ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: César Franck: Pater Seraphicus of the French Mélodie

Joseph Cole Regan, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2015

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The musical world into which César Franck found himself thrust as a thirteen-year old concert pianist valued showy technical displays above artistic authenticity. César Franck was unable to please the French public and was a failed prodigy by his twenty-third year. This dissertation explores the effect this early pressure to please had on Franck's performing career, the music he composed, and the way he taught his own students. Franck's compositional style merged elements of classical form typical of Mozart and Beethoven with the new tonal language pioneered by Liszt and Wagner. He coupled his unique theoretical approach with an unwavering commitment to artistic authenticity. Beginning with Henri Duparc in 1868, Franck attracted some of the finest musical minds in Paris, forming the highly influential La Bande à Franck. This is a performance dissertation comprises three lecture recitals. These lectures: *Pater Seraphicus, La Bande à Franck,* and *The Schola Cantorum,* chronicle Franck's life, music, and artistic legacy. They featured music by Gounod, Franck, Lekeu, de Castillon, Duparc, Chausson, Albert Roussel, Erik Satie, and Deodat de Sévérac. They were performed in Leah M. Smith Lecture Hall in the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland. Copies of this dissertation and recordings of each lecture recital may be found in the McKinley Library at University of Maryland College Park.

César Franck:
Pater Seraphicus of the French Mélodie

by

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Introduction

There are few musical genres as closely linked to institutional education as the French Mélodie. The Paris Conservatoire and its graduates dominated musical life in France for most of the 19th century. Any hope of a successful career meant passing through its doors, thus, a relatively small group of people had an enormous influence on French music. The Conservatoire was a state institution and its faculty was government appointed. As a result, generally only the well connected or politically savvy were able to gain positions. This led to a rather narrow view of what constituted great music in France, primarily focused on the opera and its unquenchable thirst for saleable melody. It was not until the end of the 19th century that a counterbalance to the power of the Conservatoire finally appeared. His name was César Franck.

It was Franz Liszt who said:

> My dear friend, M. César-Auguste Franck . . . writes very beautiful music very seriously… What matters now for this young man is to find himself a time and place. …for among the young people who sweat blood and water to set down ideas on a troublesome sheet of manuscript paper, I do not know three in France who match him.[1]

For Franck, time and place were as elusive as they were essential. César's father, Nicolas-Joseph, drove his son to be a child prodigy in the mold of Mozart or Mendelssohn. Unfortunately his son possessed neither the power nor charisma required to capture the heart of a nation as a child. Having failed to achieve greatness as a prodigy Franck offered his high-minded and deeply personal music to a Parisian public that cared

[1] R. J. Stove, *César Franck: His Life and Times* (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 60-61.

far more about blithe melody and visual spectacle than it did formal development or earnest expressions of devotion and love. The critics were harsh and dismissive. In spite of some high profile supporters, which included Liszt, Berlioz, Cherubini, Chopin, Meyerbeer, Auber, von Bülow, Mendelssohn, and many others, Paris in the middle of the 19th century wanted nothing to do with César Franck.

Franck absorbed these experiences and worked on. He continued to compose, teach, and perform according to his own artistic mores. He became an internationally renowned organ soloist. His mature compositional style put him at the forefront of French musical development. His steadfast commitment to artistic expression that was emotionally genuine and deeply rooted in his strong personality can be seen in all of his mature works, his relationships with colleagues, and in his approach to his students. César Franck's insistence that music should be personal and meaningful added a powerful new dimension to French music, was embodied in the philosophy of the Schola Cantorum, and had a lasting influence on the development of the French Mélodie.

Chapter One

Pater Seraphicus: Musician and Composer

César-Auguste Franck was born on December 10th, 1822 to Nicolas-Joseph Franck and his wife Marie. César's mother bore four other children, though only his younger brother Jean-Joseph-Hubert (who went by Joseph) would make it past early childhood. There is very little written about Madame Franck, only that she was known for her "sweetness and goodwill".[2] Nicolas-Joseph was a bank clerk in Liège but when his sons showed an early aptitude for music, he made up his mind that they would be his ticket to success. Nicolas-Joseph's exploitation of César and his talent had disastrous consequences for the young artist's early career.

At the age of eight César's father enrolled him in the Conservatoire Royal du Liège. His work ethic, his affability, and his intelligence quickly distinguished him amongst the faculty. In just a few short years César was the institution's best student. Nicolas-Joseph arranged a series of concerts throughout Belgium with which he meant to launch eleven-year old César to stardom. César's playing was well received but did not create the groundswell of enthusiasm that Nicolas-Joseph had envisioned. He decided Belgium was too small to gain international stardom as a prodigy and took his eldest son to Paris to pursue fame and fortune.

Paris in 1835 was alive with the arts. Her ballet and drama were second to none, heralded throughout Europe for their beauty and refinement. Its music scene revolved

[2] Stove, 9.

around the theater as well. Parisians adored their Opera; with massive choruses, full ballets, large orchestras, they were the most lavish shows on the continent. Opera was a state run enterprise and as an emblem of the state's largesse, productions typically cost small fortunes to mount. The composers who ruled this epoch were Hérold, Halévy, Thomas, Adam, and most of all the German born, Giacomo Meyerbeer. His operas epitomized the age; blatantly tuneful, packed with drama, replete with exotic locales and opportunities for spectacular scenery. The newly empowered bourgeoisie couldn't get enough. Some French artists however, were scandalized by what had become a nakedly commercial industry. Hector Berlioz (whose own operas failed to win public acclaim) had this to say about Parisian Opera:

> With or without ideas, one must write – write fast and often; one must pile up acts, so as to pile up premiums, so as to pile up royalties, then capital, then interest… These are merely the packaging round the ideas; to change the color of the label is enough, since it will take the public a long time to discover that the packaging contains nothing.[3]

Though perhaps overly critical as a result of his own poor public reception, Berlioz spoke to the truth of the time. Those who were able to please the public were rewarded handsomely with fame and fortune. For the composer who couldn't (or wouldn't) cater to mass taste, life was more difficult. A great deal of teaching, performing, and living on the proverbial shoestring could be expected for those artists who dared to create a more personal art.

There was of course music being made outside of the opera; Berlioz, Liszt, and Chopin all made Paris their home. In addition there were traveling virtuosi from all over Europe; Paganini, Thalberg, Hummel and countless others were fêted by the Paris elite.

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[3] Roger Parker, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 137.

Chopin remarked on his own overwhelming reception saying, "I sit next to ambassadors, ministers, princes; and I don't really know how it happened, because I didn't push myself".[4] Paris could be very kind to those with fame, money, or influence. Unfortunately for César, it would become very clear what happened to those who came to Paris without one of those precious commodities.

At the age of 13, César was too young to study at the Paris Conservatoire. In addition, César was also barred from entrance on the grounds of his nationality. While Nicolas-Joseph worked out naturalization for himself and his sons, Cesar began studying with Pierre Zimmermann, one of Paris' leading pianists and Antonin Reicha, professor of composition at the Conservatoire and adolescent friend of Beethoven. César worked with both men privately for more than a year and impressed his new teachers with his talent and his relentless work ethic. Reicha drilled César in standard counterpoint and harmony exercises while also introducing him to more exotic compositional devices and an expanded view of tonality. Some of Franck's own students argued that this time with Reicha was essential to the development of Franck's mature style. Zimmermann had this to say of his newest student:

> The young César-Auguste Franck is one of the best disciplined youngsters whom I have ever known; he combines the most brilliant aptitude with a capacity for his studies which assures me that he will become a very distinguished artist.[5]

Nicolas-Joseph was encouraged by all of this and decided the time was ripe for the boy to make his Paris debut. In the first of many over ambitious attempts to create public excitement over his son, Nicolas-Joseph booked the Gymnase Musical and wrote

[4] Stove, 19.
[5] Stove, 23.

letters to the leading music publications of the time announcing now thirteen-year old César's Paris debut. On November 17th 1836 César took the stage and played well enough. The critics however took no notice. To further dampen César and Nicolas-Joseph's spirits, Antonin Reicha unexpectedly died six months later. Now without a composition teacher and still an unknown pianist in the cutthroat Parisian musical scene, it was critical that César enter the Conservatoire.

