

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: INNOVATIONS IN FRENCH CHAMBER MUSIC AND  
*MÉLODIE* (1886 – 1962) – A COLLABORATIVE PIANIST’S  
PERSPECTIVE

Eunae Han, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2010

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French chamber music in the last quarter of the nineteenth century displayed significant advances in musical innovations and technical developments. As the Parisian public began to favor instrumental music and *mélodie* over opera, vocal and chamber music with piano became one of the main genres to express French composers’ creativity and individuality. The composers Franck, Debussy, Fauré, Duparc, Ravel, Chausson and Poulenc were the major contributors to this unusually creative period in French music.

French *mélodies* of this period blend precision with lyricism, and demand the performer’s elegance and wit. They show careful settings of the French language’s rhythmic subtleties and increased expressiveness in and importance of the piano accompaniment. The chamber works of this period demanded superior pianistic and instrumental virtuosity while displaying wide ranges of sonority, multiple tone colors, and rhythmic fluidity.

The three recitals which comprise this dissertation project were performed at the University of Maryland Gildenhorn Recital Hall on 27 October 2006, All Nations Mission Church (Dayton, NJ) on 5 December 2009, and the Leah M. Smith Lecture Hall of the University of Maryland on 11 May 2010. The repertoire included Poulenc’s Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1962) with oboist Yeongsu Kim, French *mélodies* by Fauré, Chausson, Debussy, Ravel

and Duparc with soprano Jung-A Lee and baritone Hyun-Oh Shin, Poulenc's Sextet for Piano, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon and Horn (1932-1939) with flutist Katrina Smith, clarinetist Jihoon Chang, bassoonist Erich Heckscher, hornist Heidi Littman and oboist Yeongsu Kim, Debussy's Sonata for Cello and Piano (1915) with cellist Ji-Sook Shin, Poulenc's Sonata for Violin and Piano (1942-1949) with violinist Ji-Hee Lim, Franck's Sonata for Violin and Piano (1886) with violinist Na-Young Cho, Ravel's Piano Trio (1915) with cellist Ji-Sook Shin and violinist Yu-Jeong Lee and Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Piano (1927) with violinist Yu-Jeong Lee. The recitals were recorded on compact discs and are archived within the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM).

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By

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>PROGRAM NOTES</b> .....	4
César Franck – Sonata for Violin and Piano (1886) .....	4
French Mélodies by Debussy, Fauré, Chausson, Duparc and Ravel .....	5
<i>Gabriel Fauré</i> (1845-1924) .....	5
<i>Henry Duparc</i> (1848–1933) .....	6
<i>Ernest Chausson</i> (1855-1899) .....	6
<i>Maurice Ravel</i> (1875-1937) .....	6
Claude Debussy – Sonata for Cello and Piano (1915) .....	6
Maurice Ravel – Violin Sonata (1923-1927) .....	7
Maurice Ravel - Piano Trio (1917) .....	7
Poulenc Oboe Sonata (1962), Violin Sonata (1942 - 1949) and Sextet (1932 - 1939) .....	8
Sonata for Oboe and Piano .....	8
Sonata for Violin and Piano .....	9
Sextet for Piano, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon and Horn .....	9
Conclusion .....	10
<b>PROGRAMS FOR DISSERTATION RECITALS</b> .....	12
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	15

## PROGRAM NOTES

As a pianist, I was always attracted to the imaginative and innovative sonorities of French music written in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, French composers made significant advances in the technical mastery and originality of their piano writing and added new subtleties of expression and an expanded color palette. Some of the most evident characteristics of French music of this period mirror similar innovations in other arts, impressionist painting and symbolist literature being two examples. As the Parisian public began to favor instrumental music and *mélodie* over opera, solo piano music, *mélodie* with piano accompaniment and piano chamber music became ways in which French composers expressed their individuality and originality.

The composers César Franck (1822-1890), Claude Debussy (1862-1918), Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924), Henri Duparc (1848-1933), Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), Ernest Chausson (1855-1899) and Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) were the major contributors to this unusually creative period in French music. Each work performed in the three recitals which comprise this performance dissertation has innovative qualities which conclusively place it as an important musical milestone during this time.

### **César Franck – Sonata for Violin and Piano (1886)**

Completed in 1886, Franck's violin sonata is noted for its highly original structure. Franck used thematic material in cyclic form to unite all four movements. Although the four-movement structure was common during late-Romantic music, the use of cyclic form along with modulation, counterpoint and bravura virtuosity set this sonata apart from its Romantic counterparts.

