

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE  
FRENCH VIOLIN SONATA  
(1860 – 1910)**

BY

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## DECLARATION

This exegesis contains the results of research carried out at the University of Tasmania Conservatorium of Music between 2003 and 2006. It contains no material that, to my knowledge, has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information that is duly acknowledged in the exegesis. I declare that this exegesis is my own work and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where clear acknowledgement or reference has been made in the text.

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Date:

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## ABSTRACT

This doctoral research was conducted primarily to develop my expertise in performance and interpretation through the contextual study and performance of the violin sonatas written by French composers between 1860 and 1910. The outcomes of this research are a series of recorded recitals and an accompanying exegesis that examines the stylistic characteristics of the violin sonatas written in France during that period.

The primary research culminated in the performances of sonatas by Fauré, Saint-Saëns and Franck, that are considered to be the cornerstone of the French violin repertoire, as well as lesser known works by Guillaume Lekeu, Maurice Ravel, Édouard Lalo and Paul Le Flem that are rarely played in Australia. The exegesis examines the effect that the political and cultural scene of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had on the revival of the violin sonata in France and whether the Société Nationale de Musique was the sole driving force behind this revival. Reasons for the paucity of French violin compositions during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century are proposed. Stylistic characteristics of the violin sonatas written prior to 1860 are briefly analysed and a more detailed stylistic analysis of twenty-one French violin sonatas written between 1860 and 1910 forms a major part of the exegesis.

It was determined that the Société Nationale, during its first twenty years of existence, was without a doubt the only organisation that aided French composers of the late nineteenth century in the development of the violin sonata as a genre. It was only after 1890, with the revival of the violin sonata fueled by the popularity of the sonatas written by Fauré, Saint-

Saëns and Franck, that composers not affiliated with the Société Nationale began to write violin sonatas. That resulted in the composition of over 70 violin sonatas written by French composers between 1860 and 1910.

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## INTRODUCTION

Although the violin sonata had been a popular form of composition in Austria and Germany throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with composers such as Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert Schumann and Mendelssohn all contributing to the genre, French composers during that period failed to follow their lead. French music of the early to mid nineteenth century was dominated by grand opera, opera comique, choral works (secular as well as religious), songs and organ music. Chamber music was not considered an important genre, and there are only few examples of violin sonatas written by nineteenth century French composers. Marc Wood sums up perfectly the history of the violin sonata in France throughout the nineteenth century:

...the chronology of the violin sonata in France proves interesting. In the first half of the nineteenth century, in a France dominated by grand opera and opera comique, chamber music was not regarded as particularly important, and there do not seem to be many examples of the violin sonatas written by French composers. Edouard Lalo was among the first to change this trend, with his violin sonata op. 12 (1853) followed in 1868-73 by the sonata op.6 of Alexis Castillon, a talented composer who was among the first in France to concentrate almost exclusively on chamber music, and who died, tragically at age thirty-five in 1873. Fauré produced his First Violin Sonata shortly afterwards, in 1875-76, but it was another ten years before a further example of the genre by a major French composer appeared: Saint-Saëns First Violin Sonata op.75 (1885). In 1886, Franck himself finally produced his Violin Sonata in A Major, a

classic and stimulation to his disciples and other French composers to write violin sonatas. Franck's Belgian protégé, Guillaume Lekeu (another chamber music specialist who died young), wrote his magnificent Sonata in 1892 at the same time as another French organ specialist, Charles Tournemire, completed his. Pierné's friend Saint-Saëns followed with his Second sonata in 1896, whilst Ravel's lyrical early attempt at the genre was written in 1897, although published posthumously. Following Pierné's own sonata of 1900 the floodgates really opened. The first quarter of the century saw violin sonatas by both the old guard and the up-and-coming generation including examples by Magnard, d'Indy, Le Flem, Vierne, Ropartz, Roussel, Lazzari, and Ravel.<sup>1</sup>

This excerpt from Wood's article begs three questions:

- (i) Were there any violin sonatas written in France during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century?
- (ii) Why was chamber music in France undervalued as a performance medium?
- (iii) And finally, why after the composition of Edouard Lalo's sonata in 1853 did this trend change, creating a surge in interest in the genre that ended in so many works being written during the first three quarters of the twentieth century?

