French music flourished from the last quarter of the nineteenth century into the early twentieth century, especially in the genres of opera and orchestral music. Although French keyboard music enjoyed less popularity, being overshadowed by these predominant genres, prominent impressionist figures Claude Debussy (1862-1918) and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) brought its revival to the French music. Scholars consider Debussy to be a frontrunner of Impressionism, and his influence had a major impact on subsequent composers. As a result of his popularity, other significant works by French composers seem to be overlooked by pianists and audiences and are not as often performed.

Because keyboard works by Debussy and Ravel are a popular performance choice among pianists, I was eager to examine music by other French composers. Through my research, I found many great works that warranted further study and deserve a place in the keyboard repertoire. This recording project contains works by lesser-known French composers written between the years of 1880 and 1950, namely Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894), Gabriel-Urbain Fauré (1845-1924), Charles Koechlin (1867-1950), Albert Roussel (1869-1937), Erik Satie
(1866-1925), Francis Poulenc (1899-1963), Darius Milhaud (1892-1974), Robert Casadesus (1899-1972) and Henri Dutilleux (b.1916).

Since piano repertoire is abundant, it is sometimes difficult to create a performance program. Therefore, it frequently becomes the default to choosing familiar repertoire rather than using the opportunity to expand the repertoire. As a pianist, I feel responsible to search for hidden musical treasures with which pianists and audiences alike are not so well acquainted. This recording project explores nine lesser-known French compositions written between 1880 and 1950. I expect this to be an opportunity to introduce both pianists and audiences to outstanding but unfamiliar works by French composers.

This dissertation was recorded on two compact discs in Dekelboum Concert Hall at Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center of the University of Maryland. The recordings are archived in the University of Maryland Library.
A SURVEY OF FRENCH KEYBOARD MUSIC FROM 1880 TO 1950

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts 2013

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Dedication

I thank God, my Father who guide and lead me throughout my journey.

This Dissertation is dedicated to my parents.

No Soon Yoon

and

Byung Soon Yoo

who support me with endless love and prayers.
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Program Notes

A Survey of French Keyboard Music from 1880 to 1950

Program notes are divided into two sections. The first section presents the
general information on each composer in chronological order. The second section
contains my personal experiences and thoughts while I was completing this recording
project.

Section I

Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894)

Emmanuel Chabrier studied law and became a Minister of the Interior for
France. During a trip to Munich in 1879, he became fascinated by Richard Wagner’s
opera, Tristan und Isolde, and as a result he quit his job to concentrate on
composition. Although he was not a prolific musician, he did become an influential
French romantic composer and pianist. Vincent d’Indy once defined Chabrier “He
was a hard man with tender heart; tenderness that can be heard in most of his works,
alongside the most unbridled and bohemian phrase.”1 His style involves frequent use
of generally romantic harmony such as dominant ninth chords.

1 Sévilla, Jean-Paul. Program Note for CD, Piano music by Emmanuel Chabrier by
Angela Hewitt. Hyperion CDA 67515, 2006
One of his piano works, *Pieces Pittoresques* (1881), was written after his trip to Munich. *Pieces Pittoresques* consists of ten pieces and each piece has a descriptive title. One of the pieces, *Idylle*, is known to have influenced Poulenc. Four of the pieces were later orchestrated by the composer to form his *Suite Pastorale*. Among the ten pieces, no. 6, *Idylle*, is a simple and moving melody along with staccato accompaniment. No.7, *Danse Villageoise*, is rhythmic and solid while the middle part consists of an accent on the last note of each measure. In No. 8, *Improvisation*, the composer marked *fantasque et très passionné*.

**Gabriel-Urbain Fauré (1845-1924)**

Gabriel-Urbain Fauré was a pianist, organist, composer and teacher. Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) was his teacher as well as his close friend. Early in his music career, Fauré was deeply influenced by Chopin, and as a result, he wrote thirteen barcarolles (1880-1921), thirteen nocturnes (1875-1922) and five impromptus (1881-1909). Fauré is often described as one of the most characteristic French composers. His style often involves fluent modulation, seventh chords and suspensions. He often uses arpeggio figures and sustained fingers in his piano works. The Barcarolles and Nocturnes are especially representative of his piano writing. Superficially, Fauré’s nocturnes are similar to those of Chopin, but Fauré marked more detail than did Chopin, and made use of more complicated textures.