Gaining citizenship was not a speedy process, so in the year that elapsed between the summer of 1836 and fall of 1837 Nicolas-Joseph had his son working harder than ever. If Nicolas-Joseph couldn't convince Paris of his son's worth in one glorious evening then he would put his young son on stage as often as possible until the public realized their mistake. Often appearing with his brother Joseph, César was routinely double billed as performer and composer. Some of his works from this period begin to show a more mature approach to composition, though not yet possessed of any real artistic point of view. They were good enough however to prompt one reviewer into saying:

> This child, aged thirteen [*sic*] years only, is already an adroit pianist and a good harmonist; that is a lot, but he could become better yet, and I do not hesitate to predict that he will become a great artist if he is trained with caution…[6]

Music to a father's ears, though caution was not at all what Nicolas-Joseph had in mind for his son.

César was granted admission to the Paris Conservatoire in October of 1837. He continued his studies with Zimmermann on the piano and took up composition study with Reicha's replacement Aimé-Ambroise-Simone Leborne. His also began studying organ

[6] Stove, 26.

under the celebrated teacher François Benoist. César continued to excel. At his first piano examination his playing was so superlative that the panel decided he was in class by himself and awarded him a *Grand Prix d'honneur*. He remains the only student to have earned that particular distinction.

Nicolas-Joseph however, was not satisfied. Now years removed from his job as a bank clerk, money was a pressing concern that he expected César to address. At his father's behest, in addition to his study and performing engagements, César took on a full teaching schedule. He taught from the family apartment, and four other minor colleges in Paris. César was so busy that his father drew up a daily timetable (including travel time between schools) that allowed Nicolas-Joseph to keep track of his son to the minute. Remarkably, the heavy workload did not slow César's progress. In his 1841 organ examination, students were expected to improvise on two themes one in a fugue the other in a sonata allegro form. César noticed that the two themes worked well together and proceeded to improvise one enormous work encompassing all of the examination's requirements. Years later, Franck recalled to his student, Vincent d'Indy that he was:

> very happy in the combination of the two subjects, but the developments furnished by this unusual method of treating the free composition acquired unaccustomed proportions for this type of test…[7]

His examiner, a 73-year-old composition professor either didn't notice or couldn't believe his ears because Franck was only awarded second prize. This effort to make a splash bears noting not just because it shows how quickly Franck gained mastery over the organ, more importantly, it was the last time César, without any urging from his father, tried to impress an audience with a virtuosic display.

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[7] Stove, 37.

Pleased as Nicolas-Joseph undoubtedly was with César's achievements in school, he had expected his son to ascend the heights of fame in Paris. He was impatient. And so it was that in April of 1842 as César was preparing for his attempt to win the Grand Prix de Rome, Nicolas-Joseph removed César from school and sent him on a concert of tour of Belgium in an effort to raise his son's profile and his earnings.

Perhaps contributing to this rash decision was the fact that César had begun to attract the wrong kind of attention from the critics. One man in particular, Henri Blanchard, made it a personal mission to skewer César Franck and co. at every opportunity. The typical review read something like this:

> Like the Emperors of Rome, whose names he bears and who sustained the whole weight of the government of the world, M. César-Auguste Franck bore almost the entire musical responsibility of the concert. Two trios of his composition, a solo, a quartet and the finale of the event, the invincible César-Auguste coped with them all . . . Certainly this young man has talent, but…for him inspiration as composer or executant is a closed book. He knows and does not feel.[8]

Though not all reviewers held the same opinion, M. Blanchard wrote for the Revue et gazette musicale and carried some weight with the public. Blanchard and several other prominent critics did not like Nicolas-Joseph's continued attempts to foist his sons upon them and made their feelings known.

Given César's later insistence on writing for genuine emotional expression, it is no surprise that his first mature compositions appear during this challenging time. His *Trois trios concertantes* show a decidedly more ambitious compositional mind than the childish fantasias that had preceded them. They are formally more expansive and foreshadow the mature Franck's reliance on a recurring theme or motive and exhibit a

[8] Stove, 36.

distinctly Classical influence. It was on this tour that he met Franz Liszt. Liszt enjoyed the *Trois trio concertantes* so much that he offered César great encouragement, and in 1852 he performed the final trio with Joseph Joachim in Weimar and later convinced Hans von Bülow to take up the work. The Trios were eventually dedicated to King Leopold of Belgium who awarded the nineteen-year old Franck "The Great Gold Medal of Belgium" as a gesture of thanks.

Their return to Paris was not as auspicious. In addition to his heavy teaching schedule, César began playing organ at Sunday masses, and his father continued to put him on the stage whenever possible. The incorrigible Henri Blanchard was thrilled to continue panning César and his music.

> We received from these blustering artists [meaning the Franck family] an invitation to attend, at their home, a musical event . . . we accept the invitation, having written to one of our friends that he was to throw some flowers on our tomb if we succumbed during this terrifying expedition, in which, we concluded, to tell the truth, to be met merely by a musical ambush…which kills the listener with boredom.[9]

Amidst all of this César composed for piano an impressive *Eclogue* and then an opera, *Stradella*, a complete dramatic work in three acts. Despite the tremendous effort poured into it, not a single theater was interested, and it remained in manuscript form until the Opéra Comique staged it for the first time in 1985.

In 1845, his father now desperate for a public triumph, César channeled his admiration of Méhul's *Joseph* and threw himself into the creation of his own oratorio *Ruth*. The premiere was held at the Salle Érard (the show room of a well known piano manufacturer) for an audience that included Liszt, Meyerbeer, Halévy, and Spontini

[9] Stove, 54.

among others. The performance went well and though the critical response was mixed, it was not so negative as to doom the work forever.

Liszt arranged for the work to be performed at the Paris Conservatoire and on January 4th of 1846, Ruth had its public premiere with full choir and orchestra. The performance had a good showing. One of King Louis-Philip's sons, Le Duc de Montpensier, was in attendance and made a passing remark to Nicolas-Joseph that perhaps the king himself would enjoy the work. Nicolas-Joseph immediately passed the news along to several journals. Sadly the Duc either never intended to sponsor another performance of Ruth or changed his mind. Either way the critics had wearied of Nicolas-Joseph's game and humiliated César in print when it became clear that no succeeding performance was forthcoming. With lukewarm reviews and no prospects for another performance, *Ruth* was finished; and at only twenty-three, so it seemed, was César's career.

This was a difficult blow for César. He had worked himself to the bone only to see a public apathetic to his work and a father seemingly bent on destroying his reputation in critical circles. For the first time, signs of strain appeared between Nicolas-Joseph and his eldest son. César performed with his brother Joseph in a concert for the last time in early 1846. It was a concert they arranged for themselves and Nicolas-Joseph did not like this show of independence. A few months later César showed his father a mélodie he had written entitled *L'ange et l'enfant*. Nicolas-Joseph flew into a rage, for it had been dedicated not to a sovereign or wealthy patron but the anonymous daughter of two actors. He shredded the manuscript and demanded that César come to his senses. His actions did not have their intended effect. César had fallen in love with Félicité

Desmousseaux and they were quickly engaged. Aware that marriage to Félicité meant he could no longer live on his son's earnings, Nicolas-Joseph forbade his son to see the girl again. For the first time in his life, César directly disobeyed his father and moved out of the family apartment. As a parting gesture, César left a note saying that he would pay Nicolas-Joseph's personal debt of more than 11,000 Francs.

