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**A study of the performance style of Jane Bathori and other  
early interpreters of the solo vocal music of Debussy and Ravel**

**Haggans, Kathryn Cecile Taylor, A.Mus.D.**

**The University of Arizona, 1993**

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**A STUDY OF THE PERFORMANCE STYLE  
OF JANE BATHORI AND OTHER EARLY INTERPRETERS  
OF THE SOLO VOCAL MUSIC OF DEBUSSY AND RAVEL**

by

Kathryn Cecile Taylor Haggans

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the document prepared by Kathryn Cecile Taylor Haggans entitled A Study of the Performance Style of Jane Bathori and Other Early Interpreters of the Solo Vocal Music of Debussy and Ravel

and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

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SIGNED

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kelley Taylor Haggard", written over a horizontal line.

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## ABSTRACT

This study resulted from years of interest in the singer Jane Bathori and from a desire to blend the contrasting disciplines of scholarship and musicianship. To that end, this document is a study of music and performing style from the standpoint of an artist who participated in the early performances of selected literature. Bathori is unique in at least two aspects. She sang the first performances of well over one hundred *mélodies*, by more than forty different composers, and she is the author of a book about vocal interpretation, Sur l'interprétation des mélodies de Claude Debussy, 1953. This study seeks to examine her work and that of three of her singer colleagues from the standpoint of her book, appearing in its first translation into English in this document.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Intent and Scope of the Study**

The purpose of this study has been to examine through the prism of a contemporaneous document our assumptions about the performing style of selected early singers of the solo vocal music of Debussy and Ravel. Musical scores provide us the essential information and, thanks to exceptionally detailed expressive markings in their scores, we know a great deal about what Debussy and Ravel wanted to hear in performances of their music. Debussy was also an essayist, and both composers have been the subjects of extensive scholarly studies. Less explored resources on this music include writings and recordings by artists who collaborated with them in early performances of their works. This study is therefore focused on one document, Sur l'interprétation des mélodies de Claude Debussy, by the early twentieth-century French singer Jane Bathori.<sup>1</sup> A translation into English of Bathori's manual is published as part of this document and is the only such translation known.

The study also summarizes a comparison of selected sound recordings of four singers who collaborated with Debussy, Ravel and many of their contemporaries. The use of these recordings was a central portion of the Lecture-Recital presentation of this document. Criteria for selection of these singers were twofold: 1) each sang at least one work by either Debussy or Ravel in a first performance, and 2) recordings were available of all four, some of which include either Debussy or Ravel accompanying. The four singers in this study are Jane Bathori (1877-1970), Mary Garden (1874-1967), Madeleine Grey (1897-1979), and Ninon Vallin (1886-1961).

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<sup>1</sup>Jane Bathori, Sur l'interprétation des mélodies de Claude Debussy, Paris: Les Editions ouvrières, 1953.

### Need for the Study

Jane Bathori's manual is among the first of its kind and is the only one written by an artist who collaborated directly with Debussy. The original French edition has not previously been published or translated into English. A similar source in French was Charles Panzera's 50 mélodies françaises: leçons de style et d'interprétation (Brussels, 1964). Panzera (1896-1976) was a baritone who studied at the Paris Conservatory, sang at the Opéra-Comique, and later taught in this country. His book is limited to a selection of literature by a variety of composers and does not focus exclusively on either Debussy or Ravel. Panzera is not known to have collaborated with either of those composers in any performances.

The most prominent English language source is Pierre Bernac's *The Interpretation of French Song* (New York, 1970). Bernac (1899-1979), a baritone, became famous through a long and distinguished career collaborating with Francis Poulenc. Hypothesizing on the role of the performer as one of many catalysts for a composer, Linda Cuneo-Laurent says of Bernac:

Likewise, the performer whose exceptional abilities inspire the composer to write for him is not necessarily a catalyst. He must intervene with the composer. The singer Pierre Bernac was such a performer in his association with Poulenc: not only was he the voice Poulenc had in mind for many of his *mélodies*, but he worked closely with the composer and provided a definitive interpretation in concerts with him.<sup>2</sup>

Such was Jane Bathori's role with many of Poulenc's older contemporaries. Bernac's book, though comprehensive and authoritative, represents a second-generation look, as it were, at performance styles of Poulenc's immediate predecessors.

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<sup>2</sup>Linda Cuneo-Laurent, "The Performer as Catalyst: The Role of the Singer Jane Bathori (1877-1970) in the Careers of Debussy, *Les Six*, and Their Contemporaries in Paris 1904-1926," diss., New York University, 1982, 175.

All four singers in this study, especially Jane Bathori, are distinguished by their musical collaborations with Debussy, Ravel and many of their colleagues, but Bathori is the only singer in the group to have published a book of this kind.<sup>3</sup> Treatises from many periods have informed musicians and musicologists on how music was performed and on the nature of the instruments used. Many of those historic treatises were written by singers -- from Caccini and Tosi to Garcia and Bernac. Bernac's book is and will likely remain a cardinal source for singers, teachers, accompanists and coaches in the performance of *mélodies*. Bathori's book is neither as well written nor as comprehensive as Bernac's, but she sang before he sang, and she published before he published.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This document is centered on Jane Bathori's book on Debussy's songs. A comprehensive study of all literature about performing practice of the period has not been attempted, nor have all contemporaneous singers been studied. The translation into English of Sur l'interprétation des mélodies de Claude Debussy will enhance, for those who do not speak or read French, other available sources on interpretation.

For the purposes of the Lecture-Recital portion of this doctoral project, selected recordings of the four singers named were used to demonstrate some performance principles. These demonstrations are discussed in a Chapter 4 of this document.

It is assumed that the reader will have knowledge about commonly used musical terms that are in either French or Italian. Lesser known terms, or ones which may have multiple meanings, are explained in the text or in footnotes. The opening portion of

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<sup>3</sup>Mary Garden, with Louis Biancolli, published her memoirs, Mary Garden's Story, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the methodology used in translating Jane Bathori's book and includes a discussion of her credentials as an author.

### **Source of materials and scores and recordings**

The primary document of this study is Sur l'interprétation des mélodies de Claude Debussy, published in 1953 by Jane Bathori, translated into English in Chapter 3 of this document. The musical works studied and performed for the recital portion of this project, *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, settings by Debussy and Ravel, are in published editions by Durand. Printed excerpts from Debussy's songs are from the International edition of Debussy's *mélodies*, or from Durand editions. Excerpts of music by other composers are printed from standard editions as noted. The *mélodies* of neither Debussy nor Ravel are yet available in a complete works edition.

Recordings used in the lecture are from archival discs, dating from as early as 1904 and as late as the 1930s. They are Columbia FCX 50030, recorded between 1929 and 1931, Jane Bathori, soprano, accompanied by Darius Milhaud and Jane Bathori (Bathori was famous for accompanying herself in concert); IRCC 106 and 107, Mary Garden, soprano, accompanied by Claude Debussy; Polydor 561075 and 561076, Madeleine Grey, mezzo-soprano, accompanied by Maurice Ravel; Ninon Vallin, source unknown. I am grateful to Mr. David Norbeck of Woodstock, New York, who was most generous in sharing his personal collection of recordings with me.

## BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PERFORMING ARTISTS

### Jane Bathori

Jane Bathori was born Jeanne-Marie Berthier in Paris on June 14, 1877. She died there, more than 90 years later, on January 21, 1970. From 1898 and through the 1930s she was active as a performer and entrepreneur, championing the works of her contemporaries in a remarkable series of collaborations documented in the dissertation by Cuneo-Laurent. She continued to be a teacher, coach, entrepreneur and writer, in France and abroad until well into the 1950s. Her book, Sur l'interprétation des mélodies de Claude Debussy, was published in 1953, representing more than fifty years of her experience with the *mélodie*.

The collaborative nature of her experience is the hallmark of a career in which she helped to promote and define a genre of French *mélodies* and chamber music that is quite distinct from its German counterpart or from the operatic ideal. She sang the first performances of well over one hundred *mélodies* by more than forty composers. That statistic is one measure of her importance as an artist. Indeed, if there were no other evidence of Bathori's colleagues' esteem for her, it might be sufficient to point out that she is one of only two singers (Madeleine Grey was the other) who wrote an article in a collection commemorating Ravel in 1938.<sup>4</sup> Further, she is one of less than a dozen singers represented in a monument to Debussy's memory in the Bois de Boulogne.<sup>5</sup>

Bathori was not from a privileged family, and there is no evidence to suggest that she was exceptionally well educated. Her musical training began early, however, as she

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<sup>4</sup>Jane Bathori, "Souvenir," special ed. Revue Musicale, ed. Henri Prunières, 1938:372.

<sup>5</sup>Cuneo-Laurent, 41. Other singers are those from the first cast of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, including Mary Garden of course. Ninon Vallin is also represented. She sang the first performance of Debussy's *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* and *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*.

quickly memorized the songs her mother sang to her. At age 10, she began piano lessons with Hortense Parent, who eventually encouraged her to consider a performing career. Parent (1837-1929) was a Paris Conservatory student from 1853-1857 who later organized seminars on piano pedagogy. She eventually published five books on piano literature and solfège, a significant precedent for Bathori's own later publications, which include one book on literature and one on vocal pedagogy. Bathori's reminiscences and some personal papers suggest that she decided that her hands were not big enough for concert repertoire, so she eventually abandoned the piano in order to study singing.<sup>6</sup>

Her voice teacher, Mme. Brunet-Lafleur, was also the wife of Charles Lamoureux, conductor of the Conservatory Concerts in 1872-73. Mme. Brunet-Lafleur was an heiress whose money evidently made possible several of Lamoureux' projects, including the *Concerts Lamoureux*.<sup>7</sup> Lamoureux was a particular champion of Wagner and of new music in general. Slonimsky says:

More than any other French musician, Lamoureux educated Parisians to appreciate Wagner; he was responsible not only for highly competent performances of classical masterpieces, but also for presentation of compositions of his contemporaries.<sup>8</sup>

In still further collaboration with this musical family, Bathori sang in the chorus for Conservatory concerts under the direction Camille Chéviard, the son-in-law of

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<sup>6</sup>Cunco-Laurent, 9. Cunco-Laurent's conclusion is based on her interviews with Bathori's long-time companion, Andrée Tainsy, and on Bathori's private papers. Ultimately Bathori made a similarly practical conclusion about her vocal potential. This decision led her away from operatic literature and into the recital and chamber literature of her contemporaries.

<sup>7</sup>Other Lamoureux projects include the 1873 institution of the Sacred Harmonic Society in London for the performance of oratorios by Bach, Handel, Gounod and Massenet. The *Société de Nouveaux Concerts* (also known as *Concerts Lamoureux*) were established in 1881, for the presentation in Paris of new music. According to the *Dictionnaire de la Musique*, it was partly due to the strength of his wife's wealth that he was able to stand the hostility to Wagner's music prevalent in Paris at the time.

<sup>8</sup>Nicolas Slonimsky, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 7th edition, New York: Schirmer Books, 1984.

Lamoureux. She was thus provided early exposure to some of the most prominent musicians at the Conservatory, as well as lessons with Mme. Lamoureux. At the Conservatory, Jane Bathori met some of the most influential of the musicians and composers with whom she worked throughout her life.

In 1898, Bathori sang her debut in Paris in a recital of songs accompanied by composer Reynaldo Hahn. At or near that time, she was heard by her next teacher, Emile Engel.<sup>9</sup> Engel was impressed, offering to teach and sponsor her. Later they were married and presented many recitals together in Paris and Brussels. Not as notable as his wife eventually became, he is also one of Ravel's dedicatees in the *Histoires naturelles*.<sup>10</sup> Engel was 36 years older than Bathori and ironically, after their eventual divorce, he married another, even younger student. In the meantime, they collaborated in a series of concerts and recitals and it may be that he was partly responsible for her interest in new music.<sup>11</sup>

Another hypothesis includes the likely influence of the Lamoureux family, in particular, and of Bathori's fellow musicians at the Conservatory. By 1898, Bathori was working with some of the most important musicians in Paris -- including Lamoureux, Reynaldo Hahn, and Maurice Ravel. She was aware of the potential of such relationships, saying later, ". . . I have always felt that one has not the right to ignore the works of one's time, literary as well as musical . . ." <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Engel's dates are unknown. He does not appear in Baker's Biographical Dictionary or New Grove's Encyclopedia.

<sup>10</sup>The fourth song, *Le Martin-Pêcheur*, is dedicated to Engel. The first song, *Le Paon*, is dedicated to Madame Jane Bathori, whose name appears just under the main title of the work in the Durand edition.

<sup>11</sup>Cuneo-Laurent, 9.

<sup>12</sup>Cuneo-Laurent, 12, quoting from "Entretiens avec Jane Bathori," Radio Lausanne, interviewed by Stéphane Audel.

Jane Bathori was barely 21 years old in 1898 when she made her Parisian debut singing songs of Reynaldo Hahn, accompanied by the composer. Hahn was also a product of the Conservatory, where he studied theory and composition, and moreover was a singer in his own right. The year 1898 was truly a landmark one for Bathori as it was also when she met Maurice Ravel at the Conservatory. She lovingly recalled this meeting in the "Souvenir" article of 1938.

Ravel was then a student of Gabriel Fauré and was introduced to me by a mutual friend. I see him still with his little Basque-like goatee, his dark eyes sparkling with spirit, his smile knowing and paradoxical. He spoke of his composition class and mostly of Claude Debussy who then occupied a great place in the minds of the young. He gave me himself the first edition of *Proses lyriques* with that cover of green drawings on a white background which seemed to me then the height of modernism. It was my first contact with that music which I would know and love so much as a consequence.<sup>13</sup>

Given the extent of her activity at the Conservatory and her work with other composers, it is difficult to believe that the music of Debussy was really so completely new to her, but she reiterates the importance of this incident in her book.

I had never read anything like them and suddenly entered an atmosphere for me of such new harmonies, already foreshadowing the great pleasure I would have in working to know this music better, to penetrate its feeling, essence and subtle intelligence.<sup>14</sup>

Bathori made her operatic debut in Nantes in 1900. Of this period, Cuneo-Laurent says, "She was known and respected as an opera singer of light mezzo-soprano roles . . ."

In some references Bathori is referred to as a mezzo-soprano, but other authors call her a

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<sup>13</sup>Bathori, "Souvenir," 371. "Ravel était alors élève de Gabriel Fauré et me fut présenté par un ami commun. Je le vois encore avec sa petite barbiche à la mode basque, ses yeux noirs pétillants d'esprit, son sourire fin et paradoxal. Il parlait de la classe de Composition et surtout de Claude Debussy qui occupait alors une grande place dans l'esprit des Jeunes. Il me prêta même les *Proses Lyriques* (première édition) avec cette couverture aux dessins verts sur fond blanc qui me paraissait alors le summum du modernisme. Ce fut mon premier contact avec cette musique que je devais tant connaître et aimer par la suite."

<sup>14</sup>Bathori, *Sur l'interprétation des mélodies de Claude Debussy*, 7. "Je n'avais jamais rien lu de pareil et j'entrai de suite dans cette atmosphère d'harmonies si nouvelles pour moi, pressentant déjà tout le plaisir que j'aurais à travailler, à connaître mieux cette musique, à en pénétrer le sens, la raison d'être et la subtile intelligence." Also, see page 42 of this paper for the context of this quote.

soprano. Her debut roles in Nantes do little to clarify, including as they do such soprano roles as Micaela in *Carmen*. Bathori also sang in *Mignon*, *La Fille du Régiment*, *Hänsel and Gretel*, although the specific roles are not known. In 1902 Toscanini engaged her to sing in the première of *Germania*, by Alberto Franchetti, with Enrico Caruso at La Scala.<sup>15</sup> This role is the only one found in her repertoire which actually calls for a mezzo.

Bathori also sang Concepcion from Ravel's *L'Heure espagnole*. This role, though labelled soprano in the score, is sung today by mezzos. Bathori recalls several occasions when she worked on Concepcion:

I thought I had finished with first performances of Ravel when, in 1932, he asked me to create in Buenos Aires, at the Théâtre Colon, *L'Heure Espagnole*, already programmed several times, but without the necessary French elements. It was for me an intense joy to play this work which I sang several times, in audition at the Opéra-Comique, [and] excerpted at the Vieux-Colombier during the war . . .<sup>16</sup>

Bathori eagerly hoped to replace Mary Garden in the role of Mélisande. She studied the role, got an audition at the Opéra-Comique but was superseded by the producer's wife, who also wanted the part. Such was Bathori's desire for the job that she even wrote to Debussy to intercede in her behalf but was unsuccessful. His letter read, in part:

I remain convinced that your fine talent and confident musicianship give you the right to believe that you would present an original creation of the role . . . but again, there is nothing I can do at the Opéra-Comique . . .<sup>17</sup>

Mélisande has proven to be a role for modern lyric mezzo-sopranos, most notably Frederica von Stade. Garden was indisputably a soprano, as was Maggie Teyte, a memorable successor in the role.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>For a list of operas Bathori sang, see Cuneo-Laurent, 12.

<sup>16</sup>Bathori, "Souvenir," 372.

<sup>17</sup>Cuneo-Laurent, 33. The letter is also quoted fully in *Debussy Letters*, ed. François Lesure.

<sup>18</sup>Maggie Teyte, 1888-1976, English soprano. See page 20 for Debussy's opinion of Miss Teyte.

The solo vocal literature in Bathori's repertoire is also quite diverse, if not contradictory. Calling Debussy's *Chansons de Bilitis* Bathori's signature work, Cuneo-Laurent says it was ". . . associated with her perhaps more than any other in her vast repertoire."<sup>19</sup> This assertion is confirmed by Darius Milhaud's insistence that Bathori include this work in recordings she made in 1929-1930. The work is equally at home, however, with either soprano or mezzo-soprano.

