, concert [with] Poulet. The audience wanted the ‘intermezzo’ performed again, which I myself firmly refused, primarily out of respect for the unity of the composition; hence the [entire] Sonata had to be performed again.”]

### **Maurice Ravel (1875-1937): *Tzigane* (1924)**

*Tzigane, Rapsodie de concert pour violon et piano*, composed by Maurice Ravel in 1924, is a virtuosic show piece inspired by the Hungarian gypsy style; Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen*

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<sup>48</sup> Claude Debussy, *Lettres de Claude Debussy à son éditeur*, ed. Jacques Durand (Paris: A. Durand et Fils, 1927), p. 187.

might be its closest relative.<sup>49</sup> *Tzigane* was premiered in Ravel's presence on April 26, 1924 in London by its dedicatee, Jelly d'Aranyi (1893-1966), with Henry Gil-Marchex at the piano. Even though Jelly d'Aranyi reportedly had only four days to learn the piece,<sup>50</sup> the concert proved to be a great success. Several months later Ravel arranged *Tzigane* for Violin and Orchestra, and Jelly d'Aranyi premiered it once again on November 30 under Gabriel Pierné's baton.<sup>51</sup>

The origin of *Tzigane* goes back to a private concert in 1922. Arbie Orenstein reported the event in *Ravel Man and Musician* (1975):

“In the course of an interview, Madame Robert Casadesus recalled a private musicale which took place at this time [1922], in which Jelly d'Aranyi and Hans Kindler performed the Sonata for Violin and Cello. Late in the evening Ravel asked the Hungarian violinist to play some gypsy melodies. After Mlle d'Aranyi obliged, the composer asked for one more melody, and then another. The gypsy melodies continued until about 5 a.m., with everyone exhausted except the violinist and the composer. That evening was to mark the initial gestation of *Tzigane*.”<sup>52</sup>

Virtuosity stood front and center for Ravel when composing *Tzigane*. In a letter to d'Aranyi dated March 13, 1924, Ravel expressed doubts about whether what he wrote for violin was playable and asked her for help:

“Would you have the time to come to Paris in 2 or 3 weeks? If so, I would like to speak to you about *Tzigane*, which I am writing specially for you, which will be dedicated to you ... This *Tzigane* must be a piece of great virtuosity. Certain passages can produce brilliant effects, provided that it is possible to perform them—which I'm not always sure of.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Révész, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

<sup>50</sup> Maurice Ravel to Robert Casadesus, 1924, in *Cahier Maurice Ravel* n. 1 (1985): p. 124.

<sup>51</sup> Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 236.

<sup>52</sup> Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>53</sup> Maurice Ravel to Jelly d'Aranyi, 1924, in *A Ravel reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, ed. Arbie Orenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 252-253.

To incorporate this wide range of violin techniques, Ravel reportedly immersed himself in Paganini’s 24 Caprices for Solo Violin, Op. 1. Indeed, numerous technical devices in *Tzigane*—such as double stops, octaves, arpeggios, pizzicato,<sup>54</sup> and double-stop trills—clearly reflect Paganini’s technical innovations.<sup>55</sup> For example, the extended use of the G-string—for twenty-eight measures—in the violin’s opening theme in *Tzigane* (Ex. 14a) was almost certainly stimulated by the second part of the Paganini’s Caprice No. 19 in Eb major, where Paganini indicated for sixteen measures the use of the G-string in rapid sixteenth-note runs ranging over two octaves (Ex.14b).

Ex. 14a (Ravel *Tzigane*, mm. 1-4)



Ex. 14b (Paganini Caprice No. 19, mm. 27-30)

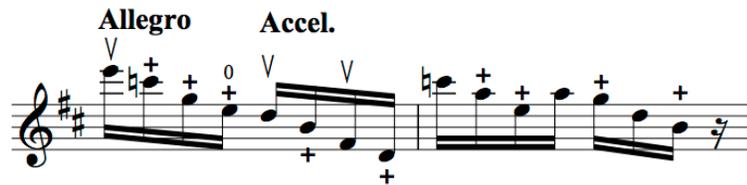


<sup>54</sup> For this and other specialized musical terms, see glossary.

<sup>55</sup> Stephen Zank, *Irony and Sound: The Music of Maurice Ravel* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009), pp. 199-203.

In the mix of left hand *pizzicati* and bow *jeté* techniques, Ravel emulated Paganini’s Caprice No. 24, variation 9 (Exs. 15a-15b):

Ex. 15a (Ravel *Tzigane*, 5-6 a. R. 21)<sup>56</sup>

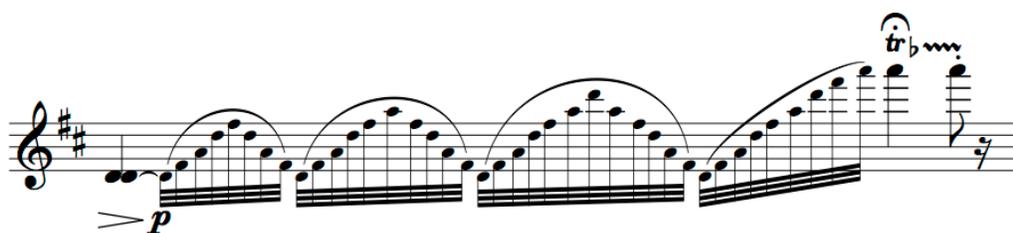


Ex. 15b (Paganini Caprice No. 24, Var. 9)



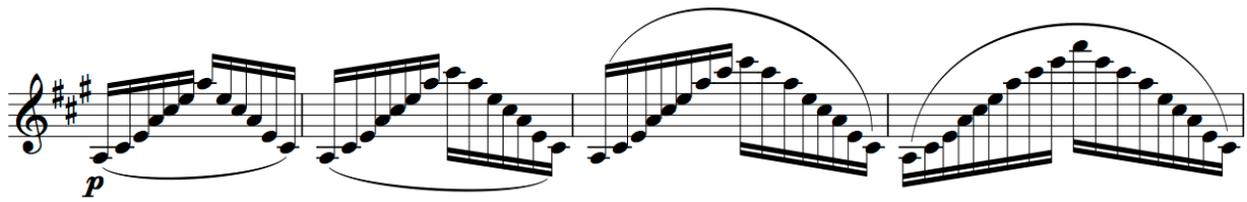
The way in which Ravel wrote arpeggiated notes in the violin part resembles what Paganini calls for in his Caprice No. 24, variation 11 (Exs. 16a-16b):

Ex. 16a (Ravel *Tzigane*, 13 a. R. 2)



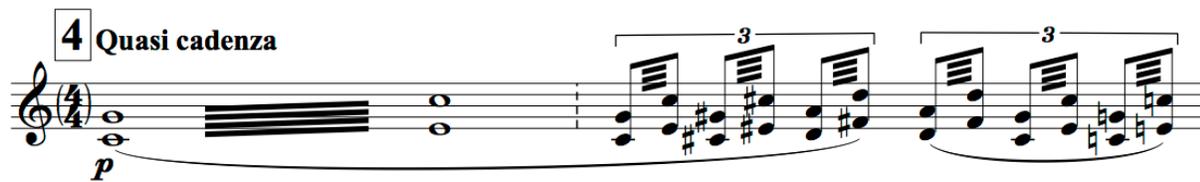
<sup>56</sup> Since Ravel’s use of dotted lines for some of the barlines in *Tzigane* creates ambiguity in terms of measure numbers, I have chosen to use the rehearsal numbers provided in the Durand edition. Hence “4 a. R. 21” means “4 bars after rehearsal 21,” while “4-7 a. R. 21” means “bars 4-7 after R. 21.”

Ex. 16b (Paganini Caprice No. 24, Var. 11, last 4 arpeggios)

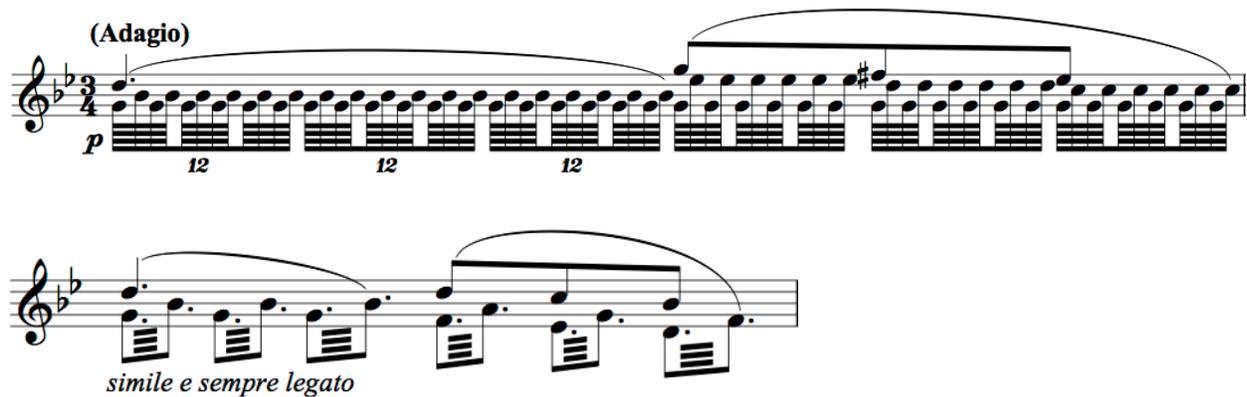


The double-stop trill studies in Paganini's Caprice No. 6, although differing in details from *Tzigane*, may well have inspired Ravel in the following passage (Exs. 17a-17b):

Ex. 17a (Ravel *Tzigane*, R. 4)



Ex. 17b (Paganini Caprice No. 6, mm. 1-2)



And yet Ravel's debt to Paganini happens very much through a French filter. The exhibitionism that marks Paganini's simple, unaffected structures are incorporated by Ravel into much more complicated and extended passages in which the listener may not even notice the debt to the Italian. However showy in and of themselves, they support the entire structure rather than co-opt it.

Structurally, *Tzigane* divides neatly into two sections: the first, for unaccompanied violin, adopts an expressive and exotic character, conjuring the gypsy's sorrowful yet free spirit. The second, in which the piano enters seamlessly amidst a double-stop trill that is part of a larger cadenza, consists largely of a free theme and variations, characterized by a festive, even playful character. This is as far as most accounts of *Tzigane* go, as if all the potential performers need remember is "improvisation." In reality, Ravel organizes *Tzigane*'s five principal themes in a manner that sounds spontaneous, even wild, in spite of being carefully—and, in some respects, conventionally—organized. For example, the opening *Lento* revolves clearly around b minor, while the second section moves ultimately from d minor to the relative major of D major. Yes, Ravel introduces all manner of non-chord tones at every turn, but the harmonic scaffolding on which they rest is never called into question.

The first section introduces three main themes (Theme A, B, and C—see Exs. 18-20) in direct succession that contrast strongly with each other. Theme A, which opens on the *Lento*'s tonic note of "B," is marked by powerful short-LONG rhythms (Ex. 18):

Ex. 18 (Ravel *Tzigane*, Theme A, mm. 1-2)

**Lento, quasi cadenza**  
sul Sol sin al segno \*



At m. 9 the expressive and more exotic Theme B joins in at *Tempo rubato* (Ex. 19):

Ex. 19 (Ravel *Tzigane*, Theme B, m. 9)

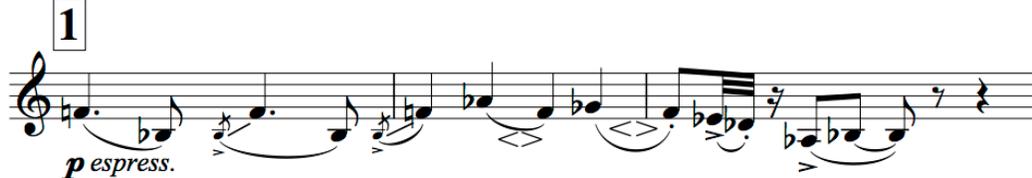
**Tempo rubato**



Finally, the most melodically insinuating idea, Theme C, appears in a calm and mysterious guise (Ex. 20):

Ex. 20 (Ravel *Tzigane*, Theme C, mm. 15-17)

**1**



In spite of their variety and originality, all three ideas are built around the ancient and venerable bar form (a-a-b), supplying Ravel with a firm scaffolding.

Not wishing for his two principal sections to feel stand-alone and unrelated, Ravel transforms the enigmatic Theme C into the playful main theme of the second part (Ex. 21):

Ex. 21 (Ravel *Tzigane*, R. 6)



At R. 17 he introduces Theme D, the most short-lived of the second section (Ex. 22):

Ex. 22 (Ravel *Tzigane*, Theme D, R. 17)



At R. 20 Ravel introduces a final theme (Theme E) whose headlong rhythmic drive evokes what Europeans associated most with the gypsy style.

Ex. 23 (Ravel *Tzigane*, Theme E, R. 20)



It, too, is subjected to variations.

