**On the cusp of change  
UCL CMC concert on Wednesday 16th November 2022**

**Gabriel Fauré**

According to the pianist Graham Johnson, Gabriel Fauré’s ‘achievements are at the heart of French song. No other composer’s output traverses the years in which the *mélodie* [the French art song] was at its height with a succession of masterpieces, ranging from tuneful salon trifles in the 1860s to the late cycles, unique in twentieth-century music, which seem as modern and sometimes as unfathomable as anything written by the 1920s avant-garde.’ (Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes: *A French Song Companion,* p.160.) Fauré’s stylistic trajectory can indeed be followed through his six decades of song composing. His musical language became increasingly individual and exploratory, sometimes inward-looking, and with unexpected, elusive but ‘logical' twists and turns to the harmony; in many of the late works it is as if the music is pared down to its essentials – every note counts.

Claude Debussy's description of Fauré as ‘the master of charms’, though not inaccurate, scarcely does him justice. The song ‘Fleur jetée’ provides a fine example of the vigorous and impassioned side of Fauré’s musical character (and incidentally the demanding piano part reminds us of what an accomplished pianist Fauré himself was). Charm is certainly present in the earlier ‘Au bord de l’eau’, with its picture of two lovers watching the world go by and contrasting it with the permanence of their love. Fauré’s richly expressive harmony, although rooted in the harmonic language of the day, is already thoroughly his own. The relaxed rhythm is that of a barcarolle, a favourite of Fauré’s (he composed thirteen barcarolles for piano in the course of his career, some of them uncompromisingly complex and serious). A somewhat more energetic barcarolle rhythm underlies the final song – Fauré’s very last – in the brief song-cycle *L’horizon chimérique* of 1921, suggesting, as do figurations in the first two songs, the sway of the sea. By contrast, the apparently simple but nuanced texture of ‘Diane, Séléné’ gives an otherworldly character to this lunar invocation.

Fauré kept up with developments in French poetry, and his choice of poets for musical settings ranges during his career over generations, starting in 1861 with Victor Hugo (1802-85). Particularly remarkable is *L'horizon chimérique,* to texts by a young poet killed early in the First World War, Jean de la Ville de Mirmont (1886-1914) whose collection *L’horizon chimérique* (1911-12) came to Fauré’s attention upon its posthumous publication in 1920. The poet was brought up and lived in the port city of Bordeaux, from which comes his rather ambiguous obsession with ships, the sea, departures and horizons – a source of renewed inspiration to the composer.

Not only did the elderly Fauré set poems by a young man, he also dedicated the cycle to a young singer starting his career – the Swiss baritone Charles Panzéra (1896-1976), who gave the first performance in 1922. Nowadays Panzéra's powerful 1936 recording of the cycle can be found online; we are fortunate to be able to step back so easily almost into Fauré’s own musical world.

*Roger Beeson*

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| **Fleur jetée** | **Discarded flower** |
|  |  |
| Emporte ma folie | Carry my folly away |
| Au gré du vent, | at the will of the wind, |
| Fleur en chantant cueillie | flower plucked in a song |
| Et jetée en rêvant. | and discarded in a dream. |
| Emporte ma folie | Carry my folly away |
| Au gré du vent! | at the will of the wind! |
|  |  |
| Comme la fleur fauchée | Like the flower cut down |
| Périt l'amour. | love perishes. |
| La main qui t'a touchée | The hand which touched you |
| Fuit ma main sans retour. | flees my hand forever. |
| Comme la fleur fauchée, | Like the flower cut down |
| Périt l'amour! | love perishes! |
|  |  |
| Que le vent qui te sèche, | May the wind which dries you, |
| O pauvre fleur, | o poor flower, |
| Tout à l'heure si fraîche | just now so fresh |
| Et demain sans couleur! | and tomorrow without colour! |
| Que le vent qui te sèche, | May the wind which dries you, |
| Sèche mon cœur! | dry my heart! |
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| *Armand Silvestre* |  |