As noted before, Bathori's solo vocal career included more than one hundred first performances of *mélodies* by more than forty composers. She sang dozens of new works by Milhaud, Ravel, and Roussel most notably, but only two of Debussy's works. Bathori sang the first performance of *Trois Chansons de France*, 1909, and of *Le Promenoir des deux amants*, 1911. She was enthusiastic about Debussy's *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, and reminisces in her book about having sung them for Debussy himself. (See pages 68-71 for her recollections and remarks on these songs.) Although Bathori did sing the first performance of Ravel's *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, Debussy's set was first sung by Ninon Vallin.

Other literature associated with Bathori includes Opus 8 (1908) of Albert Roussel. Three of the four songs in this opus are quite rangy, with high tessituras. The fourth song of the group, *Invocation*, is less demanding in range, quite sustained, and equally at home in the repertoire of either mezzo-sopranos or baritones. Excerpts from Roussel's Opus 8 and from Milhaud's Opus 233 (1942) follow.

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<sup>19</sup>Cuneo-Laurent, 34.



Milhaud's Opus 233, titled *Rêves*, was dedicated to Bathori. He wrote to her affectionately, "How I wish I could read them [*Rêves*] through with you!"<sup>20</sup> Although it is unlikely she ever actually performed these songs, written in 1942 when she was in her 60s, it is clear that Milhaud was thinking of her in conjunction with them. (The songs recall several motivic elements present in Milhaud's better known *Chansons de Ronsard*, written the year before in 1941.) Milhaud's affection and respect for her is evident in the dedication of *Rêves* to Bathori.

Bathori's greatest fame, however, resulted from her work with Maurice Ravel. Thanks to Ravel, her solo concert career began in earnest in 1904. On only a few hours' notice, she replaced soprano Jeane Hatto in a first performance of Ravel's *Asie*, the opening movement of *Shéhérazade*. This was the first of a series of historic performances she sang for Ravel. Bathori sang the notorious premiere in 1907 of *Histoires naturelles*, a work more familiarly sung today by baritones or, transposed, by basses. *Chansons madécasses* were also given their first performance with Bathori singing, and chamber ensemble conducted by Ingelbrecht in 1926. Bathori also sang the version for piano accompaniment, with Ravel. After Ravel's death in 1937, Bathori (and Madeleine Grey) wrote articles for the Memorial Edition issued by the *Revue Musicale* in 1938. Tellingly, given the extent and somewhat historic nature of her experience with Ravel versus her fascination with Debussy, she says this about their long collaboration:

I was destined, you might say, for the first performances of Ravel's songs, as either he chose me for that so often, or circumstances at the last moment constrained him to call for me.

That she gave a performance of a brand new piece on such short notice is testament to her ability to learn quickly, and *Asie* is still another work sung by both soprano and

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<sup>20</sup>This (and other correspondence between Milhaud and Bathori) quoted in Cunco-Laurent, 159-160.

mezzo. Further, three historic recordings of the work were made by women, in 1931 and 1939, all performances by sopranos.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps neither the term soprano nor mezzo sufficiently describes a career which ultimately abandoned more expansive operatic roles for the intimacy of the salon and, in particular, the modern French art song. Singers, naturally, sing the literature which best suits them. Bathori sang a wide variety of literature, some suited to a soprano, other works better for a mezzo; and, she was not the first to capitalize on her opportunities rather than on a strict voice type. One author characterized her as intrepid. It is tempting to conclude that Bathori simply summed up her strengths and weaknesses, much in the practical manner she used when abandoning hopes of a career as a concert pianist. The onset of World War I may have contributed to her decision to abandon an operatic career,<sup>22</sup> but Bathori may have decided that she lacked the vocal amplitude for a career on the stage. What she did have was an especially keen interest in new music, thanks perhaps to her early work with Mme. Brunet-Lafleur, the Lamoureux family and others at the Conservatoire. Her musicianship was more than enough to enable her to learn quickly and perform accurately. Her pianistic skills were not wasted either. In what we would regard today as highly unconventional style, Bathori was renowned for accompanying herself in concert. She was also well known for her sensitive accompaniment of other artists. Her remarkable record of collaborations with so many composers of the period surely testifies to more than merely one singer's willingness and availability, as one author hypothesizes.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975) 253. The singers were Suzanne Cesbron-Viscure and Marcelle Gérard (1929) and Rose Walter (1931).

<sup>22</sup>Cunéo-Laurent, 12.

<sup>23</sup>André Tubeuf, "Requirements for Interpreting Ravel's Songs," *Avant Scène Opéra* 127 (1990): 134. He says, "Mmes. Madeleine Grey and Marcelle Gérard created important vocal works of Ravel; was this preference of predestination? Or, more simply (but no less honorably), was it availability?" Tubeuf is no

Bathori was destined to make her singing career with Ravel while evidently preferring Debussy's music, which intrigued and occupied her for more than half a century.<sup>24</sup> Given the respective numbers of first performances -- two solo works of Debussy versus six of Ravel -- it is ironic that Bathori didn't write on both composers.

Cuneo-Laurent says:

It is to Bathori's credit that she responded immediately to the beauty of Ravel's music. From long rehearsals and many performances with the composer she learned the interpretation he sought, the points he stressed. It is unfortunate that . . . she did not follow her pamphlet on the interpretation of Debussy's songs with one on Ravel's.<sup>25</sup>

### **Mary Garden**

Mary Garden was born in Aberdeen on 20 February 1874 and died in Inverurie, Scotland, on 3 January 1967. From Scotland her family emigrated to the United States, where Mary grew up on the East Coast and in Chicago. That she was to become the supreme interpreter of *Mélisande*, that quintessentially French role, is somewhat ironic, especially in view of a letter written by Debussy. In 1908 he wrote, "She [Maggie Teyte] has a charming voice and a true feeling for the character of *Mélisande*. As you might expect, she also has the accent which the public of the Opéra-Comique has got so used to, thanks to Mademoiselle Garden."<sup>26</sup>

Garden's selection as *Mélisande*, in spite of her nationality and her inauthentic French accent was the more remarkable for a conflict it engendered between composer

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fan of Bathori's either and is the only writer encountered who disparages her work, referring to her as "la désastreuse Jane Bathori."

<sup>24</sup>Cuneo-Laurent, 27.

<sup>25</sup>Cuneo-Laurent, 26-27.

<sup>26</sup>quoted from *Debussy Letters*, selected and ed. François Lesure, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987) 191.

Debussy and librettist Maurice Maeterlinck -- a conflict not to be resolved for many years. The details of the understandings and misunderstandings which occurred between these two are recounted by Lockspeiser.<sup>27</sup> Maeterlinck had been assured that his mistress, Georgette Leblanc, would be given the part of Mélisande. Debussy wanted Mary Garden and was supported by Albert Carré, producer at the Opéra-Comique. That Mlle. Leblanc was not cast became such a hot issue that Maeterlinck even began practicing target shooting, in preparation for a duel which fortunately never materialized. Maeterlinck subsequently refused to see *Pelléas et Mélisande* at all during Debussy's lifetime. It was not until 1920, sixteen years after the premiere of the work and two years after Debussy's death, when Maeterlinck finally attended a performance in New York. Mary Garden sang the part of Mélisande, and Maeterlinck's letter to her is touching: "I had sworn to myself never to see the lyric drama *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Yesterday I violated my vow and I am a happy man. For the first time I have entirely understood my own play, and because of you."<sup>28</sup>

Garden knew Debussy only briefly, from 1902 to 1904, the time encompassing the intense preparations for the opening of *Pelléas*, and near the time of his tumultuous marriage problems. She continued to sing Mélisande until 1908 but declares in her autobiography that she absolutely severed her personal relationship with him when he left his wife, Lily, for Emma Bardac. Their professional collaboration was brief, and some of Garden's memories may be suspect.<sup>29</sup> There is a single historic sound recording of her singing with Debussy accompanying. It was made in 1904, in a recording session that

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<sup>27</sup> Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

<sup>28</sup> Lockspeiser, 201. See Chapter 18 for more on the production of the opera.

<sup>29</sup> Garden and Biancolli. On pages 77-81, Garden recalls Debussy making a passionate declaration of love to her, while he and Lily were visiting. There is no other evidence to support this event ever having occurred.

Garden recalled as being "dreadful." In recognition of the recording's documentary value however, Mary Garden said:

I can think of only one value . . . People have a chance to hear Debussy at the piano, and the women who sing *Mélisande* should listen to those disks over and over again. For they would then understand the tempo to take. Otherwise, those disks are worthless. Debussy didn't enjoy doing them very much.<sup>30</sup>

Debussy also recognized the documentary importance of sound recordings judging by this quote from *Gramophone Nouvelles*: "Like all who have heard it, I find the Gramophone a marvelous instrument. Moreover, it guarantees complete and scrupulous immortality to music, and in that, it is indispensable."<sup>31</sup>

There are numerous newspaper and periodical articles about the sometimes controversial Mary Garden and her work. She fussed at a young fan who regretted never having "heard" her sing *Mélisande*. She corrected him, saying it was necessary to "see" her *Mélisande*. Articles also document her opinion of her own vocalism. She neither claimed to have a voice such as Melba's or Calvé's, nor did she care to be compared to them. In a study of press clippings about her, John Pennino says:

For many, Garden and the phenomenal [Luisa] Tetrazzini were the Manhattan Opera Company. Tetrazzini, with her virtuoso command of the *bel canto* repertory, represented the old Italian school, and Garden, with her decidedly less brilliant instrument and technique but far superior interpretive abilities, the new French.<sup>32</sup> (underscoring added)

In addition to her ability to create a theatrical sensation, Mary Garden was also keenly aware of the power of the press and was never loath to exploit the both real and mythic flirtations for which she was known.

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<sup>30</sup>quoted in *The Genesis of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande**, by David A. Grayson (UMI Research Press: Ann Arbor, MI, 1986), 106. This passage is from Garden and Biancolli, 234.

<sup>31</sup>Grayson, 106.

<sup>32</sup>John Pennino, "Mary Garden and the American Press," *Opera Quarterly* 6 (1989): 70.

. . . her name would be linked romantically with some of the most influential men of the time, such as Albert Carré, the director of the Opéra-Comique, and André Messager, the composer and conductor. Garden, instead of suppressing these rumors, publicized them to the fullest . . . for years her romantic liaisons, whether real or fabricated, and her pronouncements on a wide range of subjects found their way into newspapers and magazines.<sup>33</sup>

Her autobiography is peppered with hints of such romantic vignettes, including her claim that Debussy himself tried to make love to her in 1908. Indeed, her memoir exploits this aspect of her life beginning with her recollections of childhood.

Garden readily admits to being a recalcitrant student as a child, but one who was eager to show off. She was successful studying both violin and piano. In a youthful echo of her future as a siren, she describes her relationship with her piano teacher:

Some time after I gave up the violin I went back to Scotland for what was intended to be a brief visit. I remained four months, during which time I took up the piano, and that was a far more serious matter. To begin with, I promptly fell in love with my teacher, who was a man named Smith. To impress him, I used to work and work, often five hours a day, till everybody in the house was wild. But I was very much in love with my Mr. Smith, and my piano lessons continued.<sup>34</sup>

In 1890 at the age of 16, she was introduced to Mrs. Robinson Duff, who became her first voice teacher. Eventually Mrs. Duff chaperoned Mary to Paris, where she was sponsored by a wealthy American businessman and where she studied with Lucien Fugère, a baritone who had a career with the Opéra-Comique, and Trabadello. Garden was introduced to Mathilde Marchesi, celebrated teacher and singer, and had several lessons. In a contest of wills neither persuaded the other, and it was not a successful collaboration.<sup>35</sup> In view of her penchant for flirtation, maybe it isn't insignificant that Fugère and Trabadello

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<sup>33</sup>Pennino, 61.

<sup>34</sup>Garden and Biancolli, 6-7.

<sup>35</sup>Garden and Biancolli, 15-17.

were men while Marchesi was another strong-willed woman. While she was studying with Mrs. Duff, Garden was still a girl, impressionable and perhaps a bit more malleable.

Garden's career at the Opéra-Comique began when a fellow singer and friend, Sybil Sanderson, introduced her to Albert Carré, a producer, in 1900. Carré encouraged her to attend rehearsals of the then new opera, *Louise*, and she learned the part. When the original Louise, Marthe Riton, was unable to finish a performance, Mary Garden was called to sing the last two acts of *Louise* in a sensational Paris debut on 10 April 1900. In the autobiography, Garden paints an excessively colorful version of this incident, altering the date of the event to a fateful Friday the 13th and recalling her seat assignment in the house (as unofficial cover for the role) that evening as number 113.<sup>36</sup>

Rehearsals for *Pelléas et Mélisande* began in 1902. Carré arranged for each member of the cast to have individual coaching sessions with Debussy, after they had learned their roles. For her session Garden met Debussy, who was already waiting in a rehearsal room. He played piano and sang all the other parts while she rehearsed *Mélisande*. According to her, "he got up abruptly and left the room. I stayed there a little while and waited, quite bewildered. I had a feeling I had offended him in some mysterious way and began to prepare myself for the shock of not singing *Mélisande*." Later, she and Debussy met again in Carré's office where Debussy is reported to have "put up his hands, and said: '*Je n'ai rien à lui dire*. I have nothing to tell her.'"<sup>37</sup>

Garden also recalls Debussy's first advice to the cast of *Pelléas*: "Oubliez, je vous prie, que vous êtes chanteurs!" (Forget, I beg you, that you are singers!) Finally, after the successful opening of the opera, Debussy inscribed scores for the participants. In Mary Garden's he wrote, "To Mademoiselle M. Garden, In the future, others will sing

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<sup>36</sup>Garden and Biancolli, 29-30.

<sup>37</sup>Garden and Biancolli, 66-67.

Mélisande. You alone will remain forever the woman and the artist that I hardly dared hope for. Your grateful Claude Debussy, May 1902."<sup>38</sup>

Another of Debussy's tributes to Mary Garden appeared in a 1908 issue of Musica. It is the more compelling for two reasons. First, he and Garden had ceased to be personal friends in 1904 (because, as Garden claimed, he had left wife Lily for Mme. Bardac). Second, he had ceased regular journalistic writing some nine years before and only agreed to write four articles for which he selected four individuals to honor. They were, it is said, the four musicians he admired most: Jules Massenet, Charles Gounod, Jean-Philippe Rameau and Mary Garden.

And above all, Mélisande's voice, which I had dreamed of as being so tender - how was that going to turn out? Even the most beautiful voice in the world could have been quite antipathetic to the special feelings her character requires. . . . I met the boundless devotion of really great artists. Among them, one emerged as quite unique; I hardly had to speak a word to her as the character of Mélisande gradually took shape. . . . I awaited the performance in complete confidence, yet still curious.<sup>39</sup>

Given such admiration for her artistry, it is an amusing coincidence that Debussy's remark about Garden's inauthentic accent was in a 1908 letter addressed to Jane Bathori: "As you might expect, she also has the accent which the public of the Opéra-comique has got so used to, thanks to Mademoiselle Garden."<sup>40</sup>

It is a further irony that Garden had a later confrontation with Oscar Hammerstein over the casting for the production in New York. Hammerstein, who had come to Paris to preview *Pelléas et Mélisande*, wanted Garden for the role of Mélisande. She quizzed him about who would be playing the other roles. Hammerstein is said to have assured Garden

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<sup>38</sup>Grayson, 106.

<sup>39</sup>quoted from Debussy on Music: The Critical Writings of the Great French Composer Claude Debussy, coll. and intro. François Lesure, trans. and ed. Richard Langham Smith (New York: Knopf, 1977), 227.

<sup>40</sup>Lesure and Nichols, 191.

that she could count on all the singers he had in mind, but she tartly replied that she wouldn't " . . . sing Pelléas with anybody who isn't French, or, at least, in the French tradition." Eventually she got her way, as Hammerstein took the entire Opéra-Comique cast back to New York with him. It was this production that Maeterlinck subsequently saw and heard. It prompted the tribute quoted above (see page 21).

### Madeleine Grey

Madeleine Grey (1897-1979) possessed another apparently hybrid voice. Called soprano in both Baker's and New Grove, she is labeled a mezzo-soprano on at least two historic recordings.<sup>41</sup> Grey also gave a number of first performances, for Fauré, Ravel and Canteloube. For Ravel, Grey sang the premiere of the orchestrated version of *Deux mélodies hébraïques* in 1920. (The piano version was first given in 1914 by Mme Alvina-Alvi.) Although Bathori sang the first performance of *Chansons madécasses*, in 1926, they were recorded by Madeleine Grey with Ravel conducting in 1932. On this recording she is listed as a mezzo-soprano.

The erotic nature of Parny's poems makes them eminently suitable for a man, and it is odd that they began by being sung by women. Martial Singher claimed to have been the "first male singer to perform the three *Chansons madécasses*. . . in the spring of 1938 [actually 1939]."<sup>42</sup> Singher recalls asking Ravel if the texts were meant for a man, with Ravel replying that "he had had in mind a male voice when writing them, but that only women singers, with strong musical backgrounds had been interested in them."<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, the issue is further clouded by Ravel's inscription to Madeleine Grey on a photograph of himself. He wrote, "For Madeleine Grey, the perfect interpreter of the *Madécasses*. . ."<sup>44</sup>

This was not the only instance when Grey crossed musical gender lines, with impunity. In 1937, when already quite ill, Ravel coached Grey and her accompanist,

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<sup>41</sup>See Orenstein, Appendix B, 247-270, for a list of historic Ravel recordings, several of which include Madeleine Grey and Jane Bathori.

<sup>42</sup>Letter to Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, comp. and ed. by Arbie Orenstein (New York, Columbia University Press, 1990), 506-508.

<sup>43</sup>ibid, 507.

<sup>44</sup>ibid, 537.

