

## Looking Back on a Journey

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Let us begin by considering how Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924) made a way for himself in France between about 1855 and 1909. As for the posthumous international development of research into his music, that will be the focus of the latter part of this text.

Fauré's long life gives one pause. One might describe it as a slow but constant and courageous ascent. Really, nothing destined this boy from Ariège, deep in the south of France, to become one of the glorious figures of the French Republic – the Republic that would one day confer on this modest man the extraordinary honor of a national funeral, like that of Victor Hugo.

We remark that since he was intended from childhood to become a church musician, he did not follow the educational path taken by the majority of French musicians and attend the Paris Conservatory, an institution founded by the National Convention in 1795. He was only nine years old when he was enrolled instead in the excellent *École de musique classique et religieuse* that had just been founded by Louis Niedermeyer, and he would study there from 1854 to 1865. At the *École*, a capital encounter took place: he met Camille Saint-Saëns, his teacher and soon his friend, who took over piano instruction after Niedermeyer's death in 1861. Fauré's beginnings as an organist were rather modest. He languished in the loft of the Church of Saint-Sauveur in Rennes (1865–69); on returning to Paris, he became organist at Notre-Dame de Clignancourt (1870) and then at the swank parish of Saint-Honoré-d'Eylau (1871). After the war he played the choir organ at Saint-Sulpice, a post he passed along to his friend André Messenger when he had to replace Saint-Saëns at La Madeleine during the older composer's tours. His professional life stabilized in 1877 when he became choirmaster of the same church, a post that put him in the public eye. Saint-Saëns was then principal organist at La Madeleine, an even more prominent position, which he yielded to his former student in 1896. Fauré was more than fifty years old when he

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received his first mark of official recognition, also in 1896: his appointment as professor of composition at the Paris Conservatory, where he succeeded a celebrated figure in French music, Jules Massenet.

As for his candidacies for election to the Academy of Fine Arts (the Institut), Fauré experienced two wounding disappointments. In 1894, he received four votes while his triumphant rival Théodore Dubois (1837–1924) got nineteen. He was no luckier in 1896: Charles Lenepveu (1840–1910) received nineteen votes against four for Fauré. The composer of *La bonne chanson* would reach the venerable age of sixty-four before being elected to the Academy of Fine Arts in 1909.

Examination of Fauré's professional life in the years around 1900 makes one wonder how and when he found time to compose. Appointed Inspector of Musical Instruction in 1892, he had to crisscross France to evaluate the activities of conservatories in the major cities, a role that required endless trips and the redaction of detailed reports on his return to Paris. After 1896, he continued this work on top of his obligations at La Madeleine and the Paris Conservatory; his work as a musical critic for *Le Figaro* after 1903 added yet another layer. In 1905, at the age of sixty, he finally could abandon his exhausting labors as inspector, organist, and professor of composition to assume the directorship of the Conservatory, an appointment that greatly astonished Parisian musical circles, since the composer had never been a student there.

As for the dissemination of his works, Fauré had to endure an extremely slow uptake by publishers with scant conviction in his merits. Hartmann published four of his songs in 1871,<sup>1</sup> and these were transferred five years later to Antoine Choudens, who issued his first songs individually, drop by drop, and finally published twenty together in 1879. The young Fauré's relations with Choudens were always difficult. As early as 1870, the composer wrote his friend Julien Koszul, "I shall send you the 'Gavotte' one of these days . . . I'll also tuck in a copy of my *romance* 'S'il est un charmant gazon,' which is about to come out. Choudens, apparently quite a comedian, gave it the title 'Rêve d'amour'! I would never have thought of that."<sup>2</sup> In 1879, the young composer broke off relations with the surly publisher when the latter adamantly refused to bring out the radiant Piano Quartet, Op. 15. In a letter to his confidante Marie Clerc, the composer diagnosed Choudens with "quartetto-phobia" and added, "Very well! This

<sup>1</sup> "Lydia," "Hymne," "Mai," and "Seule."