The interval of the third in the first movement constitutes the generative cell of the composition. Each movement has its own characteristics. Graceful and tranquil, the first movement is followed by the virtuosic second movement, one of a troubled and searching nature. The third movement is a *Recitativo – Fantasia*, with great sweep and freedom. The final movement, *Rondo*, treats the recurring theme in canonic fashion. Enriching the music with frequent modulation is one of the important facets of Franck's chromatic harmonic language.

### **French Mélodies by Debussy, Fauré, Chausson, Duparc and Ravel**

The French baritone Pierre Bernac (1899-1979), described the art of the greatest French composers as an “art of suggestion, more often expressing moods and impressions than precise emotion.”<sup>1</sup> French songs of the late Romantic period blend precision with lyricism, and demand the performer's elegance and wit. The *Mélodie* emerged as a distinct form in the middle of the nineteenth century and began to use newly current literary material that seemed to call for changes in compositional styles and techniques. The music of this period shows careful settings of the French language's rhythmic subtleties and increased expressiveness in and importance of the piano accompaniment.

### **Composer Style Synopsis**

***Gabriel Fauré*** (1845-1924)

Fauré showed an originality of melodic ideas and a mastery of harmonic support in his piano accompaniments. His compositions utilized harmonic color changes, rhythmic support and appropriate countermelodies.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Pierre Bernac, *The Interpretation of French Song*, 33.



***Henry Duparc* (1848–1933)**

Duparc wrote in a lyrical, dramatic style. His musical innovations include the sophisticated way in which he melded text and music, and used modulation and counterpoint in the accompaniments.

***Ernest Chausson* (1855-1899)**

Chausson's songs were usually intensively subjective, elegant and subtle. He used an unusual 5/4 meter in the song, "*Le Colibri*," (1882) and the accompaniment was composed of rich harmony and textures, cross-rhythms and chromatic passages.

***Claude Debussy* (1862-1918)**

Because Debussy maintained an active role in the literary and artistic circles of his time, he was able to translate poetic nuance into musical expression thereby making his *mélodies* unique in the history of French song (i.e., in duplicating the inflections and rhythm of the French language, they often seem more spoken than sung).

***Maurice Ravel* (1875-1937)**

Ravel was a perfectionist who demanded the same from his singers and pianists. His works were the result of continual refinements and revisions. His songs were characterized by elegant and subtle melodies, rich and complex harmonies, and dance rhythms. The piano accompaniment in Ravel's songs required virtuosity, and often had more musical interest than his vocal lines.

**Claude Debussy – Sonata for Cello and Piano (1915)**

Debussy's Sonata for Cello and Piano was the first of a series of six sonatas for diverse instruments which Debussy did not live to complete (he composed only three out of the projected six). Even though the work's reception was not overly favorable at the time, it has come to be

considered one of the finest masterpieces in the modern cello repertoire and one of the most innovative and forward-looking of Debussy's works.

As seen in most of Debussy's works, the sonata is filled with rich yet misty harmonies, modes, whole tones, pentatonic scales and intervallic relationships. The piece also demands comprehensive cello techniques, including *flautando* bowing, left hand *pizzicato*, *spiccato*, false harmonics and *portamenti*, with many of these techniques meant to imitate lute or guitar sounds. The piano writing is equally evocative of these instruments, even imitating the cello *pizzicato* itself. The brevity of the sonata (it lasts approximately eleven minutes) as well as the non-traditional way in which Debussy combines its three movements (monothematic development in each movement, second movement *attaca* into third, etc.) are further examples of the composer's compositional imagination.

### **Maurice Ravel – Violin Sonata (1923-1927)**

The violin sonata of Ravel, written in a traditional three movement structure, has the well-known 'Blues' movement as its second movement. This movement is the most distinctive in the sonata and sets it apart from any other work in the genre. The strummed chords in the violin (imitated immediately in the piano), and the slow slides (also imitated in the piano), give the music a type of vocal quality which clearly originated with American blues. Ravel explored coloristic devices such as various types of *pizzicato*, harmonics, *glissandi*, *ricochet*, etc, with abundance. Along with Debussy, he brought an entire world full of new sounds into existence. The last movement is a veritable *tour-de-force* (primarily for the violin) in its perpetual motion.

### **Maurice Ravel - Piano Trio (1917)**

Based on his compositional output, the piano seemed to be a particular favorite in Ravel's art. He gave it sophisticated harmonies, Spanish influence, dance rhythms, impressionistic

techniques, varying textures, and jazz influences. From the beginning, Ravel's trio had immense appeal with its lush textures and huge contrasts of color and rhythms. The shimmering tremolos and sweeping arpeggios were orchestra-like in their effect.