Félicité and César planned to marry on February 22nd, 1848 at the church where he played weekly mass. History also eyed that date for as the wedding party made its way to the church, workers and students took to the streets to protest the government. Singing La Marseillaise, they threw rocks at police and shut down the city center with barricades. One of these blockaded the wedding party's access to the church. A grill was taken off the front of the church in order that Félicité and her attendants could climb over the roadblocks. The protestors found this thoroughly amusing and helped the party to arrive safely. After a lengthy delay César and Félicité were married. Two days later King Louis-Philippe's reign was over. The following year of sometimes bloody social and political turmoil ended in the surprise return of Louis-Napoleon from exile to win the presidency in a landslide.

While the rest of Paris engaged in decades of frivolity and excess in the era of Napolean III and his Second Empire, the period from 1848-1869 for César Franck was one of hard work and self-discovery. With his father out of the picture, César now determined what his next steps would be. In the next ten years the Francks had four children (they nicknamed the oldest "Barricade" after his parents' auspicious beginning)[10]. He began to make a name for himself in Paris as a brilliant organist. His

[10] Stove, 78.

playing at Notre-Dame-de-Lorette caught the ear of Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, the man responsible for revolutionizing organ design in France during the 19th century. Many of France's great organs had been vandalized or destroyed during Reign of Terror and had been largely left in ruins. Cavaillé-Coll's organs helped to usher in a veritable golden age of French Organ playing. Franck was among the celebrated organists asked to inaugurate newly consecrated instruments at important churches and cathedrals. These events routinely drew thousands of people.

In 1858 César was awarded the position of Music Master and Chief Organist at the parish of St. Clotilde in Paris. While not as glamorous as some of the major cathedrals in the city center it featured a new Cavaillé-Coll instrument that he was to inaugurate. At the Christmas service of 1858 the Archbishop of Paris, speaking of Franck, said to the parish priest, "You have a marvelous intercessor, my son; he'll win souls to God more than we can."[11]

It was at St. Clotilde that Franck's gifts as an organist fully blossomed. While his style was never flashy, his improvisations were second to none. Wherever he went he had in his breast pocket a little red notebook that contained themes from the great masters and his own compositions. Guests in the loft would often select the theme to be improvised upon. Gabriel Pierné, a student of Franck's, recalled what happened next:

> …the theme chosen, he would concentrate before improvising. With his right elbow in his left hand he would tap his forehead with the third finger of his right hand. And from that moment nothing existed for him but the music…[12]

[11] Stove, 102.
[12] Stove, 157.

Of course this level of absorption in the music meant César often lost his place in the service and didn't know when to stop. César's parish priest took some extra steps to help him "keep track". Pierné recalled (as one biographer put it) the Battle of the Bell:

> The pastor…installed a little bell… When this little bell rang, it meant: "M. Franck, by order of the pastor, stop!" But M. Franck, absorbed, didn't hear the little bell. Then a louder electric bell was installed. That one *le Père* Franck heard (he couldn't do otherwise) but then he would exclaim, "I never have time to return to the tonic." … When the return to the key went on too long, … the good pastor … got up to give two or three imperious rings. … But Franck didn't stop.[13]

Franck was aware that his playing was not as showy as some preferred. But, having spent his formative years devoted to pleasing his father, his teachers, and a disinterested public, Franck paid them no mind and said simply, "I'm sorry not to please everyone, but I play the organ my way." [14]

For Franck the struggle between the desire for public acceptance and truth to his own art had led him to the conclusion that it was the message more than the medium that mattered. This realization propelled Franck in a direction that had a dramatic impact on French music. For as the 1860's wound to a close he was increasingly in demand as a soloist and more importantly as a teacher. For decades his students had been very nice young men and women, but entirely mediocre musicians. Now, as his reputation grew, a group of talented young men gathered around him. Henri Duparc, Vincent d'Indy, Ernest Chausson, Alexis de Castillon, Arthur Coquard and others came to Franck for guidance. Some of these men had met Franck at one of the smaller schools he taught, as with Duparc. Others sought him out at the urging of friends as Vincent d'Indy had done. Their individual styles were quite distinct from one another, though many looked to

[13] Stove, 159.
[14] Stove, 160.

Germany and Wagner for inspiration. They all however, surveyed the French musical scene at the close of the 1860's and knew that the music they wanted to make was not what the establishment wanted to hear. It was Franck's insistence on personal artistic integrity above all other concerns that encouraged these young men to develop their unique voices.

The years of 1870-1871 were a major turning point for César Franck and for the whole of France. The Franco-Prussian war and the ensuing civil unrest in Paris were a shock to the nation's psyche. Many assumed that when France declared war on Otto von Bismark's Prussia, the result would be a swift and decisive victory. The resulting conflict was indeed decisive, but in the Prussians' favor. The French army was quickly rounded up and taken captive. In Paris, radicals (distrustful of the new interim government made up of wealthy industrialists and military men) took control of the city and created the Commune. It held sway from March of 1871 through May of that year before it was brutally put down by the newly reconstituted French army. Nearly 20,000 people were killed in the fighting. Historian Richard Anthony Leonard had this to say about the effect of the conflict:

> …the entire French nation underwent a catharsis. Revolt against the existing order was nowhere more strongly motivated than in the arts.[15]

Realism in literature, the Parnassian and Symbolist schools in poetry, and Impressionism in painting were all artistic reactions to what was seen as a decay of French culture and identity during the Second Empire. In music too there was a push for change. One immediate action was the formation of the *Société Nationale de Musique*

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[15] Laurence Davies, *César Franck and His Circle* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1970), 119.

with Saint-Saëns as its driving force. Founding members including Fauré, Massenet, Dubois, Romain Bussine, Ernest Guirod, Frank himself as well as his students Duparc and Alexis de Castillon who acted as the group's secretary. Its mission was to provide a platform from which "to aid the production…of all serious works, whether published or unpublished of French composers"[16]. As for how sorely this kind of organization was needed Saint-Saëns had this to say:

> As for the general public, it was hopeless even to think about them. The name of a composer who was French and still alive had only to appear on a poster to frighten everybody away.[17]

The société was a great supporter of Franck and most of his mature works had their premieres under its auspices.

For the first time in his life Franck had a run of good fortune. The professor of organ at the Conservatoire, François Benoist, retired and surprisingly Franck was named as his replacement. César was now financially secure and surrounded by students who both challenged and adored him. Though officially a professor of organ he himself viewed there to be very little difference between playing organ and composing and taught both in his class. His manner of teaching stressed the message of the music over the medium. He expected his students to work hard and think critically. Franck told students, "Don't think that you will learn from my correction of faults *of which you are aware* unless you have strained every effort yourself to amend them."[18]

Where the period of 1848-1870 was filled with hard work and little creative output, the last twenty years of César Franck's life saw the full flowering of his creative

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[16] Stove, 144.
[17] Stove, 145.
[18] Stove, 205.

talents. As a result of he security of a position at the Conservatoire and the incalculable support that his students (known in some circles as *Franckistes*) provided, César began to write and didn't stop until his death. His three tone poems, most notably *Le Chasseur Maudit* of 1882, are among the first French attempts in the genre and exhibit the free flowing tonal language typically associated with Franck's work. Franck's music is at its best when formal structure informs tonal development. This combination of form and tonal experimentation is evident in the works that brought him true international acclaim. His Piano Quintet, String Quartet, Symphony in D, were hailed by many to be great works, but it was the Violin Sonata played throughout Belgium and France by Franck's good friend, the virtuoso violinist Eugène Ysaÿe, that brought César to the height of his fame.

