THE SONATAS FOR CELLO AND PIANO OF GABRIEL FAURÉ

by

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I hereby recommend that this document prepared under my direction by Michael Murray entitled *The Sonatas for Cello and Piano of Gabriel Fauré* be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts.

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INTRODUCTION

The music of Gabriel Fauré maintains a significant place in the standard repertoire for singers and instrumentalists alike. His songs are an integral part of the vocal recital literature and much of his instrumental chamber music enjoys wide recognition. Cellists, however, have not embraced either of Fauré's cello sonatas in the way that violinists have favored the A Major Violin Sonata. There is, of course, a vast difference in character between the lyrical sweep of the Violin Sonata, written at the mid-point in Fauré's life, and the almost severely direct nature of the late cello sonatas. Violinists rarely play the late Fauré E Major Violin Sonata and quartets seldom turn to his last composition, the op. 121 String Quartet. These late works clearly lack the accessibility of the earlier compositions. However, cellists continue to program regularly works such as Beethoven's op. 102 no. 2, whose great fugue movement is as inaccessible as any movement in Fauré.

The intelligent contemporary cellist looks for unusual works to supplement the largely Germanic standard repertoire. It is far more common to find on a cello recital the obscure sonatas of Dohnanyi, Bridge and Chopin than those of Fauré. Have cellists looked away from the Fauré sonatas before having come to an understanding of their unique nature?
This study hopes to reveal the Fauré Cello Sonatas in a manner which will give the reader some tools in understanding the highly individual musical language of the composer's compositional style and something of his artistic personality.
CHAPTER 1

FAURÉ AND HIS CULTURAL MILIEU

In the years surrounding World War I, Gabriel Fauré was firmly established in the musical tradition of France. Behind him was a long and varied career as an organist and choirmaster, inspector of the national conservatories in the provinces, successor to Massenet as composition teacher at the Paris Conservatoire and, later, director of the Conservatoire. He had traveled in 1910 to St. Petersburg, Helsinki and Moscow where his music was given a triumphant reception. Immediately after the war he was honored with the Grand Croix of the Legion d'honneur, a recognition quite exceptional for a musician. In 1924 Aaron Copland reported: "All-Fauré programs are almost as common in Paris as all-Chopin ones are in New York."¹

Aside from a success with the public, Fauré's influence, not only on his pupil Debussy, but on younger composers such as Ravel, Florent Schmitt, Koechlin and Nadia Boulanger was tremendous. He was also greatly admired by those composers known as "Les Six."

Fauré was, as Martin Cooper has pointed out, the last great traditionalist in French music, "more human and fruitful than Ravel,

more sane though less original than Debussy and more wholly, unequivocally French than either."\(^2\)

Fauré's musical personality, this "unequivocally French" quality, was much analyzed in Fauré's own lifetime and has been of equal interest since his death. In an investigation of this musical personality, the term "Hellenic" is very often encountered. Boulanger described Fauré and this quality in terms of one who "was guided by his feelings to set reason upon his altar."\(^3\)

Norman Suckling, who wrote the first full-length study of Fauré in English, said:

It is impossible to discuss Fauré without considering that resemblance to Hellenic antiquity which in his day was truly characteristic of French culture. . . . The highly sensitive but never exhibitionist art of Fauré meets the epithet of Hellenic.\(^4\)

The descriptive quality could certainly be supported by Fauré's interest in Hellenic subject matter. His two important dramatic works were the lyric tragedy, Prométhée and the operatic masterpiece, Pénélope. The notion of "hellenic" as a metaphor of "ideal beauty" without sentiment does serve Fauré's music well. However, "hellenic" should not suggest a view of the composer looking back in nostalgia for better days. On the contrary, Fauré seems to be the futurist. It has been mentioned that the composer was influential with younger composers and it should be added that he assisted in founding the

\(^2\)Martin Cooper, French Music (From the Death of Berlioz to the Death of Fauré) (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 214.

\(^3\)Nadia Boulanger, "Gabriel Fauré," La Revue musicale, vi (1924), p. 931.