How does Ravel assemble all this seemingly disparate material? Again, with a combination of conventional scaffolding and bold freedom:

*Lento, quasi cadenza* [centered around a heavily chromatic B minor]

<b>Theme A</b> (a-a'-b)	mm. 1-8
<b>Theme B</b> (a-a'-b)	mm. 9-14
<b>Theme C</b> (a-a'-b)	mm. 15-28
<b>Theme A'</b> intensified (now in octaves, a-a'-b)	mm. 29-36
<b>Theme B'</b> intensified (now in octaves and double stops, a-a'-b)	mm. 37-41
<b>Theme C'</b> (feels like a continuation of the first Theme C)	mm. 42-58
<i>Quasi cadenza</i> – permits the piano to sneak in almost unobserved	R. 4
<i>Moderato</i> – a set of free (but structured) variations on two successive themes	
<b>Theme C''</b> (D minor) in a more structured form: a (8 bars) – a' (8 bars) – b (8 bars), 4-bar improvised bridge in the piano	R. 6-7
Variation 1 (same structure as Theme C'')	R. 8-10
6-bar improvised bridge in violin and piano	
Variation 2: compressed: a (8 bars) – a' (8 bars), with a' ending in a bar of rest with a fermata; no b-phrase, 16 bar bridge in the piano plus a 2-bar tag in the violin	R. 11-13
Variation 3: a (8 bars) – a' (8 bars); no b-phrase	R. 14
Variation 4: a (8 bars) – a' (10 bars)	R. 15-16
<b>Theme D</b> (D major): a (8 bars) – a' (8 bars) – a'' (8 bars) plus one bar of fermata rest	R. 17-19

<b>Theme E</b> a (10 bars, in D major) – a' (8 bars) – b (8 bars)	R. 20-22
Variation 1: a" (10 bars, in multiple stops) – a'" (10 bars, in harmonics)	R. 23-1 a. R. 25
1-bar bridge in the piano, followed by a 2-bar vamp	
Variation 2: a (8 bars) – b (10 bars) – a' (4 bars of D-minor flavoring) –	4 a. R. 26-31
b' (5 bars) – a" (4 bars) – b" (varied and extended, 15 bars)	
<b>Theme C'''</b> (6 bars) + <b>Theme E'</b> (5 bars) + final 9 bars, rushing into a <i>Presto</i>	R. 32-End

Although Ravel skillfully masks these junctures, a successful performance hinges around the performers' ability to distinguish between important thematic material (especially Themes C, D, and E in the second section) and those passages—much freer in their delivery—that serve as bridges between more solid thematic pillars. The first three bridges become successively longer, while the last thematic statements burst with centrifugal force from the previous 8-bar regularity into asymmetrical lengths of 6 bars, 5 bars, and 9 bars. The performer must convey this explosive narrative. And armed with this structure, an aware performer can calibrate the weight, the rhythmic freedom, and the urgency of each phrase.

#### POSTSCRIPT:

*Tzigane* was originally created for violin and piano with the addition of the luthéal—an “add-on” to the piano that had been invented by Georges Cloetens, a Belgian organ maker, and patented in 1919. It enabled the keyboardist to mix and match four different stops, including one that created a cimbalom-like effect—hence Ravel's initial interest in it.

Violinist Samuel Dushkin and pianist Beveridge Webster gave the first performance with luthéal in Paris on October 15, 1924 at the Salle Gaveau.<sup>57</sup> Although we cannot hear *Tzigane*

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<sup>57</sup> Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, p. 236.

with luthéal in live performances nowadays, a 2004 recording with violinist Philippe Graffin and pianist Claire Desert from the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) in Brussels re-introduces the luthéal.<sup>58</sup> The luthéal makes a grand entrance at R. 4 with the cimbalom stop. At R. 5 and 6, the first note of each measure imitates plucked strings. At R. 14, the piano sounds muted while at R. 16, it transforms into a zither-like sound. These examples demonstrate the wide color palette of this strange invention. Presumably the lack of sufficient repertoire (Ravel only used it once again, in his opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges* of the next year-1925) led to its swift demise.

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<sup>58</sup> Maurice Ravel, *In the shade of forests: The Bohemian world of Debussy, Enescu, Ravel*, performed by Philippe Graffin, violin, and Claire Désert, luthéal (Avie Records [AVIE 2059], recorded 2004, published 2005, compact disc).

### Chapter III

#### Performing Franck's Sonata for Violin and Piano (1886)

Franck's Violin Sonata demands that violinists are not only well versed in nineteenth-century German musical traditions but they are also *au courant* with the ways of French tradition. As we discussed in Chapter II, the French aspect of Franck's Violin Sonata lies foremost in its harmonic language—opening with dominant ninth chords, the second movement's colorful chromaticism, etc.—yet the most striking French qualities lie in the fine distinctions among *dolce* sounds. A successful performance of Franck Violin Sonata requires a keen sensitivity to its delicate sound qualities. In his 1911 article Paul Landormy wrote:

“A coup sûr M. Vincent d'Indy, le disciple fidèle, M. Eugène Ysaÿe, le dédicataire de l'œuvre, M. Armand Parent, qui recueillit bien souvent de la bouche même de César Franck toutes sortes de renseignements précieux sur ses ouvrages, sont là pour affirmer la volonté du compositeur ... Jouer la phrase du début vibrato et amoroso comme le fait Jacques Thibaud est un pur contresens. Tout ce commencement est au contraire en demi-teinte, enveloppé de mystère; il faut planer dans les sereines régions de l'idéal; plus tard nous redescendrons sur la terre.”<sup>59</sup>

[“Certainly Mr. Vincent d'Indy, the faithful disciple, Mr. Eugène Ysaÿe, the dedicatee of the work, Mr. Armand Parent, who often collected from César Franck's own lips all kinds of precious information on his works, are there for affirming the composer's wishes ... To play the opening phrase vibrato and amoroso like Jacques Thibaud played it is a pure misinterpretation. This entire beginning is, on the contrary, in a muted color, enveloped in mystery; it is necessary to hover in the serene regions of the ideal; later we come down to earth.”]

In order to obtain the desired color, Franck used various shadings of *dolce*: *molto dolce* (m. 5, m. 39, m. 100), *sempre dolce* (m. 13), *dolcissimo* (m. 47, m. 63, m. 108), and *sempre dolcissimo* (m.

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<sup>59</sup> Paul Landormy, *La Vie Musical de Lausanne*, April 1, 1911, quoted in Michel Stockhem, “La Sonate de César Franck: interprétation et tradition,” *Revue belge de Musicologie* 45, César Franck et son temps (1991): p. 151.

55, m. 71). In m. 63 of the first movement *Allegretto ben moderato*, the first theme, originally marked *molto dolce* at m. 5 (Ex. 24a), returns in *dolcissimo* in both the violin and piano parts (Ex. 24b). These notations demand performers to produce even sweeter and more delicate tones. Ivan Galamian, a noted violinist and pedagogue who was strongly influenced by French bow technique,<sup>60</sup> described the bow technique needed for this section in his book *Principles of Violin Playing*:

“A tone produced with much bow and little pressure has a light, loose character ... in the neighborhood of the fingerboard, the color is paler, more delicate and pastel-like.”<sup>61</sup>

However, sound and texture alone do not impart the full French effect to this movement. To support the violin’s colorful sound, the piano evokes its atmosphere with block chords that accentuate the low, middle, and high registers at each dotted quarter-note beat.

Ex. 24a (Franck Violin Sonata I, mm. 5-6)

The image shows a musical score for the first two measures of the Franck Violin Sonata I. The top staff is the violin part, marked *molto dolce*. It begins with a rest, followed by a dotted quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, a dotted quarter note B4, and a half note C5. The bottom two staves are the piano accompaniment, marked *pp*. The right hand plays block chords: a dotted quarter note G4 with a half note B4, and a dotted quarter note A4 with a half note C5. The left hand plays dotted quarter notes: G3, A3, B3, and C4.

<sup>60</sup> Ivan Galamian studied with Lucien Capet in Paris in 1922-1923.

<sup>61</sup> Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1985), p. 62.

Ex. 24b (Franck Violin Sonata I, mm. 63-64)

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is for the violin, and the bottom staff is for the piano. Both are marked *dolcissimo*. The key signature is two sharps (D major). The violin part has a melodic line with a slur over measures 63 and 64. The piano part consists of block chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Franck’s tempos in his Violin Sonata are the subject of some controversy. While both Franck’s working autograph and his fair copy indicate *Allegretto moderato* at the opening, the first edition of the Sonata shows *Allegretto ben moderato*.<sup>62</sup> That “*ben*” now included in some current editions suggests Franck’s desire for a broader tempo that underscores *moderato*. In his 1911 article Landormy reported that “[Franck] recommandait à tous ses interprètes de prendre une allure très modérée dans ce premier morceau [[Franck] recommended all his performers to adopt a very moderato feeling in this first movement].”<sup>63</sup>

The slower tempo inevitably elevates the importance of harmony over melody. For example, the opening E-9<sup>th</sup> chords (mm. 1-4) in the piano create a sense of stasis. This suspended feeling continues for 30 more measures before we finally establish the clear tonal center of E major (mm. 30-31). All of this lends itself to a floating quality—serene, calm, balanced—that characterizes much French music from the mid-nineteenth century on. Absent are the restless,

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<sup>62</sup> César Franck, *Sonate pour Violon et Piano*, ed. Joël-Marie Fauquet (Paris: Éditions Musicales du Marais, 1990), p. XII.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Landormy, *La Vie Musicale de Lausanne*, April 1, 1911, quoted in Michel Stockhem, “La Sonate de César Franck: interprétation et tradition,” *Revue belge de Musicologie* 45, César Franck et son temps (1991): p. 151.

probing harmonic impulses that Wagner perfected in *Tristan und Isolde* and maintained in all his mature works, including the *Ring of the Nibelung*. The impact made on Franck by Wagner's *Tristan* is audible in other portions of the Sonata, but in this opening movement a different sensibility emerges.

In contrast, the second movement *Allegro* unleashes a fiery display of passion. The expressive indications for the violin—*sempre forte e passionato* (m. 44), *fuocoso* (m. 95), *forte, con passione* (m. 102), *ff molto fuocoso* (m. 112) markings found rarely in the German tradition—announce the volatile nature of the movement. As Olivier Charlier<sup>64</sup> related to me, virtually all French violinists play the first theme (Ex. 25) on the G-string even though Franck does not request it, producing both a more intense yet evenly colored sound. Playing a theme that spans a range of one and a half octaves on the G-string is technically much harder but it produces a more intense, insistent sound. Pierre Marie François de Sales Baillot (1771-1842), an eminent French violin pedagogue of nineteenth century, emphasized the importance of the tone color in each string, describing the G-string as “the tenor voice, the empire of the violin.”<sup>65</sup> Fifty years later<sup>66</sup> the identity of French sound still lays in the widest and subtlest array of sound colors.

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<sup>64</sup> Olivier Charlier is a French violinist soloist. He entered the Paris Conservatory at the age of 10, studied violin with Jean Fournier and Pierre Doukan and chamber music with Jean Hubeau. He became Professor at the Paris Conservatory in 1992.

<sup>65</sup> Pierre Marie François de Sales Baillot, *The Art of the Violin*, ed. and trans. Louise Goldberg (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p. 250.

<sup>66</sup> *The Art of the Violin* was originally published in 1835, 51 years before Franck wrote his Violin Sonata.

Ex. 25 (Franck, II, mm. 14-23)



Some violinists mistakenly emphasize the last quarter note of the phrase—presumably because it is the highest note—resulting in an emphasis on the wrong beat. Professor Charlier referred to this kind of playing style as the “victory of the G-string” [a sarcastic rather than laudatory comment].<sup>67</sup> According to Charlier, violinists should lighten their bow pressure by increasing the bow speed and creating a questioning rather than a declarative statement. This applies particularly to a lighter bow at the end of phrases. To emphasize the turbulent character of the second movement, violinists need to produce a breathless sound quality that trumps the customary strong, singing tone.

In the midst of this turmoil Franck revisits the soft, sweet sounds of the *poco più lento* passage (mm. 67-79, Ex. 26). *Poco*, of course, will be interpreted differently by different violinists. Earlier figures such as Jacques Thibaud, Yehudi Menuhin, and Jascha Heifetz lean to a faster reading of the tempo.<sup>68 69 70</sup> Modern French violinists such as Arthur Grumiaux,<sup>71</sup> Régis

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<sup>67</sup> Olivier Charlier, interview with the author, October 16, 2012.

<sup>68</sup> César Franck, *Franck/Fauré/Debussy: Sonatas*, performed by Jacques Thibaud, violin, and Alfred Cortot, piano (EMI [CDH 7 63032 2], recorded 1929, published 1989, compact disc).

<sup>69</sup> César Franck, *Franck: Violin Sonata in A Major - Lekeu: Violin Sonata No. 3 in G Major*, performed by Yehudi Menuhin, violin, and Hephzibah Menuhin, piano (Past classics, recorded 1936, published 2011, mp3).

Pasquier,<sup>72</sup> Olivier Charlier, and Guillaume Sutre<sup>73</sup> lean to the other side of this spectrum.<sup>74 75 76</sup>

<sup>77</sup> A slower tempo allows the violinist to create an intimate atmosphere in a more leisurely fashion: the ethereal world of *dolce*, supported by the gently oscillating harmonies, gets foregrounded in any persuasive performance.

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<sup>70</sup> César Franck, *The Rubinstein Collection vol. 7*, performed by Jascha Heifetz, violin, and Arthur Rubinstein, piano (BMG Classics [09026 63007-2], recorded 1937, published 1999, compact disc).

<sup>71</sup> A Belgian violinist soloist, Arthur Grumiaux studied with George Enescu as a youth. His playing was often compared to Eugène Ysaÿe for his quality of sound and highly advanced technique. His recordings include works by Franck, Debussy, Ravel and other French composers.

<sup>72</sup> Régis Pasquier is an internationally celebrated French violinist soloist and chamber musician. A pupil of Zino Francescatti, he has performed with numerous orchestras worldwide. In 1985, he was appointed Professor of violin and chamber music at the Paris Conservatory.

<sup>73</sup> Guillaume Sutre is an acclaimed French violinist and chamber musician. He studied with Gérard Poulet at the Paris Conservatory and with Joseph Gingold at Indiana University. He is the first violinist of the Ysaÿe String Quartet and the founder of the Wanderer Trio, and currently serves as professor of violin and director of chamber music at the University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>74</sup> César Franck, *Fauré, Franck, The Violin Sonatas*, performed by Arthur Grumiaux, violin, and Gyorgy Sebok, piano (Decca Classics Productions [426 384-2], recorded 1978, published 1979, compact disc).

<sup>75</sup> César Franck, *Sonate pour violon et piano en la majeur; Quintette pour piano et cordes en fa mineur*, performed by Régis Pasquier, violin, and Catherine Collard, piano (Lyrinx [LYR CD 104], recorded 1990, published 1990, compact disc).

