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Allusion Analysis in Fauré's *Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre*

ABSTRACT

Background

Jean-Michel Nectoux, Robert Orledge, Robin Tait, and Carlo Caballero have surveyed Gabriel Fauré's music, examined its musical language, assessed its contributions, and explored its context. However, relatively little attention has been paid to Fauré's *Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre* (1918), a 15-minute *concertante* work that strategically avoids bravura display, and eschews extremes of dissonance and technical complexity. In particular, there are no analyses that address the signification of its temporal allusions or account for the comprehensive process that unifies its ternary (ABA') structure.

Fauré's *Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre* anticipated Neoclassicism, yet is not often associated with that movement, perhaps because Fauré was unburdened by anxiety of influence, self-consciousness, or a sense of belatedness. Drawing upon the composer's Symbolist-influenced aesthetic, it exploits a variety of musical allusions to suggest multiple, co-existent temporalities, avoiding pastiche via referential subtlety and an underlying contextual process. The *Fantaisie* thus documents a composer in communion with a contemporary audience intimately acquainted with his musical style and *œuvre*, as well as the rich range of Western music — a rarity indeed. Its title suppresses expectations of a Romantic piano concerto and suggests the work's eclectic and interactive nature, signalling that reflection is essential to its experience.

While many forms of analysis may reveal interesting aspects of the *Fantaisie*'s structure, the composition's expressive essence seems best addressed by drawing upon hermeneutic methods associated with poetry. The first phase of poetic Symbolism, as exemplified by the early verse of Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine, features enormous amounts of suggestive allusion that engages a reader's imagination, encouraging intense investment in the aesthetic experience of reading verse, and its principles influenced Fauré's personal style from the 1870s. In the *Fantaisie*, temporal, genre, and intertextual allusions are essential to its expression and must be isolated, correlated, and explicated in order to illuminate its expressive content. In particular, Fauré's own opera *Pénélope* (1913) participates in the *Fantaisie*'s dialogue.

Aims and repertoire

Gabriel Fauré's simulation of multitemporality within his *Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre* (1918) is illuminable by the isolation and identification of historical, genre, and intertextual allusions woven within its fabric. Paradoxically, allusion through absence emerges as a source of the *Fantaisie*'s comprehensive coherence, with expected material strategically delayed until the closing minute of the music.

Methods

Fauré's allusions to forms from earlier eras, including fugue, *concerto grosso*, *sinfonia concertante*, as well as *ritornello*, *rondo*, and *sonata* designs shape the *Fantaisie*. In addition, other elements associated with the past, like modality and *ostinato*, plus genres like the waltz and operatic paraphrase, as well as allusions to Fauré's own works and distinctive stylistic traits play integral roles in its success. Temporal conflicts arising from unexpected juxtapositions provide impetus. Finally, analysis of 'allusion via absence' offers an account of the *Fantaisie*'s teleological impression.

Three excerpts may serve to illustrate. Example 1 presents the principal theme of the *Fantaisie*, Example 2 presents its secondary theme, and Example 3 presents the theme associated with the character of Ulysse from Fauré's opera *Pénélope*.

Ex. 1. Fauré, *Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre* (1918), b. 1–13.

Ex. 2a. Fauré, *Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre*, b. 29–41.

Ex. 2b. Fauré, *Pénélope* (1913), theme associated with Ulysse.

In Example 1, suggestions of the Lydian mode arise via the C-sharps in the first line (b. 2-4) and the B-naturals in the second (b. 6-8). These, in turn, may evoke memory of Fauré's *mélodie Lydia* (1870) within engaged and experienced listeners. But the series of three imitative thematic entries in Exam-

ple 1 also serve to evoke the genre of fugue, despite the absence of other Baroque features, such as transposition by 4th or 5th.

Example 2a portrays the secondary theme of the *Fantaisie*, which provides contrast, as well as suggestions of the Mixolydian and Aeolian modes. However, it alludes to the theme associated with the character Ulysse in Fauré's opera *Pénélope* (1913) via its intervallic content, as the initial brackets in Examples 2a and 2b suggest, as well as its rhythm. The second bracket in Example 2b reveals that the first theme of the *Fantaisie* features an embedded reference to the Ulysse theme of Fauré's *Pénélope*: the ascending fifths bracketed in the latter are referenced by the first, third and fifth notes of the former. In effect, the *Fantaisie* is laced with references to *Pénélope*, and for listeners acquainted with that work, represents a reminder of a familiar form — the operatic paraphrase.

The treatment of the principal themes in the first section of the *Fantaisie* recalls ritornello and/or rondo designs, while the treatment of their reprise in the final section reflects sonata form. Within the contrasting central section, a dissonant ostinato drives antiphonal interactivity interrupted by episodes, one of which alludes to the genre of the waltz.

Finally, 'allusion by absence' refers to the manner in which Fauré broadly manipulates expectation to create teleological momentum that culminates in the closing bars, drawing upon aspects of genre, structure, and historical context. As if to reward his listeners, as well as the pianist, Lisztian bravura — so conspicuously absent throughout a work already and obviously part of a new era — finally arrives, providing within this retrospectively-oriented yet thoroughly twentieth-century work one last allusion to the past, a fond reminiscence of the Romantic era within a Modern context. Approaching *Fauré's Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre* as if it were poetry — full of retrospective and at times nostalgic allusions — enables a rewarding grasp of its expressive content and establishes a foundation for further exploration.

Implications

This research demonstrates an analytical approach to musical allusion that may be appropriate to other early-stage Neoclassical musical essays, and thus serve musicological inquiry. Equally important, it highlights the modernity of Fauré's *Fantaisie* and invite reassessment of its contribution to the early twentieth-century literature. Finally, it illustrates how contextual sensitivity assures reliable analytical insights where idiosyncratic works are concerned.

The insights of this research may be fully appreciated when contextualized within the forthcoming exposition of the composer's aesthetic principles and compositional techniques called *The Music of Gabriel Fauré: Style, Structure, and the Art of Allusion*, where a full analysis of the *Fantaisie* appears in Chapter 10. Fauré's musical style continuously draws on the premises and principles found in the first phase of French Symbolist poetry — exemplified by Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) and especially Verlaine's *Poèmes Saturniens* (1866), *Fêtes Galantes* (1869), and *Romances sans Paroles* (1874) — which appeared precisely as he was developing his own artistic voice, and they remain readily apparent a half-century later within his *Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre* of 1918.

Keywords

Allusion, hermeneutics, Neoclassicism, signification, Symbolism.

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