**Lili Boulanger**

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| **Reflets** | **Reflections** |
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| Sous l'eau du songe qui s'élève | Under the rising water of the dream, |
| Mon âme a peur, mon âme a peur. | My soul is afraid, my soul is afraid. |
| Et la lune luit dans mon cœur | And the moon shines in my heart |
| Plongé dans les sources du rêve! | Plunged into the well-springs of the dream! |
|  |  |
| Sous l'ennui morne des roseaux. | Under the mournful boredom of the reeds, |
| Seul les reflets profonds des choses, | Only the profound reflections of things, |
| Des lys, des palmes et des roses | Of lilies, of palms, and of roses, |
| Pleurent encore au fond des eaux. | Still weep at the bottom of the waters. |
|  |  |
| Les fleurs s'effeuillent une à une | The flowers drop their petals one by one |
| Sur le reflet du firmament. | On the reflection of the sky |
| Pour descendre, éternellement | In order to sink eternally |
| Dans l'eau du songe et dans la lune. | Under the water of the dream and into the moon. |
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| *Maurice Maeterlinck* |  |

**Camille Saint-Saëns**

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| **Mon cœur s'ouvre à la voix** | **My heart opens to your voice** |
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| Mon cœur s'ouvre à la voix, | My heart opens to your voice, |
| Comme s'ouvrent les fleurs | like the flowers open |
| Aux baiser de l'aurore! | to the kisses of the dawn! |
| Mais, ô mon bienaimé, | But, o my beloved, |
| Pour mieux sécher mes pleurs, | to dry my tears the best, |
| Que ta voix parle encore! | let your voice speak again! |
| Dis-moi qu'à Dalila | Tell me that to Dalila |
| Tu reviens pour jamais, | you will return forever, |
| Redis à ma tendresse | repeat to my tenderness |
| Les serments d'autrefois, | the oaths of other times, |
| Ces serments que j'aimais! | the oaths that I loved! |
|  |  |
| Ah! réponds à ma tendresse! | Ah! respond to my tenderness! |
| Verse-moi, verse-moi l'ivresse! | Pour out to me the intoxication! |
|  |  |
| Ainsi qu'on voit des blés | Like one sees the wheat, |
| Les épis onduler | the blades undulate |
| Sous la brise légère, | under the light breeze, |
| Ainsi frémit mon cœur, | so trembles my heart |
| Prêt à se consoler, | ready to be consoled |
| A ta voix qui m'est chère! | by your voice which is dear to me! |
| La flèche est moins rapide | The arrow is less quick |
| À porter le trépas, | to carry death |
| Que ne l'est ton amante | than is your lover |
| À voler dans tes bras! | to fly into your arms! |
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| *Ferdinand Lemaire* |  |

**Alexander Scriabin, *Deux poèmes*, Op. 32**

Poème Op. 32, No. 1 is the first piano poem that was composed by Scriabin. This poem has no accompanying poetry. It is a dreamy piece in one of Scriabin’s favourite keys, F sharp major, although he is characteristically shy of committing himself to it at the opening. He asks for the two voices, or stands, to be clearly articulated (*ben marcato*) and the second, more flowing section is marked *inaferando* (‘elusively’).

Poème Op. 32, No. 2 differs markedly from the first one. It is more dynamic with fast moving passages. According to Bowers, it was originally intended for a philosophical opera planned in 1900.

(Notes from ‘Connections between music and poetry in the piano poems of Alexander Scriabin’ by Nong Ampai.)