<sup>76</sup> César Franck, *Quintette en Fa mineur pour piano et cordes; Sonate en La majeur pour violon et piano*, performed by Olivier Charlier, violin, and Jean Hubeau, piano (Erato Disques [2292455234], recorded 1990, published 1990, compact disc).

<sup>77</sup> César Franck, *String Quartet. Piano Quintet. Sonata for piano and violin*, performed by Guillaume Sutre, violin, and Pascal Rogé, piano (Ysaÿe Records [YR03], recorded 2003, published 2003, compact disc).

Ex. 26 (Franck Violin Sonata, II, mm. 67-79)

*poco più lento*  
*molto dolce*  
*[poco più lento]*  
*pp*

*rall.*  
*rall.*

The *Recitativo-Fantasia* third movement opens with a notational curiosity. Both Franck’s working autograph and his fair copy show a tempo indication of *Moderato* in 4/4 meter. The first printed editions, however, are marked *Ben Moderato* in 2/2 meter,<sup>78</sup> allowing both the violinist and the pianist the opportunity for broader, more expansive phrasing. Feeling one measure in half notes helps the music flow better, though performers might also be inclined to push the tempo forward. Franck specifically indicated “*Ben*” *Moderato* to tell us that the music should flow nicely while never appearing hurried.

Some editions, including Henle, are marked *Moderato* 2/2 while others indicate *Ben moderato* 2/2, as printed in the first edition. Franck’s addition of “*Ben*” can only mean that Franck desired a slower tempo in this particular movement. The opening of the movement immediately raises the issue of tempo (Ex. 27).

Ex. 27 (Franck Violin Sonata, III, mm. 1-4)

Some pianists take a faster tempo because of the 2/2 marking (they may or may not have “*Ben Moderato*” marked in their score) and the melodic line (the striving toward the “F” in m. 3).

<sup>78</sup> César Franck, *Sonate pour Violon et Piano*, ed. Joël-Marie Fauquet (Paris: Éditions Musicales du Marais, 1990), p. XII.

However, if one manages to take a slower tempo and sing through all the intervals, then the astonishingly rich and sensual color of the chord will come out through.

Another passage where Franck's *Ben moderato* brings out more of the French sound quality occurs at mm. 32-36 (Ex. 28):

Ex. 28 (Franck Violin Sonata, III, mm. 32-36)

In his 1929 recording with pianist Alfred Cortot, the eminent French violinist Jacques Thibaud, sings this particular passage in a velvety, long *legato* line. In a more recent (2003) recording, Guillaume Sutre offers instead a much wider palette of colors, with every note seemingly painted in a different hue. Sutre's slow tempo not only undergirds *tranquillo* but also encourages a greater degree of push and pull, particularly at m. 35, with its indication of *sempre dolcissimo*. Yet both these readings serve as model examples of the French style.

Another French-style passage occurs at mm. 59-62 in the same movement. The violin, *dolcissimo espressivo, tranquillo*, plays a minimalist, oscillating melody accompanied by simple arpeggios in the piano. This new texture demands much more than the traditional *cantabile* delivery (Ex. 29).

Ex. 29 (Franck Violin Sonata, III, mm. 59-62)

In his recording Guillaume Sutre plays the passage free of any surface tension, allowing the coloristic harmonies to shine through. The tone, with its slow, relaxed vibrato, exudes a vulnerability altogether foreign to German music. In his 1983 recording, Olivier Charlier performs the same passage with a warm, refined sound, with the melody more driven than Sutre's. Arthur Grumiaux's 1978 recording translates Franck's markings into a wide vibrato and an airy (i.e. light but fast) bow. The tempo is a bit faster than either Sutre's or Charlier's, sacrificing a bit of calm for melodic direction. Yet all three readings fall within a range of characteristic and persuasive French readings.

The canonic finale, *Allegretto poco mosso*, contains equally numerous French touches. While any whiff of a canon may seem to evoke Germanic leanings, the nature of the systematic imitation is delicate and tender, sometimes bordering on playful—quite unlike the contrapuntal passages of a Schumann or Brahms. Similar to the first movement, Franck carefully cycles the expressive indications on the theme repetitions between *dolce cantabile* (Ex. 30), *molto cantabile e poco più f* (Ex. 31), *sempre dolcissimo* (Ex. 32), and *molto dolce* (Ex. 33). Occasional expressive markings such as *delicato* (Ex. 34) further reveals Franck's desire for a broad but subtle sound palette.

Ex. 30 (Franck, IV, mm. 1- 2)

Allegretto poco mosso  
*dolce cantabile*  
*dolce cantabile*

Ex. 31 (Franck, IV, mm. 79-80)

*molto cantabile e poco più f*  
*molto cantabile e poco più f*

Ex. 32 (Franck, IV, mm. 116-117)

*sempre dolciss.*  
*sempre pp*

Ex. 33 (Franck, IV, mm. 185-186)

*molto dolce*  
*molto dolce*

Ex. 34 (Franck Violin Sonata, IV, m. 37)

*delicato*  
*p subito*

Galamian stated that, to diversify color, violinists should mix variations of bow speed and pressure with several types of vibrato:

“Every violinist is well advised to...learn to mix [bow speed and bow pressure] in all sorts of combinations and thereby to achieve command over a wide range of

sound-character and timbre. If, in addition to the foregoing variations in coloring, one uses at will the several types of vibrato with their different shadings, then it becomes clear that the possible combinations are innumerable and can yield an infinitely diversified palette of the most varied character, color, and quality of sound.”<sup>79</sup>

Special attention to the phrasing markings between the violin and the piano is also worthwhile (Ex. 35):

Ex. 35 (Franck Violin Sonata, IV, mm. 1-5)

The image shows a musical score for the first five measures of the fourth movement of Franck's Violin Sonata. The score is written for violin and piano. The tempo is 'Allegretto poco mosso'. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The violin part is marked 'dolce cantabile'. The piano part is marked 'dolce cantabile' in the first two measures, 'sempre legato' in the third measure, and 'legato' in the fourth measure. The piano part consists of a continuous eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Although violinists are able to play the opening melody *legato* (by slurring the notes and drawing the bow smoothly), pianists cannot realistically create the same kind of smoothness between notes. But even though the primary theme is an immediately audible canon between violin and piano, the violinist and the pianist nonetheless should try to imitate each other's phrasings. Surprisingly, the Henle edition does not have *legato* markings in the piano part. However, in his first edition Franck added the slurs in the piano part and specifically marked “*sempre legato*” at mm. 4-5. While a pianist cannot create a perfect *legato* with his melody, he can certainly phrase it so that breaks between notes are not as noticeable and the violinist can

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<sup>79</sup> Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*, pp. 62-63.

also use a minimal bow *portato* in order to imitate the piano's articulation. Says Olivier Charlier about the *legato* sound in the last movement:

“Ce qui est important dans [le dernier mouvement], c'est d'avoir une sorte de dialogue dans le canon avec le piano... le piano va essayer de lier [la phrase] le plus possible... mais le piano ne pourra pas s'empêcher d'avoir à chaque fois une petite impulsion sur chaque note... je fais un peu de *portato* pour imiter l'articulation du piano. Le piano doit essayer d'être le plus horizontal possible pour lutter contre sa tendance d'être frappé, mais peut être que le violon [doit faire] aussi un bout de chemin pour qu'il ne soit pas dans sa bulle complètement *legato*, inatteignable par le piano.”<sup>80</sup>

[“What is important in [the last movement] is to have a dialogue in the canon with the piano... the pianist will try to connect [the phrase] as much as possible... but the piano cannot avoid imparting a small impulse on each note... I play [this passage] with a little *portato* in order to imitate the piano's articulation. The piano must try to play as horizontal [a line] as possible to fight against its tendency to be percussive, but perhaps the violin [must meet] also halfway, so that it doesn't stay in its own bubble playing completely *legato*, which is unattainable on the piano.”]

Without question, César Franck erected in this Sonata the scaffolding on which the finishing touches to the French style were applied by Debussy and Ravel. All the elements—a wealth of expressive performance directions, subtlety of dynamics (especially at the soft, intimate end), a focus on color rather than pitch arrangement, chromatic harmonies built on common-tone rather than fifth relationships—are in place. The stage was set for the tyranny of sonata form to be quietly dismantled.

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<sup>80</sup> Olivier Charlier, interview with the author, October 16, 2012.

## Chapter IV

### Performing Debussy's Sonata for Violin and Piano (1917)

#### What is the “French sound”?

Debussy's Violin Sonata demands that violinists be capable of a wide-ranging palette of sounds, a good number of which in 1917 were new to violin technique. Although less heralded than the more overt technical expansions introduced around the same time by Béla Bartók in his Second String Quartet, they are no less important for a true understanding of Debussy's work. This is especially true of the delicate nuances required by softer, more subtle tone colors. Olivier Charlier remarked in our interview: “Il y a une sonorité spécifique à trouver qui doit correspondre particulièrement à la musique française [There is a specific sonority that particularly corresponds to French music].”<sup>81</sup> Specifically, he described the French sound as “delicate and imperceptible.”<sup>82</sup> How does a violinist achieve these elusive goals?

For French performers, the secret lies especially in the use of the bow. Lucien Capet, a French violinist from the late nineteenth century and the author of the treatise, *Superior Bowing Technique*, described the bow as “the *soul* of the violin.”<sup>83</sup> Régis Pasquier, a French violinist and professor emeritus at the Paris Conservatory, explained in our interview that the extreme range of sound required in Debussy's music is obtained by a combination of both bow speed and bow weight, along with the capacity to change quickly from a full tone to “un son très fluide et descriptif d'une couleur ou de quelque chose qui représente la nature, soit la mer, le vent ou la

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<sup>81</sup> Olivier Charlier, interview with the author, October 14, 2012.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Lucien Capet, *Superior Bowing Technique*, ed. Stephen B. Shipps, trans. Margaret Schmidt (Maple City: Encore Music Publishers, 2004), p. 29.

tempête [a very fluid and colorful sound, a kind of sound that portrays nature—either the sea, the wind, or the storm].”<sup>84</sup> Although a fanciful description, this characterization underscores the importance of a flowing, constantly moving tone prepared to change color at the drop of a hat.

Professor Charlier also explained what the bow must do in order to achieve the desired sound in Debussy’s music:

“Techniquement, c’est une mobilité de l’archet, un jeu au dessus de la corde, avec une sorte de légèreté dans le son... il y a un absence de solidité [dans le son] par rapport aux côtés très à la corde comme dans la musique germanique avec une prononciation puissante et définitive de la sonorité.”<sup>85</sup>

[“Technically, it is the mobility of the bow, a floating on the string, with a kind of gracefulness in the sound... compared to German technique with its powerful and definitive enunciation of the sonority, there is less strength [in the sound].”]

The same sensibility prevails in the pianos that Debussy would have known and had in mind when composing his Violin Sonata. On the Erards<sup>86</sup> and Pleyels<sup>87</sup> with which Debussy was most familiar, it was much easier to produce a light, veiled, or distant sonority than on a Steinway-type. The tone of these French instruments produced what listeners described as a sweet, misty tone. Given that violinists today will most frequently partner with a pianist on a Steinway-type, the two musicians must work especially hard to achieve the desired balance and tonal subtleties. While the type of piano was a major factor in producing the kind of sound

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<sup>84</sup> Régis Pasquier, interview with the author, October 17, 2012.

<sup>85</sup> Olivier Charlier, interview with the author, October 14, 2012.

<sup>86</sup> Érard is a Paris-based French firm of piano and harp makers founded by Sébastien Érard in 1780. Érard's improvements to the pianos include patents for double escapement and key repetition, which allowed notes to be repeated more easily than in single action pianos.

<sup>87</sup> Pleyel (Pleyel et Cie) is a French piano manufacturing firm founded in 1807 by Ignace Pleyel. Pleyel's major contribution to piano development was the first use of a metal frame in a piano and the introduction of the upright piano in France.

Debussy desired, violinists would require gut strings to be concordant with the piano. Most modern performers avoid gut strings since they go out of tune more easily than steel and do not project as much as synthetic ones. When I asked Olivier Charlier why he does not use gut strings in his concerts even though they can deliver more tonal colors, he replied:

“... parce que je suis obligé de jouer avec un piano Steinway. Si je joue avec une couleur douce et lointaine, on ne m’entend pas... Je pense qu’il y avait moins de problème d’équilibre violon-piano à l’époque de Debussy... Les cordes en boyau en effet étaient très adaptées et très favorables dans ces musiques impressionnistes mais il faut trouver un pianiste qui sait jouer avec une délicatesse du son et ce n’est pas évident.”<sup>88</sup>

[“... because I am obliged to play with a Steinway piano. If I play with a sweet and distant color, I am not heard... I think that there were fewer balance problems during Debussy’s time... Gut strings were, to be sure, very adaptive and very favorable for Impressionist music, but it is necessary to find a pianist who knows how to play with a delicate sound, and this is not easy.”]

### **The French sound and Debussy’s performance directions**

How did Debussy specify the French sound described in general terms above? To begin with, he captured the incessant ebb and flow of the music with an astonishing array of subtle tempo modifications. Consider those for the first movement alone. To the initial tempo indication of *Allegro vivo* in his first movement—for which Debussy strangely created a calm and mysterious atmosphere—he provides no fewer than 29 tempo modifications: *En serrant [Stringendo] - a Tempo - Appassionato - L’istesso tempo très expressif - Ritardando - Meno mosso (Tempo rubato) - Tempo I° - Meno mosso (Tempo rubato) - Tempo I° - Poco meno - Ritardando - a Tempo - I° Tempo - En serrant - a Tempo - Poco a poco animando e crescendo - Appassionato - au Mouvement (Retenu) [to the Tempo, Tempo primo] - Poco ritardando - au Mouvement (Retenu) - Ritardando e smorzando - au Movement - Stretto - Cédez [Ritardando] - au Mouvement - En serrant - au Mouvement - Stretto - au Mouvement.*

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

In a movement that lasts only about five minutes, this averages a tempo or character change almost every ten seconds. Yet these markings do not signify the push-and-pull we associate with German composers such as Brahms. It is rather a certain restiveness coupled with playfulness, even capriciousness that characterizes this rich harvest of tempo markings.