Francis Poulenc, for a performance of *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*. Written for bass Chaliapin, recorded first in 1932 by baritone Martial Singher (in Ravel's presence), *Don Quichotte* is a work which Bernac, the baritone, says may "of course. . . only be sung by a baritone."<sup>45</sup> With only months to live Ravel seemed barely to have heard Grey and Poulenc perform. They were astounded that he rallied enough to scold them for having made a slight *rallentando* that was not in the score.<sup>46</sup>

Grey toured extensively with Ravel, appearing with him in concerts throughout Spain. She also sang in festivals in his honor in Paris and London. Her reminiscences about working with Ravel are published in the 1938 issue of La Revue Musicale and in Ravel Remembered by Roger Nichols.

### Ninon Vallin

Ninon Vallin (1886-1961) was another favorite soprano of Claude Debussy's. She sang the first performance in 1911 of *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* and the first performance of *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, with Debussy accompanying, in 1914. She had a very long career, beginning at the Opéra-Comique in 1914, and continuing well into the 1940s. In 1935, she recorded *Louise* in an historic recording that was supervised by Charpentier.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Bernac, 204.

<sup>46</sup>Roger Nichols, Ravel Remembered (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), 84-85. The reminiscence is from an unpublished interview with Madeleine Grey. She related another anecdote from this session with Ravel in "Souvenirs," La Revue Musicale, Dec. 1938.

<sup>47</sup>This recording has been recently reissued on compact disc by Nimbus Records, NI 7829, 1991.

Debussy is said to have particularly admired Vallin's voice for its "distinctive timbre -- cool, clear, with a very forward production and a faintly nasal resonance."<sup>48</sup> One writer lauds her light voice that "developed fullness of tone and security over a wide range . . . . an oxymoronic voice, bright but curiously veiled, light but with a lurking darkness."<sup>49</sup>

Although she sang several recitals with Debussy, there are unfortunately no recordings of them. Debussy's high regard for her singing, however, is quite clear in a letter to his friend and fellow composer André Caplet. Debussy wrote about a gala performance of his music in 1913:

. . . you would have been delighted with Mlle Vallin singing the *Proses lyriques* and especially *Le Promenoir des deux amants*. It was enough to make one weep - as your friend Pelléas says, more or less - I don't know where she finds that voice. It understands the curves which the music describes through the words . . . but it's utterly beautiful and very simple . . .<sup>50</sup>

There is a biography, Ninon Vallin: Princesse du chant, by Robert de Fragny.<sup>51</sup> It emphasizes her operatic career and unfortunately does not enlarge on her early collaborations with Claude Debussy. There are fairly extensive recordings of Vallin (including some with composer Joaquin Nin) that might make her a focus for another performance practice study.

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<sup>48</sup>New Grove Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians, ed. Stanley Sadie (New York: Macmillan, 1980), in article on Ninon Vallin by Martin Cooper.

<sup>49</sup>Albert Innaurato, "Those Demonic Divas," Opera News 57:4, 24.

<sup>50</sup>quoted in Debussy Letters, 274.

<sup>51</sup>Robert de Fragny, Ninon Vallin: Princesse du chant (Lyon: Editions & Imprimeries du Sud-est, 1963.)

## STUDY OF A PERFORMANCE MANUAL

"These nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century biographies . . . also evoke a sense of the period, *an intimacy with the attitudes and assumptions of their times.*"<sup>52</sup> (italics added.)

There may be little to add to the existing body of objective information about the performance style of this period. Fundamental to this paper is the assumption that there is nevertheless value in providing any appropriate context for evaluating our understanding of the literature and the aesthetic atmosphere from which it evolved. The quote above, not specifically germane to music or to Bathori's manual, sufficiently describes this reason for proceeding.

### **Methodology of the translation**

Just as two people reading the same article might conclude with contrasting interpretations, so similarly does translating a book require a series of choices about how to render some idiomatic expressions, or whether to let stand a word which two languages share, even if there are differences in connotation. I have tried to adhere to as literal a translation as possible, even preserving word order when possible. There are occasional sacrifices of absolute integrity of the text when it was necessary to untangle awkward syntax for the reader's sake, trying instead to convey meaning with similar English expressions. I have maintained the general structural and visual format of Bathori's book, with some exceptions.

When selected words in her text were printed in all upper-case letters for emphasis, they are printed in lower-case boldfaced. Bathori published all song text excerpts in italics,

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<sup>52</sup>Daniel Aaron, general editor, *American Men and Women of Letters Series*, in a prefatory note to Mark Twain: A Biography, Albert Bigelow Paine, reprinted by Chelsea House Publishers: New York, 1980.

and with European style punctuation («*Pénétrons bien notre amour*», for example). In this way, song texts were set off from the body of the text. In the translation, song texts appear in the original French, with single quotes to set them off from the body of the paper ('*Pénétrons bien notre amour*'). They are not printed in italics. No effort was made to translate the passages discussed as there are numerous sources for both literal and poetic translations of complete song texts, and it is assumed that the reader will have access to those.

When they occur as section headings, song titles appear exactly as they do in Bathori. In the text of her book, titles occur in quotes and not italicized («*En Sourdine*»). In the translation, song titles appear in italics only (*En Sourdine*). Where Bathori used Italian musical terms, they are left in Italian (*diminuendo*, *crescendo*). In the original, Italian dynamic markings appear either in quotes («*piano*»), or abbreviated and not in quotes (*pp*). For the sake of uniformity, I have substituted all such markings with the customary abbreviations in italics (*p*, *mf*, *f*, etc.).

When Bathori quotes tempo or other expressive markings from the music which are in French, they appear in quotes («*Triste et monotone*»). In the translation, these terms appear in italics (*Triste et monotone*). It is assumed that the reader will be acquainted with such terms, as with the commonly occurring Italian ones, and they are not translated.

Musical examples are copied directly from Bathori's text, and it is assumed that they were derived from her own scores. She refers only once to a specific edition, however, and that is a first edition of *Ariettes oubliées*. It is impossible to know for certain whether Bathori is referring to an 1888 or a 1903 edition. The 1888 edition, however, was published under the single word title, *Ariettes*, and that is the title Bathori uses. The 1903 edition was published under the more familiar title of *Ariettes oubliées*. Editor Sergius Kagen, in the 1961 International collection of Debussy songs, refers to "numerous

misprints contained in the original editions of Debussy's songs."<sup>53</sup> His note may help to explain some differences between Bathori's excerpts and their appearance in modern versions. Without a scholarly edition of the complete vocal works of Debussy, it is not possible to evaluate the source of misprints or misunderstandings. Such differences are discussed in Chapter 5 of this document.

### **Evaluating Jane Bathori's artistry and authority**

Bathori was often a chosen performer for Ravel, while Debussy was, at best, somewhat indifferent to her. Given this fairly limited experience with Debussy, why did she even presume to write this book and not a similar one on Ravel, with whom her work was so much more extensive? There are several possible reasons. First, Debussy's song output is far greater than Ravel's and will support the scrutiny. Second, as Cuneo-Laurent has pointed out, Bathori evidently preferred Debussy's music.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps her book illustrates that enduring regard. Further, publication was not at all unprecedented for Bathori, whose childhood piano teacher has been noted as the author of several books on piano literature and solfège. Finally, in 1923 Bathori herself published *Conseils sur le chant*, a somewhat conventional book on vocal technique.

Other clues about Bathori's motivation comes to us from *Sur l'interprétation des mélodies de Claude Debussy*. Darius Milhaud wrote the letter of preface in which his long and devoted friendship with Bathori is apparent. That letter also reflects their evidently mutual concern that it was important for her to share her experience with other singers. He says,

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<sup>53</sup>Sergius Kagen, ed. 43 Songs for Voice and Piano, by Claude Debussy (New York: International, 1961) editor's note.

<sup>54</sup>Cuneo-Laurent, 29. "All the evidence indicates that Bathori preferred Debussy's music to that of any other contemporary."

. . . The great and noble traditions of interpretation are dying, disappearing fast. That is why it is so important to be able to rely on your testimony and experience, you who had the great joy to create and, along with their composer, to interpret so many of the vocal works of our great Claude Debussy, our dear Claude de France.

Milhaud met Bathori in 1910, hearing her perform Debussy's *Chansons de Bilitis*.

It is possible he even heard the first performance of Ravel's Mallarmé songs, a performance which occurred in 1914. He recalls in his letter hearing her sing Debussy's Mallarmé songs in 1916, with the composer accompanying her.

In *Notes sans musique*, Milhaud recalls submitting songs to Bathori in the hopes that she would sing them. Evidently not knowing her sight-reading ability, he performed them for her, an anecdote he enjoyed telling later.<sup>55</sup> In any case, Bathori eventually gave the first performances of dozens of Milhaud's songs (seventeen separate opuses, each comprised of one or more songs). Further, Milhaud dedicated five of his works to Jane Bathori, including Op. 233, *Rêves*, a portion of which is included as an example in Chapter 2, page 17.<sup>56</sup>

Milhaud uses an interesting term to describe Bathori, "Quelle admirable cantatrice tu étais . . ." This is translated simply as, "What an incredible singer you were. . .", the word 'singer' failing to convey the broader meaning of the term *cantatrice*, however. Larousse de la musique indicates that this word implies not only a singer of professional status, who possesses a solid musical education, but also one who has attained a certain degree of celebrity.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Cuneo-Laurent, 78.

<sup>56</sup>See Chapter IX of Cuneo-Laurent's dissertation, 193-211, for a list of *mélodies* either dedicated to Bathori or which she sang for the first time. Cuneo-Laurent lists the Milhaud Op. 233, *Rêves*, as unpublished. It was published in Paris in 1946 by Heugel. The songs were sent to Bathori in 1942 from Milhaud's exile in California.

<sup>57</sup>Larousse de la musique: dictionnaire en 2 volumes, ed. Norbert Dufourcq, Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1957.

Another of Bathori's attributes highlighted by Milhaud is her modesty. He praises her for her pure style, clear diction and refined, inner charm.<sup>58</sup> Bathori's willingness to be so self-effacing in her performances may well be one quality which composers found so attractive in her. Without the distraction of a domineering artistic personality it may have been easier for them to focus on their music, which might naturally have been their first interest.

Bathori's artistry is not universally praised by either fellow artists or writers. Cuneo-Laurent discusses this 'simplicité', which we can equate with Milhaud's characterization of her "charme si discret et tellement intérieur", in a series of reminiscences and appraisals by Bathori's fellow singers and composers of the period.<sup>59</sup> 'Simplicité' has a connotation of naturalness and lack of artifice. The equivalent term in English more simply implies the absence of complexity. This is an important distinction to make if one is to begin to understand the qualities of Bathori which attracted so much attention from 1900 to 1930.

Some of Bathori's fellow singers chide her for a lack of theatricality. Significant among those is Pierre Bernac, twenty years her junior, and a collaborator with an equally younger group of composers. Bernac evidently respected her but found her not to be a particularly moving interpreter.<sup>60</sup> A most interesting remark comes from Madeleine Milhaud (the composer's wife), who said that "Croiza [see note below] was like an actress

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<sup>58</sup>"... Tout en chantant avec un style si pur, une diction si claire, un charme si discret et tellement intérieur..." in the letter of preface by Milhaud, Sur l'interprétation des mélodies de Claude Debussy, Jane Bathori. See page 41 for the full text of Milhaud's letter.

<sup>59</sup>See Chapter VIII of Cuneo-Laurent's dissertation, 173-190.

<sup>60</sup>Cuneo-Laurent, 185. Also see Foreword, xvi-xvii, for more on the contrast between Bathori and Bernac. Cuneo-Laurent says, "Their styles were in opposition in that Bernac's interpretation concentrated on the minute details to a degree that bordered upon affectation, which Bathori looked for an overview, and never imposed herself upon the performance."

of the theater, and Bathori an actress of the cinema: the former must use heightened gestures, and the latter must be natural and even understated."<sup>61</sup>

The aesthetic of the period was in reaction to the enormity of Wagner's theatricality and sound. In such an aesthetic, theatrical gesture is superfluous and distracting. Debussy's imploring words to the first cast of *Pelléas et Mélisande* were, "Oubliez, je vous prie, que vous êtes chanteurs!" ("Forget that you are singers!") He also wrote "One does not 'flirt' at the opera: one screams incomprehensible words at the top of one's voice."<sup>62</sup> Claire Croiza taught her students the need for "forgetfulness of self."<sup>63</sup> Bernac says the singer must "serve and respect" the musical line.<sup>64</sup> Finally, Bathori herself cautions young singers to "Be spontaneous, but be humble."<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps by the grace of the more than fifty years between the death of Debussy and the publication of his book (1970), Bernac was better able than Bathori to grapple with the more complicated issue of whether art is in the work as it exists on paper or in the work as it is heard. "The signs penned on paper, however, are mere symbols; the actuality of the sound is totally absent from them. In the art of music, it is the interpreter's performance which we come to regard as the work itself."<sup>66</sup> Later Bernac says, "All the interest of the performance lies in the fact that, to be faithful to the work he performs, the interpreter has to give his personal vision of it. Only the performer's *presence* can give *expression* to his

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<sup>61</sup>Cuneo-Laurent, 186. Claire Croiza, 1882-1946, was a mezzo-soprano who later taught and gave master classes. She has been the subject of performance practice study, and a book about her teaching has been published, Claire Croiza's Master Classes, ed. and trans. Betty Bannerman (London: Gollancz) 1989.

<sup>62</sup>from an article in La Revue blanche, quoted in Debussy on Music, 57.

<sup>63</sup>Bannerman, 22.

<sup>64</sup>Bernac, 4.

<sup>65</sup>Bathori, 8. "Ayez de la spontanéité et de l'humilité." See page 43 for the context of this quote.

<sup>66</sup>Bernac, 1.

rendering."<sup>67</sup> (The italics are Bernac's.) There is also this in Bernac's text: "Despite the fact that a composer may carry about in his head the ideal interpretation of his work, he will be powerless to indicate it by means of signs set down on paper."<sup>68</sup>

Other appraisals of Jane Bathori's work include reviews of her performances, numerous letters from composers of the period, and more contemporary appraisals by scholars. Marc Pincherle, a musicologist, wrote in 1954:

Jane Bathori began to appear in public with a voice that opened to her any repertoire: a voice of average volume, but admirably sonorous, supple, and miraculously in tune. . . .It takes an effort of the imagination today to imagine her facing listeners lulled by Massenet or Augusta Holmès: to imagine the serene audacity of the young woman who gave the first performance in 1906 at the Société Nationale of four *mélodies* by Albert Roussel; and of a whole list of compositions by the best French composers of this century.<sup>69</sup>

Among those composers were both Roussel and Ravel, each of whom wrote preface notes to her other published book, *Conseils sur le Chant*.<sup>70</sup> Ravel's note reads:

A clear and profound study of vocal technique; not useless physiology; but such artistic advice: a method of methods, such as one awaits from a clear-headed musician, a perfect interpreter of all our composers of today and yesterday, even those yet unknown.<sup>71</sup>

Roussel's note, similarly glowing:

Jane Bathori was the first to make known and to defend, with absolute sure taste, the works of young musicians. But she is as intelligent and sensible an interpreter of the great masters, blending the science and purity of classical style with a profound understanding of new formulas.

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<sup>67</sup>Bernac, 3.

<sup>68</sup>Bernac, 2.

<sup>69</sup>Cuneo-Laurent, 13, quoted from a newspaper article.

<sup>70</sup>Conseils sur le Chant was published in 1922 in Paris by the Schola Cantorum.

<sup>71</sup>"Une claire et profonde étude de la technique vocale; pas de physiologie inutile; quelques conseils d'artiste: méthode des méthodes, celle que l'on attendait de la musicienne lucide, parfaite interprète de tous nos compositeurs d'aujourd'hui et d'hier, alors même qu'ils étaient encore obscurs." Maurice RAVEL.

We must thus read attentively and follow confidently the advice and instruction which her experience brings us today.<sup>72</sup>

Arbie Orenstein, the Ravel scholar, is generous in his praise of Jane Bathori, referring to her more than a dozen times in his book, Ravel: Man and Musician. ". . . [I]n her brilliant career which spanned some four decades, she interpreted the vocal works of virtually every important French composer from the late 1890s until the outbreak of World War II."<sup>73</sup> Ravel himself was somewhat stingy with written praise, his preface note above being one exception. Another exception came from Jules Renard, author of the prose poems *Histoires naturelles*. Renard quotes a letter from Ravel, urging him to attend the 1907 performance of *Histoires naturelles*, "Anyway, I have every confidence in my singer -- she's splendid."<sup>74</sup> The singer, of course, was Jane Bathori.

Reynaldo Hahn, with whom Bathori gave a pivotal recital early in her career, wrote a review in 1912 of her performance in an opera by Léon Moreau.

Regarding Mme. Jane Bathori, those who have heard her only in concert or in intimate settings, where her voice and her art perform each day so many services to music, can only imagine how interesting and arresting she is [in the theatre], how communicative her emotion is, and how profoundly the simplicity of her acting, joined with the perfect style and variety of her singing, moves the spectator.<sup>75</sup>

In the late 1920s, it was Darius Milhaud who urged Jane Bathori to be recorded in 1929-1930 for the *Voix-illustres* series of recordings, excerpts from which were used in the *Lecture-Recital* presentation of this paper. In 1929 and 1930, when Bathori recorded

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<sup>72</sup>"Jane Bathori fut la première à faire connaître et à défendre, avec le goût le plus sûr, les œuvres des jeunes musiciens. Mais elle est aussi l'intelligente et sensible interprète des grands maîtres d'autrefois, alliant ainsi la science et la pureté du style classique à la connaissance approfondie des formules nouvelles.

Nous devons donc lire avec attention et suivre avec confiance les conseils et l'enseignement que son expérience nous apporte aujourd'hui." Albert ROUSSEL.

<sup>73</sup>Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1975, 23.