<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Fauré, *Correspondance, suivie de Lettres à Madame H.*, ed. Jean-Michel Nectoux (Paris: Fayard, 2015), 29.

little snub has undoubtedly been more significant for me than I would ever have thought. It's really the end of the line. If I knew M. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, I would ask him why the anatomical collection in the Jardin des Plantes does not have any publishers' skeletons!"<sup>3</sup> Op. 15 would be issued by Julien Hamelle who, for better or worse, became Fauré's regular publisher from 1880 to 1905 and greatly vexed the composer.<sup>4</sup> Fauré would later find in Henri Heugel (1906) and Auguste and Jacques Durand (1913) publishers of quite another level of commitment.

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While Fauré's music often met with favorable reviews in the press of his time, only much later did it inspire extensive critical study, scant examples of which appeared during his lifetime. In 1888, Hugues Imbert published a chapter in his book *Profils de musiciens* whose title page, unfortunately, identified the composer as "J. Fauré," typical of the Parisian press who frequent confused the famous baritone Jean-Baptiste Faure (1830–1914) with the young composer.<sup>5</sup> Faure was famous for playing the title roles in *Don Giovanni* and *Guillaume Tell* at the Paris Opéra, but he also occasionally composed vocal music. He lives on in memory thanks to the astonishing collection of paintings, including Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, which he bequeathed to posterity.

In 1909, the monthly magazine *Musica* honored Fauré with a special issue, and in 1914 Louis Vuillemin wrote a short book, *Gabriel Fauré et son œuvre*, brought out by the composer's own publisher Durand.<sup>6</sup> During World War I, Georges Jean-Aubry devoted a few pages to Fauré in his collection *La musique française d'aujourd'hui*, to which Fauré contributed a preface.<sup>7</sup> Émile Vuillermoz reprinted his articles on *Mirages* and the Second Piano Quintet in a collection entitled *Musiques d'aujourd'hui*, and Fauré honored his former pupil with a short preface to this

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>4</sup> See Nectoux, "Un début dans la vie d'artiste: Gabriel Fauré et ses premiers éditeurs," in *Noter, annoter, éditer la musique: Mélanges offerts à Catherine Massip*, ed. Cécile Reynaud and Herbert Schneider (Geneva: Droz, 2012), 565–577.

<sup>5</sup> Hughes Imbert, *Profils de musiciens* (Paris: Fischbacher et Sagot, 1888), 57–78. The composer's personal copy (private collection) bears this inscription: "To M. Gabriel Fauré | Kind and affectionate recollections | H. Imbert."

<sup>6</sup> *Musica* 77 (February 1909); Louis Vuillemin, *Gabriel Fauré et son œuvre* (Paris: A. Durand et fils, 1914).

<sup>7</sup> Georges Jean-Aubry, *La musique française d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Perrin, 1916); the chapter on Fauré is on pp. 72–81.

volume.<sup>8</sup> Joseph de Marliave had consecrated two remarkable articles to Fauré's music just before the war, which were republished in the posthumous volume *Études musicales* in 1917.<sup>9</sup> In October 1922, under the editorship of Henry Prunières, *La revue musicale* honored Fauré with a special issue. It opened with a short memoir by the composer himself, recalling his student days, and continued with essays by Émile Vuillermoz, Maurice Ravel, Roland-Manuel, Charles Kœchlin, Florent Schmitt, Roger-Ducasse, Alfred Cortot, Nadia Boulanger, and René Chalupt. Most of the authors were former composition students of Fauré's, and some of the essays remain significant because of their direct insights into the composer's world.<sup>10</sup> Fauré died in November 1924, and Alfred Bruneau, observing a hallowed tradition, delivered a long eulogy at the Académie des Beaux-Arts when he inherited the late composer's chair, a speech that was later published as a pamphlet.<sup>11</sup> As for Fauré's work as a musical critic for the daily paper *Le Figaro*, a selection of his articles, sensibly regrouped by the composers under review, was published in 1930 under the title *Opinions musicales*.<sup>12</sup>