Franck also found time to write smaller works, such as his small collection of mélodies. Though he wrote songs as far back as 1842 his best work appeared after 1870. In these songs there is a fascinating contrast to be heard with the blithe melodies and active evocations of love and exotic locales epitomized in the works of Charles Gounod and Camille Saint-Saëns. Both of these men were icons of the age and their songs embody the charm and grace that the public and Conservatoire craved. Gounod in particular was important to the development of the Mélodie for he was one of the first to intentionally pair excellent poetry with finely wrought vocal and piano lines. Though Franck had no desire to court the public the way much of Gounod's more successful songs do, he looked to Gounod as a starting point for his own work in the genre.

Irony and guile are completely absent from Franck's mélodies. While Franck did not possess the same flair for melody as some of his contemporaries he could still create

charming miniatures when he wanted to. The two songs, *Roses et papillons* and *Les marriages des roses* are winning little pieces that manage to possess a depth of emotion while retaining a grace and elegance not often found in Franck's writing. *Les marriages* perhaps best displays the merging of Gallic and Prussian aesthetics with a charming melodic opening moving into a more openly chromatic section at the end of each verse. This broadening of the tempo and thickening of the piano texture rarely occurs in the work of other French composers of Franck's era and has an emotional directness unique to his compositions.

Two of Franck's final mélodies *Nocturne* and *La procession* display all of the traits that made him such a compelling mentor to so many aspiring composers. The opening to *Nocturne* sounds as though it was improvised in at the organ bench with its circling chromaticism coming around to the home key after journeying far afield. Both mélodies have clear formal structures that are delineated both by the stanzas of the poems and the harmonic structure itself. Both are emotionally direct and at their highest points almost overwhelming for both performer and audience. Where *Nocturne* hints at the divine nature of all things, *La procession* revels in its religious fervor. In the hands of a less sure composer, these settings might have come off as too saccharine. Franck however, demonstrates the emotional authenticity and individuality that were the hallmark of his playing, composing, and teaching; and in doing so earns his place among the best composers of mélodie.

At the end of his life, Franck was recognized throughout France and Belgium as one of the French-speaking world's greatest composers. In 1885 he was awarded the cross of the Legion d'Honneur. That same year he was elected as president of the Société

Nationale de Musique. When he contracted what would eventually become a fatal case of pleurisy 1890, he continued to see students in his home until he could no longer sustain conversation. César-Hubert-Auguste Franck died on November 8th, 1890.

Franck's reputation as a composer continued to grow after his death. His students continued to advance the cause of his music and the public itself in the tumultuous times that followed the *Fin de siècle* gained a new appreciation for Franck's emotional and spiritual intensity. Almost thirty years after César's death, returning from eight months in the hell that were the trenches of Verdun, a young violinist was asked if he could have played Franck's famed sonata as brilliantly before his experience, his response:

> Nothing is quite the same after one has passed through Verdun. One is not studying music down there, and yet one is learning… how to express such thoughts as Franck has here—and as never before one could have expressed them.[19]

Franck fought hard to earn that knowledge and that is the message that he sought to share with his students and audiences. To hear Franck's music is to hear a man working to be at peace with himself and the world around him.

[19] Stove, 305.

Chapter Two

La Bande à Franck

Oh what is Heaven but the fellowship

Of minds that each can stand against the world

By its own meek and incorruptible will?

-Emerson[20]

These words from *Self Reliance*, written by the great American author Ralph Waldo Emerson, perhaps best sum up the bond that formed between César Franck and the students who created their own community around this unique and brilliant artist. La Bande à Franck as they came to be known looked to their beloved teacher as something more than a simple instructor in counterpoint and harmony. No, these men and women looked to him as an exemplar for how to find their way through the complicated and fickle world of French music at the end of the 19th century. Those students who formed Franck's inner circle were those who possessed a great deal of talent, a great deal of love for the art, but were beset by self-doubt, depression and struggled to forge their own artistic identities. These were the individuals who needed Franck most. For indeed there will always be those who will become great composers no matter the challenges that arise, men like Beethoven, Mozart, Strauss, and Stravinski. The vast majority of artists however are forever indebted to the teachers who cross their path. Franck's brilliance as

[20] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self Reliance* (Hoboken, N.J.: BiblioBytes, 1990),11, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2008480>.

a teacher found its true purpose in those who possessed the talent and the desire for greatness but who required the proper guidance to find their own true voices.

Franck had taught piano, organ, and composition since his early twenties. He had begun at the behest of his father and continued to support his growing family. As his reputation grew in Paris during the 1860's, Franck attracted some of the brightest young musicians in the city. At le Collège de Vaugirard César had taken under his wing a young Henri Duparc. Though known to many as the musical genius responsible for some of the greatest mélodies ever written, Duparc was critical to the gathering of talent that resulted in La Bande à Franck. Duparc quickly realized what a singularly special teacher César Franck was and he set about persuading others to join him in learning from this still hidden gem. First to join the group was Alexis de Castillon. Though initially pupil of the fashionable Victor Massé, after meeting with Franck at Duparc's request, Castillon never looked back. Joined by Albert Cahen and Arthur Coquard, these four men formed the nucleus of what became a major force in French music at the end of the 19th century.

The foundation of the Société Nationale de Musique after the Franco-Prussian war was even more critical for the development of Franck's student than it was for his own music. Where Franck was at the very least an established organist of the first rank, many of his young students had yet to create any reputations of their own. The public was continually suspicious of art it did not already have an opinion about, thus works with modernist tendencies or consciously lofty artistic aspirations were generally not produced. On the rare occasion when a daring new work could make it to the stage, the results were unpredictable. Bizet's disastrous premiere of Carmen in 1875 that included protests from the performers in rehearsals and a displeased audience at the first

performance showed how terrified of new ideas the general public was. Instrumental music (the hallmark of many of Franck's young pupils) was even more difficult to find an audience for.

The formation of the Société speaks to an important counterculture in France that had been steadily growing. There was a thirst on the part of many young musicians to add to the vocabulary of French music something that could speak to the more subtle and difficult questions of their time. They had grown weary of the one-dimensional dramas of Halevy, Offenbach, and Meyerbeer. They desired a more serious art for more serious times. Franck's students were no exception, and the Société proved to be an excellent tool for the Franckistes' as they furthered their musical agenda.

The founding of the Société was a positive development to be sure, but the general public and a majority of the faculty at the Paris Conservatoire still felt the only path to success lay through the theater. The students who came to Franck, came to him because they yearned to say something serious and in a new more subtle way, but either didn't know how or weren't possessed of the confidence to follow through with it. Henri Duparc one of Franck's first students, belonged to the latter category.

A generally confident and outgoing young man, he had never considered a career in music until he began study in harmony with Franck at the Collège de Vaugirard. Meeting in 1866, Duparc was already heavily influenced by Wagner and just two years later produced one of the great works of French Mélodie *Chanson Triste*. Here he was not even a student at the Conservatoire (he followed Franck there in 1872 when he became professor of organ) and Duparc had already written a song that combined the rich

chromatic language pioneered by Liszt, mastered by Wagner and combined it with a uniquely Gallic sense of grace and refinement.