**Gabriel Fauré**

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| **Au bord de l'eau** | **At the water’s edge** |
|  |  |
| S’asseoir tous deux au bord d’un flot qui passe, | To sit together on the bank of a passing stream, |
| Le voir passer; | to see it pass; |
| Tous deux, s’il glisse un nuage en l’espace, | together, if a cloud glides by, |
| Le voir glisser; | to see it glide; |
| À l’horizon, s’il fume un toit de chaume, | on the horizon, if smoke rises from a thatched roof, |
| Le voir fumer; | to see it rise; |
| Aux alentours si quelque fleur embaume, | if nearby a flower smells sweet, |
| S’en embaumer; | to savour its scent; |
| Entendre au pied du saule où l’eau murmure | at the foot of the willow, where water murmurs, |
| L’eau murmurer; | to hear the murmuring water; |
| Ne pas sentir, tant que ce rêve dure, | not to feel, while this dream lasts, |
| Le temps durer; | that time goes on; |
| Mais n’apportant de passion profonde | but feeling no deep passion |
| Qu’à s’adorer, | except to adore each other, |
| Sans nul souci des querelles du monde, | without any care for the world’s quarrels, |
| Les ignorer; | to know nothing of them; |
| Et seuls, tous deux devant tout ce qui lasse, | and alone together before all that tires, |
| Sans se lasser, | not to tire of each other, |
| Sentir l’amour, devant tout qui se passe, | to feel that love, in the face of all that passes, |
| Ne point passer! | never passes! |
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| *René-François Sully-Prudhomme (1839-1907)* | Translation adapted from Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes: *A French Song Companion.* |

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| **L'horizon chimérique** | **The Illusory Horizon** |
| **1. *La mer est infinie*** | **1. *The sea is boundless*** |
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| La mer est infinie et mes rêves sont fous. | The sea is boundless and my dreams are wild. |
| La mer chant au soleil en battant les falaises | The sea sings in the sun, as it beats the cliffs, |
| Et mes rêves légers ne se sentent plus d’aise | and my light dreams are overjoyed |
| De danser sur la mer comme des oiseaux soûls. | to dance on the sea like drunken birds. |
|  |  |
| Le vaste movement des vagues les emporte, | The waves’ vast motion carries them away, |
| La brise les agite et les roule en ses plis; | the breeze ruffles and rolls them in its folds; |
| Jouant dans le sillage, ils feront une escorte | playing in their wake, they will escort |
| Aux vaisseaux que mon cœur dans leur fuite a suivis. | the ships whose flight my heart has followed. |
|  |  |
| Ivres d’air et de sel et brûlés par l’écume | Drunk with air and salt and stung by the spume |
| De la mer qui console et qui lave des pleurs, | of the consoling seas that washes tears away, |
| Ils connaîtront le large et sa bonne amertume; | they will know the open sea and the good, bitter brine; |
| Les goëlands perdus les prendront pour des leurs. | lost gulls will take them for their own. |
|  |  |
| **2. *Je me suis embarqué*** | **2. *I have embarked*** |
|  |  |
| Je me suis embarqué sur un vaisseau qui danse | I have embarked on a ship that dances |
| Et roule bord sur bord et tangue et se balance. | and rolls from side to side, and pitches and rocks. |
| Mes pieds ont oublié la terre et ses chemins; | My feet have forgotten the land and its ways; |
| Les vagues souples m’ont appris d’autres cadences | the lithe waves have taught me other cadences, |
| Plus belles que le rythme las des chants humains. | lovelier than the tired rhythms of human song. |
|  |  |
| À vivre parmi vous, hélas! avais-je une âme? | Ah! Did I have a heart to live among you? |
| Mes frères, j’ai souffert sur tous vos continents. | Brothers, I have suffered on all your continents. |
| Je ne veux que la mer, je ne veux que le vent | I want only the sea, I want only the wind |
| Pour me bercer, comme un enfant, au creux des lames. | to cradle me like a child in the trough of the waves. |
|  |  |
| Hors du port qui n’est plus qu’une image effacée, | Far from the port which is no more than a faded image, |
| Les larmes du depart ne brûlent plus mes yeux. | tears of parting no longer burn my eyes. |
| Je ne me souviens pas de mes derniers adieux… | I no longer recall my last farewells… |
| Ô ma peine, ma peine, où vous ai-je laissée? | O my sorrow, my sorrow, where have I left you? |
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| **3. *Diane, Séléné*** | **3. *Diana, Selene*** |
|  |  |
| Diane, Séléné, lune de beau métal, | Diana, Selene, moon of beautiful metal, |
| Qui reflètes vers nous, par ta face déserte, | reflecting on us, from your deserted face, |
| Dans l’immortel ennui du calme sidéral, | in the eternal tedium of sidereal calm, |
| Le regret d’un soleil dont nous pleurons la perte. | the regret of a sun whose loss we lament. |
|  |  |
| Ô lune, je t’en veux de ta limpidité | O moon, I begrudge you your limpidity, |
| Injurieuse au trouble vain des pauvres âmes, | mocking the vain commotion of wretched souls, |
| Et mon cœur, toujours las et toujours agité, | and my heart, ever weary and ever uneasy, |
| Aspire vers la paix de ta nocturne flame. | longs for the peace of your nocturnal flame. |
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| **4. *Vaisseaux, nous vous aurons aimés*** | **4. *Ships, we shall have loved you*** |
|  |  |
| Vaisseaux, nous vous aurons aimés en pure perte; | Ships, we shall have loved you to no avail, |
| Le dernier de vous tous est parti sur la mer. | the last of you has set sail on the sea. |
| Le couchant emporta tant de voiles ouvertes | The sunset bore away so many spread sails |
| Que ce port et mon cœur sont à jamais déserts. | that this port and my heart are forever forsaken. |
|  |  |
| La mer vous a rendus à votre destinée, | The sea has returned you to your destiny, |
| Au delà du ravage où s’arrêtent nos pas. | beyond the shore where our footsteps halt. |
| Nous ne pouvions garder vos âmes enchaînées; | We could not keep your souls enchained, |
| Il vous faut des lointains que je ne connais pas. | you need distant realms that I do not know. |
|  |  |
| Je suis de ceux dont les désirs sont sur la terre. | I belong to those whose desires are earthbound. |
| Le souffle qui vous grise emplit mon cœur d’effroi, | The wind that elates you fills my heart with fear, |
| Mais votre appel, au fond des soirs, me désespère, | but your call at nightfall distresses me, |
| Car j’ai de grands départs inassouvis en moi. | for within me are vast, unappeased departures. |
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| *Jean de la Ville de Mirmont (1886-1914)* | Translation adapted from Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes: *A French Song Companion.* |