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Wood, "Pierné in perspective: Of Church and Circus," *Musical Times* 143:1878 (Spring 2002): 48.

The entry on “Violin” in *The New Grove*<sup>2</sup> does shed light on the reason why there was a sudden interest in the violin sonata as a genre after 1860. It states that, except for Lalo and Alkan, it was due to the establishment of the Société Nationale de Musique after the 1870-71 war with Prussia, and to the various private societies devoted to the performance of chamber music that French composers began to show an interest in chamber music and more particularly in the violin sonata as a genre.

The aim of this exegesis will be to examine the effect that the political and cultural scene of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had on the revival of the violin sonata in France and whether the Société Nationale de Musique was the sole driving force behind this revival. Reasons for the paucity of French violin compositions during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century are proposed. Stylistic characteristics of the violin sonatas written prior to 1860 are briefly analysed and a more detailed stylistic analysis of twenty-one French violin sonatas written between 1860 and 1910 forms a major part of the exegesis. This analysis will attempt to discover the compositional techniques and styles used by French composers in their violin sonatas and compare and contrast those techniques in an attempt to give an overall view of the characteristics and innovations that became the hallmarks of the violin sonatas written during that period. This analysis of the stylistic characteristics of the French violin sonata composed between 1860 and 1910 has informed my contextual understanding, interpretation and performance of the violin sonatas written during that period.

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<sup>2</sup> Robin Stowell, “Violin, §I, 5 (ii) (b): Repertory Since 1820: Sonata”, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2nd ed, (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2001), 727.

As the majority of the music literature written about nineteenth-century France predominantly focuses on organ music and opera, a review of the available literature reveals that little seems to have been written about the French violin sonata in the late nineteenth century. The currently available literature on the violin sonatas written in France between 1860 and 1915 includes a treatise by Blanche Selva,<sup>3</sup> a doctoral thesis by David Shand<sup>4</sup> and an Encyclopedia by Alan Pedigo<sup>5</sup>. Selva outlines in detail in her treatise<sup>6</sup> the form and main themes of the violin sonatas written by Franck, d'Indy, Ropartz, Roussel and Witkowski and mentions in less detail the sonatas of Fauré, Saint-Saëns, de Castillon, and Lekeu. The only comparison made between any of those works is that of the cyclicism used by Franck, d'Indy and Witkowski in their sonatas.

Shand devotes an entire chapter of his research to the sonatas written in France between 1860 and 1915. His research once again only states the main themes of each work and mentions briefly any significant compositional devices used (such as modes or the use of cyclicism) without going into significant detail. No comparison is made between any of the sonatas; so, no common characteristics were noted. In addition many of the sonatas written after 1900 are only mentioned by name and not analysed at all.

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<sup>3</sup> Blanche Selva, *La Sonate* (Paris: Rouart, Lerolle et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1913).

<sup>4</sup> David Austin Shand, "The Sonata for Violin and Piano from Schumann to Debussy 1851-1917" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1948).

<sup>5</sup> Alan Pedigo, *International Encyclopedia of Violin – Keyboard Sonatas* 2nd ed. (Arkansas: Arriaga Publications, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Chapter six titled "The Modern Sonata".

Alan Pedigo's encyclopedia, though incomplete (as it did not mention many of the sonatas written in France during that period), in many cases only stated the composer's name and the year the work was written. No analysis of the works was undertaken but the inclusion of publication details proved very helpful in trying to obtain some of the more obscure sonatas written during that period.

Although very little analysis has been done on the majority of violin sonatas written during that period, a large amount of literature has been compiled on the sonatas of Fauré, Franck and to a lesser extent d'Indy. Books and articles by Penesco,<sup>7</sup> Trumble,<sup>8</sup> Caballero, and Paul Landormy<sup>9</sup> proved invaluable. An article by William Rorick in *The Music Review*<sup>10</sup> was the only work found that compared any of the violin sonatas written during that period.