The songs of Duparc were the very embodiment of the lofty ideals preached by the Société. What need then did Duparc have of Franck's guidance? In spite of his clear talent and ability to work in the form, Duparc was racked with self-doubt. Though he lived to be 85 years old, his creative faculties left him before he turned forty and so only sixteen examples of his mélodies are left to us. He was so self critical that he burned anything he felt was not up to his standard. Laurence Davies recalls one particularly painful example regarding an attempt to turn Pushkin's Roussalka into an opera:

> The first act was written in the 1880's… In all he had probably set two thirds of the poem when he was caught up in a cycle of despair. This was June 1900, and though it was summertime he had a roaring fire lit so that he could experience the satisfaction of plunging his manuscript into the flames. Shocked by what he had done, the composer spent the next three months rewriting the entire score by memory, only to work himself up into another fit of destructiveness in which the process was repeated.[21]

When left to his own devices, Duparc, and many of the other members of this brotherhood (Chausson in particular also dealt with feelings of inadequacy) were beset by crises of confidence. It was César Franck and his calming presence counseling them to write works that were musical and emotional, regardless of the public's reaction, that gave these men the courage to carry on. Though Duparc eventually lost the ability to write music for reasons that are still not entirely clear, his contribution to the Mélodie stands with Fauré and Debussy in its beauty and importance. He was also a key figure in bringing more musicians to the cause of Père Franck.

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[21] Davies, 175.

In February of 1872, César Franck was made professor of organ at the Paris Conservatoire. In Franck's mind there was no clear distinction between teaching organ and teaching composition and he ran his class that way. Immediately the students who had come with Franck to the Conservatoire began to encourage others to sit in on the classes and join when possible. Albert Cahen (initially recruited to the cause by Duparc) was especially persuasive when it came to finding students to join in class sessions with Franck.

One of the earliest to join the inner circle was Vincent d'Indy. D'Indy eventually became the standard bearer (for good and for ill) of the Franckistes but it almost didn't happen. Outside of the circle some were given to think that each session with César Franck was simply a meeting of the mutual admiration society. This misunderstanding arose because of the glowing terms many of Franck's students used to describe their lessons. This was not the case however. When it was needed César did not pull his punches. Vincent d'Indy was an early beneficiary of this particular quality of Franck's pedagogical approach. After securing an introduction to Franck through his friend Duparc, d'Indy brought a movement from a Quartet he had been writing. Here is how d'Indy recalls the old master's reaction:

> After I had played…he was silent for a moment; then, turning to me with a melancholy air, he spoke the words I have never been able to forget, since they had a decisive action upon my life: 'There are some good things in it; … the ideas would not be bad—but—that is not enough; the work is not finished; in fact, you really know nothing whatever.' Seeing that I was dreadfully mortified… he went to explain his reasons, and wound up by saying: 'Come to see me, if you want us to work together. I could teach you composition.'[22]

[22] Davies, 146.

Though initially upset, after going through his score and examining each area Franck had identified, d'Indy was obliged to agree with every observation. He went back the next day to state his intentions to study composition whereupon Franck immediately admitted him to his organ class. Thereafter d'Indy was Franck's fiercest advocate. Raised by a domineering grandmother in an aristocratic household d'Indy was ruthless when pursuing an objective but able to harness considerable reserves of charm when he needed to persuade rather than bully. This combination of tenacity and guile made him a formidable force.

He first made an impact with the Société Nationale de Musique where he was largely responsible for the political machinations that led to an ideological split. An ardent supporter of Wagner and his followers, d'Indy had grown increasingly vocal in his desire that the Société should support all modern works and not just those by French composers. The conflict resulted in the allowance of works by foreign composers to be performed, the resignation of Saint-Saëns and Bussine from the organization, and the installation of César Franck as its president in 1886. After Franck's death in 1890, d'Indy's forceful personality helped to fill the void for some of the younger less self-reliant students and d'Indy saw himself as the heir to the Franckiste legacy. He eventually carried this to its extreme with the founding of the Schola Cantorum, where among other aims, d'Indy sought to enshrine what he believed were the core tenets of Franck's teaching.

Just what those tenets were, was extremely unclear to those not privileged to be allowed into the inner circle. While all of his students agreed that he was the greatest living teacher of composition in France, they just as readily acknowledged that he had no

explicit method. There were no textbooks and no exercises for the sake of repetition. As d'Indy put it:

> The first of the conditions that Franck placed on the pupil was not to work much, but to work well, or rather, and more strictly speaking, not to bring him a great quantity of task work, but only extremely careful work.[23]

Indeed Franck himself is quoted on the importance of good thoughtful work:

> Don't try to do a great deal, but rather seek to do *well*, no matter if only a little can be produced… bring me the results of many trials which you can honestly say represent the very best you can do… Don't think that you will learn from my correction of faults *of which you are aware* unless you have strained every effort yourself to amend them."[24]

This is not to say that if Franck observed a technical deficiency he would not assign a clear course of action designed to alleviate the problem. When Paul de Wailly joined Franck's group he set him on a rigorous course of counterpoint and wouldn't allow the young man to move on until Franck was satisfied that he was fluent in the technique.

Above all things, Franck was more interested in giving students the tools to create the music they wanted to make rather than force them to make music that sounded a particular way. He respected music of all styles and nationalities without ever feeling overwhelmed or threatened by it. For example, though he appreciated and even admired the expansive tonalities of Wagner, he did not worship the man the way many of his young charges did (Guillaume Lekeu actually fainted at the conclusion of the Prelude to *Tristan* and had to be carried out of the theater at Bayreuth). Tellingly, after a student passionately declared that Tristan was a wholly unique triumph, Franck responded, "After *Tristan* take the score of *Les Béatitudes*: What Wagner has done for human love, I

[23] Stove, 205.
[24] Ibid.

have done for divine."[25] It was perhaps this combination of open mindedness and deep self-assurance that so impressed his pupils.

Perhaps no student benefitted more from this striking combination than Ernest Chausson. The only child of a wealthy family he had been very carefully sheltered from his earliest days. Having lost two children before Ernest was born, his parents kept him out of school and had him tutored privately. Deprived of a typical childhood, Chausson grew up to be a highly sensitive and deeply introspective young man. He once said of his younger self, "I was sad without quite knowing why, but firmly convinced that I had the best reason in the world for it."[26] Chausson originally went to university to study law in 1877 but decided to make music his life's work after seeing Wagner's Ring Cycle in Munich in 1879. Initially a student of Massenet, Chausson soon began attending Franck's classes and shortly thereafter began to work exclusively with him. Just as Duparc before him, Chausson came nearly fully formed as a composer, writing some of the most beloved songs in the literature *Le Charme* and *Les Papillons* in his first year at the Conservatoire. Again like Duparc, Chausson needed someone to help him face his inner demons. Where Duparc struggled with perfectionism, Chausson battled melancholy and feelings of inadequacy. Speaking of his place in the artistic pantheon:

> Beside the great men, there are thousands of little ants which grind away;… what they do is of little consequence; it does not change anything and yet they cannot do otherwise. Why the deuce am I one of those beasts?[27]

Through his work with Franck, observing the steady patient example he set for his students, Chausson learned to control his demons. Over time he produced nearly fifty

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[25] Norman Demuth, *César Franck* (London: D. Dobson, 1949), 52.
[26] Davies, 178.
[27] Davies, 183.

mélodies, many of which are as widely performed as those written by Fauré, Duparc, Debussy, and Ravel.