There are distinctive rhythmic aspects in the first movement: the unusual accent groupings within an 8/8 meter, like 3+2+3. The *Pantom*, the second movement, is unique in its title and structure. It is named after a Malayan verse structure, its form consisting of a group of quatrains with each stanza in its first and third lines repeating lines two and four of the preceding stanza. The *Passacaille* is extremely effective, each instrument contributing equally to the whole, having an omnipresent and hymn-like serenity. The melodies are generally tonal, sequentially treated or repeated rather than having motivic development. The texture of this piece maximized virtuosity. The last movement, *Final*, calls for an even greater display of technical brilliance. Set in a 5/4 and 7/4 meter (often found in Basque music) the movement conveys great depths of emotion.

Ravel's harmonic language was novel and revolutionary in his day. He employed unresolved chords of the seventh and ninth, complex harmonies over pedal points, and used many modal nuances. One also finds some exploration of bitonality and traces of atonality. This trio marks an important point in Ravel's chamber music; the orchestral effects attained by pushing the boundaries of the three instrument's technical requirements combined with the expansion of each instrument's range contributed to the significant originality of this work.

### **Poulenc Oboe Sonata (1962), Violin Sonata (1942 - 1949) and Sextet (1932 - 1939)**

#### **Sonata for Oboe and Piano**

During the last years of life, Poulenc wrote music in memory of friends who had died, notably Sergei Prokofiev. The elegiac Oboe Sonata, which was written in honor of Prokofiev,

was the last work Poulenc composed before his own death. The sonata borrowed from Prokofiev's ballet music for Romeo and Juliet. It was written in three movements; however, instead of conventional fast-slow-fast, it is slow-fast-slow. The music is quite moving starting with the lyrical "*Elégie*" of the first movement and culminating with the melancholy oboe line over the piano's tolling funeral bells in the final movement.

### **Sonata for Violin and Piano**

This sonata illustrates Poulenc's tendency during the 1940s towards expressive Romantic gestures. The three-movement sonata was dedicated to the memory of Garcia Lorca, a fact reflected in its Spanish-sounding melodies as well as the Garcia Lorca quote at the beginning of the beautiful second movement *Intermezzo*: "The guitar makes dreams weep."

In this piece, Poulenc developed two distinctive melodic styles. The first was what he referred to as "Parisian folklore", a tuneful type of melody associated with popular performers of the time, street musicians and circus bands. The second type was more deeply-felt style, often heard in his religious works. Both types are used throughout the sonata. Poulenc's creativity can also be seen in the third movement, *Presto tragico*, which, after much lively virtuosity, ends the sonata suddenly with a slow tragic coda.

### **Sextet for Piano, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon and Horn**

Poulenc began the Sextet in 1932 and it took seven years to reach its final form. It is the only Sextet for Piano and Winds which is performed on a regular basis and is considered one of the masterworks in the piano chamber music repertoire. Full of dazzling piano writing, this Sextet contains Poulenc's effortless melodies, playfully abrupt key changes and rhythmic verve.

## **Conclusion**

In learning the repertoire for this project, I found myself constantly experimenting at the piano to create the sounds I felt each composer intended. Particularly as a collaborative pianist, the search for new colors, orchestral textures and the need to be able to match the timbres and qualities of other instruments as well as the human voice led me to continually look for ways in which to expand my technical, mental and emotional understanding of the music. Not only were all of the works presented of exceptional technical difficulty, they all presented mental challenges (polyrhythms in the Ravel Trio, for example) and emotional ones as well (the tragic ending of the Poulenc Violin and Piano Sonata).

Understanding the difference between the instruments for which these works were written as compared to modern instruments was also important. The difference in the lighter action of a French turn-of-the-twentieth-century Erard piano and the heavier action of the modern Steinway explains why many of the technical demands in the works from that time can be much more difficult on modern instruments and require pianists to make adjustments in their approach and thinking. A lighter touch, clearly-delineated voicing, long pedal points, exact articulations, technical accuracy and an exceptional ear for pedaling are just some of the things a pianist should be considering.

Because of orchestral textures and pedal points, balance within any ensemble, be it vocal or instrumental, should be paramount. Whether recording oneself or having another pair of ears coming to listen, it is really necessary to be able to hear how all the lines of a work combine and blend and which ones should be brought out more than others. To complicate matters further, every piano will have its own completely unique sound as well as pedals requiring completely different foot control and pressure.

Since pedaling is critical to the color, texture, quality and quantity of sound a pianist produces, it is really important to be able to control an instrument's pedals. The pedal techniques which one uses (especially in French music) from flutter pedal to half-pedal, from the *sostenuto* pedal to the *una corda* pedal, are numerous enough that they require their own separate practice sessions.