\(^4\)Norman Suckling, Fauré (London: M. Dent, 1946), p. 3
Société Musicale Indépendante. This society broke from the traditional Société Musicale Nationale de Musique and attracted the younger composers who would shape the future of French musical culture.

This French-Hellenic quality of Fauré might be parallel with that wholly Germanic musical language of Max Reger, the Scandinavian association of Carl Nielsen, or the long-untransportable Englishness of Edward Elgar. These composers, like Fauré, were (and perhaps still are) highly regarded in their own countries but little known in an international scope. They have been regarded as being exclusivists: embodying their own culture and only understood by that culture.

To understand better the exclusively French character of Fauré, it is helpful to consider two other French artists of Fauré's time and draw comparisons. To study Fauré in the light of Flaubert, the novelist, and the photographer, Eugène Atget can provide some fascinating comparisons and perhaps uncover something regarding French culture.

Flaubert, Atget, and Fauré, despite their disparate artistic achievements, possess a common trait, which one might define as an intuitive grace. This quality manifests itself in a style which is seemingly spontaneous, fresh and forthright. The style of these artists, while direct and free of affectation, is a result of careful and often laborious re-working of material. Coupled with the impression of simplicity, therefore, is a pervasive and conscious sense of control which often results in a work of an impersonal nature. In this sense, their art is neo-classical. It is art which is severed from the contingency of the artist. Romanticism aims at the opposite. It seeks to create art which is inseparable from the source of the artist.
Flaubert, for example, greatly admired the basic attitude of the scientific method and brought to his novels his concern for truth and detail. In preparation for his tale, *A Simple Heart*, Flaubert returned to his home to investigate the death of his oldest childhood friend; he studied a treatise on pneumonia to describe his character's last illness; he studied the details of the Corpus Christi procession, and even borrowed a stuffed parrot from the Rouen Museum to serve as a model for a parrot in the story. Flaubert exercised such concern for accuracy and control of detail that the basic tenets of plot seem often obscured and critics have complained that the characters are overpowered by their surroundings.

The photographer, Atget, set out to chronicle Paris in an almost documentary manner. Instead of recording landmarks that are familiar to all, Atget focuses on street corners, shop windows, doorways. These minutiae suddenly take on importance, and an inner life springs up. As with Flaubert, an element of control is apparent: the eye for sharp detail, an almost microcosmic interest in the subject.

Fauré's "Hellenic" artistic nature, too, strips away the excess of the Romanticism in which he was nurtured. His music is not a Romantic self-portrayal but an art of refinement and distance, expressive in a classical way. Like Atget, Fauré seems more at ease with smaller forms; and an almost detached and impersonal character--reminiscent of Flaubert--envelops his works.

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The theory of impersonality was once taken up by T. S. Eliot:

The poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experience combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry (literature, photography, music), and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality. . . .

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.6

Eliot's remarks seem to capsulize the restraint sensed in Fauré, Atget and Flaubert. Their emotions and sensitivity contribute to their works but do not dominate them.

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CHAPTER 2

GENERAL STYLISTIC FEATURES OF FAURÉ'S MUSIC

Fauré's life forms a link between two artistic worlds: Romanticism at its maturity and the rebellious experimentation of the twentieth century. In 1845, the year of Fauré's birth, Wagner's Tannhäuser was produced. Schumann was in his creative maturity and Berlioz was composing his La damnation de Faust. By the end of Fauré's life Schönberg had formalized his Method of Composing with Twelve Tones, Stravinsky had created Les Noces and Messiaen was composing his first works. Fauré's work, as Jean-Michel Nectoux wrote, "is a work of transition; he is a musician of the nineteenth century, but also a classic of the twentieth."  

Fauré's musical language is conservative in form and texture, yet he developed an ambiguous harmonic style by reuniting modality and tonality. In this language, melody derives itself from the harmony; lines are woven inseparably. Fauré was influenced by the harmonic theories of Gottfried Weber, whose ideas were disseminated in France by Gustave Lefèvre.  