Chausson's contribution could have been much greater, indeed, he was positioned (in a similar way to d'Indy) to carry the banner of the Franckist ideals into the 20th century when he was killed in a tragic bike accident. Riding alone while in the country he somehow lost control and careened into a brick wall cracking his skull. He was just 44 years old. This is perhaps the most curious characteristic of La Bande à Franck, their tragically short life expectancy. Chausson was taken too early, Duparc lost his ability to compose early in his life, Alexis de Castillon came to music late and wrote excellent pieces after joining up with Franck in 1868 before dying as a result of chronic illnesses he had contracted while serving in the Franco-Prussian war just a year later in 1873. Guillaume Lekeu, a prodigious young talent, writing nearly 60 works before his death at 24 from Typhoid Fever, possibly after eating a bad piece of fish. Perhaps the most bizarre case of all was Albéric Magnard who, when told of the advancing German infantry in August of 1914, sent his family away and awaited the army in his study. He shot and killed at least one soldier from his study window before being killed himself when the Germans set his house ablaze.

In spite of all of this self-doubt, bad luck, and sometimes downright bizarre behavior the men and women who made up La Bande à Franck had an enormous impact on the direction French music would take at the *fin de siècle*. The songs of Duparc and Chausson, the chamber music of Chausson, d'Indy, and others, and most importantly the niche they carved out in the French musical landscape gave other French artists a place to pursue their own unique brand of high minded art music. That is perhaps the most

important piece of Franck's legacy. The bad behavior, the self doubt, the tragic endings all came to La bande because they were in fact a group of deeply emotional, talented, and flawed human beings desperate for help in making their way through the world. It was Franck's insistence on the message over the medium, working well not just hard, and his careful work not to box his students in with rules and methodology that allowed this very different group of artists to flourish. Perhaps the best way sum up what Franck taught his students to do was what he told his young pupil Tournemire, "Discover yourself, it will take years."[28]

Though the members of La Bande à Franck had varying degrees of success in the world of music. Among its members you may find some of truly great composers of Western art music standing hand in hand with relative unknown. They all however worked relentlessly to heed their beloved teachers advice. The members of La Bande took great pride in knowing that their art was theirs and theirs alone; an art that continues to inspire and challenge us more than a century later.

[28] Stove, 205.

Chapter Three
The Schola Cantorum

"It's a strange thing but at the Schola, side by side, you will find the aristocracy, the most left wing of the bourgeoisie, refined artists and coarse artisans"[29]

– Claude Debussy

It certainly would have pleased César Franck to hear those words uttered in reference to an institution founded by his students and whose curriculum was designed (at least partially) as an attempt to codify the conditions the old master created for his own beloved band of students. The man who took it upon himself to secure a Frankiste legacy was Vincent d'Indy. Franck's enduring gift to d'Indy was a thorough grounding in counterpoint and harmony, drawn almost solely from the great masters of the past. Franck's patient, rigorous, and humanistic approach, in the face of the musical establishment's apathy toward much of his work deeply affected d'Indy. So much so that he dedicated his life to bringing attention to and espousing the merits of the Franckiste ideals. D'Indy's discipleship would have far reaching consequences for his master's reputation in particular, and the French musical establishment at large.

Born into an aristocratic family tracing its roots as far back as 1388 when Enguerrand Indy was governor of the Dauphiné region.[30] His forbears were engaged in military and public service for generations and this familial zeal for personal industry, leadership, and love of country were central to d'Indy's personality. In addition to this militaristic bent, his family was active in the arts as well. His uncle Wilfrid a highly

[29] Andrew Thomson, *Vincent D'Indy and his world* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 122.
[30] Thomson, 1.

skilled amateur pianist attended the more fashionable salons in Paris.[31] In spite of his high position young Vincent's life was not without tragedy. His mother died in childbirth and his father Antonin, so grieved at the loss, went away for some time leaving the care of the newborn to the boy's grandmother, the Comtesse Thérèse d'Indy. Known to the family as Rézia, she was a dominating personality whose family also contained several generations of highly decorated military and government servants. Even after Antonin returned, Rézia retained complete control over the young d'Indy's intellectual and artistic development.

There are colorful anecdotes regarding Vincent's time under her care, often stressing Rézia's strictness. She made sure that he had every advantage and that he should work tirelessly to make the most of his position. It was owing in large part to her steady, often forceful guidance, that d'Indy never once allowed himself to play the wealthy dilettante. Indeed, he sought to earn his place in the musical establishment and saw no musical task as being beneath his station.

His childhood passed in a steady rhythm, most of the year was spent in Paris working with his private tutors and becoming a more facile pianist while summers were spent on the family estate at Chabret in Valence. Despite the later influence of German music (especially that of Liszt and Wagner), he remained fiercely devoted to his beloved France. During these summer retreats he grew close to his extended family, one cousin in particular, Isabelle. They eventually fell in love and in a perfect example of d'Indy's tenacity, they endured three years of complete separation with no correspondence before being allowed to marry.

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[31] Norman Demuth, *Vincent d'Indy, 1851-1931; champion of classicism, a study* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1974), 1.

D'Indy grew up dreaming of military glory and had always planned on serving his country. Though music became harder to pursue as a mere avocation, he planned (much to his grandmother's chagrin) to enroll in the military academy St. Cyr upon completion of his examinations. As reward for the successful passing of the Baccalauréat, Rézia sent him on a tour of Italy. During this trip the young man became fully immersed in art and culture. He gloried in the monuments, the paintings, the music, and especially in Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Dante's artistic genius informed by an unquestioning Catholic faith mirrored d'Indy's own youthful certainty and prompted an artistic awakening. Upon his return home, d'Indy announced to his overjoyed grandmother he would forgo his military training in order to pursue the life of an artist.

Before d'Indy could enroll in the Conservatoire however, the growing tension between France and Bismark's unified Germany came to a head as the Franco-Prussian war broke out in 1870. Following the army's disastrous showing on the field of combat the government called for volunteers to defend Paris. D'Indy enlisted straightaway and relished the thought of fighting for his country. The siege of Paris quickly disabused him of these youthful fancies. In spite of the high spirit the commanders displayed he saw how ill equipped he and his fellow soldiers were in the face of the modern German military. He later recalled his inadequate shelter and provisions writing how he spent Christmas Eve of 1870, "with a layer of ice for a mattress, and a heap of snow for a pillow"[32]. After the siege was lifted, d'Indy returned to the family estate to rest. Not one to sit on his heels, he commenced work on several musical compositions, including a grand opera and published a book regarding his experiences during the siege. His music did not come along as swiftly as the book prompting him to find a teacher.

[32] Thomson, 14.

His father however, decided it more appropriate for his son to study law at the Sorbonne. Vincent reluctantly obeyed, but continued to make every attempt to establish himself as a musician. He attended the weekly salon presided over by Saint-Saëns. Here he met Bizet, Massenet, Widor, Alexis de Castillon, Bussine, and César Franck gaining a foothold in the upper echelons of the Paris musical community.[33] He began taking composition lessons from Albert Lavignac and began work on a symphony. During this period his grandmother Rézia died. Although emotionally distressing, the sizeable inheritance she left d'Indy made him financially independent. He immediately withdrew from law school and made music his sole venture, playing percussion and horn at society parties, accompanying choral rehearsals and making music wherever possible. Though he often liked to tell the tale that he had been a poor student, it should never be forgotten that d'Indy's social and economic welfare were secured for him before he had reached full adulthood, allowing him an artistic and social freedom few young musicians could imagine.

D'Indy had given the conductor Pasdeloup the scherzo movement of his now finished symphony and it was played at several orchestral rehearsals. The young composer however, was still in need of guidance. At the behest of his friend Henri Duparc, he visited César Franck with a movement from his string quartet. Franck was blunt in his assessment and though he was gentle in delivering the message, the verdict was clear, d'Indy had much to learn. D'Indy remembered the older man saying, "in fact, you really know nothing whatever."[34] Though initially enraged by this pronouncement,

[33] Thomson, 19.
[34] Davies, 146.

he had to admit the assessment's accuracy and returned the next day to Franck's classroom.