This bibliographical overview may seem rather slender. Yet one must stress that from the moment of his death Fauré's work attracted a veritable cult. The first substantial books about him appeared, written by his former students: a study by Charles Kœchlin which continues to be of great interest, and a belated one by Émile Vuillermoz.<sup>13</sup> But we must draw even more attention to the writings of Philippe Fauré-Fremiet (1889–1954), the composer's younger son. He published a biography of his father in 1929,

<sup>8</sup> Émile Vuillermoz, *Musiques d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: G. Crès, 1923), 1–20. We should also add the very short essay at the start of André Cœuroy's *La musique française moderne* (Paris: Delagrave, 1924).

<sup>9</sup> Joseph de Marliave, *Études musicales* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1917). The opening section of the book, headed "Un musicien français: Gabriel Fauré," includes two essays: "Sa musique de piano" [1909], 1–34; and "Pénélope" [1913], 35–60. De Marliave (1873–1914) died in battle on August 24, 1914. He is best known for his book on Beethoven's string quartets, published in 1925 with a preface by Fauré. Ravel dedicated the splendid Toccata from *Le tombeau de Couperin* to the memory of de Marliave.

<sup>10</sup> Gabriel Fauré, special issue of *La Revue Musicale* 4, No. 11 (October 1, 1922).

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Bruneau, *La vie et les œuvres de Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1925).

<sup>12</sup> Gabriel Fauré, *Opinions musicales*, ed. P.-B. Gheusi (Paris: Rieder, 1930). Nicolas Southon is currently working on a complete edition of Fauré's critical writings.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Kœchlin, *Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Alcan, 1927; second edition, Paris: Plon, 1949). Émile Vuillermoz, *Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Flammarion, 1960), completed only a few months before his death; the English translation by Kenneth Schapin (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1969) contains valuable additions: a chronology, catalogue of works, an index, and an important discography by Steven Smolian. For the record, let us also mention, despite its extremely irritating approach, the book by Georges Servières, *Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Laurens, 1930).

and then published a new version in 1957 that includes the additional essays “Réflexions sur la confiance fauréenne” and “Notes sur l’interprétation,” as well as an important catalogue of works arranged by opus number and a discography covering the years 1926–1957.<sup>14</sup> We also have Philippe Fauré-Fremiet to thank for an edition of the composer’s letters to his wife Marie, published under the title *Lettres intimes*.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, these letters were published without critical notes or an index, but the 300-odd pages offer the reader glimpses into the workshop of a composer who was always secretive. Indeed, a few weeks before his death, he wrote to his wife, “When I am back in Paris, each day I shall set about giving you, so that you may burn them, all my sketches, all my rough drafts, all those things of which I wish nothing to subsist after I am gone. This worry haunted me while I was ill. You will help me to appease it.”<sup>16</sup> This invaluable corpus of letters still awaits a truly critical edition, which it obviously merits.<sup>17</sup>

In 1945, the composer’s centenary prompted various publications. We may mention Claude Rostand’s *L’œuvre de Fauré* and the more personal work of Fauré’s near-homonym and friend, Gabriel Faure (no accent mark!), which includes interesting excerpts from letters he received from the composer.<sup>18</sup> Above these looms the important volume brought out by Éditions de la Revue musicale, *Le centenaire de Gabriel Fauré (1845–1945)*, which includes “La genèse de Pénélope” by Philippe Fauré-Fremiet, “Le centenaire de Gabriel Fauré” by René Dumesnil, and a study by Georges Jean-Aubry on an operatic project, “Gabriel Fauré, Paul Verlaine et Albert Samain, ou Les Tribulations de ‘Bouddha’: Lettres inédites.”