<sup>74</sup>quoted in Ravel Remembered, by Roger Nichols (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 78.

<sup>75</sup>Cunéo-Laurent, 11, quoted from a review by Reynaldo Hahn, *Le Journal*, 19 September 1912.

the songs on this set, she was more than 50 years old and considered herself past her vocal prime, although she was still performing occasionally. As is illustrated in his preface letter to Bathori's book however, Milhaud was keenly aware of the importance of both written and recorded documentation. He was quite insistent that she make the recordings, a few of which he accompanies. On most of the selections, Bathori accompanies herself.

Translation of Sur l'interprétation des mélodies de Claude Debussy

**JANE BATHORI**

**On**  
**the INTERPRETATION**  
**of the songs of**  
**CLAUDE DEBUSSY**

*Preface letter by*

**DARIUS MILHAUD**

translated from the French by  
**KATHRYN HAGGANS**

## PREFACE LETTER

Paris, October 7, 1953.

My dear Jane,

I am happy you decided to publish your notes on the interpretation of the songs of Debussy -- and I'm grateful to you for asking for an introduction which you certainly don't need, but which forty years of marvelous friendship will surely justify.

I believe the first time I heard you was around 1910, at one of the Concerts Sechiari at the Théâtre Réjane, rue Blanche. Accompanying yourself at the piano, you sang the *Chansons de Bilitis*. What an incredible singer you were, making light of the subtle harmonies, so aristocratic and yet with such ease at the piano, and all the while singing with a style so pure, diction so clear, and such an inner, unobtrusive charm.

The last time I heard Claude Debussy at the piano was in 1916 at the home of his editor, Jacques Durand. He accompanied you in a wonderful rendition of his Mallarmé songs.

The great and noble traditions of interpretation are disappearing, quickly being engulfed. Because of that, it is so important to be able to rely on your testimony and experience, you who had the great joy to create and, along with their composer, to interpret so many of the vocal works of our great Claude Debussy, our dear Claude de France.

Darius MILHAUD

I resisted a long time before writing this little book as it is difficult to explain with words just what constitutes the interpretation of a song as subtle as *Les Ingénus*, for example, on Paul Verlaine's poetry. I resolved to do it after hearing Debussy's thoughts so often misrepresented, and also to engage singers (at least those who will be curious enough to read me) in the study of some of the songs which aren't as well known and that are never sung with the excuse that they are so difficult to interpret. That is exactly the primary interest in doing it -- to make the public listen to what it either does not know or knows poorly! And with the help of my memory, if I can cause young people and others who are curious to become interested in music which is fifty years old, I will be very happy again to have served this art by imparting to others the joy I have felt in the past in my relationships with musicians whom I admire profoundly.

I had the happy chance to meet Claude Debussy in 1904, two years after the première of *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Opéra-Comique. I would love to have been among the first to hear this great work, but was away from Paris and had to wait. Indeed, just anticipating such great delight seemed to make it even more complete and profound.

I owe my first contact with Debussy's music to Maurice Ravel, whom I had met in 1898, coaching with him at the Concerts du Conservatoire. He gave me a copy of *Proses lyriques*. I had never read anything like them and entered successively an atmosphere for me of such new harmonies, already foreshadowing all the pleasure I would have in working to know this music better, to penetrate its feeling, the essence and subtle intelligence.

Thus it was in 1904 that I saw Claude Debussy for the first time, in a little apartment on the rue Cardinet where he had just an upright piano, a curled up Copenhagen cat lying on it. I was so overwhelmed that I couldn't see anything else. I played several piano pieces and sang some songs for him, among them the *Chansons de Bilitis*.

Among contemporary French art songs, there are few as beautiful, as perfect from both literary and musical views, as those of Claude Debussy. With his acute sense of the French language, his delicate sensitivity never exceeded the right expression. Without undue emphasis he said beautifully what he wanted, stressing with a mark or accent the word which he heard as the most important. All this requires work of great detail and moreover of absolute musical taste. I was excited by the mind, the spirit, the utter refinement of this genius musician who could with simplicity blend such subtle details without having them collapse from exaggeration or vulgarity.

Since I mentioned *Chansons de Bilitis* [composed in the spring and summer of 1897, following Gabrielle Dupont's attempted suicide in February], we will begin by showing young singers, who haven't had the chance to study them with the composer, just what might distract them and give them an interpretation lacking contrast. First, there is the false idea that one must give this music an original interpretation, that the words, not in the least ambiguous, can be lent a somewhat improper undercurrent.<sup>76</sup> In support of that

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<sup>76</sup>Bathori may reveal some prudishness in her denial of any sensuous undertones to this music. Her own marriage (to a man more than 30 years older, who later divorced her and married a younger woman) provides some context for understanding her position. The sensuous undertones of *Bilitis* are nearly universally acknowledged, and are even at the source of these poems and songs. Lockspeiser in Debussy: His Life and Mind, page 175-176, recounts the provocative circumstances around the creation of these works:

Gide [André Gide, mutual friend of Pierre Louÿs and Debussy] gives an alluring sketch of Meriem ben Atala who inspired Louÿs's well-known prose poems, the *Chansons de Bilitis*:

Meriem was amber-skinned, firm-fleshed. Her figure was round but still almost childish for she was barely sixteen. I can only compare her to a bacchante -- the one on the Gaeta vase, for instance -- because of her tinkling bracelets too, which she was continually shaking. . . . Her cousin En Barka was dancing there too. They danced in the antique fashion of the Oulad, their heads straight and erect, their busts motionless, their hands agile, their whole bodies shaken by the rhythmic beating of their feet. How much I liked this 'Mahommedan music' [sic] with its steady, obstinate, incessant flow; it went to my head, stupefied me like an opiate, drowsily and voluptuously benumbed my thoughts.

[Louÿs'] *Chansons de Bilitis* were published in 1895, dedicated to Gide 'in memory of Meriem ben Atala'. Three of these prose poems were set by Debussy: the second of the series, *La Chevelure*, appeared in the journal L'Image (October 1897) with designs by Van Dongen, and the remaining two, *La Flûte de Pan* and *Le Tombeau des Naiades*, were completed by September 1898. A copy of the score of the three songs bears the

assertion, I'll cite the remark of a sophisticated woman, an excellent musician blessed with a beautiful voice, who said, "When I sing the *Chansons de Bilitis*, we must make the young ladies leave the room..."

Everything is marked in *La Flute de Pan*. The prosody of Debussy's songs is so perfectly correct that **everything** is in place. Take this advice: study this song **observing the note values rigorously**. You may say to me, "this is solfège...!" No! It is musical honesty and you can never achieve the right expression without giving duplets and triplets their correct value. However, and I insist on this (it is not necessary that the listener perceive these rhythmic changes) **without rhythmic severity**, which is to allow the imagination to be at the foundation of interpretation, with the sounds following not stiffly, but with such simplicity that the phrase just unwinds, giving throughout an impression of being improvised. Be spontaneous, but be humble. All the accents are marked in this music; one must **know how to read** and forget any inclination to speed up or to accent a word or fragment of phrase except those marked. That is the **true secret**. I cannot deny that the sound of a clear young voice can add to the charm of a performance, but as happens far too often, that cannot replace the rest.

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following dedication: 'Pour Pierre Louÿs à cause du 19 Octobre 1899', the date of Debussy's marriage to Rosalie Texier. It is impossible not to be impressed by the numerous cross-identifications associated with this work, as if Gide, Louÿs, and Debussy, together with their mistresses or partners, were enmeshed in triangular situations of an almost impenetrable complexity. Following their journey to Algeria, Gide and Louÿs met in March 1895 at Algiers where they quarrelled bitterly on issues arising from the trial of Oscar Wilde. Louÿs returned to Paris in April 1896 with Zohra, the sister of Meriem, with whom he lived until the end of the year . . ."

## La Flute de Pan

Let's take the opening of *La Flute de Pan*. Make the elision at 'pour le jour des Hyacinthies...' Give full value to the word 'hyacinthies', but without emphasizing nor allowing the '-es' to be heard. At 'Il m'a donné une syrinx faite de roseaux bien taillés' make a little break with immediately a big breath for saying 'unis avec la blanche cire qui est douce à mes lèvres comme le miel.' In this phrase, respect the triplets, diminishing immediately the accents which are against those in the accompaniment. To get the effect of the 16th-notes against the triplets, find the exact pulse and let the voice lightly stress each note of the duplet. Use a gentle sound, barely moving for 'mais je suis un peu tremblante.' Carefully observe the nuances<sup>77</sup> marked over 'Il en joue après moi/ si doucement/ (with a *subito p*) que je l'entends à peine.' Likewise, at 'Nous n'avons rien à nous dire,' the 16th-notes and triplets alone will supply all the necessary expression of candor and passion. [There is] a *rallentando* on 'et tour à tour nos bouches s'unissent sur la flute' -- gauge the notes of the triplets carefully as they must fall correctly on the 16th-notes of the accompaniment. Don't give the impression of either rushing or of waiting for the piano. It is difficult to work out, but one must practice many times to find the balance in this phrase.

Sing very smoothly, 'voici le chant des grenouilles vertes qui commence avec la nuit,' without accent or crescendo - and say the last phrase without breathing, giving a little stress on 'Ma mère ne croira jamais...' The remainder of the phrase must run out without stopping to the end: *Ma mère ne croira jamais que je suis restée si longtemps à chercher ma ceinture perdue.*

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<sup>77</sup>*Nuances* is a term used both in French and English. In this instance, it refers specifically to the dynamic markings appearing over, and shaping, the phrase. Its English context is somewhat more general than that. Bathori uses this term several more times.

*La Flute de Pan* is certainly the most difficult of the three *Chansons de Bilitis* because it requires the absolute connection of rhythm and expression and that sort of freedom or suppleness without which the work might seem stiff.

### La Chevelure

*La Chevelure* may appear easier, musically more direct, but pay attention not to exaggerate the expression. For the rest, Bilitis is young and preserves through [it] all a kind of candor which the music knows how to lend her. Follow the expressive marks which Debussy has given. At the beginning, *p*, use restrained feeling to say 'Il m'a dit: Cette nuit, j'ai rêvé.' Carefully emphasize the different pronunciations of the three [e] sounds: j'ai rêvé [é], [è], and [é]. Make extremely legato 'J'avais ta chevelure autour de mon cou.' 'J'avais tes cheveux comme un collier noir autour de ma nuque et sur ma poitrine' is sung with a crescendo, then resume the *p* for 'Je les caressais -- et c'étaient les miens' and 'et nous étions liés toujours -- ainsi.' Then, with a great crescendo and speeding up, 'par la même chevelure / la bouche sur la bouche.' Without pressing the voice on the e-natural (mi), maintain the *f* to the end. With a nuance from *p* to *pp* on 'ainsi que deux lauriers n'ont souvent qu'une racine,' resume tempo. For me, this is the emotional climax of *La Chevelure*. Here we realize agitation unleashed with a new crescendo and accelerando up to 'ou que tu entraîs en moi comme mon songe. Then again she speaks, still affected, and says, 'Quand il eut achevé (de parler) .' Do not be mistaken here. We do not want to hear any badly intended singers who would have us hear something which neither Louÿs nor Debussy wanted to say.

The last phrase is again full of gentle, delicate emotion for saying, 'et il me regarda d'un regard si tendre, que je baissai les yeux (separating with a false breath) avec un

frisson,' as simply as possible. "Et surtout, pas de frisson" [above all, without shivering] said Debussy before the last phrase, indicating clearly how he did not want it sung.

### Le Tombeau des Naiïades

*Le Tombeau des Naiïades* is a difficult one to bring into focus. It requires a voice that is crystal clear and totally musical. It is necessary to forget oneself completely -- everything is in the music. The accompaniment must maintain an imperturbable rhythm with stresses and doubled voices.<sup>78</sup> It needs a transparent sound that evokes frost and ice. The voice in this third song is only the servant of the piano, but a faithful servant, knowing how to follow all the inflections of the accompaniment, not coldly, but nonetheless without personality.

Debussy wrote *doux et las* (gentle and weary) at the beginning. The voice must give that impression by pressing a bit on each 8th-note of 'Le long du bois couvert de givre....' Continue this tranquil movement with a little crescendo on 'se fleurissaient de petits glaçons' and a *subito p* on 'et mes sandales étaient lourdes de neige fangeuse et tassé.' This phrase must be said with total rhythmic accuracy -- and without slowing. Take care to give the following dialogue the variety of colors necessary to differentiate between questions and answers. Bilitis can brighten a little on, 'Je suis la trace du satyre....' The reply, 'Les satyres sont morts,' will then follow beautifully without pressing or giving too much weight. There should be a little crescendo on, 'La trace que tu vois est celle d'un bouc.' From this *mf*, one must back off again through wonderfully legato chords, which are an interesting musical connection, then arrive, *très doux*, at 'Mais

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<sup>78</sup>Bathori writes '*les accents et les double-parties.*' *Accent* is a stress. *Partie* is a part; *deux ou trois parties* two or three parts; *double-parties* a doubled part. In this song, octaves are occurring simultaneously in both hands of the accompaniment.

restons ici, où est leur tombeau,' with great feeling in the expressive nuance. Then, make a crescendo on 'glace de la source où jadis riaient les naïades.'

The piano needs a warm tone throughout. There is a single little nuance after 'Il prenait de grands morceaux froids,' without slowing, then a *subito p* on 'et les soulevant vers le ciel pâle,' an astonishing effect before the final crescendo on 'il regardait au travers.' Finally, everything dies away, ending with a lifeless nuance, but clearly on the last four 16th-notes of the accompaniment.



What I have said about *Bilitis* I will reiterate for each group of songs. It is absolutely **essential** to be attentive to the notes and nuances in Debussy's music. Try to enter into the music's feeling, which can be done only through the words and, with this as a foundation, if you truly have the personality it will find the occasion to manifest itself. Don't begin with that, however, or you will always endanger a true interpretation. I compare the work of a singer to that of a pianist. One must work on a song just as on a piano work -- that is observing as exactly as possible the notes, accents, accidentals, etcetera -- before attempting an interpretation. Why should we allow ourselves in a song to alter the bar or the tempo or the expressive nuances because there are words and because we believe we feel them differently or better than the composer. Debussy's songs are very difficult to perform. The voice must be expressive, supple, capable of *demi-teintes*<sup>79</sup> and of nuances in rapid contrast. If you do not possess all these qualities, and the sensitivity as well, you will have to acquire them. If you want to sing *Fantoches* for example, work

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<sup>79</sup>Occurring throughout the text is the term *demi-teinte*, which is left in the original French. It is a term borrowed from the visual arts, indicating both a refined dynamic level and a kind of vocal color. See a further discussion of this term in Chapter 4.

hard to achieve the *p* on the high A-natural in 'Clame la détresse à tue-tête.' It must appear to be easy and spontaneous.



The *p* on the words 'à tue-tête' ['at the top of one's voice'] is the principal effect of the song, a paradoxical one perhaps, but one which the composer wanted. Even if it is true that the nightingale is at the top of her voice and that the glissando in the piano is, in a sense, contrary to the voice, it is an inspiration.

### Fantoches

*Fantoches* is found in the *Fêtes Galantes*, Book I, to the poetry of Paul Verlaine. There are many things to look for in *Fantoches*. The tempo at first must be fast, quite rhythmical, and above all with a frivolous spirit, full of humor and elegance. The little Spanish arabesque recurs, sometimes legato, sometimes staccato, and the stresses in the piano should be well marked.

The voice makes a constant juxtaposition of staccato and legato. Take special care that the first arabesque on the 'la la la...' is legato and that then, after Scaramouche and Pulcinella appear, quite detached.

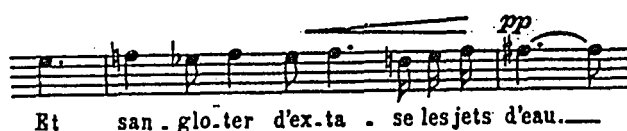




'Que les branches hautes font,' and a *subito pp* on, 'Pénétrons bien notre amour.' This must all unfold in the half-tint of the voice, very connected and ringing throughout. It is like telling a secret, demanding suppleness in phrases that are so finely shaped, like the descent on, 'Parmi les vagues langueurs des pins et des arbousiers,' which must be sung without a breath. Later increase the tempo a bit, but so subtly that the listener will not even perceive it. Then, again a little crescendo and the descent without breathing on 'Et de ton cœur endormi chasse à jamais tout dessein.' Do not resume the opening tempo until the very last phrase, 'Et quand solennel, le soir, des chênes noirs tombera.' Finally -- still more slowly and with appropriate color on the F-sharp, 'Voix de notre désespoir, le rossignol chantera' -- it is the nightingale who finishes this marvelous song.

### Clair de lune

Since I have already discussed *Fantoches*, we'll move on to the third song of the group, *Clair de lune*, one of the most difficult of Debussy's songs to sing. One must have the right tone qualities as well as even range, breath, low notes, high notes, and a natural *pp*. See, for example, this phrase from the second half of the song:



This phrase is particularly dangerous because it must be done without breathing, yet still give an impression of ease and serenity. The ensuing phrase is also best done without breathing, 'Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres.' One must have both qualities of a mezzo and of a soprano, as well as complete technical assurance.

There is a great difference between this song and that of Fauré's. The latter is a charming, perfect painting which makes us think of Watteau; it has grace and elegance. It is the accompaniment, however, which has preeminence -- the voice is only a commentary. In Debussy's setting by contrast, it is the voice which is dominant and expressive, which takes part in the action and is important. It is more difficult vocally than Fauré's. I have compared these two works, contrary to my habit of not making comparisons, because each of these works of art has its own qualities and each succeeds admirably. I make the comparison for the sake of understanding the difference in interpretation.