Why did this young aristocrat having education, money, social standing, and connections so brashly throw in his lot with a poorly known organist, failed prodigy, and essentially ignored composer? It is important to remember that Vincent d'Indy valued two things above all others; hard work and artistic expression and these characteristics best describe the life and work of César Franck. After failing as a prodigy, working in near anonymity and poverty for decades, Franck had persevered to become an instructor at the nation's finest music school. Furthermore, he was about to be recognized as one of France's great composers. Franck was the personification of hard work and humility.

Franck was relentless in his belief that a firm grounding in counterpoint led to structurally secure compositions while remaining musical and emotional first. Most alluring of all to d'Indy was Franck's humble deportment and deep empathy. His was not a one size fits all approach. Franck sought to provide a unique course of instruction tailored to each student's individual strengths and weaknesses.

The *other* teachers of composition at the Conservatoire were more interested in preparing their students to compete for the Prix de Rome. D'Indy felt, "They did not properly understand either their *art* or their *craft*."[35] Franck's strict but compassionate approach also mirrored his Grandmother's mentoring. Clearly d'Indy had found his Master and spent the rest of his life making sure the rest of world knew it.

His penchant for leadership, unflagging work ethic, and gift for administrative work helped d'Indy quickly ensconce himself in the heart of La Bande à Franck. Prior to the premiere of Franck's oratorio *La Rédemption* the first rehearsal went terribly awry

[35] Thomson, 23.

due to countless mistakes in the orchestral parts. Though relatively new to the group d'Indy spearheaded the effort to rewrite all of the parts, aided by Duparc and Benoît, in two nights and one day just in time for next rehearsal.

In addition to promoting Frank, d'Indy supported any music he found worthy. For instance, Georges Bizet enlisted him to play a harmonium backstage for Don Jose's unaccompanied Act II aria in *Carmen* because the tenor couldn't hold the pitch. D'Indy became increasingly involved with the Société Nationale de Musique working as unofficial joint secretary with Henri Duparc ensuring that all worthy music be heard, including foreign works. Composers revered by the public and the musical elite routinely disappointed him when they did not match the guileless sincerity of Pére Franck. Once, when Vincent praised Massenet's recent opera as divinely inspired, Massenet replied. "Oh, so you think a lot of all these sanctimonious ditties, but I don't take them seriously… the public likes them, and we must always keep in touch with the public."[36]

D'Indy was increasingly frustrated with certain member's displeasure with the promotion of foreign works. D'indy led the effort forcing Bussine and Saint-Saëns to resign and install Franck as president. Franck's subsequent death and Duparc's withdrawal from composition further cemented d'Indy as true head of the group.

The death of César Franck marked a major moment of transition for all of La Bande à Franck. Without Pater Seraphicus the younger students needed a guiding hand more than ever. The dominant d'Indy filled the void. In 1887, outraged when Franck was awarded the *Legion d'Honneur* as an organist and not a composer, D'Indy founded

[36] Thomson, 34.

an organization whose sole purpose was to raise public awareness of Franck's compositions, underwriting a gala all-Franck concert.

While d'Indy worked tirelessly to cement Franck's legacy another Franckiste struck out in his own unique direction. A few months before Franck's death, Charles Bordes had taken a new position at the parish of St. Gervais in Paris. Bordes had always fascinated by the music of the French and Italian renaissance had been encouraged to study it by Franck. In his new position, Bordes took it upon himself to restore this music to the Catholic liturgy. Within two years, Bordes' professional choir, *Les chanteurs des St. Gervais*, presented a Holy Week program consisting entirely of music by Palestrina, Victoria, Gallus, Josquin, and other polyphonic luminaries. It was a huge success and attracted the artistic elite from across Paris. Debussy and Mallarmé made a point of attending many of the services. The congregation enjoyed the musical change but were more than a little disturbed by these artistic interlopers, who, although maintaining complete silence throughout the service sat with their backs to the altar![37] With the addition of a published journal, Bordes had reinstated Renaissance music to popularity

Vincent d'Indy meanwhile had made his own attempt to affect a change in the Parisian musical climate. In 1892 a commission had been formed to consider making changes to the curriculum at the Paris Conservatoire. D'Indy's views are well documented. He wrote that it did, "not concern itself any longer with the intelligence of the students, as if they were merely machines for producing notes… The professors…have nothing to do with *Art*."[38] D'Indy's proposal suggested a more rigorous, two part curriculum be instituted. The first part focused on technical facility.

[37] Thomson, 81.
[38] Thomson, 72.

The second, "an artistic education designed to inculcate a complete knowledge of the literature…the sense of style…and the kind of interpretation it called for."[39] Though the committee acknowledged the inherent value in his ideas, they declined to adopt d'Indy's suggestions. Denied his new curriculum at the Conservatoire, d'Indy turned elsewhere to introduce his plan.

Inspired by Bordes' incredible success, d'Indy and another former Franckiste, Alexandre Guilmant, joined forces with Bordes to found a society dedicated to the advancement of Renaissance music and a reinvigoration of the French sacred musical tradition. The original name was *La Société de propogande pour la Divulgation des Chefs-d'Oeuvres Religieux.*[40] Though descriptive, the name was too long and was shortened to the Schola Cantorum. This was d'Indy's opportunity to implement his progressive educational philosophy. Although offered a post at the Conservatoire as a professor of composition (something never offered to Franck), d'Indy declined, unable to serve an institution not promoting his personal agenda. As a result, he was free to invest all of his impressive personal resources in the Schola Cantorum.

They opened their doors in 1896 to just 10 students. From 1896-1900 the school operated out of a church and grew steadily in class size and reputation. Thanks to the fund raising efforts of *Les Chanteurs des St. Gervais* and a large grant from the d'Indy family, the school moved to a more spacious location in 1900. The Schola Cantorum was soon at the height of its success and influence. D'Indy gave a speech at the opening of the new building entitled, "A School of Music Responding to Modern Needs".[41] In it, he outlined his artistic and pedagogical agenda. "Art is not a metier': there is more to being

[39] Thomson, 83.
[40] Davies, 285.
[41] Thomson, 118.

a musician than merely playing an instrument or writing a fugue…correctly… where metier ends, art begins."[42] Just as Franck before him, d'Indy fervently believed that technique should always serve the art.

In accordance with Franck's conviction that music should be for all willing to work hard and well, along with d'Indy's own hatred of bureaucracy, the Schola possessed none of the Conservatoire's regulations regarding age, gender, and nationality. If a student passed the entrance exam, he was admitted. This made the Schola especially appealing to non-traditional students, those getting a late start, or from another country. One such student was Albert Roussel.

As a young man Roussel enlisted in the Navy. During his time at sea he was privileged to see much of the world, and this worldliness formed the core of his compositional approach. Roussel came to the Schola in 1898 and committed to complete the entire nine-year program although he was almost 30. At that age the Conservatoire would have been regarded him a failure for not already achieving success. His military discipline and self-reliance made him ideally suited to d'Indy's brand of instruction, and Roussel flourished. In 1904, having mastered the technical portion of his instruction, Roussel was made professor of Counterpoint.

Taking his time to discover his own style, Roussel was drawn to a middle ground. His mature style incorporated both the methodic and structural approach of the Schola and the sensual beauty of the impressionist aesthetic, adapting older methods for a new century. No less an artist than the noted interpreter of Mélodie, Clair Croiza, described his art as being:

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[42] Ibid.