For Weber, tonality was viewed more broadly than in Rameau's classical theory, foreign notes and altered chords did


8 Ibid., p. 421.
not create a change in tonality, seventh and ninth chords were not considered dissonant and the alteration of the mediant was possible without a change of tonality or mode. Therefore, Fauré's music must be considered in terms of horizontal phrases rather than by vertical chords. The bass line in particular is as much an independent line as it is an harmonic support. To illustrate, the opening of Les présents, op. 46 no. 1 (Figure 1) is in F major, despite the A♭ major suggestions. The mobility of the mediant (A♭ to A♮) is characteristic of Fauré's style.

![Figure 1: Les présents, op. 46 no. 1, opening](image)

The ambiguous tonal-modal nature of Fauré's music is also traced back to his training at the École Niedermeyer where he was introduced to plainchant and Renaissance polyphony as preparation to a career as church organist and choirmaster. In Lydia (Figure 2) Fauré mixes the F major scale with the Lydian mode with its raised fourth degree and tritonal suggestions.
Also, important to Fauré’s style is the shape and sequential movement that his melodies take. The opening of the A major violin sonata exemplifies the Fauréan tendency of beginning a theme without introduction. Typically, then, the violin sonata begins with an upbeat and progresses as a long, beautifully contoured trajectory. The theme also contains the motifs which the sonata needs for its development, in particular that of the syncopated third bar.
Figure 3: Violin Sonata in A major, op. 13, opening

Fauré's instrumental melodies are generally governed by wide intervals while the vocal music is characterized by narrow intervals. The instrumental melodies, particularly in Fauré's later years, involve more use of cross-rhythms as will be shown in connection with the sonatas for cello. It appears that rhythmic variety became more of a concern to Fauré in his late years. His desire to avoid stressing the strong beats of the bar in common time is somewhat analogous to his penchant for tonal-modal mixtures. The rhythmic flexibility, like the harmonic, is much like the flexibility of the sixteenth
century and Faure's training in the church music of this century would support such an analogy. One such example of this rhythmic flexibility is the bass line of the op. 92 song, *Le Don silencieux* (Figure 4).

Figure 4: *Le Don silencieux*, op. 92, bars 18-20

The ambiguity between the rhythmic vagueness of the accompaniment and the taut rhythmic pattern of the vocal line recalls that same ambiguity between the Lydian mode and the F major scale of *Lydia* (Figure 2).

It is perhaps the ambiguity that permeates Faure's art which sets him apart from other composers. It may also be this ambiguity which alienates many a listener. What the superficial listener may regard as monotony, the attentive listener will distinguish as
precision and control of detail. The musical language which Fauré speaks is singular and requires time. The cellist who wishes to study the sonatas should also be familiar with the songs and other chamber works. Fauré's art is elusive and his personality will not reveal itself in a single work.
CHAPTER 3

THE SONATAS FOR CELLO AND PIANO

The two cello sonatas of Gabriel Fauré were written late in the composer's life. Fauré attempted a cello sonata earlier in his career but this work was left unfinished. (All that remains of this early attempt is the slow movement which is the famous Élégie.) Each sonata presents musical elements which are particularly associated with Fauré's late compositional style and each is richly contrapuntal, canonic between the outer voices, syncopated and austere. Despite these shared traits, the sonatas greatly differ from one another in character. The circumstances under which these works were written can help to explain these differences.

The first Cello Sonata was composed rather quickly in July-August of 1917 during the most devastating period of the war. The Second Sonata was composed in 1921 soon after Fauré's academic retirement when the composer was able to devote his full energies to composition. It should be mentioned that, prior to this time, virtually all of Fauré's compositions were written during summer vacations.

First Cello Sonata, op. 109

The first Cello Sonata, op. 109, is in D minor and was dedicated to the conductor-cellist Louis Hasselmans. Hasselmans was one of a
distinguished Belgian-French family of musicians. Louis was the conductor of the Paris premiere of Fauré's opera, Pénélope.