One of these tempo indications, *Tempo rubato*, requires particular attention in Debussy's music. The "*Meno mosso (Tempo rubato)*" at m. 84 in the first movement (Ex. 36) is, according to Richard Hudson in *Stolen Time*, Debussy's way of notating "*Meno mosso and Tempo rubato*". Hudson stated: "Debussy usually separates the expression *tempo rubato* from the actual tempo terms by a comma, parentheses, or by the word *et.*"<sup>89</sup>

Ex. 36 (Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 84-87)

In this passage, the violin and piano find themselves in a 2-against-3 rhythm. Modern musical training usually demands rhythmic accuracy and careful coordination between the musicians. However, Debussy's marking *Tempo rubato* pre-empts any requirement for rhythmic synchronization. Violinists should avoid the impulse to synchronize every measure with the

<sup>89</sup> Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 342.

pianist but rather play with a larger sense of phrase architecture. Performers should also be mindful that Debussy preferred a more subtle *rubato* rather than an overly expressive one. Hudson stated that Debussy played the *rubatos* of his works in “an exceedingly subtle manner.”<sup>90</sup> Moreover, Debussy’s music publisher and lifelong friend Jacque Durand described Debussy’s *rubato* playing as “un *rubato* imperceptible cadrant toujours dans le temps [an imperceptible *rubato* always framed in a beat].”<sup>91</sup>

Misconstruing Debussy’s *rubato* can result in stylistic distortions, especially in the *Rubato* passage of the Finale, mm. 89-95 (Ex. 37).

Ex. 37 (Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 89-95)

Charlier underscored the dangers of over-interpreting *rubato* in this passage:

“... Un des écueils de cette musique, ce serait d’en faire une musique à la russe qui voudrait trop déballer ses sentiments ou une musique à la tzigane qui voudrait chercher l’effet facile et séducteur... [c’est] une littérature faite un peu sur recherche d’une délicatesse d’un monde irréel... on est dans des sphères de rêve,

<sup>90</sup> Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

<sup>91</sup> Jacques Durand, *Quelques souvenirs d’un Editeur de musique 2e série (1910-1924)* (Paris: A. Durand et Fils, 1925), p. 21.

d'imaginaire, de monde idéal et fantastique... On n'est pas dans une expression passionnelle exagérée...<sup>92</sup>

[“One of the dangers of this music would be to perform it in a Russian style that would display too much sentiment, or to play it in a gypsy style that would have an easy and seductive effect... [It is] the pursuit of sensitivity in an unreal world... we are in an imaginary dream world, an ideal fantasy world... It is not about an overly passionate expression...”]

While a proper reading of *rubato* inflections and the various tempo indications is daunting enough, Debussy's sound world extends well beyond these two factors.

Indeed, dynamics play just as important a role in defining the new French sound. The first movement alone contains 81 instances of soft dynamics (*mp* and below) between the violin and piano parts, including *p*, *p subito*, *più p*, *pp*, *sempre pp*, *più pp*, *diminuendo*, *più diminuendo*, *pp dolce sostenuto*, *pp lusingando* [caressing], *p dolce espressivo*, *p poco marcato*, and *p marqué*. A few of these markings invite comment. *Lusingando pp* combined with *Tempo rubato* are the markings Debussy provides the pianist in the heavily arpeggiated B-Section (mm. 84 ff.). Debussy asks the pianist to create a sound at odds with the natural percussiveness of the instrument—an effect achieved much more easily on a period Pleyel than on a modern Steinway-type. The last two markings would never be found in a German work of the period (where they would be heard as contradictory); for Debussy, however, *p marqué* suggests a kind of subtle *pointillism*.

We find only 46 instances of loud dynamics (*mf* and above) in the combined piano and violin parts of the first movement: *f*, *sff*, *sfz*, *crescendo molto*, *crescendo poco a poco*, *ff con fuoco*, *ff con fuoco molto sostenuto*. The last of these markings (at mm. 238-239 in the coda) appears contradictory, yet only a French composer could combine abandon with sustain. Yet in terms of variety and nuance, softer dynamics and shadings are almost twice as abundant as

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<sup>92</sup> Olivier Charlier, interview with the author, October 14, 2012.

aggressive sounds. The subtle distinctions among the types of soft dynamic markings must be fully realized in order for Debussy's "sensitivity in an unreal world" to come to life.

Often used in tandem with dynamic markings, Debussy's expression markings throughout the entire Sonata offer further insights into the French sound. These markings include *dolce vibrato*, *sur la touche* [on the fingerboard], written *portamenti*, *lusingando*, *expressif et sans rigueur* [expressive and without rigidity], *morendo* [dying away], *léger et lointain* [light and distant], *mordant* [biting], *cuivrez* [brassy], and *sourdement agité* [agitated but muffled]. These specific indications illustrate the extraordinary range of rich and delicate tone colors that Debussy paints in his Sonata. Indeed, when I queried Professor Pasquier about the French sound, he described it as "la multi-couleur à travers un même son [several colors created through the same sound]."<sup>93</sup>

Many of these sound colors can be achieved through skillful bow strokes. A technique known as *bow vibrato* flourished within the early twentieth-century French violin tradition. Light undulations in the right forearm while drawing the bow produce a slow and delicate *vibrato*. Even though Debussy did not indicate this specific bow technique in his Violin Sonata, I sometimes use it when playing open strings or long held notes in order to provide musical momentum. Another kind of bow technique, *sur la touche*, appears in mm. 88-95 of the first movement. This technique directs the player to draw the bow on the fingerboard in order to produce a flute-like tone. The resulting light and airy sound remains closely associated with French sound today.

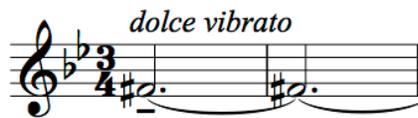
One of the main techniques supplied by the left hand is *vibrato*, used to embellish and intensify a tone when used with *le bon goût*. What seems clear is that Debussy would neither have known nor approved of the omnipresent wide *vibrato* popularized by violinists starting with

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<sup>93</sup> Régis Pasquier, interview with the author, October 17, 2012.

Fritz Kreisler in the 1920s. Debussy would have both called for less *vibrato* and a greater number of varieties than we typically hear today. Debussy indicated a specific kind of *vibrato* in the first movement—*dolce vibrato* (Ex. 38). This specific indication is evidence that Debussy had various kinds of *vibrato* in mind when he composed the Violin Sonata.

Ex. 38 (Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 24-25)



Literally meaning “sweetly shaking” and separate from normal *vibrato*, this technique demands careful listening to the quality of the *vibrato*. Olivier Charlier described *dolce vibrato* to be “un *vibrato* lent qui a un côté un peu abandonné [a slow *vibrato* that has an abandoned feeling].”<sup>94</sup>

While each performer is free to interpret the term “*dolce vibrato*” to their taste, my personal solution is to undulate the left finger more slowly and wider than other vibrated notes.

Debussy’s sparing but varied *vibrato* can be fast, slow, wide, or narrow; variable or consistent, and early performers such as Jacques Thibaud and Zino Francescatti combine them to create many shades and colors of *vibrato*. In Francescatti’s 1958 recording, there are no fewer than three different types of *vibrato* in the opening 25 measures of the Debussy Sonata. Francescatti uses an extremely subtle *vibrato* in the opening phrase (mm. 5-8), creating a calm and atmospheric sound. As the dynamics expands through mm. 18-22, Francescatti’s *vibrato*

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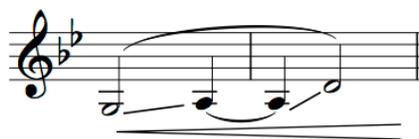
<sup>94</sup> Olivier Charlier, interview with the author, October 14, 2012.

becomes more energetic, faster, and narrower. When he plays the note “F#” at the *dolce vibrato* bar (mm. 24-25), his *vibrato* continues to be fast but distinctly wider.<sup>95</sup>

In comparison, Thibaud delivers a more constant, fast, and extremely narrow kind of *vibrato* throughout the opening 25 measures, with the exception of the *dolce vibrato* (mm. 24-25), where he uses a particularly wide and slow type of *vibrato*.<sup>96</sup> Added to his subtle *vibrato* are highly expressive *portamenti*. Thibaud supplies four conspicuous *portamenti* in the opening 25 measures, whereas Francescatti makes no use at all of *portamento* during the same span of measures. While their *vibrato* styles differ significantly from one another, the one thing they never do is employ the consistent and wide *vibrato* of most violinists today.

In addition to *vibrato*, the left hand is also often subject to *portamenti*, or slides. Debussy never asks directly for a “*portamento*”; instead, in a practice peculiar to him, he writes them out by inserting long dashes between adjacent notes (Exs. 39-42):

Ex. 39 (Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 72-73)



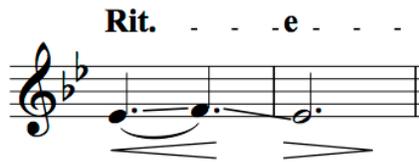
Ex. 40 (Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 136-141)



<sup>95</sup> Claude Debussy, *Beethoven, Brahms, Saint-Saëns, Debussy, Ravel*, performed by Zino Francescatti, violin, and Eugenio Bagnoli, piano (Ina Archives, recorded 1958, published 2012, mp3).

<sup>96</sup> Claude Debussy, *Cortot plays Debussy and Ravel*, performed by Jacques Thibaud, violin, and Alfred Cortot, piano (Biddulph Recordings [LHV 006], recorded 1929, published 1991, compact disc).

Ex. 41 (Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 211-212)



Ex. 42 (Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 85-88)



It was also common practice during Debussy's time for violinists to use *portamenti* at their discretion. As Professor Pasquier described in our interview, a *portamento* is “une expression de sentiment [an expression of sentiment]” that you use when you wish to create “a soft and caressing sound.”<sup>97</sup> But in the case of Debussy's Violin Sonata, having the *portamento* written out in specific places naturally limits a violinist's options. Pasquier continued on talking about the use of *portamento* in the particular work:

“... on entend quelques fois des interprétations de la Sonate de Debussy où il y a trop de *portamento*. Et le problème, c'est que le *portamento* vraiment voulu par Debussy perd sa valeur. C'est un peu comme une dame qui met des bijoux partout et qu'il y en a un qui est très joli mais qu'on ne remarque pas parce qu'il y en a trop...”<sup>98</sup>

[“... we sometimes hear an interpretation of Debussy's Sonata where there are too many *portamenti*. And the problem is that the *portamenti* that Debussy really wanted lose their value. It is like a woman who wears jewelry all over and there is one jewel that is very pretty, but we do not notice it because of all the other jewelry.”]

<sup>97</sup> Régis Pasquier, interview with the author, October 17, 2012.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

Debussy may not have indicated each *portamento* in the score and violinists are certainly allowed to add their own *portamenti* in performance. However, *portamenti* should not be used profusely in order to preserve the value of the ones Debussy indicated. Moreover, playing the non-written *portamenti* with shorter and more subtle lengths and durations will help keep the elegance in the flow of the music.

The second movement, *Intermède*, contains *portamenti* indications that could lead violinists into an unstylistic rendering (Ex. 43).

Ex. 43 (Debussy Violin Sonata, II, mm. 60-62)



When taken literally, the *portamenti* appear to start immediately after the note E and slowly reach the note G. This could result in a heavy and tasteless sound, especially in a playful passage like this. As a matter of fact, the options that composers have for notating such a passage are limited and could possibly cause misinterpretations. However, Debussy’s intention becomes clear when looking closely at the other indications in the score. In the span of three measures (mm. 60-62), Debussy wrote *Scherzando, p doux et expressif* for violin and *p leggiero* for piano. A performer with good taste will play the *portamenti* lightly and playfully rather than heavy.

### Phrase Markings in Debussy’s Violin Sonata

The Durand Edition was for some eighty years the only published version of Debussy’s Sonata. In 1997 the German firm of Günter Henle published a new edition—because “the

discrepancies between the score and the printed part [of the Durand Edition] are highly dissatisfying and a source of confusion”— that supplies no fewer than three different violin parts: 1) the original violin part from the Durand edition, 2) the edited violin part by Ernst-Günter Heinemann, and 3) the edited violin part by Ernest-Günter Heinemann with supplementary bowings and fingerings by Kurt Guntner, German violinist and pedagogue.

When Durand—the premiere French music publisher—brought out Debussy’s Violin Sonata in 1917, it contained major discrepancies between the violin part and the piano score with regard to phrasing and articulation markings. Phrase markings in the violin part appear to be bowings, while the markings in the piano score appear to supply phrase marking, perhaps supplied by Debussy himself. How can we discern which is which?

The numerous instances where the violin part and the piano score do not match have injected considerable confusion into the performance of this work. I was able to ask Gérard Poulet,<sup>99</sup> the son of the very person who premiered Debussy’s Violin Sonata, about these discrepancies. In an email correspondence with Poulet, he related the role that his father Gaston Poulet had played in premiering the Violin Sonata, especially his role in the violin part’s bowings:

“... mon père a mis les coups d’archet sur la partition de violon de la première édition. Les articulations d’archet portées sur la partie de piano sont de Debussy. Mais il n’était pas violoniste, mon père a donc fait au mieux pour coller au plus près sur la vision du compositeur.”<sup>100</sup>

[“... my father supplied the bowings in the violin part of the first edition. The bow articulations written in the piano part are from Debussy. But he was not a violinist, so my father did his best to create bowings that are as close as possible to the composer’s vision.”]