As I began with Verlaine, we shall continue by looking at two earlier songs whose musical expression seems to me to be among the most charmingly realized. These two poems, *Le Son du Cor s'afflige* and *L'Echelonnement des Haies*, were set to music at nearly the same time by a musician now sadly forgotten -- Charles Bordes. There is no other resemblance between the two, each being as successful as the other -- one must forget one while singing the other.

### **Le Son du Cor**

Debussy's *Son du Cor* was especially written for the mezzo-soprano voice, which can use a rich, warm quality in the beginning even though the composer wrote a *pp*. It requires a sensitive and expressive legato. After the descending notes on, 'La neige tombe à longs traits de charpie,' the phrase leans into a crescendo on 'le couchant sanguinolent.' Oh! without exaggeration, these dynamic nuances are so slight, nearly always in half-tints, crescendos never going past a *mf*. It is a very beautiful song, one which we should sing and get to know because it comes from one of Debussy's best periods.

## L'Echelonnement des Haies

The same is true of *L'Echelonnement des Haies*, where the composer rediscovers his lively, free and descriptive rhythm. The right tempo must be set; we must also carefully observe the staccati and accents, especially on 'mer **claire** dans le brouillard clair.'



These last words should be completely detached. The same effect recurs after 'où vient s'ébattre et s'étendre l'agilité des poulains,' the final few words sung rather stiffly. The end becomes quite legato and lovely through nuances of breaths indicated by the composer: 'Tout à l'heure déferlait l'onde --- roulée en volutes --- de cloches comme des flûtes --- dans le ciel comme du lait.' That is the meaning of course: the chiming of the bells like flutes -- rolled out in spirals -- in the sky like cream.

These two works, by virtue of their contrast, make a sure vocal and musical effect. Hamelle once published these two preceded by a third, on still another of Verlaine's poems, *La Mer est plus belle que les Cathédrales*. It is also best suited to a mezzo as it makes great use of the lower register. The interpretation is easier, more ordinary, because the question of the volume of the voice does not matter as much as in the other two. But I do not place it on the same level as *Le Son du Cor* and *L'Echelonnement des Haies*, which are more refined and spiritual.



With Verlaine we come to the most famous group of songs, the *Ariettes oubliées*. It isn't possible to find six songs of more contrast which yet share a mysterious unity of

dramatic feeling in all its variations and subtle fluctuations. We find it all here -- love, contemplation, melancholy, sorrow, and an earthy popular humor, as in *Chevaux de Bois*. We find that earthiness again in *De Soir*, the last song of *Proses Lyriques* which we will examine later.

### **C'est Extase**

I am looking at a first edition of the *Ariettes*, which Debussy inscribed simply 'Achille Debussy.' At the front, these two verses of Favart:

*Le vent dans la plaine  
Suspend son haleine*

(The breeze on the plain  
Holds its breath)

Also, above the first phrase this note -- *Rêveusement* [dreamily]. That should suffice, it seems to me, to indicate the feeling, expression, and overall mood. Not content with these indications, with each new phrase Debussy reiterates the *p* and, if there is a crescendo, he still concludes it with a *p*. This is not to say the singing should be cold and dry; but with Debussy, one must achieve the quality of warmth with the most subdued nuances. Do not sing indifferently, but first enter deeply into the poem's meaning and then allow the music to follow. It seems that the composer was afraid of a raised voice, so listen and articulate every phrase with the greatest delicacy. 'Cela gazouille et susurre, cela ressemble au cri doux que l'herbe agitée expire....' This phrase, with the indicated *animato*, must be sung without a breath from 'cela ressemble' on. The crescendos which are marked must give the impression of an inflection that immediately fades. Only at the end, on 'la mienne, dis, et la tienne,' may the voice expand some, but a *diminuendo* follows on the descent 'dont s'exhale l'humble antienne,' with 'par ce tiède soir tout bas' barely murmured. As you can see, everything is marked and one must submit to that so as

not to betray the composer's intention. Above all, have the presence of an actor, all the more necessary in a song which has neither scenery nor gesture to sustain it. [This song is discussed further in Chapter 4.]

### **Il pleure dans mon Cœur**

Debussy wrote *Triste et monotone*. The voice can remain light and legato, while the accompaniment creates an atmosphere with its expressive countersubject. Without alteration, without any exaggeration, this half-tint continues with lovely, *p* high notes. Then, on 'Quoi!', change the tempo -- the pause permits the accent on 'nulle trahison?' 'Ce deuil est sans raison' is completely despondent. The tempo resumes as at the beginning on 'C'est bien la pire peine de ne savoir pourquoi, sans amour et sans haine.' There is a *molto rallentando* on 'mon cœur a tant de peine,' with a crescendo which stops cleanly on the word 'peine,' then tapers down to nothing. One should sing this phrase without breathing to give the appropriate feeling and the sense of fatigue. It is not sorrow - it is despondency.<sup>80</sup> In French we do not have an adequate word to convey this sense -- *ennui* would be too strong. And in any case, Debussy has saved this line for the last: 'Les roses étaient toutes rouges...' That seems even more woeful.

### **L'Ombre des Arbres...**

The third would appear to be one of the most difficult to sing. The opening requires great finesse. The little stress marks over the words, 'meurt comme de la fumée' should not be treated as accents, but do call for some weight on each syllable. The same is

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<sup>80</sup>Bathori wrote "Ce n'est pas de la douleur, c'est le spleen. Nous n'avons pas de mot français qui en donne véritablement le sens; ennui serait trop fort." *Douleur* implies grief, pain or sorrow; *avoir le spleen* means to be depressed or in low spirits; and *ennui* is boredom or weariness. Bathori clearly felt it was important to convey these fine distinctions in meaning.

true for 'les tourterelles.' In this way we achieve the crescendo and dramatic accent on 'Te mira blême toi-même.' A stringendo follows and stops immediately at the a tempo. The *pp* on the G-sharp must be transparent -- 'Et que tristes pleuraient dans les hautes feuillées, tes espérances noyées.' This is all very delicate and demands hard work in preparation. [This song is discussed further in Chapter 4.]

### Chevaux de Bois

We come now to a poem taken from *Paysages Belges* of Paul Verlaine. Debussy preserves these words of Victor Hugo:

*Par Saint Gille  
Viens nous en  
Mon agile  
Alezan*

The tempo indication carries this note: *Joyeux et sonore*. It's necessary to take each phrase separately to give it the color desired by Debussy. The song is one of gaiety, perhaps even a bit clumsy, with heavy accents, sudden dynamic contrasts and staccato notes. In the beginning for example, 'Tournez, tournez' -- and then suddenly, 'bons chevaux de bois,' cleanly detached and *p*.



You may exaggerate -- the contrasts can never be too much. Similarly, make the most of the little crescendos on 'Tournez cent tours, tournez mille tours...' And finally, arrive at a *ff* on 'au son des hautbois.'

'L'enfant tout rouge' should be exactly as marked (it wouldn't be necessary to insist on this if singers had the habit of doing what is indicated) and staccato. I can still hear Debussy's voice singing this phrase with its cutting meaning, so true and picturesque.



There is a heavy crescendo up to 'Se paie un sou de dimanche.' Debussy certainly understood the simple pleasures -- but true pleasure, without vulgarity. Think of *Fêtes*, the second of the *Nocturnes*.

Vigorously resume with 'Tournez, tournez, chevaux de leur cœur,' with those last words slightly tapered to make what follows distinct. 'Clignote l'œil du filou surnois' should be very detached and soft with, once again, a crescendo up to 'piston vainqueur!'

Now comes a trouble spot where you might stumble and lose your way.

This is the only marking which does not absolutely conform to the text, or at least is not exactly indicated. Debussy sang 'dans ce cirque' with a crescendo; the accent on 'bête' was *p* then tapering off. It was an unforgettable effect.

Then, once again with vigor, full of unabated joy, arrive at full voice on 'sans espoir de foin . . .'. It is getting later though, night falls, and fatigue and hunger overtake the party. There is a diminuendo of both rhythm and dynamic right up to the last phrase,

'La nuit qui tombe et chasse la troupe de gais buveurs que leur soif affame,' which you should try to sing on a single breath. In any case, connect 'et chasse la troupe de gais buveurs.' And now that it is night, everything fades away like the echo of the wooden horses. 'Tournez, tournez!' (twice as slowly) the end, full of poeticism with 'L'Eglise tinte un glas tristement.' Give very clean articulation to the word 'tinte.' All at once we resume the opening tempo, muted and without *rallentando* to the end -- 'Tournez au son joyeux des tambours, tournez.'

This song is truly a scene -- a picturesque tableau which can produce an extraordinary effect when well sung. Most singers fear the contrasts and lack the courage to bind themselves to the exactitude of the dynamics and markings.

We come now to the last two songs of this group, *Green* and *Spleen*, titled *Aquarelles* by the poet Verlaine.

## **Green**

Everything about *Green* is in the tempo indicated by Debussy: *joyusement animé*. It is youthfulness, the spark of infatuation with all its passionate sweet fire. Pay close attention to the duplets and quarters, whose importance is fundamental and which allow the whole tempo in the first phrase. Bear in mind that the *ritenutos* are within an *animé*, which is to say they are barely noticeable. Don't lose the bounding outlook which characterizes this song. After an *accelerando* on the first words [*sic*], 'Rêve des chers instants,' you may make a slight slowing on 'qui la délasseront.' Take care in the *ritard* so you can recapture the opening phrase on 'Sur votre jeune sein, laissez rouler ma tête,' with a lovely *p* on the A-flat of 'laissez' and also on 'vos derniers baisers' (*pp*). Then it becomes much slower and softer but with totally warm tenderness. [This song is discussed in Chapter 4.]

## Spleen

*Spleen* is dramatic and sorrowful, difficult to sing and shape with its tempo changes and feelings which must be demonstrated in only two pages. It is both tender and sad and, as the song is short, requires constant contrasts which are noticeable in the music, in phrasing, and in a rangy tessitura. One needs, as usual in Debussy's songs, the suppleness of voice to make transitions from dramatic low sections to ones that are sensitive, sweet and high. At the end we have an enormous crescendo on 'Et de la campagne infinie Et de tout, fors de vous.' This stays strong and should be released without breathing until after 'hélas,' which is barely murmured.



I can assure you that a touching and expressive effect results from the suspension of breath in this phrase.



Continuing with Verlaine, let us take the second set of *Fêtes Galantes*, which appeared in 1904, much later than the others. It may be that Debussy put even more delicacy and soul in these songs. They are seldom sung (I don't know why), save the last, *Colloque sentimental*.

## Les Ingénus

If you work on *Les Ingénus*, you will discover the exact spiritual sense of the poetry, which will help you to interpret it only if you adhere to the marked details and to the

accents which emphasize important words. There should be a lot of color on 'Parfois luisaient des bas de jambes, trop souvent **interceptes!**' and an accelerando on 'Et ce régal comblait nos jeunes yeux de fous.'

The first two pages are very detailed in articulation and diction. There is a sudden change on 'Le soir tombait,' twice as slow -- a feeling thus emerges from both music and words. The emotion is intense on the last phrase: 'Que notre âme depuis ce temps tremble et s'étonne.' The voice must interpret these words with a nearly undefinable inner expression already begun with 'Dirent alors des mots si spécieux.' One must make felt both the ambiguity of this epithet as well as the kind of deception which derives from it.

### **Le Faune**

*Le Faune* captures again that picturesque coast so dear to Debussy. It happens first in the accompaniment, which he composed for an Erard piano as he found in them a bass sonority that was both muffled and yet cut like a drum. There are no particular difficulties in *Faune*. Good articulation and musicality, without interfering with the tempo nor the accompaniment -- it must all blend together and be made one.

### **Colloque sentimental**

And so we come to *Colloque sentimental*. Know the words by heart. Speak them, giving all the feeling and intensity without the music. Put the description in place without expressive nuance and in implacable rhythm -- then comes the drama. Vary the sounds of the two people, without exaggeration, but so the questions can appear a bit distinct regarding tempo and anxiety. Follow the marvelous expressive and tempo markings. 'Pourquoi voulez-vous donc qu'il m'en souvienn...' The 'non' should not be harsh. The

'C'est possible' must glide as if on ice; the same further on for 'L'espoir a fui, vaincu, vers le ciel noir.'

As for the last phrase, it must be only a murmur. Avoid an elision on 'Tels / ils marchaient.' The slowing and the *pp* fade to the end. Make the listener listen carefully to understand the desperation. I say it for *Colloque* and reiterate it for all songs in general -- especially for Debussy's: you must make the scene **mentally** and, while singing, must see with your eyes and mind and heart all the people moving and the changing landscapes. This is the secret of effective interpretation: to sing *Colloque* without following this development is to betray both musician and poet.



There are still other songs by Debussy on the poems of Paul Verlaine.

### **Mandoline**

One of the best known is *Mandoline*, sparkling and supple, which must be sung in the correct tempo, which is to say the one indicated in the latest editions: *allegretto vivace*, 126 = ♩. I recall having sung *Mandoline* for Claude Debussy in the tempo indicated in the first edition: *allegretto*, without a metronome marking. Debussy himself wrote of the first measures: "C'est le double plus vite." ["It is twice as fast."] I told him no one, following the sole indication of *allegretto*, took it that way, and so he corrected the subsequent editions, adding the 126 = ♩. [See Chapter 4 for further discussion of tempo.]

Exaggerate the nuances -- the crescendo on 'Et c'est l'éternel Clitandre.' Sing the song with humor -- make the most of the contrast between legato and detached. Finish the final connected quarters without slowing and without breathing, diminishing clear to the end. Release on the final C in the accompaniment.



The passage should be sung as it is written in the above example.



In May 1926, under the title *La Jeunesse de Debussy*, Revue Musicale published an additional four unedited songs after the composer's manuscripts on poems of Verlaine, Banville and Mallarmé. There are, among others, an earlier version of *Clair de Lune*, *Pantomime* of Verlaine, and *Pierrot* of Mallarmé. These songs are vocally and musically very difficult, written for a high soprano with demi-teintes on A-sharps and high Bs. One needs a very light voice as some of the tempos are fast and one must capture high notes skillfully and spontaneously. The final song, *Apparition*, on a poem of Mallarmé, is moreover written in a romantic style and demands more vocal development.<sup>81</sup>

These four songs add nothing to the glory of Debussy. They have been published under a curious title and, if one can sing them, it will only be after a great deal of work. I don't think that Debussy would have allowed them to be published in his lifetime. I much

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<sup>81</sup>Cunéo-Laurent lists two of these songs, *Apparition* and *Clair de lune*, in a program Bathori gave in 1926 at the Salle Erard. Bathori's subsequent remarks, especially in light of her having sung these pieces and her overall admiration of Debussy, are surprisingly deprecating.

prefer *Les Cloches*, on a poem of Paul Bourget or *Paysage sentimental* and *Les Angélus* by the same poet, the music of which already demonstrates all the charm and originality of Claude Debussy. There is still another Bourget poem --which baritones particularly like to sing, because there is a strong, high F-sharp -- titled *Beau Soir. Romance*, again by Bourget, is very well known and often sung in a high transposition to take advantage of a G-sharp. I prefer the lower key which is the original.



For a change in style we go now to the two *Rondels* of Charles d'Orléans.

### **Le Temps a laissé son Manteau**

The first is *Le Temps a laissé son Manteau*, which is pronounced 'laissé'. I heard one singer, each time the word occurred, pronounce it 'laissé'. This was ridiculous -- it was as if she was singing in dialect.

There isn't a great deal to say about interpretation. The indication *joyeux et animé* suffices I think. The phrase, 'Le temps a laissé son manteau de vent de froidure et de pluye' is direct and should be sung without a breath. It requires being rhythmic and having a clear voice. There is nothing else left but to be guided by the marked nuances -- and, to finish, a beautiful crescendo.

### **Pour ce que Plaisance est morte**

The second song is a complete contrast, in a very moderate tempo. It is sung with sadness, with neither exaggeration nor pompous despair. Sing with simplicity, without many breaths -- and clear to the end of the phrase. Respect the nuances and the *très retenu*

and close with a breath, leaving the accompaniment to finish with all the necessary expressiveness. This beautiful song is not often sung.

### **La Grotte**

*La Grotte* is on the poem by Tristan L'Hermite. It was included in the première of the d'Orléans *Rondels*. Debussy published it in 1910 under the title *Le Promenoir des deux Amants*, with two other poems of Tristan L'Hermite.

*La Grotte* is one of Debussy's most beautiful songs -- it requires sure breath, a warm voice that is both supple and sonorous. Sing it **very slowly** but without seeming to -- this requires calm, like the calm of still water that can reflect the flowers and hanging rushes. The end is long and must be sung without a breath -- 'les songes de l'eau qui sommeille.'

### **Crois mon conseil, chère Climène**

The second song of *Promenoir* has a difficult tessitura. We must not hear you breathe, these phrases are legato and murmured as, for example, 'Allons nous asseoir sur le bord de cette fontaine.' The biggest crescendo does not go beyond *f* and is immediately followed by a *p* and a diminuendo ending in *pp*. 'Sa bouche d'odeur toute pleine' is a difficult phrase, sung *p*, the tessitura remaining there to the end on 'A l'ombre de ta douce haleine.'

### **Je tremble en voyant ton visage**

The third and last is again perhaps the most difficult for the breath -- *doux et très soutenu dans l'expression* wrote the composer. One must sing and yet give the words the

impression of being barely murmured, as if afraid even to utter them. The shipwreck is difficult to bring off sweetly, especially as the subito *p* does not fall on the tonic accent.

One phrase needing special attention is 'Fais-moi boire au creux de tes mains,' which needs all the charm possible. On the last verse, I suggest you breathe after 'Si l'eau -- n'en dissout point la neige' so as not to interrupt the sense of the words. It doesn't make sense to say 'Si l'eau n'en dissout point -- la neige.' It makes it a long phrase but, if one can do it, it is better for the meaning and the voice. I gave the first performance of *Promenoir des deux Amants* at the Annales, accompanied by Claude Debussy. I was very nervous, I assure you, but it is a wonderful memory.