As previously mentioned, this sonata was created during World War I. Jean-Michel Nectoux writes of Fauré's compositions during the years of the war:

His compositions of this period are among the most powerful in French music, having unusual force and even violence. . . .

This "force" and "violence" are evident in the opening of the First Sonata. Immediately, the listener is shaken by the rhythmic ambiguity created by a duple meter pattern in the piano part supporting the cello line which is following a triple meter pattern (Figure 5).

SONATE

Violoncelle et Piano

GABRIEL FAURÉ

Op. 109

I

Allegro

Allegro. =138

PIANO

Figure 5: Cello Sonata in D minor, op. 109, Allegro, opening

9 Nectoux, "Gabriel Fauré," p. 420.
The cello theme displays the unusually wide intervals which Fauré favored in his instrumental scoring. This theme can be traced to an earlier, discarded Symphonie in D minor, op. 40 from 1884 (Figure 6).

First Cello Sonata (op. 109)

Figure 6: Symphony in D minor, op. 40, opening

Another close resemblance to the opening of the op. 109 Sonata is found in the opening of Act III of Pénélope (1912) in which Ulysses sings of his anger and vengeance (Figure 7):

Figure 7: Pénélope, Act III, opening
The rhythmic ambiguity of the Cello Sonata gives way after fourteen measures to the first of several canonic devices which Fauré uses in this sonata (Figure 8).

![Sheet music]

Figure 8: Cello Sonata in D minor, op. 109, Allegro, meas. 14-17

This example (Figure 8) is particularly Fauréan because the canonic voices are presented at such extreme ranges. This feature is evident in much of the composer's late music and seems related to his use of extremely wide intervallic leaps found in the instrumental music.

The second theme is in the relative major and, for the first time, the insistent syncopations and cross-rhythms of the opening cease (Figure 9).
There is an extraordinary contrast provided by this theme and an equilibrium is established as the violence and ambiguity give way to expressive melodic line and order.

The development section sets the two themes in opposition. Fauré treats the opening theme in strict canonic fashion at the outset of this section (Figure 10).
This leads to a fragment of the second theme which undergoes a metamorphosis while the piano insistently pursues the duple pattern of the opening theme (Figure 11).
Only in the last moments of this section is the cello part dissuaded from its lyrical reverie and the intensity of the opening is renewed by a formal recapitulation. The cello asserts itself an octave higher than the original material and at a greater dynamic level (Figure 12).

Fauré introduces a rhythmic variation in this section which provides a greater ambiguity between the agitated nature of the piano part and the lyricism of the cello part (Figure 13).
In the coda, Fauré succeeds in combining elements of the two themes once again by recalling briefly in the piano the "dolce" chords of the second theme. It is now the cello which provides the contrasting opening theme material (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Cello Sonata in D minor, op. 109, Allegro, meas. 213-219.
The movement ends canonically with displaced accents and the cello rising through a D minor arpeggio, once again displaying the great range which this movement exhibits (Figure 15).

![Musical notation]

Figure 15: Cello Sonata in D minor, op. 19, Allegro, meas. 226-close

The Andante movement of the First Sonata provides a tranquil and contemplative contrast to the aggressive nature of the opening movement. The movement is in G minor and moves to G major toward the end. Like the Andante movements of the Second Cello Sonata, the Second Violin Sonata, and the Piano Trio, it forms a central panel
of a three movement scheme. These middle movements seem to be the center of emotive gravity as well and express what Martin Cooper defined as Fauré's "power of tranquil thought."\textsuperscript{10}

The movement possesses two rather complementary themes (Figure 16 and 17):

\begin{center}
\textbf{II}
\end{center}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure16}
\caption{Cello Sonata in D minor, op. 109, Andante, opening}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure17}
\caption{Cello Sonata in D minor, op. 109, Andante, meas. 11-16}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{10} Martin Cooper, French Music (From the Death of Berlioz to the Death of Fauré) (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 212.
Figure 16 serves initially as an introduction to Figure 17 but recurs elsewhere in the movement and gains an independence of its own. Later (Figure 18), the cello plays an augmented transformation of the material of Figure 16 while Figure 17 is heard in the piano.