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<sup>99</sup> Gérard Poulet, son of the noted violinist and conductor Gaston Poulet, is a distinguished French violinist. He studied with Zino Francescatti, Yehudi Menuhin, Henryk Szerying and others. An emeritus Professor at the Paris Conservatory, Poulet is now professor at Tokyo University.

<sup>100</sup> Gérard Poulet, e-mail communication to the author, November 2, 2012.

Hence, most of the modifications in the violin part result from the awkward bowings that would result if one attempts to interpret Debussy's phrase markings as bowings. A list of examples (Exs. 44a-48b; Debussy's phrase markings first, then Gaston Poulet's division into more manageable bowings in the violin part) includes:

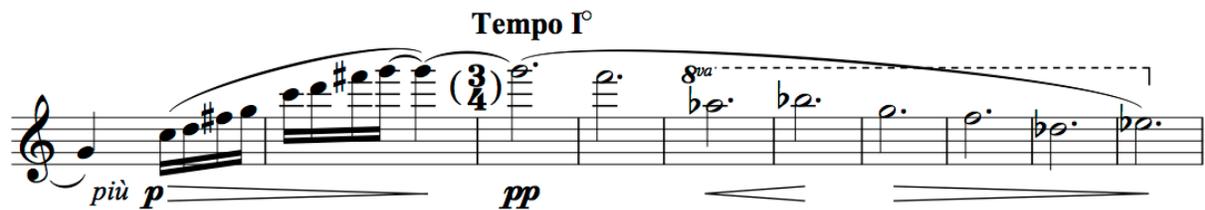
Ex. 44a (Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 5-8, Debussy's phrase markings)



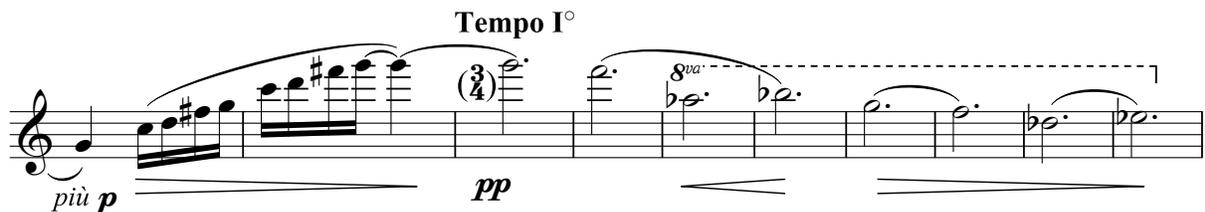
Ex. 44b (Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 5-8, Poulet's bowings)



Ex. 45a (Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 120-127, Debussy's phrase markings)



Ex. 45b (Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 120-127, Poulet's bowings)



Ex. 46a (Debussy Violin Sonata, II, mm. 112-113, Debussy's phrase markings)

Musical score for Ex. 46a, Debussy Violin Sonata, II, mm. 112-113. The score is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with the tempo marking "au Mouvt". The music consists of a single melodic line with a long, sweeping slur over the entire phrase. A dynamic marking of *8<sup>va</sup>* is placed above the final notes of the phrase, which are enclosed in a dashed box.

Ex. 46b (Debussy Violin Sonata, II, mm. 112-113, Poulet's bowings)

Musical score for Ex. 46b, Debussy Violin Sonata, II, mm. 112-113. The score is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with the tempo marking "au Mouvt". The music consists of a single melodic line. The phrasing is broken into several distinct groups by curved lines, representing bowings. A dynamic marking of *8<sup>va</sup>* is placed above the final notes of the phrase, which are enclosed in a dashed box.

Ex. 47a (Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 29-34, Debussy's phrase markings)

Musical score for Ex. 47a, Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 29-34. The score is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with a tempo marking of  $\frac{9}{16}$  and a metronome marking of (60 = ♩). The music consists of a single melodic line with a long, sweeping slur over the entire phrase. A dynamic marking of *sf* is placed below the first notes of the phrase.

Ex. 47b (Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 29-34, Poulet's bowings)

Musical score for Ex. 47b, Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 29-34. The score is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with a tempo marking of  $\frac{9}{16}$  and a metronome marking of (60 = ♩). The music consists of a single melodic line. The phrasing is broken into several distinct groups by curved lines, representing bowings. A dynamic marking of *sf* is placed below the first notes of the phrase.

Ex. 48a (Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 91-96, Debussy's phrase markings)

Ex. 48b (Debussy Violin Sonata, III, mm. 91-96, Poulet's bowings)

In each instance the addition of bow changes allows the performer greater bow speed and therefore greater control over tone color. Performers, of course, must remain free to use bow speed as a flexible tool in order to achieve a French sound.

In certain passages, however, Poulet inserted bowings to achieve a different end (Ex. 49a-49b). For example, in mm. 102-106 of the first movement, he appears to slur mm. 104-105:

Ex. 49a (Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 102-106, Debussy's phrase markings)

Ex. 49b (Debussy Violin Sonata, I, mm. 102-106, Poulet's bowings)

The musical notation is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature. It shows a sequence of notes with dynamic markings 'pp' and 'più pp', and performance instructions like '(3/4) Von' and 'Meno mosso (Tempo rubato)'. A boxed number '3' is placed above the staff, indicating a triplet or a specific bowing pattern.

However, it is doubtless that Poulet wanted to begin the *pp* of mm. 106 ff. on an upbow, not that he wished play mm. 104-105 *legato*. In my own performance I changed bows in each of mm. 102-105, trusting myself to deliver an appropriately delicate downbow in m. 106.

In this particular work, the performer can benefit from two sets of directions. Poulet offers the performer practical advice for negotiating the Sonata, while Debussy's phrase markings retain the groupings that the composer had in mind.

As all these devices and examples demonstrate, Debussy's sound world expanded far beyond the demands made by composers such as Brahms and successors such as Zemlinsky, Schoenberg, and Berg. Color has moved from its position as a delectable sauce to the primary ingredient. In some respects, it was more subtle than the more dramatic expanded techniques being introduced by the Hungarian Bartók around the same time. But as the testimony of recordings and living performers closely related to this new French style attest, its impact on every aspect of performance—bowing, bow speed, bow pressure, fingering, *vibrato*, *portamento*, to name only the most obvious—was profound and lasting.

## Chapter V

### Performing Ravel's *Tzigane: Rapsodie de concert for violin and piano* (1924)

Unlike the sonatas by Franck and Debussy, Maurice Ravel's rhapsody *Tzigane* would seem, because of its exotic subject matter, to occupy a special niche in the modern French violin repertory. Would not the raw elements of the gypsy style—the shifting pulse, the improvisatory flair, the raw energy—trump the frequently delicate shadings and nuances so essential to the “French-ness” of Franck and Debussy? Hence, it is altogether surprising to discover just how many issues raised by the music of Franck and Debussy inform Ravel's take on gypsy life. The hues may take on different shadings but the apples all fall from the same tree.

The opening of Ravel's *Tzigane* poses two immediate questions: First, what is the meaning of the tempo indication *Lento, quasi cadenza*? Second, why are the rhythms throughout this opening notated so precisely? These two factors seem quite simply at odds with each other. Since this opening section constitutes almost half of the piece, it is important to understand what Ravel means by “*cadenza*.” And how then do we translate his meticulously notated rhythms?

The rhythm that opens the solo violin part seems unambiguously precise. From the thirty-second rest to the carefully placed accents echoing the sounds of the Hungarian language,<sup>101</sup> Ravel's meticulousness does not seem to leave much room for freedom of execution. The opening motive, for example, is written in three different ways within the span of five measures (Exs. 50-52):

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<sup>101</sup> In Hungarian, the stress is always on the first syllable of a word.

Ex. 50 (*Tzigane*, m. 1)



Ex. 51 (*Tzigane*, m. 3)



Ex. 52 (*Tzigane*, m. 5)



However, the point seems to be this: if the performer imbibes these three notated rhythms and executions to the point where they sound entirely natural, even spontaneous, then one will have captured the sense of *quasi cadenza*.

Equally intriguing are the indications of *Tempo rubato*, *Accelerando*, *Vivo* and *a Tempo* at mm. 9-14. These tempo modifications suggest that the first eight measures should be played in a stricter manner (Ex. 53).

Ex. 53 (Ravel *Tzigane*, mm. 9-14)

**Lento, quasi cadenza**  
sul Sol sin al segno \*

**Tempo rubato**  
*espressivo*

**Accel.** **Vivo**

**a Tempo**

The clue seems to lie in his notation; Ravel specifically employed the word *quasi* to discourage performers from taking too much freedom and to remind them that the opening of *Tzigane* should sound as if it were a *cadenza*. This reading reflects what we know of Ravel’s personality. He was well known to be an almost obsessive perfectionist. In *Cahiers Maurice Ravel*, Arbie Orenstein reported on Ravel’s personality as described by *Monsieur et Madame Casadesus*:

“... il avait le souci de la perfection aussi bien dans sa musique que dans sa toilette...”<sup>102</sup>

[“... he strove for perfection in his music as well as in his dress...”]

Added to this picture is an account that Olivier Charlier relayed to me during our interview about an oral tradition starting with Ravel regarding the performance of *Tzigane*:

“... Aurélia Spadaro, une violoniste et proche disciple de Zino Francescatti disait... ‘Francescatti racontait que lors d’une tournée avec Ravel au piano... Francescatti lui avait demandé ‘Maître Ravel, dites moi, comment faut-il interpréter *Tzigane*?’ Il paraît que Ravel a répondu ‘Mais mon petit, il ne faut pas interpréter Ravel, il faut jouer ce qui est marqué.’”<sup>103</sup>

[“... Aurélia Spadaro, a violinist and close disciple of Zino Francescatti, who said ... ‘Francescatti once told a story that when he went on tour with Ravel at the piano... Francescatti asked him, ‘Maestro Ravel, tell me, how should one interpret *Tzigane*?’ To which Ravel replied ‘But my young friend, one should not interpret Ravel; one should simply play what is written.’”]

By advising Francescatti—with whom Ravel used to perform often together—to play “simply what is written,” Ravel surely did not want to deprive his performers of any sense of freedom and he certainly would not have wished every performance to sound identical. *Quasi cadenza*

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<sup>102</sup> Arbie Orenstein, “La correspondance de Maurice Ravel aux Casadesus,” *Cahiers Maurice Ravel* no. 1 (1985): p. 114.

<sup>103</sup> Olivier Charlier, interview with the author, October 16, 2012.

indicates the style so carefully notated by Ravel rather than offering a license to alter things at will.

Despite the fact that Ravel wrote the opening motive in three different ways within a span of five measures—see Exs. 50-52, the differences are scarcely audible even in recordings by extraordinary violinists. In Zino Francescatti’s 1931 recording,<sup>104</sup> he plays the “B” (m.1) and the “D” (m.5) the same way, as if they were both thirty-second notes. In Jascha Heifetz’s 1934 recording,<sup>105</sup> except for accentuating the very first note of the piece, he also plays these three motives as if they were the same. Itzhak Perlman also plays them identically in his 1973-74 recording.<sup>106</sup> In addition, the long note “B” (m.1, see Ex. 53) is often cut off earlier than indicated and the long note “A#” (m. 3) held scarcely long enough.

G rard Poulet expressed his opinion about the inexact rhythms in the opening of many performances:

“La cadence... il appara t souvent que les valeurs longues sont largement  court es et les silences oubli s ainsi que les dynamiques ou autres indications non respect es. L , je ne suis pas d’accord.”<sup>107</sup>

[“[In] the cadenza... it often appears that the long notes are played plenty short and the silences are forgotten, as well as the dynamics or other indications that are not respected. This I do not agree with.”]

Olivier Charlier underscored the importance of precise rhythms in *Tzigane* by stating:

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<sup>104</sup> Maurice Ravel, *Maurice Ravel, Son oeuvre et son temps Vol. 3*, performed by Zino Francescatti, violin, and Maurice Faur , piano (Cascavelle [VEL 3049], recorded 1931, published 2002, compact disc).

<sup>105</sup> Maurice Ravel, *Maurice Ravel Son oeuvre et son temps Vol. 3*, performed by Jasha Heifetz, violin, and Arpad Sandor, piano (Cascavelle [VEL 3049], recorded 1934, published 2002, compact disc).

<sup>106</sup> Maurice Ravel, *Orchestral Works*, performed by Itzhak Perlman, violin, and Orchestre de Paris, Jean Martinon, conductor (EMI Classics [7243 5 75534 2 1], recorded 1973-74, published 1975, compact disc).

<sup>107</sup> G rard Poulet, e-mail communication with the author, November 2, 2012.

“Pour moi, *quasi cadenza* [dans *Tzigane* de Ravel] n’est pas une cadence. Sur le principe, Pierre Doukan m’a toujours demandé de jouer exactement ce qui est marqué... [Ravel] est extrêmement précis sur le langage rythmique... Je pense qu’il faut d’abord partir de ce qu’il a marqué parce que c’est suffisamment riche au niveau de l’écriture, spécifiquement au niveau de l’écriture rythmique...”<sup>108</sup>

[“For me, *Quasi Cadenza* [in Ravel’s *Tzigane*] is not a cadenza. In principle, Pierre Doukan<sup>109</sup> always asked me to play exactly what is written... [Ravel] is extremely precise with rhythmic language... I think that it is necessary to first begin with what is written because it is rich enough rhythmically...”]

Ultimately what Charlier means is that, although performers can allow themselves a sense of rhythmic freedom—of push and pull—it must be within limits. Playing the opening of *Tzigane* metronomically is certainly no solution, but neither is disregarding Ravel’s precise rhythms. Violinists should blend Ravel’s text with their own personal style so that the opening comes off as if an actual “cadenza.”