Every pianist works on these important techniques. However for the collaborative pianist, who is often responsible for the balance of an ensemble, the issues which determine balance become critically important. Since French music with piano from this particular time epitomizes the skills needed to become adept at these techniques, learning this repertoire can only increase a pianist's general level of technical expertise and improve their playing at every level.

Almost all of the composers included in this dissertation were either organists or pianists. Their musical imagination and understanding of the mechanics of the instrument changed how the piano was played and how it was treated in chamber music and *mélodie*, in the orchestra and in two-piano or four-hand repertoire. Their influence is obvious in music composed following their time, particularly in the piano writing but also in vocal and instrumental writing as well (examples being Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Boulez, Henri Dutilleux, etc.): the use of wide ranges of sonority, multiple tone colors, rhythmic fluidity and superior pianistic, vocal and instrumental virtuosity are techniques still evident in music of today. The changed world of sound they left behind continues to astonish, inspire and energize present-day performers and audiences alike and undoubtedly will continue to do so in the future.

## PROGRAMS FOR DISSERTATION RECITALS

### Program for Recital 1

University of Maryland Gildenhorn Recital Hall on 27 October 2006 at 8:00 PM

In collaboration with: Yeongsu Kim (oboe), Jung-A Lee (soprano), Hyun-Oh Shin (baritone), and the Voci di bento Quintet (Katrina Smith (flute), Yeongsu Kim (oboe), Jihoon Ghang (clarinet), Erich Heckscher (bassoon) and Heidi Littman (horn))

Francis Poulenc - Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1962)

- I. *Elégie: Paisiblement, sans Presser* (5:15)
- II. *Scherzo: Très animé* (4:32)
- III. *Déploration: Très calme* (4:54)

French Melodies by Fauré, Chausson, Debussy, Ravel and Duparc

- |                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gabriel Fauré   | <i>Après un rêve</i> (2:21)<br><i>Clair de lune</i> (2:53)<br><i>Mandoline</i> (2:09)                                                                                                                       |
| Ernest Chausson | <i>Le Colibri</i> (2:46)                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Claude Debussy  | "Apparition" from " <i>Quatre Chansons de jeunesse</i> " (3:06)                                                                                                                                             |
| Maurice Ravel   | <i>Fire's aria</i> from " <i>L'enfant et les sortilèges</i> " (2:12)                                                                                                                                        |
| Henry Duparc    | <i>Lamento</i> (3:16)<br><i>Le Manoir de Rosamonde</i> (2:37)                                                                                                                                               |
| Maurice Ravel   | " <i>Don Quichotte à Dulcinée</i> " <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>I. <i>Chanson romanesque</i> (1:55)</li><li>II. <i>Chanson épique</i> (2:54)</li><li>III. <i>Chanson à boire</i> (2:04)</li></ul> |

Francis Poulenc - Sextet for Piano, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon and Horn (1932 – 1939)

- I. *Allegro vivace* (8:10)
- II. *Divertissement: Andantino* (4:42)
- III. *Finale: Prestissimo* (7:22)

## **Program for Recital II**

All Nations Mission Church (Dayton, NJ) on 5 December 2009 at 7:00 PM

In collaboration with: Ji-Sook Shin (cello), Ji-Hee Lim (violin) and Na-yeong Cho (violin)

### Claude Debussy – Sonata for Cello and Piano (1915)

- I. *Prologue: Lent, sostenuto e molto risoluto* (4:25)
- II. *Sérénade: Modérément animé* (3:15)
- III. *Final: Animé, léger et nerveux* (3:26)

### Francis Poulenc - Sonata for Violin and Piano (1942 – 1949)

- I. *Allegro con fuoco* (7:15)
- II. *Intermezzo: Très lent et calme* (7:13)
- III. *Presto tragico* (5:40)

### César Franck – Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major (1886)

- I. *Allegretto ben moderato* (5:40)
- II. *Allegro* (7:56)
- III. *Recitativo fantasia, ben marcato* (7:00)
- IV. *Allegretto poco mosso* (6:07)



### **Program for Recital III (with lecture)**

University of Maryland, Leah M. Smith Lecture Hall on 11 May 2010 at 5:30 PM.

In collaboration with: Ji-Sook Shin (cello), Yu-Jeong Lee (violin)

#### Maurice Ravel – Violin and Piano Sonata (1927)

- I. *Allegretto* (8:23)
- II. *Blues: Moderato* (6:01)
- III. *Perpetuum mobile: Allegro* (4:32)

#### Maurice Ravel – Piano Trio in A minor (1915)

- I. *Modéré* (9:52)
- II. *Pantoum: Assez vif* (4:36)
- III. *Passacaille: Très large* (7:32)
- IV. *Finale: Animé* (6:23)

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