His sixth Nocturne (1894) is built from an Adagio first theme, followed by a contrasting section in C sharp Minor. After a stormy climax the opening theme appears again to end the Nocturne quietly. Alfred Cortot said “There are few pages in
all music comparable to these."² Aaron Copland wrote that it was with this work that Fauré first fully emerged from the shadow of Chopin, and he said of the piece, "The breath and dignity of the opening melody, the restless C sharp minor section which follows (with the peculiar syncopated harmonies so often and so well used by Fauré), the graceful fluidity of the third idea: all these elements are brought to a stormy climax in the short development section; then, after a pause, comes the return of the consoling first page."³

**Charles Koechlin (1867-1950)**

Koechlin was a pianist, composer, and teacher. He was interested in a variety of topics such as the medieval period, traveling, social scenes and politics. Fauré was his most influential teacher and later Koechlin wrote his biography. Milhaud (1892-1974) and Poulenc were his pupils. Even though he composed piano music throughout his life, he preferred to write in the larger genres. This could be a reason why his works have been overlooked by most pianists. Koechlin was known as a master of counterpoint and he also orchestrated the music of other composers, for example, Chabrier’s *Bourrée Fantasque*.

Koechlin’s music is rooted in traditional structure, but he also experimented with different techniques and harmonies such as polytonality and unmeasured bar lines, which later influenced Erik Satie (1866-1925). His work uses extreme Baroque

² Copland, Aron. *Gabriel Fauré, a Neglected Master.* The musical Quarterly, October 1924, pp.573-588

counterpoint as well as impressionistic elements. In some of his pieces, harmony is static, and his melodies are frequently extended. His other works are often sectional and improvisatory.

For the piano, Koechlin wrote two sets of Sonatines, Op.59 (1915-16) and Nouvelles Sonatines Op. 87 (1923-24) as well as sets of character pieces and these are possibly his most accessible works. The four Nouvelle Sonatine Op. 87 reveal a rich and poetic imagination. The first two sonatines are quite short, and the third contains a slow movement, a sicilienne known for its beauty. The fourth sonatine is dynamic and rhythmic and consists of four movements; Animé, Scherzando moderato, Assez lent, and Allegro con moto. Melodic inspiration is prominent throughout the work.

Albert Roussel (1869-1937)

Roussel was interested in mathematics from an early age and served as an officer in the French Navy, but after studying harmony with Julien Koszul (grandfather of composer Henri Dutilleux) he focused on pursuing music. D'Indy was also one of his teachers and from him Roussel was able to accomplish more in terms of counterpoint. Satie was one of his pupils. Roussel was known as a major French composer for the ballet, so in his works a spirit of dance is evident. Roussel's early works were mostly influenced by impressionism but later his works seem to lean more toward neoclassicism. On the whole, Roussel preferred to remain within classical structures. His works do contain a strong rhythmic drive and functional tonality which could have come from his interest in jazz.
He composed only a few piano works, including *Trois pièces* (1933). This was one of his last compositions. The pieces are marked *Allegro con brio*, *Allegro grazioso*, *Allegro con spirito*. They were dedicated to the premiere performer at the time, pianist Robert Casadesus (1899-1972). First one starts in a percussive manner along with many accent markings. The second piece is marked *Tempo di Valz* and it flows with a simple melodic line. The last piece is in ternary form, *Allegro- Andante- Allegro*.

**Erik Satie (1866-1925)**

Satie studied with d'Indy and Roussel when he was almost forty. During his music career, he struggled financially; he was forced to perform at a café to support his career. His music mostly consists of short character pieces and often represents satire and humorous characters. His music includes simple and direct harmony, short melodies, and unusual use of scales such as church modes or folk tunes. Some of Satie’s works have humorous titles, and often include interesting commentaries as well. In some of his works, he did not indicate bar lines in the score.

*Sports et divertissements* (1914) consists of twenty-one pieces with titles like *La Chasse, La Yachting, Le Tango, Le Golf*. Each one is very short, none more than four lines long and each is accompanied by a tiny sketch by Satie himself. Darius Milhaud considered *Sports et divertissements* to be one of the most characteristic works of the modern French School.⁴

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Darius Milhaud (1892-1974)

Milhaud was a composer and teacher, as well as one of the members of Les Six. He taught both at the Paris Conservatory and Mills College in Berkeley, California. He was interested in mixing elements of popular music and jazz with new ideas like polytonality. During World War I, he moved to Brazil with Paul Claudel, a minister at the French delegation. In 1922, during a trip to the United States, he heard jazz for the first time, which left a great impact on his musical outlook. Milhaud wrote numerous works for piano in large and small forms, such as his two sonatas and Saudades do Brazil.