We move on now to *Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire*, which present more and more vocal difficulties and a delicate literary interpretation.

### **Le Balcon**

First is *Le Balcon*. It is a monument of vocal music. I recommend you begin your work with the words, to know them by heart. Take care to give them their true and exact meaning. As for the music, one must see it only to respect the rhythm, emphasis, different tempos and the precision. It is a great work and it is wise in exploring to imbue it with his warm and enthusiastic dramatic style before even adding the words. One must work on the *pp* effects to succeed.

'Et le charme des soirs,' with the diminuendo on 'soirs' is difficult -- one must say it with great suppleness. There are nuances, as nearly always with Debussy, which come suddenly -- this seems simple, and one stumbles as a result. Great sensuousness and warmth are also called for, and all is marked sometimes by delicacy. The phrases are long and different in expression. One must have effortlessly available a palette of colors that come at the necessary moment. One must also know the accompaniment well, to follow it

and change with it the sense of the phrase which is coming. There are several themes -- do not be indifferent to them. Finally, give *Balcon* the weight of a dramatic scene and, without exaggeration, play it with all the warmth possible in a song. In this work there is a place for all the nuances and tempos.

At 'Que les soleils sont beaux...' it is marked *moto poco a poco*. Sing the opening slowly, then press little by little up to 'Je croyais respirer le parfum de ton sang' with all the warmth you can give your voice, and finish, *più lento* with another expressive *p* on 'Que les soleils sont beaux.' Then comes drama mingled with sweetness -- 'O douceur, ô poison!' - - 'La nuit s'épaississait ainsi qu'une cloison...' The accompaniment rises and falls over a *p* to prepare the words, 'Je sais l'art dévouer les minutes heureuses...' All the lyricism characteristic of Baudelaire heightens again to conclude in the splendor of 'soleils rajeunis' and 'des mers profondes.' It is satisfaction, in spite of the passion of the words -- 'ô serments! ô parfums! ô baisers infinis!'

### **Harmonie du Soir**

*Harmonie du Soir* presents great difficulty for me because of all the tempo changes in phrases which are repeated as a refrain or digression. We have *Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige* and then 'Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige.' To find the exact meaning, you must copy those words and place them over all the repetitions of the verse. When you can say them expressively, then repeat the same phrases with the music to add to the intensity. It takes a great deal of searching.

### **Le Jet d'Eau**

*Jet d'Eau* begins with a sweet, delicate phrase in the low part of the voice of which Debussy was particularly fond. Then comes the refrain, an image of 'gerbe d'eau qui

tombe comme une averse de larges pleurs.' The song recommences with tempo rubato on 's'élançe, rapide et hardie, vers les vastes cieux enchantés.' Tempo primo again on 'Puis, elle sépanche...', ending with difficult tuning on 'descend jusqu'au fond de mon cœur.' Take extra care with the whole and half steps. The 'gerbe d'eau' returns, in tempo rubato, and with the splendid noise of the water, 'qui sanglote dans les bassins!' The tempo slows a little on 'Lune, eau sonore, nuit bénie' with a difficult *pp* G-sharp. Then, for the last time, 'La gerbe d'eau,' which falls dying 'comme une averse de larges pleurs.' This song was orchestrated by Debussy for full orchestra, thick but iridescent.

Having used the word rubato so often perhaps it is well to offer an explanation. The word comes from the Italian *rubare*, which means *dérober* [to steal, filch or rob]. In an expressive passage one steals a fragment from the tempo of one bar by pressing a little and then, on the following bar, restores that fragment with the barest slowing down. It is rather a compensation -- but rubato is difficult to do and requires taste and discretion.

### **Recueillement**

We come to *Recueillement*, one of the most beautiful in the collection because of the moving opening -- 'Sois sage, ô ma douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille' -- revealed by music that is so intense in its simplicity of expression. Then comes the night: the accompaniment seethes with all the noises of the city while the voice must enhance these scornful words -- 'la multitude vile' and 'sous le fouet du plaisir, ce bourreau sans merci.' Then this sad waning, 'Ma douleur, donne-moi la main; viens par ici, loin d'eux.' All the rapture of the poetry is expressed in rising up to a *p* high G-sharp, an ascending line which is difficult to tune. The sun sets and the solemnity of the hour unwinds up to 'Entends, ma chère, entends la douce nuit qui marche,' *très lent*. This last phrase must be connected

without breathing, with the *pp* G-sharp completely serene. It is a conclusion which needs work to accomplish successfully, but it makes an extraordinarily moving effect.

### **La Mort des Amants**

The Baudelaire songs conclude with *La Mort des Amants*, death in the exaltation of love which makes it sublime and lyrical. How can one explain the interpretation? One must raise oneself as far as possible above worldly concerns and the voice itself must dematerialize completely. All these phrases must be said with warmth and delicacy to enhance the words, chosen from among the most beautiful and most poetic.

As always, observe the nuances faithfully. Try to find new purer tones in your voice, aim carefully for them, to give a perfect impression of this wonderful song. Beware of the effects which could be justified by the tessitura of some of the descending phrases -- I'm speaking of *ports de voix* that are too heavy and in bad taste. Try to be tender in the face of such beauty and perfection. Arturo Toscanini, with whom I had the opportunity to make music, had a particular admiration for *La Mort des Amants* and also for *Le Tombeau des Naiades*. And how he understood this music! What wonderful sensitivity!

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I rarely hear Debussy's last vocal work, the *Trois Poèmes de Mallarmé*, performed. It gave me, however, my last opportunity to see its composer -- on 10 December 1916. The first performance of the Trio Sonata was given in my home.<sup>82</sup> Darius Milhaud played viola, Manouvrier flute, and Mme. Dalliès-Mario Meunier the harp. I had asked Debussy to hear it and, at the same time, wanted to get the exact tempos for the Mallarmé. Thus, we went there when he was already very ill for which I felt profoundly sad. He accompanied me himself in a performance of these songs at the home of Durand [Jacques Durand, Debussy's publisher].<sup>83</sup> [The two sets of songs, *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* by Debussy and Ravel, are discussed in Chapter 4.]

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<sup>82</sup>Cuneo-Laurent lists the date of this performance as 3 December 1916. It was a recital to benefit blind soldiers, disabled during World War I. The war was, of course, a great preoccupation of Debussy, whose final vocal work, *Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons*, was written in 1915. His penultimate vocal work was the Mallarmé collection, *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, 1913.

<sup>83</sup>Cuneo-Laurent verifies Bathori's recollection of this occasion. The following letter from Debussy to Bathori was dated 7 December 1916:

Jacques Durand writes to me of your wish to come to his place next Sunday to sing for me the *Trois Poèmes de Mallarmé*. You are right to think that I would be happy to hear you. [Until Sunday then.]

Jacques Durand m'écrit au sujet de votre désir de venir Dimanche prochain chez lui me chanter les *Trois poèmes de Mallarmé*? Vous pensez bien que je serais heureux de vous entendre. Donc, à Dimanche.

Cuneo-Laurent also notes Bathori's final request to sing for Debussy, nearly a year later. Debussy replied with this letter, dated 27 October 1917:

You can't imagine to what degree I suffer from neuralgic rheumatism. I have little time left . . . And in spite of my desire to give you what you ask, I must ask in return that you help me by not tiring me too much.

Excuse me  
Pity me

Vous ne pouvez vous imaginer combien étant toujours la proie de névralgies rhumatismales. J'ai peu de temps à moi. . . Et malgré tout le désir que j'aurais à acquiescer à vos demandes, à votre tour aidez-moi à ne pas trop me fatiguer. . .

Excusez-moi  
Plaiguez-moi un peu.

## **Soupir**

*Soupir* is very slow and calm, just as is indicated. It is very difficult to breathe for this tempo of ♩ = 50, and to sustain the *p* dynamic. The intake of breath should be gentle, long and subordinate throughout, in the very sense of these phrases. One must have the courage to breathe deeply and to activate the breath especially at the close of words. Without this the ends of phrases will die and be uninteresting. At the end, breathe before 'd'un long rayon.'

## **Placet futile**

*Placet futile* is in the tempo of a slow minuet, not quite as slow as *Soupir*, but with a totally different feeling, a style that is rather precious, much as the text might indicate. There are several instances for the use of *ports de voix*, but ever so lightly: on 'Princesse!' for example, at both the beginning and the end, and again on the word 'sourires.' These must be well supported and very legato. Give great value to the words, singing them with grace and charm and bringing them out as much as possible. Don't overlook the rapid dynamic changes, as in 'ni la pastille, ni du rouge, ni jeux mièvres,' with small crescendos tapering off to a *p*. Capture the tenderness of 'Et que sur moi je sais ton regard clos tombé,' with that final word very connected and gently tapered. Note the staccato marks on 'sont des orfèvres!', which gently exaggerate the preciousness of this phrase. Give a great crescendo to 'et bêlant aux délires.' Carefully connect 'M'y peigne flûte aux doigts endormant ce bercail,' without making an elision between 'doigts' and 'endormant'. The reprise of the 'Princesse' figure is in major mode. End the song if you can with a single breath and as lightly as possible on 'nommez nous berger de vos sourires.'

One must be charming above all! Emphasize the text, giving the words great weight in spite of the delicate dynamics. Mallarmé is a poet who must be brought out not

so much from the point of view of the sense of the words as from their sonority. The words alone created the music -- they have their own rhythm and Debussy has respected them, only giving them more intensity and understanding.

### **Eventail**

*Eventail* requires even more suppleness than the first two. It is marked *scherzando*, with *délicat et léger* added parenthetically by the composer. Further on there is *rubato*, which evidently permits some freedom of tempo and interpretation. It must be Debussy's style all the same, and one must try not to exceed the limits of the good taste of which he was a model. He did not exclude warmth and passion, but he knew to stop just at the moment when that passion might become vulgar. How many times I have heard musicians say that they don't like Chabrier's music because it is vulgar -- that is the fault of interpreters who lack style, who overstep their bounds and give false interpretations, confusing earthiness and warmth with vulgarity!

Returning to *Eventail*, we find the accompaniment murmuring little groups of 32nd notes, which have the effect of mordents over the note held in the bass. These mordents are the flickering of the fanlight. This little play stops at 'Garder mon aile dans ta main.' Then the short scale in 32nd-notes, imitating the gentle sigh of the wind -- the words are also murmured. This section is followed by an *accelerando*, a loud accent on 'vertige,' and the descending chromatic passage to 'Voici que frissone l'espace,' with another group of 32nd-notes in the accompaniment. Do not slow down for 'ne peut jaillir ni s'apaiser.' There should be no *crescendo* on 'sens-tu le paradis farouche,' which should be said with warmth and expressiveness. There is a gradual slowing clear to the end, but without any heaviness. Bring out the words, which are beautiful and expressive by themselves, and

finish this little movement intimately, with the triplet on 'Contre le feu d'un bracelet,' just barely whispered.

I first sang these songs in February 1917.<sup>84</sup> This is a group hardly ever sung, except by someone such as Pierre Bernac. I always hope to see it listed on a program -- there should always be something new, even though it is true that singers follow the same well-worn paths, and the public encourages them by demanding works they already know by heart and which they can leave the hall humming.

In front of me now are the last two groups of Debussy to analyze. I'll begin with the *Ballades* of François Villon, which have been sung occasionally, not often, since Jean Périer, the unforgettable creator of *Pelléas*, gave the first performance with orchestra. They are difficult to sing, with distinct difficulties, all three demanding an intelligent understanding of the words. Written for a powerful low voice, they are best suited to a man, with the exception of the second, *Ballade que fait Villon à requeste de sa mère pour prier Notre-Dame*.

### **Ballade de Villon à s'amyé**

The first song seems to me to be the most difficult interpretation. The vocal line is rough, very angular, with words that one must accent, stressed furthermore by the composer as, 'Yeulx sans pitié! ne veult droict de rigueur,' and following, the phrase which recurs at the end of each of the eight verses, 'Sans empirer, ung povre secourir?' which one must vary in nuance and in expression. The first, with its question mark, may be sung a little louder than the others.

In the second verse sing 'Mieulx m'eust valu avoir esté crier ailleurs secours' without a breath. Then the serrez and 'Trotter m'en fault en fuyte à deshonneur' and a

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<sup>84</sup>This was not a premiere performance, merely the first time Bathori sang the songs. They were actually premiered by Ninon Vallin in 1914.

heavy crescendo on 'Haro, haro, le grand et le mineur!' Immediately following, anguish, sadness, sweetness, and this time with a diminuendo on 'Sans empirer, ung povre secourir.'

Then, here is the verse 'regret', bitterness and fear of old age: 'qui fera desseicher, jaulnir, flestrir, vostre espanie fleur' -- 'Vieil je seray; vous, laide et sans couleur.' And, right afterwards, the remedy for so many ills: 'Or, beuvez fort!...Ne donnez pas à tous ceste douleur Sans empirer ung povre secourir.'

And to conclude, the narrator 'Prince amoureux' -- with strength, 'Vostre mal gré ne vouldroye encourir'; and calming down, the final phrase, 'Mais tout franc cueur doit, par Nostre Seigneur, ung povre secourir.' The markings are very difficult to coordinate with the accompaniment, which must be very expressive, taking its important place preparing the phrase **sensitively** for the singer.

### **Ballade que fait Villon à la requeste de sa mère pour prier Nostre-Dame**

Here the strophe is in ten lines. 'Dame du ciel, regente terrienne' must be sung with a pure tone, humble and in supplication. There are some accents in the accompaniment which the voice can emphasize during 'Sont trop plus grans que ne suys pecheresse, Sans lesquelz bien ame ne peult merir N'avoir les cieulx.' Then again humbly with 'je n'en suis menteresse. En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.'

The second strophe is more spirited, a crescendo in the accompaniment during the quickening tempo, 'Combien qu'il eust au diable faict promesse' and again, 'Préservez-moy que je n'accomplisse ce!,' with a diminuendo upon arriving at tempo and intoning (in a deep voice), 'Le sacrement qu'on célèbre à la messe. En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.' *Pieusement* the composer wrote.



donnez le prix.' From then on, increase the tempo with the triplet rhythm in the accompaniment back to the opening tempo for 'Il n'est bon bec que de Paris' full strength.

The accompaniment is very important in this last ballade. It underscores the accents which underscore the tempo and give character to the contrasts. As the voice remains low, in half-tint, the accompaniment must limit itself to a light and witty background.



We come now to the last group which were one of the first, chronologically, edited in 1895 by Fromont. Here the composer was also the poet, if one grants that prose is perhaps poetry, and the same inspiration was given to these four *Proses Lyriques*, so typical of the multiple genius of Claude Debussy. It is a distinct work, perhaps, but one which contains everything Debussy could bring to bear in uniqueness of expression, color, style, harmony. The unification between word and music is complete. Neither concession nor error is possible, all is self-contained and unfolds magically. The style of the prose derives from several influences. Debussy was a great admirer of Maeterlinck, and *Pelléas et Mélisande* was as a work well underway, although not finished. Further, the musicians who gathered around Ernest Chausson -- and Debussy was one of them -- were still imbued with romanticism of this epic and descriptive piece of literature that so captivated us between 1890 and 1900.

Two of the *Proses Lyriques* remain somewhat outside this slightly morbid expressiveness: *De Grève* and *De Soir*. But the two others, *De Rêve* and *De Fleurs* are nevertheless from a musical point of view quite characteristic of the harmonic experimentation and dramatic strength of Claude Debussy.

### De Rêve...

We begin with *De Rêve* which -- with perhaps a slight reminiscence of Wagner contained in the accompaniment, the evocative feeling of knights and swords -- creates a medieval atmosphere -- and then one speaks of the Grail ...

The descending arpeggios in unexpectedly augmented intervals give this song an original color. One can sing it with full voice without searching for the excessive nuances of *Fêtes Galantes* or of *Chansons de Bilitis*, completely respecting the rhythms and durations which always have their value. One must have a wonderful vocal range, able to make a forceful effect on top with the feeling from the expressive lower voice.

### De Grève

There is nothing like that for the second, *De Grève*. It is a tableau full of pictures and whispers; it is the sea and the sound of its muffled restlessness. It is very difficult in articulation and for the voice because of nuances that are the chiaroscuro so dear to Debussy. In 'Les vagues comme de petites folles jasant, petites filles sortant de l'école,' there is a quick crescendo followed by scherzando and it must all be said with spirit. Further, 'Les nuages, graves voyageurs,' with a crescendo followed immediately by a diminuendo. Then 'prochain orage' is very full with the immediate contrast on 'Et c'est un fond vraiment trop grave à cette anglaise aquarelle.' Gradually a long crescendo in the accompaniment beautifully reflects 'la méchante averse,' then 'Frou-frous de jupes envolées, soie verte affolée.'

But all becomes calm, just like the billows of the sea; the moon appears and 'vient apaiser ce gris conflit.' We arrive at plus lent et calme; the song continues with *pp* effects on a high A-natural; then, nothing more than an echo of far off bells and the absolute peacefulness made complete with the last phrase, 'Soie blanche apaisée.'

This song by itself is a marvelous evocation of the sea, which inspired Debussy so many times. He felt so strongly from it the simmering powerful strength, the waxing and waning, the enchantment and relentlessness . . . all this is in the music, so vibrant and full of contrasts. The accompaniment is difficult, requiring facility and sforzandos, imitating the wave that falls and lashes your face. A warm sound, in spite of the *pp*, is required to make the bells heard, and then it is peace.