Certain aspects of Fauré’s work prompted specialized studies, for example, Marguerite Long’s little book *Au piano avec Gabriel Fauré*, which brings together personal memories and the advice of an interpreter who fostered a sort of cult of the composer – a cult of which she firmly believed herself the sole priestess.<sup>19</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, we must admit, Fauré’s music suffered from a certain disaffection. The generation of fervent

<sup>14</sup> Philippe Fauré-Fremiet, *Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Rieder, 1929), an edition illustrated with nearly 100 high-quality (rotogravure) images (second edition, Paris: Albin-Michel, 1957).

<sup>15</sup> Fauré, *Lettres intimes*, ed. Philippe Fauré-Fremiet (Paris: Grasset, 1951).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 295 (October 14, 1924). Translation from Carlo Caballero, *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 241.

<sup>17</sup> The original documents are held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique.

<sup>18</sup> Claude Rostand, *L’œuvre de Fauré* (Paris: J. B. Janin, 1945), of little interest; Faure, *Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Artaud, 1945).

<sup>19</sup> Marguerite Long, *Au piano avec Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Julliard, 1963). Long was the widow of Joseph de Marliave, cited above in note 9.

Fauréans born in the 1880s dwindled and musical France was focused on the discovery of newer works stretching from Bartók to Messiaen, from Stockhausen to Boulez . . .

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Although Debussy, Fauré, and Ravel are often invoked as a triumvirate, we must recognize that, of the three, Fauré remains by far the least understood, the least famous, and the least often performed. This state of affairs provokes and, indeed, merits speculation. The composer's creative activity developed in an era when Parisian musical life was dominated by the lyric stage, and we may remark, when we consider Fauré's work as a whole, that he embraced, first and foremost, the intimate media of song, piano music, chamber music, and religious music. His rare symphonic essays did not meet with success or even with the composer's own approval, and he destroyed most of his scores, often keeping only a few themes for much later redeployment.<sup>20</sup>

While his work certainly has spectacular moments – we may recall the unjustly forgotten *Prométhée* (1900) and the beautiful design of *Pénélope* (1913) – Fauré is a musician of understatement; he lacks the orchestral mastery of his student Ravel and the inventive freedom of Debussy. Whoever would follow the lines of his music must listen attentively and tune into the harmonic language, so rich in surprises, which may startle listeners on first hearing. Fauré is a musician of the unexpected. To the very end, and with ever greater boldness, he explored harmonic landscapes uniquely his own. But his muse remained reserved, shadowy, only attaining splendor in his final years. Nonetheless, who would deny that the traits so peculiar to his aesthetic are also its assets? The musician operated in a highly personal universe that ultimately satisfied him. Witness the astonishing letter he wrote to his former teacher Saint-Saëns in October 1893: “My dear Camille, if, by chance, you wake up one morning in a state of disgust and nausea over Meurice and Vacquerie's *Antigone* . . . pass it along to me! Incidental music is the only kind [of theatrical composition] that more or less suits my small means!”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Symphony in F, Op. 20 (1866–73), from which he recycled two movements; Concerto for Violin, Op. 14 (1878–9), two movements composed and performed and only one (the Allegro) extant; Symphony in D Minor, Op. 40 (1884), performed and destroyed.

<sup>21</sup> Fauré, *Correspondance*, 213. Fauré was referring to incidental music for a revival of Sophocles' *Antigone*, translated by Paul Meurice and Auguste Vacquerie. The premiere took place at the Comédie-Française on November 21, 1893 with music by Saint-Saëns.

Why Fauré? I found myself being asked this question again and again by people surprised by this choice I had taken as a young man. To tell the truth, I would have liked to commit myself to Ravel's music, which I spent my leisure hours listening to in recordings by Vlado Perlemuter and Samson François. In 1975, the centenary of Ravel's birth, I curated a Ravel Exposition in the great gallery of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, interviewing those few surviving witnesses who knew the composer, such as Madeleine Grey, the mezzo-soprano who recorded the *Chansons madécasses* under Ravel's direction. But I judged, not without some good sense, that the last word on the composer had been written by his devoted follower Roland-Manuel (1891–1966) and by the man who would become my teacher, Vladimir Jankélévitch (1903–85).