Saudades do Brazil ("Recollections of Brazil") op. 67(1920-21), consists 12 pieces and each one has a title of a district in Rio. These are based on Brazilian dance rhythms and make use of bitonality. It comprises a miniature history of the composer’s year in Brazil and each of them dedicated different person. Milhaud wrote in his autobiography, Notes Without Music, “In the evening I often walked around the Tijuca. I love to see the panorama of Rio gradually spread out before me, with the bay clearly outlined in glittering light…Claudel and I often took the Corcovado funicular, as far as Paineras…No sooner had the sun set than, as if operated by an invisible switch, all kinds of birds peopled the forest night with their different noises.”

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Poulenc was a member of Les Six, a well-known group of early twentieth-century French composers whose music represents a strong reaction against the German Romanticism, as well as against the chromaticism and complex orchestration of Debussy. The members of Les Six were Darius Milhaud (1892-1974), Francis Poulenc, Arthur Honegger (1892-1955), Georges Auric (1899-1983), Louis Durey (1888-1979), and Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983). Directness, simplicity, and clarity are characteristics of Poulenc’s music. It is also likely to contain popular musical styles. His music is tuneful, based on clear melodies. Poulenc created his unique musical style by blending elements from Satie and Stravinsky as well as popular music. He wrote a large body of piano works between 1918 and 1959 and also excelled in writing chamber and vocal music.

Les soirées de Nazelles (1930-1936) is his most extended piano work and it includes a préambule and finale as well as free and descriptive variations, inspired by Poulenc’s country home that he visited for leisure.

Robert Casadesus (1899-1972)

Casadesus was a virtuoso pianist and composer who came from a renowned musical family. Beginning in 1922, he worked with Ravel as a performer and piano composer. His works are generally focused on delicate melody and line, and formal clarity. His playing style is very classical; he was regarded as a prominent interpreter of Mozart. His compositions are mostly piano works (including four sonatas) but he also wrote chamber music and orchestral works (nine concertos and seven symphonies). During World War II, he spent his time in the United States, which
created opportunities for him to teach a number of students from both Europe and America.

Among his piano sonatas, the second Sonata, op.31 (1941) consists of three movements. This sonata was written when Casadesus was in exile from France and it possibly contains his feeling for his homeland. The first movement consists of two themes and it concludes with a long coda; the second movement includes a Sicilian rhythm. The last movement, Non troppo vivo e delicatamente, presents contrasting articulation between delicate staccato and long legato.

**Henri Dutilleux (b.1916)**

Dutilleux is one of the most significant French composers in the second half of the twentieth century. His style is influenced by Béla Bartók and Stravinsky (both of whom were non-French musicians) while still remaining close to earlier French composers such as Debussy and Ravel. Dutilleux was not affiliated with any composition schools. He tried to develop a contemporary style including serialism. His music also incorporates elements of jazz and includes complex rhythm, modality, atonality and pedal point. His output is not large, but his works are valuable.

His piano sonata (1948) was written for his wife, Geneviève Joy, who was known to be a good score-reader. Dutilleux’s sonata follows traditional sonata formation; however, the movements are not connected to one another. The sonata is very substantial and virtuosic, containing rich textures. The first movement, Allegro con moto, has two contrasting themes. He calls the second movement Lied, and the
final movement, Choral et Variations, starts with a grand theme followed by four variations.

Section II

Among Chabrier's *Pieces Pittoresques*, no. 6, *Idylle* is a short piece with the same motif that is presented continuously within the piece, making it tricky to engage interest. Moreover, since the composer marked *avec fraîcheur et naïveté* and *bien chanté et très en dehors*, the performer must hold the outer line while playing inner voice very lightly. The piece is also required to be played without pedal. Another challenge makes every note even within the piece, especially tempo and inner voices. No. 7, *Danse Villageoise* is based on ternary form. Interestingly, the middle section has an accent on the last beat of each measure. It starts with a strong ascending theme. In No.8, *Improvisation*, the composer marks *fantasque et très passionné*. It includes ascending and descending broken chords along with a beautiful melody. It somehow reminds me of a Fauré nocturne or a Chopin prelude.