> Melancholy, without drama—moderation, never a sentimental "effect", never any of that excess which, in life as in art, so often destroys within ourselves every trace of sensitivity.[43]

His early mélodie, *Le jardin mouillé* is a particularly shining example. A setting of the poetry of Henri de Régnier, the piano evokes the quiet magic of rain falling on a leafy garden drawing on impressionistic coloring coupled with complex rhythmic structure.

While teaching at the Schola Cantorum, Roussel had the fortune of having Erik Satie enroll in his counterpoint class in 1905. Satie was yet another older student drawn to the Schola in the hopes of making a fresh start. Satie however, had already had a far more interesting musical life than Roussel. Satie enrolled at the Conservatoire in the 1880's and had earned the reputation for being lazy, untalented, and difficult to work with. Despite trying twice to matriculate, Satie was a terrible match for the Conservatoire. Afterward Satie found himself in the musical wilderness, and made the best of his situation. He played piano nightly at the Chat Noir, a popular cabaret in Montmartre. He published dozens of popular cabaret style songs including *Je te veux, La diva de l'empire,* and *Tendrement*. Eventually more ambitious works for piano (though still small) *Gymnopédies,* helped to bring him more serious musical attention. His close friend, the poet Contamine de Latour, summed up his situation at the time:

> His musical education was extremely incomplete. But he put together the things he had and manufactured from them a formula of his own, maintaining that all other techniques were non-existent and even a barrier to true musical expression. He was in the position of a man who knows only thirteen letters of the alphabet and decides to create a new literature using only these, rather than admit his own insufficiency. For sheer bravado, it was unparalleled at the time.[44]

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[43] Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes, *A French Song Companion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 438.
[44] Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter, *French music since Berlioz* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 225.

Finally, Satie decided, in order to be more than just a fringe element he would need to learn the rest of his musical alphabet.

Satie did not waste his time at the Schola Cantorum. He was awarded a diploma for his work in counterpoint in 1908 with the rarely bestowed *très bien* distinction. He continued to study orchestration and composition with d'Indy until 1912. While Satie's style was always unique, his study in counterpoint and other formal techniques is widely credited with streamlining his music and making it more linear. Far more important than the Schola Cantorum's influence on his musical style, was Satie's newfound confidence.

The years immediately after leaving the Schola, 1915-1925, proved to be the most successful and musically creative period of his life. Always one to push the boundaries of respectability in the art world, Satie was one of the first to flock to the Cubist painters. Picasso in particular was one of his favorites. His ballet *Parade*, staged by Diaghilev's Ballet Russe in 1917, used sets and costumes designed by the great artist and caused quite the sensation.

Just as Franck, d'Indy, and Roussel before him, Satie now sought to share his hard won wisdom and musical knowledge. Given his youthful and often intentionally provocative artistic attitude, he was popular among younger composers and cultivated these relationships. He formed a group he called *Les Nouveaux Jeunes* including Poulenc, Taillefaire, Durey, and Honnegger. He wrote there would be, "No subscription; No rules; No committee: Just – *Us*."[45]

Jean Cocteau, another painter of the modern school who had collaborated with Satie and Picasso on *Parade* and other projects, saw the potential of the six young artists Satie had rather loosely brought together. Capitalizing on his position as columnist of a

[45] Smith, 233.

weekly newspaper, Cocteau publicly christened Satie's young friends as *Les Six* in an article titled *Les Cinq Russes, Les Six Française et Erik Satie* on January 16th, 1920. Auric, Durey, Taillefaire, Honnegger, Milhaud, and Poulenc while not really connected musically in any way, had appeared together on several concerts (organized largely by Cocteau and/or Satie) and ran in the same artistic circle. The group did not last long as a functioning musical organization. They published only one collective work together, the *Album des* 6. Though he possessed the Schola's collaborative spirit, Satie had neither the patience of Franck, nor the administrative capacity of d'Indy. As a result all of Satie's cooperative were short lived.

Ironically, its insistence on individual artistic expression is what hastened the demise of the Franckiste movement. While Vincent d'Indy was compassionate and thoughtful when engaging with students individually his archconservative values and dogmatic religious faith brooked no compromise. His love of César Franck and his desire to promote the Franckiste ideal was laudable, but his tendency to make a saint of the humble organist from Liège alienated many. Passages from d'Indy's biography on Franck which compared his work to Gothic cathedrals, "His work, like that of the poets in stone… is all a splendid harmony and a mystic purity …Franck cannot get away from this angelic conception" and posited divine inspiration, "…a seraph sent from heaven to instruct…in the eternal verities"[46] may have rung true for the most devoted of Franck's students, but caused the public to dismiss d'Indy as an overzealous sycophant. More damaging still to the Schola, was d'Indy's anti-Semitism. Though he maintained life long friendships with Jewish colleagues like Paul Dukas and Octave Maus (who was a

[46] Thomson, 152.

great supporter of Franck'), he published several overtly anti-Semitic articles. Even his opening address to the Schola Cantorum in 1900 on the occasion of the opening of their new building contained the remark, "Art is not essentially a profitable occupation: Leave such business to the Jews with whom music is encumbered!"[47].

As d'Indy and the Schola Cantorum grew older they began to lose relevance. Reforms instituted at the Conservatoire by Fauré beginning in 1904, which took their cue primarily from the Schola Cantorum's model, brought the Conservatoire into line with modern educational thought. This meant that the Schola Cantorum was no longer a progressive revolutionary. In fact, it had come to be seen by many as a home for religious and political right-wingers. While this was not the whole truth, the strict academic requirements that had led to such ground breaking educational reforms now stifled the creativity of many of the students it had been created to help. Albert Roussel left the school in 1914 as his musical style began to drift toward a more lush tonal landscape. Satie left in 1915 to pursue his own idiosyncratic artistic career. Several other talented students who came to the school to secure their compositional technique, notably Varèse and Sévérac, moved on when it became clear that the next step in their artistic journey required a less prescriptive approach. And yet, The Schola Cantorum is still a thriving music school today with nearly one thousand students studying in fifty disciplines. It stands as an enduring monument to all those who had a hand in its creation, and who have kept it running for more than a century. It is fitting that an examination of the life, works, and influence of César Franck should end with a still thriving school of music as its closing statement.

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[47] Thomson, 118.

Conclusion

When Franck arrived in Paris in 1835 it was in many ways the cultural center of Europe. Many of the finest artists in the world made their way there to seek the financial and social rewards that could be found in the City of Light. The lavish rewards bestowed upon the chosen few came with a cost however. For homegrown musicians, the emphasis placed on technical facility solely for commercial success left many otherwise worthy musicians on the outside looking in. These extreme conditions were the cause of his initial failure as a concert pianist and young composer. Yet, these very same conditions were the crucible in which Franck forged his unique combination of scholarly rigor, deep empathy, and artistic conviction.

It was Liszt's conviction that what Franck needed was, "to find himself a time and place"[48]. Though it took him the better part of his life to find it, the place Franck created for himself and others had a profound effect. Accounting for his music, that of his students, Duparc, Chausson, d'Indy, Lekeu, Castillon, Tournemire, Magnard, and those so aided by the Schola Cantorum, Roussel, Satie, Sévérac, and Varèse, the output is staggering. The influence Franck, and in turn his students, had on the course of French music was an important one, if more subtle than that of Debussy or Ravel. What the Franck school demonstrated was the importance and effectiveness of the individual human experience as a source of artistic expression. Franck's years of dedication to the message over the medium, hard thoughtful work, and artistic vision grounded in

[48] Stove, 60-61.

compassion and humility created an art and a legacy few can match. It is a message that rings as true now in the 21st century as it did for those first students of Franck's in the 19th and one of enduring inspiration for those musicians lucky enough to call themselves teachers.

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