Other material on the chamber music written in France during this period are works by Joël-Marie Fauquet,<sup>11</sup> Boris Schwarz,<sup>12</sup> Stephen Sensbach,<sup>13</sup> and Serge Gut.<sup>14</sup> Fauquet and Schwarz both give a general overview of the string quartets, piano trios, and piano quartets written by foreign and contemporary French composers in France from 1820 to 1870. Gut and Sensbach

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<sup>7</sup> Anne Penesco, "La Sonate de Franck et L'esthétique Post-Romantique du Violon," *Revue Européenne d'Etudes Musicales*, no. 1 (1991): 165-181.

<sup>8</sup> Robert William Trumble, *The Compositions of Vincent d'Indy* (Ballarat Vic.: University of Ballarat, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Paul Landormy, *La Musique Française de Franck à Debussy 5<sup>th</sup> ed.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943).

<sup>10</sup> William Rorick, "The A Major Violin Sonatas of Fauré and Franck: A Stylistic Comparison," *The Music Review*, 42:1 (February 1981): 46-55.

<sup>11</sup> Joël-Marie Fauquet, "Chamber Music in France from Luigi Cherubini to Claude Debussy," Translated by Stephen E. Hefling and Patricia Marley. In *Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music*, ed. Stephen E. Hefling, 287-314. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Boris Schwarz, *French Instrumental Music Between the Revolutions (1789-1830)* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987).

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Sensbach, *French Cello Sonatas 1871-1938* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press Ltd., 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Serge Gut and Danièle Pistone, *La Musique de Chambre en France de 1870 à 1918*. (Paris: Honoré Champion 1978).

cover different genres of chamber music in France after 1870. Gut not only lists the chamber music composed by the majority of French composer after 1870 but also makes mention of the societies in France that performed chamber music including the Société Nationale. Sensbach's book is the most comprehensive research done on the cello sonatas written in France from 1871 to 1938.

A number of sources cover the historical, cultural and political scene in Paris during the nineteenth century. Books by Martin Cooper<sup>15</sup>, Carl Dahlhaus<sup>16</sup> and Rey Longyear<sup>17</sup> proved invaluable in gaining general information on the historical and cultural scene in Paris at this time.

Both Jeffrey Cooper,<sup>18</sup> and Joël-Marie Fauquet<sup>19</sup> examine the cultural scene in France prior to the foundation of the Société Nationale in 1871. Whilst Kay Norton<sup>20</sup> and Michael Strasser<sup>21</sup> cover the historical background of the Société Nationale, all four authors list in various detail the programs given by the different societies in France: Cooper and Fauquet the programs of the different societies formed prior to the foundation of the Société Nationale, Norton and Strasser the programs of the Société Nationale. Unfortunately, Strasser's research only lists concert programs of the Société Nationale until the end of the 1891 season, many of which are

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Cooper, *French Music from the Death of Berlioz to the Death of Fauré* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

<sup>16</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Rey M. Longyear, *Nineteenth-Century Romanticism in Music* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1973).

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey Cooper, "The Rise of Instrumental Music and Concert Series in Paris 1828-1871" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1981), (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Joël-Marie Fauquet, *Les Société de Musique de Chambre à Paris de la Restauration à 1870* (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Kay Norton, "The Société Nationale de Musique: 'A Cradle and Sanctuary of French Art'," *Music Research Forum* Vol. 4 (1989): 11-23.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Strasser, "Ars Gallica The Société Nationale de Musique and its Role in French Musical Life, 1871-1891" (Ph.D diss., University of Illinois, 1998).

incomplete. Duchesneau's research however not only lists every program given by the Société Nationale during its fifty-eight year existence but also provides information on the performers of the works and the venue at which the concert was held.