![Musical notation image]

Figure 18: Cello Sonata in D minor, op. 109, Andante, meas. 21-27

It is the material of Figure 17, however, which is the focal point of the movement. This curious pentatonic melody is heard first on the fifth degree of the G minor scale and reappears on the first degree of the same scale with the same accompaniment. In this way, Fauré alters the melody but not the key. It is much like viewing the same scene from another perspective (Figure 19).
The finale, Allegro commodo, seems to recall the lyricism and sweep of Fauré's earlier period. The movement is in the tonic major which provides the entire sonata with a progression from the darker moments of the first movement, through the contemplativeness of the middle movement to a finale which brims over with melodic invention.

In this movement, Fauré approaches a rondo scheme in the manner he chose for the finales of many of his late works. However, Fauré blurs the formal structure in much the same ambiguous way he presents harmony and rhythm. One is less aware of a returning "rondo theme" and more conscious of an unfolding idea.

By way of illustration, Theme A (Figure 20) returns first with an identical musical texture, the same bass line and harmony but, as seen in the Andante, presented in a different degree of the scale (Figure 21).
Where this theme makes another appearance, it is treated developmentally in imitation between the two instruments (Figure 22).
The last entry occurs in strict canon, the hallmark of his late compositional style (Figure 23).
The coda (Figure 24) also derives its material from the same theme and Fauré in almost Beethovenian fashion uses only fragments of the theme until the listener is left only with a four-note unit. In this way, the sonata is closed.

Figure 24: Cello Sonata in D minor, op. 109, Allegro commodo, meas. 156-close.
Between these transformations is a Theme B which spans the full range of cello in two measures (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Cello Sonata in D minor, op. 109, Allegro commodo, meas. 21-22.

This expansive theme returns later in the movement to balance the formal scheme.

Constituting the central episode of the movement is a long canon at the octave at a distance of one beat (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Cello Sonata in D minor, op. 109, Allegro commodo, meas. 51-55.

Within this section Fauré seems to ask the impossible. Cello and piano left hand in octaves are doubled against the must balance with the piano right hand which is also engaged in a sixteenth note figuration (Figure 27).
Second Cello Sonata, op. 117

Fauré was commissioned by the State to compose a work commemorating the centenary of Napoleon's death in May of 1921. For this occasion he created a work, Chant funéraire, which was orchestrated for winds by Guillaume Balay who led the Orchestre de la Garde Républicaine. This occasional piece met with considerable success and Fauré used the work to form the middle movement of the Second Cello Sonata, op. 117.

The Sonata, op. 117, is in G minor and was written in 1921. It is dedicated to Charles Martin Loeffler, violinist-composer, who had left France and was, at the time of the Second Sonata's creation, enjoying success in Boston.

In this sonata, one finds the lyricism of Fauré's early style combined with the elaborate imitative writing which he favored in his later years. The first movement begins with the main theme in the piano which is then taken up canonically two bars later at the fifth degree of the scale by the cello (Figure 28).
The opening theme (Figure 28) repeats with the cello taking the lead in the imitation and leads to two episodes. First, a more compressed canonic episode is presented in the tonic (Figure 29).
The second episode, more related to the opening theme is also introduced (Figure 30).

Figure 30: Cello Sonata in G minor, op. 117, Allegro, meas. 49-50

The restlessness of this opening material is ended by an expansive second theme in E♭ major which is introduced by the piano (Figure 31).
Figure 31: Cello Sonata in G minor, op. 117, Allegro, meas. 72-102

The development section is begun with a restatement of the compressed canonic episode (Figure 29). Fauré then combines the
three episodes (Figures 29, 30, 31) and unifies this combination of
the syncopated accompaniment of the opening.