### **De Fleurs...**

*De Fleurs* is by contrast a rising cry emanating out of ennui and the pang of sorrow; and there the impressionistic words, a bit grandiloquent, seem to reflect beautifully an era when intense feelings were used to make difficult ideas understood. Then a prayer to the sun, followed immediately by the exasperation it gives to the dying soul; all this part in accelerating power with articulation that permits hearing the words in spite of the accompaniment, charged and dramatic on this phrase: 'Brisez les vitres de mensonge, brisez les vitres de maléfice.' Then the hopelessness returns, more resigned and more mellow on 'Mirages! Plus ne reflourira la joie de mes yeux'; the lassitude of the prayer, the tears and 'l'ennui tombant goutte à goutte sur ma tête, dans le vert de la serre de douleur!'

Through it all is great deal of music and beautiful phrases to sing for a beautiful voice, with all the nuances that make it so, but with sentiment that is a bit artificial and, let's face it, out of fashion.

### **De Soir**

The fourth, *De Soir*, reflects Sunday joys in the towns, in hearts 'chez les petites filles chantant d'une voix informée des rondes obstinées où de bonnes tours n'en ont plus que pour quelques jours!' The accompaniment is lively, clear, rhythmic with syncopations

already expressive and the remembrance of the departed 'pour des banlieues d'aventure, dans les trains dévorés par d'insatiables tunnels' and the 'bons signaux des routes échangent d'un œil unique des impressions toutes mécaniques.' All this out of stunning vigor, in a frantic tempo which all at once results.

Then it becomes a melancholy Sunday with a memory 'des feux d'artifices manqués' and 'de vieux dimanches trépassés.' The accompaniment subsides in an 8th-note triplet rhythm to paint 'la nuit que vient endormir le beau ciel fatigué, dans les avenues d'étoiles.' The idea of the Virgin appears: 'or sur argent:' she who 'laisse tomber les fleurs de sommeil!' There the poetry takes first place and one must sing in the end in a half-tint with a nearly religious calm. We begin again a bit faster on 'Vite, les petits anges, dépassez les hirondelles afin de vous coucher forts d'absolution!' and the sound dies away just as the tempo changes again with, 'Prenez pitié des villes, prenez pitié des cœurs, Vous, la Vierge' (slightly accented) and the last words are *pp*, 'or sur argent!'

Work on *De Grève* and *De Soir* and sing them together for a very beautiful Debussy group. As one never hears them, they will have the flavor of newly discovered songs.



Before concluding, I cannot silently pass over the last vocal work of Claude Debussy, written during the 14-18 war, which inspired from him both words and music, *Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons*.

### **Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons**

Nothing is more simple, spontaneous and felt than this lamentation and cry, which must be sung as it is written, without slurring or vocal effects. Take care to think like and

convey yourself as a child: 'Nous n'avons plus de maisons! -- les ennemis / ont tout pris,' without elision.

'Ils ont brûlé': there, you must make one [an elision].

Further on, 'N'allez plus jamais chez eux, Punissez-les!' with a crescendo and without breathing. Make an accent on 'punissez-les.'

'Et les petits Polonais / aussi!' is also sung without elision.

The beginning is reprised, then: 'Noël! écoutez-nous' as if you are telling a secret, with lots of breath. Finally there is a crescendo and the end is full force.

No one else could have written a human cry with such convincing power or with such simplicity.



Take care to save for Claude Debussy, whom we call Claude de France, that place which he so justly deserves, and let us work to make him better understood with these wonderful songs. Serve him by following note for note and word for word the indications that he marked with such care and clarity, because he knew what he wanted.

## APPLICATION OF THE DOCUMENT TO SELECTED LITERATURE

### A Summary of the Lecture Demonstration

There are no profound discoveries to be made in Jane Bathori's performance manual. Her observations adhere to the printed scores and to the knowledge she gained by working with Debussy and listening to performances of his works during his lifetime. Although those observations conform to our general understanding of this literature and how to perform it, it may be important to note her thoughts on why she wrote the book, "after hearing Debussy's thoughts so often misrepresented and also to engage singers in the study of some of the songs that are never sung with the excuse that they are so difficult to interpret."

The forty years since 1953 (the year Bathori's book was published) have witnessed an unprecedented world-wide dissemination of recordings of a vast amount of musical literature. Without a comprehensive study of an evolution of style in the performance of this literature, it isn't possible to know precisely which of Debussy's thoughts were being misrepresented or who was misrepresenting them. We can only appropriately evaluate what Bathori has written by viewing it from her perspective in 1953.

Bathori's sternest admonitions have to do with rhythmic accuracy, about finding the innate meaning of the words through the strict observance of Debussy's rhythmic gestures. She cautions against exaggeration in most cases -- although she invites it occasionally, as in the dynamic contrasts of *Chevaux de Bois* (see pages 55-57). Her principal rule regarding exaggeration, or vulgarity as she occasionally terms it, is that all expressive nuances made by the singer must serve Debussy first, the singer second.

Bathori makes numerous points about tempo, articulation, and vocal color. She particularly reminds the singer to observe Debussy's notes on tempo and expressive mood which are often in French, in addition to those he uses in Italian. Bathori adds extra

emphasis to Debussy's articulation marks, and there are occasional coaching notes about phrasing or text declamation that are not otherwise obvious in the score.

Listening to music and evaluating singers are not notably scientific endeavors. With a somewhat limited group of recordings and singers, it was necessary to make some arbitrary selections based on the availability of comparable material. Ideally, songs were selected which provided contrasting interpretations by at least two of the singers studied. In the case of contrasting vocal colors, illustrations were made using different songs.

The song *Fantoches* provides material for studying articulation. The three examples below illustrate Bathori's point.

The little Spanish arabesque recurs, sometimes legato, sometimes staccato, and the stresses in the piano should be well marked. The voice makes a constant juxtaposition of staccato and legato. Take special care that the first arabesque on the "la la la ..." is legato and that then, after Scaramouche and Pulcinella appear, quite detached.

EXAMPLE 1



*Sur l'interprétation . . . , Bathori*

EXAMPLE 2

EXAMPLE 3

We can see the slight differences in printed versions above. Example 1 is directly from Bathori's book and presumably from her own edition of the songs. Example 2 is from the 1961 International edition of Debussy songs. A phrase mark appears in the Bathori version which is not present in the modern, which may account for her special emphasis on the legato of this phrase as contrasted with the staccato articulation of later appearances of the same material, printed as Example 3. Bernac, whose book was published two decades after Bathori's, also discusses the articulation of this passage, noting the importance of making the most of the "contrasts of quavers, semiquavers and triplets, and also of staccato and legato."<sup>85</sup>

Bathori is specific about emphasizing accents in the text, "ce-pendant l'excellent docteur **Bolonais** cueille avec lenteur des simples," printed below as Example 4, from Bathori's book, and Example 5, from the score. She highlights the articulation of the subsequent phrase. It is printed below as Example 6 (from the book) and Example 7 (from the score).

The following phrase, "Lors sa fille piquant minois," must be very detached, followed by a very legato phrase, "sous la charmille." Don't be afraid to make the light portamento from the low G to the high A.

EXAMPLE 4 'ce-pendant l'excellent docteur **Bolonais** cueille avec lenteur

EXAMPLE 5

The musical score for Example 5 consists of two staves. The upper staff is a vocal line in treble clef with the lyrics "Ce - pen - dant l'excellent doc - teur Bolonais". The lower staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef, featuring a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. Dynamics markings include *sf* and *p*. The word "International" is printed at the bottom right of the score.

<sup>85</sup>Bernac, 179-180.

## EXAMPLE 6



Bathori

## EXAMPLE 7

Musical notation for Example 7, showing a piano accompaniment for the same passage. The notation includes a grand staff with treble and bass clefs, a key signature of one flat, and a 3/4 time signature. The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes.

International

Bernac's notes on the same passages:

Careful stress and nuances for "Cependant l'excellent docteur Bolonais," "cueille avec lenteur Des simples" is *subito pp* and very legato . . . Not too *p* on "Lors sa fille" and more *p* on "piquant minois." A little *portamento* (without anticipating the 'I') for the big jump on "Sous la charmille."<sup>86</sup>

Ninon Vallin's recording of this song was used to illustrate these points. Her tempo is nearly exactly ♩ = 126, which is what Bernac suggests. Bathori urges a tempo that is "fast, quite rhythmical, and above all with a frivolous spirit, full of humor and elegance." Bathori's conclusion: "It takes great patience to achieve these effects because Debussy demands the refinement of a light soprano but with a great dramatic warmth. It takes a voice which is expressive and has easy, natural high notes."<sup>87</sup>

The song *Mandoline* is an interesting example for studying tempo. It must be:

sparkling and supple [and] must be sung in the correct tempo, which is to say the one indicated in the latest editions: *allegretto vivace*, ♩ = 126. I recall having sung *Mandoline* for Claude Debussy in the tempo indicated in the first edition: *allegretto*, without a metronome marking. Debussy himself wrote of the first measures: "C'est le double plus vite." I told him no one, following the sole indication of *allegretto*, took it that way, and so he corrected the subsequent editions, adding the ♩ = 126.

<sup>86</sup>Bernac, 179-180.

<sup>87</sup>see pages 49-50 for Bathori's comments on *Fantoches*.

Example 8 illustrates the fact that the modern edition reads *Allegretto* (no *vivace*), with the metronome marking as Bathori indicated. We await the scholarly edition of Debussy's songs to find out if there ever was an edition that read *Allegretto vivace*, and which editions are faithful to the manuscript. Bernac, commenting on the same metronome marking, allows that it is "probably on the fast side, but one should not depart too much from it."<sup>88</sup> In fact, the metronome marking is nearly impossibly fast, and even Bernac gives advice on executing the dotted rhythm which is quite difficult at the indicated tempo. Ninon Vallin's interpretation is sung at nearer to ♩ = 108-112.<sup>89</sup>

### EXAMPLE 8

PAUL VERLAINE  
*Allegretto* (126 = ♩.)  
*dolce e legg.*

Voice

Les donneurs de

PIANO

*sf* *pp*

*Allegretto*

sé - réna - des Et les bel - les é - couteu - ses Echan - gent des propos fa - des

<sup>88</sup>Bernac, 157-159.

<sup>89</sup>see pages 61-62 for Bathori's comments on *Mandoline*.

The song *Green*, from *Ariettes oubliées* yielded the greatest tempo contrasts in performed versions. Example 9 from the score shows the opening of the song and its tempo marking. Example 10, the third and final stanza, shows identical musical material with a different tempo marking.

### EXAMPLE 9

PAUL VERLAINE  
Joyeusement animé

Voice

PIANO

*pp* *leggierissimo*

*pp* *leggierissimo*

Vo - ci des fruits des fleurs des feuil - les et - des bran - ches

### EXAMPLE 10

Andantino

Andantino

*pp*

*pp*

*caressant*

Sur vo - tre jeu - ne sein, lais -

Everything about *Green* [says Bathori] is in the tempo indicated by Debussy: *joyusement animé*. It is youthfulness, the spark of infatuation with all its passionate sweet fire . . . Bear in mind that the ritenutos are within an *animé*, which is to say they are barely noticeable. Don't lose the bounding outlook which characterizes this song.<sup>90</sup>

Bernac also notes the contrasting tempi and suggests a tempo for each, ♩ = 104 for the *joyusement animé*, ♩ = 72 for the slower third stanza.<sup>91</sup> Two recorded illustrations of *Green* were compared. Mary Garden, with Claude Debussy accompanying, recorded this song in 1904, and Ninon Vallin (name of accompanist not known) somewhat later. Garden's tempo of ♩ = 116 for the opening stanza sounded frantic to the modern ears of the lecture audience, but she makes the most of the contrasting *Andantino*, sung at ♩ = 76. Ninon Vallin utterly sacrifices the expressive potential of this tempo contrast. Instead, she sings a beautifully lyrical opening at ♩ = 76-80, the slower stanza at ♩ = 72-76.

It is not possible to overlook the fact that it is Debussy accompanying Mary Garden and collaborating with her in setting a tempo. Moreover, one recalls Garden's remarks about the 1904 recording session, which she disliked so much. She was quite specific about the landmark importance of the tempos she and Debussy took for later generations of musicians and listeners. (See page 22 for the text of Garden's comments.) Vallin's interpretation was musically pleasing to a modern audience, but is technically inauthentic if authenticity means that one must be true to the composer's score.

The last demonstration of the Lecture Recital compared the respective vocal colors of Mary Garden and Jane Bathori. This was the least scientific effort in a process of aesthetic evaluation that is unscientific at the outset. Unfortunately, there was not a song which both singers recorded, so the selections were chosen based on similarity of tessitura

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<sup>90</sup>See pages 58-59 for Bathori's comments on *Green*.

<sup>91</sup>Bernac, 169-170.

and overall mood. From *Ariettes oubliées*, the selections played were *L'ombre des arbres* sung by Mary Garden, and *C'est l'extase* sung by Jane Bathori.

One of the terms Bathori used to describe the dynamic and expressive color necessary for a given song was *demi-teinte*. A literal translation is simple -- half-tint -- but this did not convey the appropriate color. A second choice is the word pastel, a commonly used descriptive term with literature of this style and period. Research into the origin of the term in the visual arts, however, revealed the essential difference between pastel and *demi-teinte*. A *demi-teinte* is not a vivid red color made pink with the addition of white (as with pastel). Rather, it is a vivid red made pale and translucent with the addition of a wash. In oil and water-color painting, this technique made possible a nearly seamless transition on the canvas from one color to another. For the purpose of translating Bathori's manual and understanding what she was trying to convey, the contrast of meaning is of a sweetly pale but opaque color with a more vivid color that is somewhat transparent.

Applying the term *demi-teinte* to the recordings used in the Lecture Demonstration proved to be difficult. One of Mary Garden's most unique characteristics is her negotiation into the top of her voice, which acquires an utterly fragile, transparent quality (is this *demi-teinte*?). It was a quality which Debussy prized, judging by his written testimonies about her. From the technical point of view of a modern listener, however, Garden's high voice sounds disconnected from the rest of the voice. The sweet quality of the top voice is moreover in complete contrast to the lower middle voice, in which she occasionally scoops into pitches, pressing down into the sound. The painting technique of *demi-teinte* made seamless transitions possible, but Mary Garden's transitions from one vocal color to another are not seamless. They are quite audible.

Garden was just 30 years old when she made the 1904 recording; Jane Bathori was more than 50, past her prime vocally, when she made the 1929-1930 recordings. The most

striking difference between the two singers, however, is how they approach the top of the voice. Bathori -- perhaps neither absolutely soprano or mezzo-soprano -- manages nevertheless a fairly seamless transition to a high G, G-sharp and A. The vocal color throughout the range is quite consistent, the technique more like our contemporary ideal.

Time did not permit the use of recordings of Madeleine Grey, who was principally known for her work with Ravel, not Debussy. In the recording she made with Ravel of *Chansons Madécasses*, however, she is audibly less at ease with the top of the voice than any of the other three singers of this study. As previously noted, Madeleine Grey was a singer like Jane Bathori, known alternately as soprano and mezzo-soprano.

### Two settings of Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé

In 1913 Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel chose some poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé to set to music. Debussy selected *Soupir*, *Placet futile*, and *Eventail*; Ravel selected *Soupir*, *Placet futile*, and *Surgi de la croupe et du bond*. The poet Mallarmé (1842-1898) was at the center of an aesthetic community which included many contemporaries of Debussy and Ravel, and his works are the supreme examples of symbolist poetry. These poems are difficult pieces in which metaphorical ideas are distilled into the minimum of words which are chosen for their symbolic meaning. Word sonority is an important aspect of this poetry, which is evocative and subtle.

These six songs are often overlooked, characterized as "overly refined," "somewhat obscure," "unusual," or "uncharacteristic in the output." Indeed, even Mallarmé's contemporary, Jules Renard, wrote in his journal, "Mallarmé -- untranslatable, even into French."<sup>92</sup> Still, Debussy was said to have aspired to evoke musically what Mallarmé evoked symbolically/poetically, and Ravel wrote in his autobiographical sketch:

I wished to transpose Mallarmé's poetry into music, especially that preciousness so full of meaning and so characteristic of him. *Surgi de la croupe et du bond* is the strangest, if not the most hermetic of his sonnets. In this work, I used approximately the same instrumental ensemble that is found in Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*.

In some standard sources on solo vocal literature, we find only passing references to the two sets of Mallarmé songs. In Stevens' *A History of Song*, Debussy's Mallarmé songs get a postscript that quotes Ravel's words about preciousness. Ravel's set is not treated. In *The Concert Song Companion*, Conrad Osborne writes of Debussy's *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*. The "isolated images of these enigmatic, often obscure poems, have brought forth from the composer similar musical images, coldly and carefully

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<sup>92</sup>quoted by Arbie Orenstein in *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 179.

placed."<sup>93</sup> Osborne sidesteps treating Ravel's set because, as chamber music, they fall outside the venue of solo song as defined in his book.

Pierre Bernac simply runs out of space. After an already extensive chapter, he says Debussy's final set of *mélodies* are, "masterpieces of concision and subtlety, and match the hermetic [Ravel's word] refinement of the poems."<sup>94</sup> Ravel's Mallarmé songs are mentioned only in the list of his solo vocal output. Ironically, Bathori credits Bernac as the only singer she knew who ever programmed the Mallarmé (see pages 68-71 for Bathori's remarks on these songs).

Claude Debussy remarked unhappily in a letter to a friend, that the fact that he and Ravel had each composed *mélodies* titled *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* was a "phenomenon of autosuggestion worthy of communication to the Academy of Medicine."<sup>95</sup> He was annoyed by the publishing rights hassle which ensued, complaining to the publisher Durand that it was "strange that Ravel happens to have chosen the same poems as myself."<sup>96</sup>

The publication problems occurred after Durand, acting on Debussy's behalf, attempted to secure the rights to the poems from the Mallarmé estate. Ravel had previously obtained rights to the poems for his *mélodies*, and so the estate granted Debussy the right to use only the third poem of his group, *Éventail*, the first two having previously been promised. It was left to Ravel to resolve the matter by intervening with the Mallarmé family, which he graciously did. He wrote to a friend about the difficulty:

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<sup>93</sup>Conrad Osborne, *A Concert Song Companion* (New York: Da Capo Press) 1974, 153.