The tempo markings in *Tzigane* are also carefully indicated, especially in the second half of the piece—the theme and variations. Ravel proved to be as detailed about tempos as he was about the rhythmic values of notes. Each variation undergoes slight tempo modifications. At R. 21 (Ex. 54),<sup>110</sup> Ravel’s tempo indications become even more complex, changing with almost every measure. In a span of ten measures (R. 21-2 a. R. 22), he offers no fewer than nine different tempo directions: *Esitando* [hesitating] – *Accelerando* – *Vivo* – *Rallentando* – *Allegro* – *Accelerando* – *Vivo* – *Moderato* – *Accelerando*.

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<sup>108</sup> Olivier Charlier, interview with the author, October 16, 2012.

<sup>109</sup> Pierre Doukan (1927-1995) was a former, distinguished violin professor at the Paris Conservatory.

<sup>110</sup> Since Ravel’s use of dotted lines for some of the barlines in *Tzigane* creates ambiguity in terms of measure numbers, I have chosen to use the rehearsal numbers provided in the Durand edition. Hence “2 a. R. 22” means “2 bars after rehearsal 22,” while “2-5 a. R. 22” means “bars 2-5 after R. 22.”

Ex. 54 (Ravel *Tzigane*, R. 21-2 a. R. 22)

The image displays two staves of musical notation for Ravel's *Tzigane*. The first staff, labeled '21', begins with 'Esitando' and includes markings for '0', 'Accel.', 'Vivo', and 'Rall.'. The second staff continues with 'Allegro', 'Accel.', and 'Vivo' markings, and includes performance instructions such as 'V' (vibrato), '+' (fingerings), and '0' (fingerings). The third staff, labeled '22', starts with '(pizz.)' and 'arco', followed by 'Moderato', 'mf', 'cresc.', and 'Accel.' markings.

Again, if the tempo gradations are carefully observed, they will convey an impression of improvisation. Unfortunately, most performers simply ignore these detailed markings. In his 1966 recording, Arthur Grumiaux makes scarcely any distinction between *Esitando*, *Accelerando*, and *Vivo* (1-3 a. R. 21).<sup>111</sup> In fact, he implements only a small *Rallentando* (4 a. R. 21). Kyung-Wha Chung's<sup>112</sup> 1979 recording also does not observe the tempo differences in the same passage; indeed, at the *Rallentando* she actually speeds up.<sup>113</sup> In Heifetz's recording, he plays this entire passage fast and straight, with absolutely no changes in tempo. While this shows off

<sup>111</sup> Maurice Ravel, *Arthur Grumiaux Edition Vol. 3, Symphonie espagnole in D minor, op.21*, performed by Arthur Grumiaux, violin, and Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux, Manuel Rosenthal, conductor (Philips Classics Productions [PHCP-4925], recorded 1966, published 1986, compact disc).

<sup>112</sup> Kyung Wha Chung is an eminent Korean-American violin soloist. A pupil of Ivan Galamian, she has performed with major orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, and Boston Symphony Orchestra under George Solti, Claudio Abbado, André Previn and others.

<sup>113</sup> Maurice Ravel, *Saint-Saëns/Chausson/Ravel*, performed by Kyung Wha Chung, violin, and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Charles Dutoit, conductor (The Decca Record Company Limited [London MCPS 417 118-2], recorded 1977, published 1979, compact disc).

his extraordinary technique, Heifetz obliterates any “hesitancy” in the character. Itzhak Perlman’s 1973-74 recording also implements none of these tempo changes, while he gives other markings only a nod of the head.

In contrast, Zino Francescatti’s 1931 recording follows Ravel’s tempo markings precisely, highlighting the first harmonic’s “A” in the *Rallentando* measure (4 a. R. 21) by playing it in the high position, producing an unexpected but delightful *glissando*. Olivier Charlier’s 2004 video recording with the *Orchestre National de Lorraine* also respects Ravel’s indications exactly while playing a few harmonics in high positions in the *Esitando* and *Accelerando* measures (1-2 a. R. 21).<sup>114</sup> In both cases the tempo changes are much more compelling.

As to when the tradition of using harmonics in notes in a high position became a part of the tradition of playing *Tzigane*, we can only infer the following: since Francescatti toured with Ravel playing *Tzigane*, they presumably used the printed edition. Given that Francescatti introduced the harmonics in his 1931 recording, it is hard to imagine that he was not already using them while performing with Ravel. Such a small change would have been no occasion for a revised edition, and Ravel would have been perfectly content with the tradition being transmitted orally.

*Tzigane* embodies other practices that were apparently transmitted orally, or in some cases are simply the result of an individual violinist’s decision. These involve more harmonics as well as *pizzicati*.

At R. 14, Ravel notated the theme entirely in natural harmonics (Ex. 55).

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<sup>114</sup> Maurice Ravel, *Tzigane*, performed by Olivier Charlier (violin) and Orchestre National de Lorraine, conducted by Jacques Mercier, recorded 2004, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjrCM1F15Wo>

Ex. 55 (Ravel *Tzigane*, R. 14)

14 Tempo 1º

*p*

Francescatti performs this passage exactly as Ravel notated it. However, slightly later tradition seems to allow for playing the same passage with a mixture of artificial harmonics.<sup>115</sup> For example, Heifetz plays the natural harmonics at R. 14 for the most part, but uses artificial harmonics on the “C#” (10 a. R. 14) with *vibrato* accompanied by a slight *glissando*, to change the color of the note. In his 2004 recording, French violinist Philippe Graffin<sup>116</sup> mixes pure and artificial harmonics freely, invoking artificial harmonics with *vibrato* wherever he wants more

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<sup>115</sup> A sequence of pitches indicated as “natural harmonics” is performed with a single string lightly stopped with a single finger. Practically, this does not allow for any *vibrato*, since vibrating a single lightly stopped string sounds unpleasantly empty. With “artificial harmonics” the same pitch is achieved by holding the first finger down firmly and touching the same string lightly a fourth above with the fourth finger. This allows the first finger to vibrate in a traditional manner and creates a stronger sense of a forward-moving phrase.

<sup>116</sup> A pupil of Joseph Gingold and Philippe Hirschhorn, Philippe Graffin is an eminent French violinist. He has established an exceptional reputation for his interpretation of late romantic French repertoire such as Chausson’s *Poème* and Ravel’s *Tzigane*. He is currently Artist-in-Residence at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

emphasis on a note.<sup>117</sup> Hence, while natural harmonics sound purer, a performer playing artificial harmonics can bring out a wider range of expression through *vibrato* and even *glissando*. On this topic, Professor Charlier declared:

“[Dans *Tzigane*] il y a des choses de tradition... les harmoniques par exemple... Ici [Fig. 14], [Ravel] écrit tout en harmoniques naturelles. [Une chose de tradition], vu qu’il y a des harmoniques partout, on a tendance à les faire avec des harmoniques artificielles... parce qu’on trouve cela plus expressif... [mais] je ne suis pas contre l’entendre comme c’est marqué. Sur le principe, celui qui fera des harmoniques naturelles aura raison, puisque c’est marqué comme ça. Mais il faut le rendre convainquant pour que cela reste suffisamment expressif...”<sup>118</sup>

“[In *Tzigane*] there are traditions... harmonics for example... here [R. 14], [Ravel] wrote natural harmonics entirely. Because there are harmonics everywhere, we have a tendency to play with artificial harmonics, because we find it more expressive... [but] I am not against hearing it as written. In principle, the violinist who plays natural harmonics will be correct, since it is written like that. But he must make it convincing so that it stays sufficiently expressive...”]

Professor Poulet offered an equally tolerant opinion in our correspondence:

“... chaque violoniste y voit quelque chose, des couleurs, des inventions que l’imagination crée, c’est pourquoi on entend des effets sonores, des sons harmoniques qui ne sont pas toujours reconnaissables sur la partie de violon, à mon sens cela n’a aucune importance si le résultat est bon et brillant.”<sup>119</sup>

“... each violinist sees something—colors, inventions that the imagination creates. It is why we hear sound effects, harmonic sounds, which are not always recognizable in the violin part. [But] in my opinion, that is not important at all if the result is good and bright.”]

I have already mentioned the frequent changes in tempo at R. 21. In the first “*Esitando*” bar, a number of performers play alternate natural harmonics that require the performer to slide

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<sup>117</sup> Maurice Ravel, *In the shade of forests: The Bohemian world of Debussy, Enescu, Ravel*, performed by Philippe Graffin, violin, and Claire Désert, luthéal (Avie Records [AVIE 2059], recorded 2004, published 2005, compact disc).

<sup>118</sup> Olivier Charlier, interview with the author, October 16, 2012.

<sup>119</sup> Gérard Poulet, e-mail communication to the author, November 2, 2012.

up the fingerboard, thereby intensifying the sense of hesitancy. A delightful example is a 2004 recording entitled *The Shade of Forests*, in which Philippe Graffin plays this passage exquisitely with alternate natural harmonics in the high position accompanied by a small slide on the second sixteenth of each group, imparting a delicate and playful character. Below I show in notation just what Graffin actually does (Ex. 56b), showing Ravel’s original notation first (Ex. 56a):

Ex. 56a (Ravel *Tzigane*, R. 21, as shown on the score)



Ex. 56b (Ravel *Tzigane*, R. 21, altered version - Graffin)



An additional performance tradition in *Tzigane* revolves around *pizzicato*. To begin with, Ravel demands extremely advanced *pizzicato* techniques. R. 11 requires a combination of both left and right hand *pizzicati* in order to bring out the theme. Another example is at measures 5-8 after R. 21, where Ravel calls for a combination of *jeté* and left hand *pizzicati* (See Ex. 54). This section also instructs the violinist to press forward in tempo (with *Allegro – Accelerando – Vivo* markings), making it particularly challenging. For most violinists, playing the last beat in *pizzicato*—as is suggested in parentheses—proves very difficult since the right hand must come into position to play *pizzicato* even though it has just played *jeté* just one beat before. While

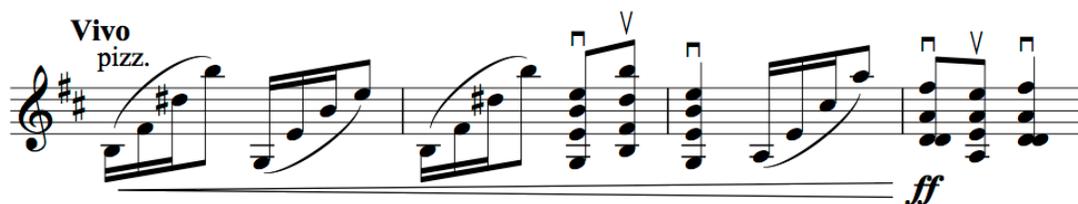
Francescatti manages Ravel’s apparent *pizzicato*, Grumiaux and numerous performers use *arco* to achieve both greater accuracy and emphasis.

At the *Vivo* passage, 7-10 bars after R. 24 (Ex. 57), the four measures are marked *pizzicato*. However, because of the difficulty in rhythmic accuracy when playing the arpeggiated figures *pizzicato*, some violinists play them with a *ricochet* bowing, including Arthur Grumiaux in his 1966 recording of *Tzigane*. In most recordings, violinists play this passage entirely *pizzicato* but some of them forego rhythmic accuracy for the clear articulation of the chords. Professor Charlier stated in his interview that he, in fact, mixes *pizzicato* and *ricochet* to play this section in order to serve Ravel’s rhythmic character even more fully than the *pizzicato* indication:

“Ici [7-10 a. Fig. 24], je fais quatre ricochets en tirant pour être en mesure. Je n’arrive pas de manière satisfaisante à faire en même temps le rythme et la solution proposée (*pizz*) par Ravel. [Si] je le fais en *pizz*, je ne fais pas de rythme. Faire le *ricochet* ici est une solution [pour moi] pour faire sortir l’élément qui me paraît le plus important... Je préfère imiter le *pizz* avec l’archet et garder le rythme plutôt que d’avoir le risque de sacrifier le rythme...”<sup>120</sup>

[“Here [7-10 a. R. 24], I play four down-bow ricochets in order to be in rhythm. I cannot play the rhythm and Ravel’s proposed solution (*pizz*) at the same time in a satisfactory manner. If I play *pizz*, I cannot execute the rhythm. Playing the *ricochet* here is a solution [for me] to bring out the element that seems to me the most important... I prefer imitating the *pizz* with the bow and maintaining the rhythm instead of risking to sacrifice the rhythm ...”]

Ex. 57 (Ravel *Tzigane*, 7-10 a. R. 24)



<sup>120</sup> Olivier Charlier, interview with the author, October 16, 2012.

After a sudden and dramatic descent in the piano part at R. 25, the violin mysteriously enters and plays the previous theme in a much slower tempo, accelerating gradually until the very end. This is as close as Ravel comes to calling for wild abandon. Numerous violinists emphasize the *non sequitur* aspect of the violin entrance by playing it *ponticello*, even though Ravel did not indicate it—he wrote only “sul Sol [on the G-string]” for 6 measures.

While some violinists may think of the *ponticello* as a stylish choice, Professor Pasquier judged this as “scandalous” because “on n’a pas le droit de faire des petits effets qui ne sont pas écrits sur la partition [one should not add little effects that are not written in the music].”<sup>121</sup> However, why is *ponticello* considered such a sinful deviation while other sound enhancements such as harmonics or *pizzicati* are counted as tradition? Professor Poulet shared his point of view about this issue in our correspondence, allowing that *ponticello* at the violin entrance at R. 25 does not disturb him at all.<sup>122</sup>

Another performance custom in the last passage is to slightly slow down each time the pattern begins in a different key (at R. 27, 28, and 29), with which I do not agree. Starting 5 measures after R. 25, Ravel wrote *Accelerando poco a poco* until reach *Sempre accelerando* at R. 31. This makes clear that Ravel expressly wanted a long and continuous *accelerando*. Playing 43 measures in an unceasing *accelerando* is definitely a challenge since it requires tight discipline with regard to both tempo and execution, but it results in a much more impressive and breathless performance.