The recapitulation retains the opening theme but dispenses with
the episodic material (Figures 30 and 31), and the second theme is
immediately brought back in its original key. This harmonic path
leads to a second development in which Fauré presents a permutation
of the opening theme in the piano (Figure 32).

![Figure 32: Cello Sonata in G minor, op. 117, Allegro,
meas. 256-262](image)

Notable in this section is the progression to the relative major
in which the movement will conclude.

An elaborate coda (Figure 33) ends the movement. Here one finds
Fauré as youthful as in his earlier compositions. The upward sweep
in the piano part, the marvelous excursion from G major to D major
and back in the course of four bars, and the cross-rhythms of cello
chords in duple meter against the triple meter piano pattern combine
to take the listener along an exhilarating trajectory to the final
G major cadence.
Figure 33: Cello Sonata in G minor, op. 117, Allegro, meas. 324-close
The second movement, Andante, is the homage to Napoleon, Chant funéraire, scored for cello and piano. It is undoubtedly among the finest slow movements written for the cello and would stand on its own if programmed as a short piece. It is, in fact, tempting to compare this movement with the famous Élégie partly because of the shared C minor tonality and because of the poetic writing heard in each work. Placed side by side, the two works reflect the refined reshaping of Fauré's imagination over the span of the composer's career. The early Élégie climaxes dramatically with the cadence-like cello filigree and weighty piano part. The late Andante possesses an introspective nobility even at its climax; the drama is as profound as in Élégie but the means of conveying the intensity is more refined.

Perhaps the most exquisite moment in the movement is the abrupt change to the parallel major in which the gravity of C minor gives way to quiet optimism (Figure 34).

Figure 34: Cello Sonata in G minor, op. 117, Andante, meas. 39-44
The opening material returns not with the soaring drama of the Élégie recapitulation but simply and briefly. Fauré shifts to C major and treats the material of Figure 34 in canons. The movement spins its way quietly to its C major ending.

The finale, Allegro vivo, is in the character of a scherzo. Again, Fauré creates a rhythmic ambiguity of the most subtle kind. The melodic phrases fall in a triple meter mold while the accompaniment adheres to the duple meter time signature (Figure 35).

![Allegro vivo](image)

Figure 35: Cello Sonata in G minor, op. 117, Allegro vivo, opening

This device is similar to the opening movement of the First Cello Sonata. In that earlier work, the effect was one of tension. The Second Sonata, however, portrays a sportive grace.

The second theme which follows without transition begins much like a four-part chorale which is colored by several parallel fifths (Figure 36).
A peculiar episode follows which begins with a three-note announcement and continues with a dazzling piano run which is punctuated by "pizzicatti" in the cello part. This is the only time in either sonata that Fauré has turned to this colorist effect (Figure 37).

Figure 36: Cello Sonata in G minor, op. 117, Allegro vivo, meas. 63-74
This three-note announcement is very important at the movement's end for it heralds the change to G major and the beginning of another of Fauré's brilliant codas.
The two Fauré cello sonatas form an important contribution to the body of cello literature. The cellist who wishes to expand his repertoire beyond the more familiar Germanic literature should not overlook Fauré. Both works represent the composer at his most reflective and his most exuberant. While the First Sonata exploits more of the technical resources of the cello by means of the extreme range, the Second Sonata offers music of great immediacy and sustained inventiveness.

Both sonatas, like all of Fauré's music, demand great technical refinement and temperamental control. These are not works associated with exhibitionist performance but with a performance stamped by inner intelligence and planning. For the cellist, therefore, there is a challenge as great and as rewarding as can be found in the repertoire.
APPENDIX

COMPLETE WORKS FOR CELLO AND PIANO
OF GABRIEL FAURE

Élégie, op. 24, 1880.
Papillon, op. 77, 1885.
Pétite pièce, op. 49, 1888.
Romance, op. 69, 1894.
Morceau de lecture, op. 75, 1897.
Sicilienne, op. 78, 1898.
Sérénade, op. 98, 1908.
Sonata no. 1, op. 109, 1917.
Sonata no. 2, op. 117, 1921.
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