<sup>94</sup>Bernac, 215.

<sup>95</sup>Orenstein, 67, quoted from a letter from Debussy to a friend.

<sup>96</sup>*ibid.*, 67.

We will soon witness a Debussy-Ravel match. The other day, our publisher sent me a desperate letter, because Bonniot [Mallarmé's son-in-law, executor of the estate] had refused the authorization for "Soupir" and "Placet futile" which Debussy had just set to music. I have settled everything.<sup>97</sup>

In the event, it is Debussy's songs which bear the earlier publication date: 1913, contrasted with Ravel's date of 1914. Ravel composed his songs, noted in the Durand edition, in April, May and August of 1913. While Debussy left it to the publisher to take care of such details, it is perhaps more evidence of Ravel's fastidiousness that he had obtained the rights to the poetry before completing the songs.

That they nearly simultaneously composed their respective works was an uncomfortable, even unpleasant circumstance, but perhaps not all that much of a coincidence. First, both composers had set poems of Mallarmé previously -- Debussy, *Apparition*, in 1882; Ravel, *Sainte*, in 1896. Mallarmé's *L'après-midi d'un faune* was a landmark work as was Debussy's orchestral setting for it. The poet was greatly admired by both composers, and they knew one another. Second, the Durand publishing house had commissioned new works for a series of commemorative concerts from 1910-1913, honoring the late founder of the firm. Debussy and Ravel were among the composers commissioned for those concerts. Finally, 1913 was the year that the first complete edition of the poetry of Mallarmé was published. It is highly likely that both composers were at least aware of this new edition, perhaps even owned copies. In any case, the publication of the collected works of Mallarmé in 1913 placed this poetry prominently in view.

Jane Bathori recalls having sung the Mallarmé songs on two occasions -- once at the home of the publisher Durand with Debussy accompanying her. In 1917 she sang them in another performance which Debussy evidently heard. He was quite ill at the time

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<sup>97</sup>Orenstein, 68, quoted from a letter by Ravel to Roland-Manuel.

however, writing a rather pathetic letter to Bathori begging to be excused from any undue demands.

Ninon Vallin sang the first performance of Debussy's *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* on March 14, 1914. No reviews of this performance were available in standard sources. The first performance of Ravel's Mallarmé songs was on January 14, 1914 at a concert for the Société Musicale Internationale, with Jane Bathori singing and a chamber ensemble conducted by Désiré-Emile Inghelbrecht. One of Bathori's early performances of Ravel's *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* was reviewed. The review confirms to some extent the perception of these pieces as difficult and unapproachable, although Bathori's singing of the difficult songs is lauded for its "great insight and expressiveness."<sup>98</sup> Alternatively, another critic spoke of the audience's "absolute bewilderment" over some of the "strangest exercises in ultramodern cacophony."<sup>99</sup> Soprano or not, great artist or "la désastreuse," Jane Bathori was courageous and certainly capable enough to tackle this music and the criticism it engendered.

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<sup>98</sup>Orenstein, 68, quoted from an article in the London Daily Mail.

<sup>99</sup>Orenstein, 68, quoted from an article in the London Westminster Gazette.

## CONCLUSIONS

### The Authenticity Problem

Bathori's book is steeped in her idiomatic understanding of the aesthetics and mores of late 19th-early 20th century Paris. Her's may not be the final word on performance practice, but she reveals that time and place for us with her tireless fussing about following the printed score, in her stern lectures about unwanted meaning, vulgarity or exaggeration. One wonders how these songs were being sung, and who was singing them.

A comprehensive study of the evolution in performing style of the solo vocal music of Debussy and Ravel has yet to be made. It will necessarily include a survey of all available sound recordings, from the first crude ones until today's. It will differ fundamentally from studies of earlier periods therefore, by virtue of the existence of these sound recordings. Harold Mayer Brown notes that:

[T]here is no 'lost tradition' separating the modern performer from the music of Haydn, Mozart and their successors comparable with that which separates him from Machaut, or even Monteverdi . . . consequently the gradual changes in performing styles and in instruments have not elicited the same degree of scientific investigation.<sup>100</sup>

How will future musicologists evaluate recordings which include the composer as performer, or which document a first performance of a work? Brown continues in the same article:

. . . one need only imagine the value to the musicologist of being able to hear a performance of, say, Dowland singing one of his lute songs or of Bach directing a cantata at the Thomaskirche to appreciate the importance of mechanical reproduction to the study of performing practice.

Would we like the sound of Dowland singing or playing his own compositions?

Records of singers and composer-performers of the 20th century are available but are not

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<sup>100</sup>Howard Mayer Brown, "Performing practice," New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 6th edition, ed. Stanley Sadie, (London: Macmillan, 1980) 388.

always the most artistically satisfying. A limited survey of the four singers central to this study revealed interesting discrepancies in style with regard to tempo, articulation, and tone color.<sup>101</sup> Some of their recordings included either Debussy or Ravel as accompanist. Does such a recording suggest artistic limits for us? Does the fact that a composer performed his score in a particular way bind us to that interpretation? Probably not. Indeed, as noted in Chapter 4, Vallin's interpretation of a Debussy song was more musically satisfying to a modern audience than that of Mary Garden, with Claude Debussy accompanying.

At least one French writer argues emphatically that "original" recordings of works of Ravel, do not represent a stylistic ideal. Writing on the first recording of Ravel's *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*, André Tubeuf asks:

Does the perpetuity of Singher's recording [1934] authenticate him as the trustee of a tradition or as the elected representative of a style? Evidently not. It was altogether otherwise, as Ravel wrote the songs for the *Don Quichotte* film by Pabst, tailored to Chaliapin's historical voice and bearing . . . . In the event, it wasn't Chaliapin who bowed to Ravel's style; it was Ravel, quite on the contrary, who wrote specifically to suit Chaliapin.<sup>102</sup>

Further confusing our understanding of composer's intentions there is Pierre Bernac's imperative, "These mélodies [*Don Quichotte*], of course, can only be sung by a baritone."<sup>103</sup> The evidence suggests that is not strictly true, as Chaliapin was a renowned bass. Singher was the baritone (and so was Bernac). Mary Garden first sang *Mélisande*, a role labeled for soprano but most recently sung by lyric mezzos such as Frederica von Stade. Similarly, the role of Concepcion in *L'heure espagnole* is labeled for soprano and was first sung by women who also sang other soprano roles. It too has recently become a signature role for mezzos. Technique and vocal color are issues which do not lend

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<sup>101</sup>See Chapter 4 for a summary of the contrasts of recorded examples used in the Lecture-Recital.

<sup>102</sup>André Tubeuf, "L'oeil de l'oreille: Ravel dans son habit vocal," *Avant Scène Opéra* 127, 1990: 134.

<sup>103</sup>Bernac, 264.

themselves easily to objective study. Garden admitted her shortcomings: "I know full well that I have not a great voice. . . I am not a Melba or a Calvé and do not expect to be compared with such singers."<sup>104</sup> Greater voices, such as von Stade's, may have sung *Mélisande*, but they have not diminished the legendary status of Garden's interpretation.

Poulenc said that tempo markings were only "good for the first two bars," an aphorism one can apply to Vallin's relaxed rendition (♩ = 112) of Debussy's metronome marking (♩ = 126) for the song *Mandoline*. The ideal of authenticity is relative then, loosely circumscribed by the dictates of *le bon goût*, the undefinable variable of good taste. Tastes change, performing styles evolve, printed scores and manuscripts outlive their composer, and in the case of 20th century musical literature, there are now libraries of sound recordings to compare, contrast, and measure.

From her book, Jane Bathori speaks to us with a uniquely grounded sensibility, one that is steeped in her personal understanding and interpretation of a body of literature the creation of which belonged to her time. If the pure quality of her vocalism was not legendary, then neither was Mary Garden's, who is legendary after all. Garden notes the importance of the tempos she and Debussy took, and Debussy spoke of "complete and scrupulous immortality to music." Did he mean to imply that one must absolutely observe the performance tempos he took in the single existing recording of him and Garden?

It is difficult to measure the remarkable qualities of these singers which attracted the attention of such an impressive number of their colleagues. André Tubeuf, in a recent article about Ravel's vocal works, referred to Jane Bathori as 'la désastreuse,' unfortunately without saying why. This a rather inflammatory characterization in view of Bathori's historic career and her presence in so many current scholarly studies of

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<sup>104</sup>John Pennino, "Mary Garden and the American Press," *Opera Quarterly* 6 Summer 1989: 63. Quoted from the original article, "Miss Mary Garden Talks about Her American Operatic Debut," *New York Herald* 1 December 1907: sec. 3, 12.

composers of this period. Like Mary Garden and her *Mélisande*, there was surely a quality about Bathori which attracted the attention of an impressive number of her contemporaries, composers and critics alike. The record shows that she was a hard worker. Her name appears as dedicatee in numerous compositions of the period, demonstrating the regard composers had for her. The most damning characteristic she had, if Pierre Bernac is to be believed, was her 'simplicité,' or what he found to be a certain coldness in her performances. Perhaps that was her secret -- at least from the point of view of a composer whose work she sang, and to which she was able to yield herself. Possibly the best advice in her entire manual then, whether on interpreting the songs of Debussy or any other composer, is "Ayez de la spontanéité et de l'humilité." <sup>105</sup> Be spontaneous, but be humble.

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<sup>105</sup>Bathori, 8.

**APPENDIX A****Lecture Demonstration Musical Examples**



*Fantoches*

EXAMPLE 3a.

la la la la la la la la la

Sur l'interprétation . . . , Bathori (Les éditions ouvrières)

EXAMPLE 3b.

la la la la la la la la la

International

EXAMPLE 3c.

la la la la la la la la la la

EXAMPLE 4a.

'ce-pendant l'excellent docteur Bolonais cueille avec lenteur

Bathori

EXAMPLE 4b.

Ce - pen - dant l'excellent doc - teur Bolonais

EXAMPLE 5a.

sous la char.mil le

Bathori

EXAMPLE 5b.

Sous la - charmil - - - le,

International

Mandoline

EXAMPLE 6.

PAUL VERLAINE  
*Allegretto (126 = d.)* *dolce e legg.*

Voice

PIANO

*Allegretto*

*sf* *pp*

Les donneurs de  
 sé - réna - des Elles bel - les é - cou - teu - ses Echange de propos fa - des  
 Sous les ra - mures chan - teu - ses

*p dim.* *pp*

*p dim.* *pp*

International

EXAMPLE 7.

In this tempo the following rhythms are difficult to execute with precision:

af - éna - dis      é - cou - teu - ses

The second F on the syllable 'ré' and the E on the syllable 'cou' always tend to be too short; and this also applies to the same musical phrase in the second stanza. I suggest that it should be first practised like this:

af - éna - dis      é - cou - teu - ses

the semiquaver being added afterwards.

Bernac

## Green

## EXAMPLE 8.

PAUL VERLAÏNE  
Joyeusement animé

Voice

PIANO  
*pp* *leggierissimo*

Voilà des fruits des fleurs des feuil - les et - des bran - ches

Et puis voilà mon cœur qui ne bat que pour vous

## EXAMPLE 9.

Andantino

Sur votre jeu-ne sein, lais-

Andantino

*pp*

*crepissant* (p)

International



EXCERPTS

*Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*  
by Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel

excerpt from *Soupir*, Durand

Debussy

CHANT Calme et expressif  $\text{♩} = 50$

PIANO Calme et expressif  $\text{♩} = 50$   
*p* doux et neutre *pp*

*p* très neutre

Meu à . . me vers ton front où rêve, ô cal . me

*pia pp*

whole step, and metric relationship

use of triplet

excerpt from *Soupir*, Durand

Ravel

CHANT Lent

PIANO Lent  $\text{♩} = 40$   
*ppp* sourdine  $\text{♩}$

En jaque's

Meu à . . me vers ton front

/ où rêve, ô cal . me sour, Ca au .

excerpt from *Placet futile*, Durand

Debussy

CHANT

Dans le mouv<sup>t</sup> d'un Menuet lent  $\text{♩} = 56$  *p* Cédex -

Prin . ces . se!

PIANO

Dans le mouv<sup>t</sup> d'un Menuet lent  $\text{♩} = 56$  *p* Cédex -

*doux et gracieux*

excerpt from *Placet futile*, Durand

minor 6th

Ravel

Très ralenti au Mouvt Retenez

Princesse! à jalouser le des . tin . é . mé .

Très ralenti au Mouvt Retenez

*mf* *p*

Debussy

major 6th

au Mouvt un peu retardé

Princes . se, nom . mez

au Mouvt un peu retardé

*p* *pp*

Ravel

minor 6th but transposed up a step

Très lent

Princes . se, hommes - nous berger de . sous .

Très lent.  $\text{♩} = 72$  Encore

*pp* *p* *express.*

## TRANSLATIONS

## Éventail

O rêveuse, pour que je plonge  
Au pur délice sans chemin,  
Sache, par un subtil mensonge,  
Garder mon aile dans ta main.

Une Fraîcheur de crépuscule  
Te vient à chaque battement  
Dont le coup prisonnier recule  
L'horizon délicatement.

Vertige! voici que frissonne  
L'espace comme un grand baiser  
Qui, fou de naïtre pour personne,  
Ne peut jaillir ni s'apaiser.

Sens-tu le paradis farouche  
Ainsi qu'un rire enseveli  
Se couler du coin de ta bouche  
Au fond de l'unanime pli!

Le sceptre des rivages roses  
Stagnants sur les soirs d'or, ce l'est,  
Ce blanc vol fermé que tu poses  
Contre le feu d'un bracelet.

## Soupir

Mon âme vers ton front où rêve, ô calme sœur,  
Un automne jonché de taches de roussour  
Et vers le ciel errant de ton œil angélique  
Monte, comme dans un jardin mélancolique,  
Fidèle, un blanc jet d'eau soupire vers l'Azur!  
Vers l'Azur attendri d'Octobre pâle et pur  
Qui mire aux grands bassins sa langue infinie  
Et laisse, sur l'eau morte où la fauve agonie  
Des feuilles erre au vent et creuse un froid sillon,  
Se traîner le soleil jaune d'un long rayon.

O dreamer, so that I can dive  
into pure delight without direction  
Understand how, with subtle conniving,  
To hold my wing in your hand.

A coolness of twilight  
Comes to you with each flutter  
From which the imprisoned stroke  
Delicately extends the horizon.

Vertigo! how space quivers  
the space like a great kiss,  
Which, wild to be born for no one's sake  
Can neither be sprung nor stilled.

Do you feel the wild paradise  
Thus like a stifled laugh  
Springing from the corner of your lips  
To the depth of one crease!

The dominion of rosy shores  
Lying on golden evenings, it is this,  
This closed white wing which you hold  
Against the fire of a bracelet.

My soul climbs toward you, where dreams, o calm sister,  
An autumn strewn with reddish freckles  
And toward the wandering heaven of your angelic eye  
Climbs, as in a melancholy garden,  
Faithful, a white stream of water sighing toward the blue!  
Toward the melting sky of October, pale and pure,  
Which mirrors in its vast lakes its infinite languidness  
And leaves behind, on the dead water where the noisy gasps  
Of leaves roam on the wind and plow a cool wake,  
Dragging out of the yellow sun a long ray.

## Placet futile

Princesse! à jalouser le destin d'une Hébé  
Qui point sur cette tasse au baiser de vos lèvres,  
Juse mes feux mais n'ai rang discret que d'abbé  
Et ne figurerai même nu sur le Sèvres.

Comme je ne suis pas ton bichon embarbé  
Ni la pastille, ni du rouge, ni jeux mièvres  
Et que sur moi je sais ton regard clos tombé,  
Blonde dont les coiffeurs divins sont des orfèvres!

Nommez-nous... toi de qui tant de ris framboisés  
Se joignent en troupeaux d'agneaux apprivoisés  
Chez tous broutant les voeux et bêlant aux délires,

Nommez-nous... pour qu'Amour ailé d'un éventail  
M'y peigne flûte aux doigts endormant ce bercail,  
Princesse, nommez-nous berger de vos sourires.

## Surgi de la croupe et du bond

Surgi de la croupe et du bond  
D'une verrerie éphémère  
Sans fleurir la veillée amère  
Le col ignoré s'interrompt.

Je crois bien que deux bouches n'ont  
Eu, ni son amant ni ma mère,  
Jamais à la même Chimère,  
Moi, sylphe de ce froid plafond!

Le pur vase d'aucun breuvage  
Que l'inexhaustible veuvage  
Agonise mais ne consent,

Naïf baiser des plus funèbres!  
A rien expirer annonçant  
Une rose dans les ténèbres.

Princess! Envious of the fate of some Hebe  
Who on this cup awaits a kiss from your lips,  
I unleash my passion, but I am only a modest abbot  
And will never appear naked on a piece of porcelain.

Because I am not your whiskered doggy,  
Nor your pastille, nor your rouge, nor your fragile  
playthings  
And, since on me your unseeing gaze falls,  
Blonde, such divine hair as is dressed by the goldsmiths!

Choose us... you whose berried laughter  
Becomes a flock of tame lambs  
Browsing on our desires, and bleating with ecstasy,

Choose us... so that Cupid, winged like a fan  
May portray me with a flute between my fingers,  
putting to sleep the fold,  
Princess, choose us as shepherd of your smiles.

Sprung from the leap and the croup  
Of the ephemeral vase  
Without blooming, in bitter vigil  
The forgotten neck is broken.

I believe that two mouths never  
Drink, neither lover nor mother,  
From the same fantasy,  
Me, sylph in this cold mural!

The pure vase of no drink  
But that of unending widowhood  
Dies but does not give in,

Naive kiss of the most dark!  
To nothing expiring, announcing  
A rose in the shadows.

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