Throughout its history cultural politics has influenced many aspects of musical life in France. Over the last thirty-five years a large amount of research has been undertaken in regards to the political and cultural scene in France during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Michael Strasser<sup>22</sup> describes how the events surrounding the Franco-Prussian war led to the foundation of the Société Nationale. His research buries the notion held by many that the Société Nationale was formed as a result of an anti-Germanic sentiment. He states that its foundation was due to the reaction against the state of French music prior to the Franco-Prussian war and not to the war itself.

Kay Norton and Michel Duchesneau<sup>23</sup> shed light on the political problems within the Société Nationale, Kay Norton on the political problems that arose prior to 1894 and Duchesneau the effect that the Dreyfus affair had on the Société Nationale. Books and articles by Jane Fulcher,<sup>24</sup> Laurence Davies<sup>25</sup> and Charles Paul<sup>26</sup> also cover the influence of domestic and European politics on French culture during the late nineteenth century.

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Strasser, "The Société Nationale and its Adversaries: The Musical Politics of *L'Invasion Germanique* in the 1870's," *19<sup>th</sup> Century Music*, Vol 24/3 (Spring 2001): 225-51.

<sup>23</sup> Michel Duchesneau, *L'avant-Garde Musicale et ses Sociétés à Paris de 1871 à 1939* (Liège: Mardaga, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Jane F. Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Laurence Davies, *César Franck and his Circle* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970).

<sup>26</sup> Charles B. Paul, "Rameau, d'Indy, and French Nationalism," *The Music Quarterly*, Vol 58/1 (January 1972): 46-56.

Finally the sonatas selected for performance as part of the requirements for the degree have benefited from information provided in *New Grove*,<sup>27</sup> as well as Robert Jacoby's doctoral thesis<sup>28</sup> which was invaluable with regards to performance practice in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>27</sup> Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie, eds., *The New Grove Handbooks in Music Performance Practice: Music after 1600* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989).

<sup>28</sup> Robert Jacoby, "The Role of Technique in Violin Playing: An Analytical Approach to Stylistic and Interpretive Problems of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1980).

The Sonate pour violon et piano (Violin Sonata), FP 119, by Francis Poulenc was composed in 1942-1943 in memory of the Spanish poet Federico Garca Lorca. The score, dedicated to Poulenc's niece Brigitte Manceaux, was published by Max Eschig. The work was premiered by the violinist Ginette Neveu with the composer at the piano on 21 June 1943 in Paris, Salle Gaveau. Spring sonata, movement 1. During the Classical period the harpsichord had been largely replaced by the piano. Many piano sonatas were written and many composers wrote sonatas for a solo instrument and piano. Violin, cello and flute sonatas were all popular. Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven all wrote piano sonatas, violin sonatas and cello sonatas. Classical sonata. The standard Classical form is a codetta comes at the end of the exposition and finishes this section off. in the development section the material from the exposition is transformed. the music goes through several modulations (key changes). in the recapitulation the material from the exposition is recapped so it is repeated in a slightly different and shorter form. the first and second subjects are now both heard in the tonic key. 10 Mangan: Violin Sonata in F, 1744 (Op.4?) 11 Marchand: Suite Sonate IV in D major. 12 Rebel: Violin Sonata in D minor, Livre 2 No.8. 13 Senaill: Violin Sonata in E major, Op.1 No.4. 14 Senaill: Violin Sonata in C minor, Op.1 No.5. General Information. Work Title. French Baroque Violin Sonatas. Alternative. Title. The development of the modern violin was gradual and complex, evolving from a variety of other stringed instruments. The pear-shaped lira, found in Europe as early as the ninth century, was played in an upright position and bowed. In the early 1560s, Catherine de Medici, the French queen regent, commissioned Amati to make a variety of string instruments for the Royal Ensemble. How many Amati made and delivered remains unknown, but it is thought that the scale of work required ultimately established the basic form and construction of the modern violin. Amati's creation had a wooden sound box with two F-shaped apertures. First Among Instruments. Sonata Prima for Violin by Giuseppe Tartini. Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice. Photograph by Bridgeman/ACI.