Fauré's music slowly but surely captured me. In fact, it had attracted me for many years, and with hindsight I feel that a series of happy accidents led to my impassioned, fascinating research into this most secret of musicians. In my early adolescent years, I was beguiled by certain songs, like "Automne," "Au bord de l'eau," and "Les berceaux," which I discovered thanks to Colette Ledran, my music teacher at the Lycée de Montgeron.<sup>22</sup> Each week she gathered around her piano some older students who came to sing the works that with flawless musical instinct she recommended to us. And so we sang together passionately (and in French) *An die ferne Geliebte* by Beethoven or Cherubino's "Voi che sapete" from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*. But I particularly remember the ravishing voice of Jocelyne Vessières singing "Dove sono," the Countess's second aria from the same opera, or Mélisande's song from Debussy's opera:<sup>23</sup>

Mes longs cheveux descendent jusqu'au seuil de la tour,  
 Mes cheveux vous attendent tout le long de la tour,  
 Et tout le long du jour, et tout le long du jour.

Saint Daniel et Saint Michel  
 Saint Michel et Saint Raphaël  
 Je suis née un dimanche,  
 Un dimanche à midi.

<sup>22</sup> My first biography, *Fauré* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), is dedicated to her. She is also one of the three dedicatees of my recent *Gabriel Fauré: Catalogue des œuvres*, in *Œuvres complètes de Gabriel Fauré*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> She was the daughter of André Vessières, a remarkable Arkel in *Pelléas* at the Opéra-Comique. He can be heard, under the baton of Ernest Ansermet, in a 1960 recording, later reissued on compact disc.

Mæterlinck in fact wrote five versions of Mélisande's song. John William Mackail, who translated *Pelléas et Mélisande* for the London production in 1898, chose a different one, which Fauré set to music (in English):

The King's three blind daughters  
 Sit locked in a hold.  
 In the darkness their lamps  
 Make a glimmer of gold.

Up the stairs of the turret  
 The sisters are gone.  
 Seven days they wait there,  
 And the lamps they burn on.

What hope? says the first,  
 And leans o'er the flame.  
 I hear our lamps burning,  
 O yet! if he came!

O hope! says the second,  
 Was that the lamps' flare,  
 Or a sound of low footsteps?  
 The Prince on the stair!

But the holiest sister,  
 She turns her about:  
 O no hope now for ever,  
 Our lamps are gone out.

But I should evoke an even more distant period of my life, my childhood – in a family where music was always present, loved, and practiced. My maternal grandfather, René Brille, possessed a superb bass-baritone voice, having received his musical training from the brothers of the Collège Saint Joseph in Dijon, where he was called upon to sing Gregorian chant in the boys' choir of the Cathedral of Saint-Bénigne. After he became an engineer, stationed just east of Paris in Gagny, he participated actively in the choir of the parish of Saint-Germain, of which he was also president. I still have vivid memories of the times he invited me to climb the organ loft as a boy to add my voice to the church choir during Christmas Masses. Seized with passion and astonishment, I beheld the organist Mademoiselle Ravassard lavish the full energy of her hands and feet on the consoles and pedalboard. The choir and organ music were then directed by the composer Roger Calmel (1920–98), a student of Messiaen



and Milhaud and long-time professor at the Maîtrise de Radio France. Under his direction, I heard on many occasions and with a thrill that has survived the passage of many years Fauré's first youthful masterwork, the *Cantique de Jean Racine*.