#### Alexander Scriabin,

#### **Etude in D sharp minor, Op. 8, No. 12 and *Vers la flamme*, Op. 72**

The two pieces selected illustrate the radical changes that Scriabin's musical language underwent throughout his life. The last of his Op. 8 etudes, nicknamed ‘Revolutionary’, exemplifies Scriabin's early style, marrying Russian romanticism with Lisztian figurations. Its brooding melodies and bombastic pianism are reminiscent of Chopin's etude of the same name. *Vers la flamme*, originally intended as his eleventh sonata but ultimately designated a poem, replaces this bombast with the otherworldly mysticism that permeates Scriabin's late works and abandons tonality altogether; in place of melodies, зо́вы (calls) consisting of pairs of descending or ascending semitones provide the only stable thematic elements. The work depicts, depending on whom one asks, ‘the breakthrough from the fog to the blinding light’ (Scriabin) or ‘the evolution from darkness to the purifying fires of redemption...along a steady path from bleakness to spiritual release and divine consummation’ (Ballard): fire, light, apocalypse, and enlightenment all being recurring ideas in late Scriabin.  
  
As contrasting as the pieces are, some characteristic elements of Scriabin's oeuvre are found in both: pulsating repeated chords that provide rhythmic drive (they take the form of chord tremolos in the poem), extensive use of polyrhythms (2:3 and 3:4 in the etude, and infamously 5:9 in the poem), and perhaps most importantly an overarching sense of manic excitement.

(Citations from *Alexander Scriabin Life Works: History, Performance, and Lore*.)

*Jeremy Cheng*