Ravel’s sound world is, of course, more “high wire” and extravagant than anything in Debussy’s Sonata, but for that very reason its color palette is wider and therefore subject to more interpretation. It is safe to say that modern performances have brought more homogeneity to this

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<sup>121</sup> Régis Pasquier, interview with the author, October 17, 2012.

<sup>122</sup> Gérard Poulet, e-mail communication to the author, November 2, 2012.

kaleidoscopic work than its earliest executants. For this we have the internationalization of violin sound and technique to thank. Yet anyone preparing to tackle *Tzigane* would be well advised to rediscover this work closer to its original and endlessly shifting sound world.

## Postlude

Given the complexity of the French sound and style during the critical decades from ca. 1870 to 1930, defining it with mere words—airy, refined, delicate, etc.—however illustrative, cannot compensate for a direct and repeated hearing of the countless phrases under discussion in the previous three chapters. One useful frame of reference after this intense focus on the music is to step back and re-consider this evolution against the backdrop of the quintessentially French concept of *le bon goût* with which this study opened.

At one level *le bon goût* refers to a constellation of tastes and values that carry a connotation of conformity—a sense of proper etiquette, appropriate cuisine, dramatic conventions—with which French citizens were intimately familiar. But as I have attempted to show, *le bon goût* was never—especially during this turbulent period—a static set of norms passed on without change from one generation to the other. *Le bon goût* also carried with it the concept of “French-ness”—the ways in which French culture distinguished itself from other mainstream European cultures, especially German.

However influenced by matters of geography and topography, from at least the mid-fifteenth century on, French practice in matters of music set itself apart. Rameau and J. S. Bach are contemporaries but their approaches to both large-scale and detailed musical issues differed substantially. It is worth noting that Bach looked frequently to the French style for inspiration, while few French composers or musicians looked with equal interest toward Germany.

The transformation of the French violin sound and style maintained earlier concepts of *le bon goût*—finesse and refinement, for example—while simultaneously exploring new strategies and sonorities. Yet simply observing all of the technical elements that led to the creation of the

new French sound—varieties of *vibrato*, bow speed, bow pressure, tasteful use of *portamento* and *portato*, the search for a floating sound on the string—cannot by themselves produce a “French sound” if the performer lacks imagination and flair. Essential to capturing this performance style is a persistent curiosity about the many kinds of sounds possible in any given passage. This is not to suggest that choices do not exist in the central German repertoire as well, but they are in key respects more bounded by stylistic norms than French music ever was.

As part of this process, the would-be performer of French music will constantly search for new outlets, new composers, and new repertoires to explore. Much could be learned, for example, by close readings of the two violin sonatas of Gabriel Fauré or *Poème*, Op. 25 of Ernest Chausson. At the same time, space must be reserved for the classically-oriented *oeuvre* of Camille Saint-Saëns, who was active throughout much of this period. The sometimes suffocating influence of Wagner plays only a small role in this study, but its impact on music in France remained considerable until the First World War. My focus on three seminal works represents the most progressive wing of French music, yet plenty of other cultural cross-currents also competed for attention. As just one example, no writer has yet fully explored the role of the nationally mandated and funded Paris Conservatory throughout this period.

Equally important, perhaps, is the reality that the evolution of French violin style has continued unabated into the twentieth (and twenty-first) century. Neither Henry Dutilleux’s acclaimed violin concerto *L’arbre des songes* [The Tree of Dreams], nor Olivier Messiaen’s masterful *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* [Quartet for the End of Time], not to mention Pierre Boulez’s *Anthèmes*, can be contemplated without the pioneering examples of Franck, Debussy, and Ravel. All of these wider lenses suggest fruitful avenues for further research on French string music that extend out from the necessarily bounded parameters of this study. While the French

neither invented the violin nor participated centrally in its first flowering, the art of music on the violin has for the last century and a half found in France as fruitful a soil for growth and development as some of the world's greatest wines have found in the stony soils of Burgundy.

## **APPENDIX**

Interviews and Email Correspondence with  
Olivier Charlier, Régis Pasquier, and Gérard Poulet

Franck's Violin Sonata

Ce qui est important dans [le dernier mouvement], c'est d'avoir une sorte de dialogue dans le canon avec le piano... le piano va essayer de lier [la phrase] le plus possible... mais le piano ne pourra pas s'empêcher d'avoir à chaque fois une petite impulsion sur chaque note... je fais un peu de *portato*, pour imiter l'articulation du piano. Le piano doit essayer d'être le plus horizontal possible pour lutter contre sa tendance d'être frappé, mais peut être que le violon [doit faire] aussi un bout de chemin pour qu'il ne soit pas dans sa bulle complètement *legato*, inatteignable par le piano.

[What is important in [the last movement] is to have a dialogue in the canon with the piano... the pianist will try to connect [the phrase] as much as possible... but the piano cannot avoid imparting a small impulse on each note... I play [this passage] with a little *portato* in order to imitate the piano's articulation. The piano must try to play as horizontal [a line] as possible to fight against its tendency to be percussive, but perhaps the violin [must meet] also halfway, so that it doesn't stay in its own bubble playing completely *legato*, which is unattainable on the piano.]

... [Dans le deuxième mouvement], je pense que c'est une musique plus de l'inquiétude et de la préoccupation que de cette sorte de force guerrière, d'une corde de sol victorieuse. Par exemple, [dans la première phrase du violon], j'entends souvent des appuis sur la dernière note... [mais] c'est pas les notes les plus longues qui sont les plus intéressantes... chaque fin de phrase est un point d'interrogation... par contre, le deuxième thème [est] toujours dans le *ff*... contrairement à ce qu'on entend souvent. Le premier thème est plutôt un peu intérieur et réservé, mais le deuxième thème est plus déclamé...

[... [In the second movement], I think it's more like agitated and preoccupied music than a war-like force, a "victory-of-the-G-string" kind of music. For example [in the violin's first phrase], I often hear pressure on the last note... [but] the longest notes are not necessarily the most important ones... the ending of each phrase is a question mark... On the other hand, the second theme is still in *ff*... contrary to what we often hear. The first theme is rather interior and reserved, but the second theme is more declamatory...]

Q – Qu’est-ce qui est particulièrement difficile à réaliser dans la Sonate pour violon et piano de Franck?

A – ... souvent, ça me gêne si l’interprétation est uniquement mélodique et pas assez harmonique, quand j’ai l’impression que la ligne mélodique est sortie de son contexte ... je crois que c’est particulièrement important et délicat dans cette musique.

[Q – What is especially challenging to achieve in Franck’s Violin Sonata?

A – ... often, it bothers me when the interpretation is only melodic and not sufficiently harmonic, when I feel like the melodic line is out of its context... I think [this balance] is especially important and delicate in this music.]

### Debussy’s Violin Sonata

Q – Que pensez-vous des indications de nuances dans la Sonate pour violon et piano de Debussy?

A – ... Dans la Sonate pour violon et piano de Debussy, je vois beaucoup d’indications de nuances délicates qui sont très détaillées et raffinées. Par exemple, on navigue entre *p*, *più p*, *pp*, *diminuendo* dans tout le premier mouvement et je pense qu’il faut vraiment les respecter... Pour moi cela donne à la partition une direction, une spécificité dont Debussy avait absolument besoin... Tout ce monde impressionniste est fait de l’étagement d’une grande quantité de couleur, de nuance, d’articulation, de détail, de finesse qui donne à cette musique cette sorte d’atmosphère impalpable et extrêmement immatérielle et cela fait surgir cette magie de la couleur, de l’harmonie et de la nuance...

[Q – What do you think of the dynamic indications in Debussy’s Violin Sonata?

A – ... In Debussy’s Violin Sonata, I see a lot of delicate dynamics that are very detailed, refined. For example, we float between *p*, *più p*, *pp*, *diminuendo* in the entire first movement, and I think that it is necessary to respect these dynamics. In my opinion, these indications provide a direction, a specificity that Debussy absolutely needed... This impressionistic world is built of a great quantity of colors, dynamics, articulations, details, and subtlety that give this music its kind of impalpable and extremely immaterial atmosphere, and that’s what makes this magic of color, harmony, and dynamics...]

Q – Que pensez-vous des *portamenti* dans la Sonate de Debussy?

A – ... Tous les *portamenti* [glissades] ne sont pas forcément indiqués dans [la Sonate de Debussy]... le compositeur a marqué les principaux dont il avait absolument besoin ... Je pense que, en plus de ceux qui sont marqués, on peut se permettre d'ajouter des *portamenti* de manière délicate et sans doute moins appuyée qu'aux endroits où elles sont demandées par le compositeur. Par moment, la relation entre deux notes et l'intervalle veulent être soulignées... Le problème du *portamento*, c'est que s'il est mal utilisé, au lieu d'avoir ce côté impalpable plein de délicatesse et de charme qu'un *portamento* peut avoir, cela peut devenir tout d'un coup un gros pâté, une sorte d'ascenseur qui sert uniquement à chercher la justesse...

[Q – What do you think about the use of *portamenti* in Debussy's Violin Sonata?

A – ... All of the *portamenti* are not necessarily indicated in the Sonata... the composer only wrote the main ones that he absolutely wanted... I think, on top of the written *portamenti*, we can allow ourselves to add more *portamenti* in a delicate and probably less heavy manner than the ones indicated by the composer. Sometimes, the interval between two notes needs to be underlined [by a *portamento*]... The problem with *portamento* is that when it is used tastelessly it can become a kind of big *pâté* or a kind of elevator that serves only to find the intonation instead of creating this kind of impalpable, delicate charm...]

Q – Le son français?

A – ... Il y a une sonorité spécifique à trouver qui doit correspondre particulièrement à la musique française. Mais je ne mettrais pas toute la musique française dans la même catégorie... Par exemple, la Sonate de Franck est plus germanique que Debussy, même si le premier mouvement de la Sonate de Frank a un côté debussyste...

[Q – The French sound?

A – ... There is a specific sonority that particularly corresponds to French music. But I won't place all of French music in the same category... For example, the Franck Violin Sonata is more German than Debussy's, even if the first movement of the Franck Sonata has a Debussian side...]

Q – Techniquement parlant, qu'est ce vous faites pour avoir ce son bien adapté à la musique française?

A – C'est un ensemble de choses... Je dirais d'abord que c'est une autre envie de sonorité. J'ai envie de trouver quelque chose de délicat, quelque chose d'insaisissable qui suggère une sorte de rayonnement dans la sonorité... Techniquement, c'est une mobilité de l'archet, un jeu au dessus de la corde, avec une sorte de légèreté dans le son... il y a une absence de solidité [dans le son]

par rapport aux côtés très à la corde comme dans la musique germanique avec une prononciation puissante et définitive de la sonorité...

[Q – Technically speaking, what do you do to create a sound that is well adapted to French repertoire?

A – It is several things working in ensemble ... the most important thing is the desire for a different kind of sound. For example, I strive to find something delicate and imperceptible that suggests luminosity in the sound... Technically, it is the mobility of the bow, a floating on the string, with a kind of gracefulness in the sound... compared to German technique with its powerful and definitive enunciation of the sonority, there is less strength [in the sound]...]

Q – Comment interprétez-vous l'indication de *dolce vibrato* dans la Sonate de Debussy?

A – ... pour moi, *dolce vibrato*...c'est un *vibrato* lent qui a un côté un peu abandonné...

[Q – How do you interpret the *dolce vibrato* marking in Debussy's Violin Sonata?

A – ... for me, *dolce vibrato*... is a slow *vibrato* that has an abandoned feeling...]

Q – Aujourd'hui, est-ce que vous utilisez encore des cordes en boyau pour rechercher des belles couleurs du son?

A – Non, je n'utilise pas les cordes en boyau parce que je suis obligé de jouer avec un piano Steinway. Si je joue avec une couleur douce et lointaine, on ne m'entend pas... Je pense qu'il y avait moins de problème d'équilibre violon-piano à l'époque de Debussy... Avec les cordes en perlon, on a gagné en confort pour jouer juste, en puissance et en articulation mais on a perdu en timbre... Les cordes en boyau en effet étaient très adaptées et très favorables pour ces musiques impressionnistes mais il faut trouver un pianiste qui sait jouer avec une délicatesse du son et ce n'est pas évident.

[Q – Do you still use gut strings nowadays in order to create a delicate and colorful sound in your playing?

A – I do not use gut strings in my performance because I am obliged to play with a Steinway piano. If I play with a sweet and distant color, I am not heard... I think that there were fewer balance problems during Debussy's time... With steel strings, we gained the comfort of playing in tune, power and clearer articulation but we lost timbre... Gut strings were, to be sure, very adaptive and very favorable for Impressionist music, but it is necessary to find a pianist who knows how to play with a delicate sound, and this is not easy.]

Q – Comment interprétez-vous le passage *Rubato* dans le Finale de la Sonate de Debussy?

A – ... Un des écueils de cette musique, ce serait d'en faire une musique à la russe qui voudrait trop déballer ses sentiments ou une musique à la tzigane qui voudrait chercher l'effet facile et séducteur... [c'est] une littérature faite un peu sur la recherche d'une délicatesse d'un monde irréel... on est dans des sphères de rêve, d'imaginaire, de monde idéal et fantastique... On n'est pas dans une expression passionnelle exagérée...

[Q – How do you interpret the *Rubato* section in the last movement of Debussy's Violin Sonata?

A – One of the dangers of this music would be to perform it in a Russian style that would display too much sentiment, or to play it in a gypsy style that would have an easy and seductive effect... [It is] the pursuit of sensitivity in an unreal world... we are in an imaginary dream world, an ideal fantasy world... it is not about an overly passionate expression...]

### Ravel's *Tzigane*

Q – Comment interpréter l'indication *Quasi Cadenza* dans *Tzigane*?