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During the long and difficult months of the revolution of May 1968, after the prospect of university examinations evaporated, I began to study Fauré's chamber music, perhaps his most characteristic field of creativity. I soon realized that most of the books devoted to him offered few details concerning either the chronology or the analysis of these masterpieces. Driven by the energy and audacity of youth, I decided to go back to the autograph sources, manuscripts, and letters. Eager to deepen my research by consulting the composer's own archives, I got in touch with his daughter-in-law, Mme. Philippe Fauré-Fremiet (née Blanche Felon, 1895–1983), who received this young scholar in an unforgettable manner. She welcomed me into nothing less than the last home of the composer, at 32 rue des Vignes in Paris, where he moved in April 1911. Fauré's presence still seemed palpable. Nothing appeared to have changed for half a century in the vast apartment situated on the fifth floor of a classic bourgeois building of the sixteenth arrondissement. A long hallway opened onto a dining room to the left; then came the composer's study, facing the street. It was an intimate room draped in red cloth, with black woodwork picked out in gold. Above the white marble hearth rose a mirror fashioned in Louis XVI style; on the wall were many watercolors, drawings, and paintings by the composer's father-in-law, the sculptor Emmanuel Fremiet (1824–1910). A medium-sized Erard grand piano occupied a large part of the room,<sup>24</sup> and there was still a divan upholstered in grey velvet which stood against black-and-gold wooden doors that would have opened onto the dining room. A bay window with a view of greenery graced this studio where the composer worked and slept. In the entry hall one could see to the right the immense atelier, two stories high, belonging to the composer's wife Marie, née Fremiet.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> This piano from 1914 was bequeathed along with John Singer Sargent's oil portrait of the composer to the Musée de la musique, Cité de la Musique–Philharmonie de Paris (inv. E. 995.6.157), as was a plaster bust of the musician by Emmanuel Fremiet (inv. E. 995.6.157), which is visible in a well-known photograph of the composer in front of his piano in his studio.

<sup>25</sup> She had a talent for drawing but also tried her hand at sculpture. According to Blanche Fauré-Fremiet, when she died (1926) only formless attempts were found in her studio.

Over the course of May and June 1968, in a Paris lacking all means of communication, I used up the last liters of petrol in my little car to cross the capital, almost deserted, to come to work in the Fauré archives. I would eventually spend innumerable fascinating hours there consulting original documents that Blanche Fauré-Fremiet brought me with unflagging trust and patience. Her attention, willingness to help, encouragement, and friendship were a constant source of support. In the large atelier at rue des Vignes, two black wooden file-cases were placed at my disposal, containing an impressive collection of manuscripts, letters, and photographs of the musician. A few years later, in 1979, I took great joy in welcoming them into the collections of the Département de la musique of the Bibliothèque nationale, where, as a young curator, I cataloged them.

Ever modest, Blanche Fauré-Fremiet maintained from the outset that she could in no way guide my research, especially in the absence of her late husband. She suggested that I approach Vladimir Jankélévitch, the celebrated philosopher and long-established professor at the Sorbonne, who was friendly with the Fauré family. He had already devoted three indispensable works to the composer in 1938, 1951, and 1974.<sup>26</sup> I enjoyed the privilege of many long conversations with the philosopher in his beautiful apartment at 1 Quai aux Fleurs, situated near the tip of the Île de la Cité. During our meetings, sitting near his study and piano, I had an unforgettable view of the spire of Notre-Dame. Under his direction I wrote a dissertation entitled “Fauré et le théâtre” (1980).

I count among my most moving memories of those years the two interviews I held in January and February 1971 with the composer’s older son, Emmanuel Fauré-Fremiet (1883–1971), a renowned researcher in comparative embryology and professor at the Collège de France. This old man – witty, the essence of charm – relayed the memory of how on summer nights in Bougival he heard *La bonne chanson* sung by Emma Bardac accompanied by his own father ... During my studies at the Institut de musicologie, I encountered another great teacher in Yves Gérard, a researcher at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), known for his catalogue of the works of Boccherini and also responsible for the Saint-Saëns archives housed in the Château de Dieppe. Under his direction I published an edition of the correspondence between Fauré and Saint-Saëns, the composer’s teacher and friend.

<sup>26</sup> Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Gabriel Fauré et ses mélodies* (Paris: Plon, 1938); *Gabriel Fauré: Ses mélodies et son esthétique* (Paris: Plon, 1951); and *Gabriel Fauré et l’inexprimable* (Paris: Plon, 1974).