**Fauré's nocturne** is a beautiful and charming piece. However, harmonically it is relatively complicated compared to melodic line because the harmony moves in unexpected and unique ways. As a result, it was one of the more difficult pieces to memorize.
Koechlin’s *Nouvelle Sonatine, op. 87 no.4* may not be quite appropriate for the concert hall, but it contains imaginative background music. It is more linear music than harmonically-oriented.

Roussel’s *Trois Pieces* starts with strong chords with accents. The first piece contains driving chords and octaves. This piece took longer than I expected to master technically due to Roussel’s awkward hand positions. However, it is an effective piece to open a recital because it requires great energy. In contrast, the second piece, *Allegro grazioso*, begins with interesting phrasing, 1+1+2+3 and then continues with 1+1+3 based on the melody. It surprisingly ends *ff* with accents. The third piece is scherzo-like, somewhat teasing but powerfully moving. The middle section, marked *Andante*, contains chords in triplet progression. It starts in a different key and mood and builds up to *fff*. The third movement returns to the beginning and finishes at *Fine*. *Trois Pieces* are based on all ABA form.

Among Satie’s piano works, *Sports et Divertissements* is one of the most interesting pieces due to his detailed markings. Each piece contains the composer’s text and according to him, the texts are to be read between each of the pieces. Just by reading the interesting titles and texts, one is able to get an idea on how to express or interpret the music. In terms of the notes, it is not complicated, but since it requires various characters and expressions, it is not easy to perform.

Milhaud’s *Saudades do Brazil* consists of short pieces no longer than four pages. According to the interview with Lawrence Gilman in 1923, he said that “these compositions be regarded not as reproductions of actual dances, but as music suggested by the dance rhythms of Brazil—in the main by tango rhythms...to some
extent idealized.” Specifically, *Tijuca* is a very short piece based on habanera rhythms with much use of bitonality.

**Francis Poulenc**’s most profound piano piece is *Les Soirées de Nazelles*. According to the composer’s note written in the score, he explains that “the variations which form the center of this work were improvised at Nazelles in the course of long evening in the country when the writer played as ‘portraits’ with friends grouped around the piano.” ⁶ He also noted that he hopes that this work “will have the power to evoke this game [music portraits] in the setting of a Touraine salon, a window open to the night.” ⁷ Clearly, *Les Soirées de Nazelles* was an improvised work based on a form of variation, but it does not contain a theme. Every “variation” has a title and each creates different characters and colors. Moreover, the composer indicated detailed markings that require frequent color changes, dynamic changes and various articulations. Between variations, there is no specific connection except between variations IV and V. *Les Soirées de Nazelles* could be a good concert repertoire in terms of its overall timing (23 minutes) and it challenge the performer’s ability to make color changes.

**Robert Casadesus** is more famous as a great pianist rather than as a composer. Since he knows well about the instrument, I had full expectation of how the composer handles the instrument in terms of technique and color. In his *Sonata*,

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⁶ Quote in Donald Garvelmann for LP recording, *Grant Johannesen plays Casadesus and Milhaud*. Huntington Station, NY: Golden Crest 4060, 1963

⁷ Quote in Donald Garvelmann for LP recording, *Grant Johannesen plays Casadesus and Milhaud*. Huntington Station, NY: Golden Crest 4060, 1963
although the notes are complicated, the piece can be played in easy hand positions. The most challenging part is the third movement because it is required to be played \textit{sempre con sordina} throughout the movement.

The piano \textbf{Sonata} (1948) by \textbf{Dutilleux} was written when he was recuperating from the Second World War. It has become one of the substantial piano sonatas of the twentieth century. According to notes by Etienne Moreau, this work “finds perfect balance between tradition and innovation, thoughts and feelings, tonality and modality, and harmony and freedom.”\footnote{Quefflec, Anne. Program Notes for CD, Dutilleux \textit{L'œuvre pour piano} = \textit{The works for piano} = \textit{Die Klavierwerke}. Virgin Classics 45222, 1996} Dutilleux’s writing is brilliant because he utilizes a theme in various ways through inversion and repetition in different voices. In terms of dynamics, it is quite broad and shows great contrast in articulation and phrasing. The first movement shows two contrasting themes like a traditional sonata; however, the development section presents a completely different idea. The second movement, \textit{Lied}, is based on D flat major in ternary form but when the first part is repeated, it is presented in a different key. Overall, it is quiet and contains a beautiful melody. The third movement is most challenging to perform. It starts with a grand opening, \textit{molto marcato}, and consists of four variations. Although the third variation is quite slow, the other three are fast and virtuosic and the movement ends with the same idea as the beginning.
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