A – Pour moi, *Quasi Cadenza* [dans *Tzigane* de Ravel] n'est pas une cadence. Sur le principe, Pierre Doukan m'a toujours demandé de jouer exactement ce qui est marqué... [Ravel] est extrêmement précis sur le langage rythmique... Il y a une anecdote, Aurélia Spadaro, une violoniste et proche disciple de Zino Francescatti disait... "Francescatti racontait que lors d'une tournée avec Ravel au piano... Francescatti lui avait demandé 'Maître Ravel, dites moi, comment faut-il interpréter *Tzigane*?' Il paraît que Ravel a répondu 'Mais mon petit, il ne faut pas interpréter Ravel, il faut jouer ce qui est marqué.'" Je pense qu'il faut d'abord partir de ce qu'il a marqué parce que c'est suffisamment riche au niveau de l'écriture, spécifiquement au niveau de l'écriture rythmique...

[Q – How do you interpret the *Quasi Cadenza* indication in *Tzigane*?

A – For me, *Quasi Cadenza* [in Ravel's *Tzigane*] is not a cadenza. In principle, Pierre Doukan always asked me to play exactly what is written... [Ravel] is extremely precise with rhythmic language... There is a story about Aurélia Spadaro, a violinist and close disciple of Zino Francescatti, who said... "Francescatti once told a story that when he went on tour with Ravel at the piano... Francescatti asked him, 'Maestro Ravel, tell me, how should one interpret *Tzigane*?' To which Ravel replied 'But my young friend, one should not interpret Ravel; one should simply play what is written.'" I think that it is necessary to first begin with what is written because it is rich enough rhythmically...]

Q – Y a t-il des traditions françaises dans la manière d’interpréter *Tzigane*?

A – [Dans *Tzigane*] il y a des choses de traditions... les harmoniques par exemple... Ici [Fig. 14], [Ravel] écrit tout en harmoniques naturelles. [Une chose de tradition], vu qu’il y a des harmoniques partout, on a tendance à les faire avec des harmoniques artificielles... parce qu’on trouve cela plus expressif... [mais] je ne suis pas contre l’entendre comme c’est marqué. Sur le principe, celui qui fera des harmoniques naturelles aura raison, puisque c’est marqué comme ça. Mais il faut le rendre convainquant pour que cela reste suffisamment expressif... Ici [7-10 a. Fig. 24], je fais quatre ricochets en tirant pour être en mesure. Je n’arrive pas de manière satisfaisante à faire en même temps le rythme et la solution proposée (*pizz*) par Ravel. [Si] je le fais en *pizz*, je ne fais pas de rythme. Faire le *ricochet* ici est une solution [pour moi] pour faire sortir l’élément qui me paraît le plus important... Je préfère imiter le *pizz* avec l’archet et garder le rythme plutôt que d’avoir le risque de sacrifier le rythme...

[Q – Are there any French traditions in the performance practice of *Tzigane*?

A – [In *Tzigane*] there are traditions... harmonics for example... here [R. 14], [Ravel] wrote natural harmonics entirely. Because of the fact that there are harmonics everywhere, we have a tendency to play with artificial harmonics, because we find it more expressive... [but] I am not against hearing it as written. In principle, the violinist who plays natural harmonics will be correct, since it is written like that. But he must make it convincing so that it stays sufficiently expressive... Here [7-10 a. R. 24] I play four down-bow ricochets in order to be in rhythm. I cannot play the rhythm and Ravel’s proposed solution (*pizz*) at the same time in a satisfactory manner. If I play *pizz*, I cannot execute the rhythm. Playing the *ricochet* here is a solution [for me] to bring out the element that seems to me the most important... I prefer imitating the *pizz* with the bow and maintaining the rhythm instead of risking to sacrifice the rhythm...

Q – Qu’est-ce que vous pensez du son et du style français?

A – Le goût français, je pense que c’est une chose assez spécifique qu’on a développée dans la cuisine, dans l’esthétique, dans le produit de luxe, dans le parfum, dans la haute couture... c’est un développement qui a connu son apogée avec ces compositeurs dans la sphère impressionniste... [je pense] que cette sonorité française et ce style français doivent être maniés avec précaution et qu’ils méritent d’être cultivés parce qu’il est indispensable pour magnifier le répertoire français... avec la nécessité, parfois difficile à conserver maintenant dans un monde qui est devenu beaucoup plus pragmatique, beaucoup plus rapide, beaucoup plus conquérant. Alors que cette esthétique est plutôt faite sur une impression, sur un ressenti, sur un “peut-être,” pas sur des certitudes, et pas sur un côté vindicatif. On doit pouvoir cultiver cette sorte de “entre deux” sans être dans un flou artistique ou dans un grand n’importe quoi... ces musiques, si on les joue à contre style, ça devient de la mauvaise musique...

[Q – What do you think about the French sound and style?

A – The French taste, in my opinion, is a pretty specific thing that we developed in cuisine, aesthetics, luxury items, perfume, and *haute couture*... its development reached its peak with those composers from the Impressionist sphere... [in my opinion] the French sound and style must be handled with precaution and it deserves to be cultivated because it is essential in order to perform the French repertoire...with the caveat that it is sometimes difficult to maintain [this style] in a world that has now become much more pragmatic, faster, and more aggressive. This aesthetic, however, is rather created as an impression, a feeling, and even a “perhaps,” not on certainty or vindictiveness. One must be able to cultivate this sort of “in between” without slipping into an artistic blur or making nonsense... If played in an incorrect style, this music can become bad music...]

Interview with Régis Pasquier – Transcription and Translation  
Oct. 17, 2012

Q – Qu'est ce que vous pensez du son dans la Sonate pour violon et piano de Debussy?

A – Tous les types de sons selon une harmonie que [Debussy] a donnée et selon ton imagination, toutes ces couleurs et ces types de sons, tu peux les utiliser. Alors, comment les utiliser? Il faut que tu les utilises avec deux choses pour la technique du violon. C'est-à-dire, avec de la vitesse d'archet et le poids de l'archet. C'est-à-dire que tu dois être capable de changer très rapidement d'un son plus plein... à un son très fluide et descriptif d'une couleur ou de quelque chose qui représente la nature, soit la mer, le vent ou la tempête...

[Q – What do you think of the sound in Debussy's Violin Sonata?

A – You can use all types of sound according to a harmony that Debussy provided and according to your own ideas and imagination. So how are they used? You need to use two violin techniques: combining both bow speed and bow weight. You need to be able to change quickly from a full tone to a very fluid and colorful sound, a kind of sound that portrays nature—either the sea, the wind, or the storm...]

Q – L'usage de *portamento* dans la Sonate de Debussy?

A – Le *portamento* est très important. Le *portamento*, c'est une expression de sentiment. Si tu veux faire quelque chose de doux ou de caressant, tu peux faire un joli *portamento*... Le danger c'est qu'on entend quelques fois des interprétations de la Sonate de Debussy où il y a trop de *portamento*. Et le problème, c'est que le *portamento* vraiment voulu par Debussy perd sa valeur. C'est un peu comme une dame qui met des bijoux partout et qu'il y en a un qui est très joli mais qu'on ne remarque pas parce qu'il y en a trop...

[Q – The use of *portamento* in Debussy's Violin Sonata?

A – *Portamento* is very important. *Portamento* is an expression of sentiment. If you want to create a soft and caressing sound, you can make a nice *portamento*... The danger is that we sometimes hear an interpretation of Debussy's Sonata where there are too many *portamenti*. And the problem is that the *portamenti* that Debussy really wanted lose their value. It is like a woman who wears jewelry all over and there is one jewel that is very pretty, but we do not notice it because of all the other jewelry.]

Q – Qu’est ce que vous en pensez du style violonistique dans la musique française?

A – ... Il y a beaucoup de personnes qui ne comprennent pas la musique française et cela les énerve... ils ne comprennent pas la logique de la fluidité de la musique française et de son inconstance. C’est inconstant comme musique, ce sont des impressions! ...

[Q – What do you think of violin performance style in French music?

A – ... There are many people who do not understand French music and that annoys them... they do not understand French music’s logic of fluency and fickleness. It is an inconstant kind of music—they are impressions! ...]

Q – Comment interprétez-vous *Tzigane* de Ravel?

A – J’ai rencontré une dame qui a connu Ravel... Apparemment, Ravel était furieux contre les violonistes parce qu’il considérait que les violonistes ne jouaient pas ce qu’il avait écrit... Il ne faut pas oublier que [*Tzigane*], c’est une écriture très précise. Par exemple, dans la dernière page de *Tzigane*, on entend [souvent] le *sul ponticello* et cela est un scandale. On n’a pas le droit de faire des petits effets qui ne sont pas écrits sur la partition. Par contre, tu peux interpréter ce que [Ravel] a écrit... mais il faut que tu respectes ce qui est écrit. *Tzigane* est un morceau personnel dans un style qui s’inspire des Tziganes... Mais ce n’est pas la totale liberté où tu peux faire ce que tu veux. Ravel était très précis sur ce qu’il voulait.

[Q – How to interpret Ravel’s *Tzigane*?

A – I met a woman who knew Ravel... Apparently, Ravel was furious with violinists who, he believed, did not play what he wrote... One should not forget that *Tzigane* is notated very precisely. For example, on the last page of *Tzigane*, we often hear *sul ponticello*, which is scandalous. One should not add little effects that are not written in the music. On the other hand, you can interpret what Ravel wrote... but you [also] have to respect what is written. *Tzigane* is a personal piece in a style inspired by gypsies... But it is not a total freedom where you can do whatever you want. Ravel was very precise about what he wanted to hear.]

Q – Comment définissez-vous le son français dans le jeu du violon ?

A – Le son français, c’est de la multi-couleur à travers un même son. Tu peux faire un son qui au début de la note va avoir une consistance et dans la deuxième partie de la même note, un autre. Ce qui définit le son français... c’est un son qui est inconstant d’une manière voulue et sophistiquée, alors que le son romantique ou germanique, c’est un son globalement plus plein et qui est donc un peu plus épais par nature.

[Q – How do you define the French sound in violin playing?

A – The French sound issues from several colors created through the same sound. You can make a sound that has a consistency at the beginning of the note but another sound in the second half of the same note. What defines the French sound... it is a sound that is intentionally elusive in a sophisticated manner, while the German or Romantic sound is generally fuller and by nature thicker.]

Email Correspondence with Gérard Poulet with Translation  
Nov. 2, 2012

Ma chère Ji Young, je vous réponds sur Debussy aujourd'hui, Ravel un peu plus tard; Oui, il est vrai que mon père a mis les coups d'archet sur la partition de violon de la première édition. Les articulations d'archet portées sur la partie de piano sont de Debussy. Mais il n'était pas violoniste, mon père a donc fait au mieux pour coller au plus près sur la vision du compositeur. J'ai regardé, en effet, la nouvelle édition d'Henle qui n'est pas mal et va dans le bon sens mais s'éloigne dans quelques passages de l'authenticité de la sonate. Une nouvelle édition au Japon de cette sonate existe dont je me suis occupé. Dites moi si elle vous intéresse? ... Gérard Poulet.

[Dear Ji Young, I will answer your questions concerning Debussy today, Ravel a bit later. Yes, it's true that my father supplied the bowings in the violin part of the first edition. The bow articulations written in the piano part are from Debussy. But he was not a violinist, so my father did his best to create bowings that are as close as possible to the composer's vision. Indeed, I looked at the new Henle edition, which isn't bad, and it goes in the right direction but it moves away in some passages from the authenticity of the Sonata. A new Japanese edition of this Sonata exists of which I am in charge. Let me know if that interests you? ... Gérard Poulet.]

Bonsoir Ji Young, *Tzigane* de Ravel maintenant. Mon avis à ce propos, faut-il respecter le texte à la lettre? Il s'agit d'une œuvre d'un genre particulier dans notre répertoire. C'est quand même un grand compositeur qui propose cette pièce qu'il appelle *Tzigane* parce qu'il la veut libre et d'un style rappelant la musique tzigane jouée en Europe centrale. Il écrit un rythme, donc il convient de bien lire ce qui est écrit. Cependant, chaque violoniste y voit quelque chose, des couleurs, des inventions que l'imagination crée, c'est pourquoi on entend des effets sonores, des sons harmoniques qui ne sont pas toujours reconnaissables sur la partie de violon, à mon sens cela n'a aucune importance si le résultat est bon et brillant. C'est à l'artiste de mesurer sa dose d'invention et de rester dans le cadre de Ravel ... Fig. 21, on est libre de faire une harmonique dans le haut de la touche, si la note écrite correspond. *Ponticello* maintenant en haut de la dernière page: cela ne me gêne nullement, de même que cela peut être joué en détaché ou en *spiccato*! La cadence pareillement libre, mais il apparaît souvent que les valeurs longues sont largement écourtées et les silences oubliés ainsi que les dynamiques ou autres indications non respectées. Là, je ne suis pas d'accord. Vous avez mon opinion sur le sujet. Je vous souhaite bonsoir et bonne chance. Gérard Poulet.

[Good evening Ji Young, now, Ravel's *Tzigane*. My opinion on this subject: must one respect the score to the letter? This concerns a piece of a particular kind in our repertoire. It is nonetheless a great composer who writes this piece and calls it *Tzigane* because he wants it to be free and of a style recalling the Gypsy music of Central Europe. [Ravel] writes in a [specific] kind of rhythm; therefore it would be appropriate to respect what is written. However, each violinist sees something—colors, inventions that the imagination creates. It is why we hear

sound effects, harmonic sounds, which are not always recognizable in the violin part. [But] in my opinion, that is not important at all if the result is good and bright. It is up to the artist to calibrate his creativity while respecting Ravel's style ... at R. 21 we are free to use harmonics in a high position on the fingerboard, if the written note corresponds. Now the *ponticello* at the top of the last page: it does not bother me at all. It could also be played *détaché* or *spiccato*! The Cadenza is free in the same way, but it often appears that the long notes are played plenty short and the silences are forgotten, as well as the dynamics or other indications that are not respected. This I do not agree with. That is my opinion on this subject. I wish you good night and good luck.  
Gérard Poulet.]

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### **Video**

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