

Gabriel Fauré

(1845-1924)

The Complete Music for Cello and Piano

Steven Doane, cello

Barry Snyder, piano

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| 1 | Sérénade, Op. 98 | (2:56) |
| 2 | Sicilienne, Op. 78 | (3:35) |
| 3 | Élégie, Op. 24 | (6:46) |
| | Sonata in D minor, Op. 109 (18:01) | |
| 4 | Allegro | (5:12) |
| 5 | Andante | (6:22) |
| 6 | Allegro comodo | (6:15) |
| 7 | Romance, Op. 69 | (3:34) |
| 8 | Morceau de Lecture (for 2 cellos)
with Kurt Fowler, cello | (1:02) |
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| | Sonata in G minor, Op. 117 | (18:58) |
| 10 | Allegro | (6:29) |
| 11 | Andante | (7:07) |
| 12 | Allegro vivo | (5:11) |
| 13 | Après un Rêve, Op. 7, #1
(transcribed by Steven Doane) | (2:47) |

Notes by James M. Keller

Like snails in gastronomy and Jerry Lewis in cinema, the music of Gabriel Fauré resonates more vibrantly to French sensibilities than it does to the outer universe. It isn't that the non-French world ignores Fauré, or fails to respect his subtle artistry. But the French have generally showered him with adulation – even during his lifetime, when he enjoyed acclaim as organist at some of the most respected Parisian churches (including St. Sulpice and the Madeleine), as director of the revered Conservatoire, and as the beloved teacher of such composers as Ravel, Enesco, Florent Schmitt, Charles Koechlin, and Nadia Boulanger. To this day, the French rank Fauré roughly on a par with Schumann and Brahms, a credible position in light of his songs, piano music, and chamber music. But Fauré's strength lay with smaller forms, and among his compositions for large forces, only his *Requiem* has achieved international status. Since, outside of France, a composer's prestige tends to rest on his large-scale works – such as operas and symphonies – Fauré's reputation in the aesthetically intense climate of France is only dimly reflected in the export market.

"One could no more analyze a work of Fauré than one could dissect the wing of a butterfly," wrote the French critic Bernard Gavoty, invoking an apt metaphor. An examination of Fauré's scores (or of a butterfly's wing) reveals structures that are strong but never bulky. Their magic, however, resides apart from their sturdiness, in the luminous, elusive beauty with which their melodies, harmonies, and counterpoint interact. The pianist Alfred Cortot, one of Fauré's leading interpreters insisted that "in all M. Fauré's work, the true novelty lies in the quality of the musical texture much more than in an unusual style of writing."

Discipline was Fauré's watchword, and, though he lived well into the era that shattered tonality, his works always purveyed a refined Classicism. Viewing his musical style as essentially traditional, he wrote:

In whatever realm of thought one takes – literature, science, art

– an education which is not based in the study of the classics can be neither complete nor fundamental. . . . In the wide reaches of the human spirit, all those who have seemed to create ideas and styles hitherto unknown have only been expressing, through the medium of their own individualities, what others have already thought and said before them.

Nonetheless, Fauré's harmonic practice was distinctive. Without discarding the dramatic tension inherent in the ebb and flow of tonic and dominant, he often melded the standard progressions of tonality with tinges of modality, doubtless learned through his early study of plainchant and church accompaniment. His ethic was to express much with as little noise as possible. Cortot summed it up: "Using a language which has never tried to astonish or compel attention, he has set on his masterpieces the hallmark of a surprising and permanent freshness."

Given Fauré's preference in his vocal works for the mellow timbres of mezzo-soprano and baritone, it's no surprise that the cello should have claimed his attention as an instrumental equivalent. His nine solo and chamber works for cello spanned the entire second half of his career. The earliest piece on this recording is, however, not an original cello work, but rather Steven Doane's own adaptation of the well-known song *Après un Rêve*, probably composed in 1878. Without exceeding the range of an eleventh, Fauré manages to convey the regret of his recently broken engagement, through an asymmetrical melody quietly compelled by insistently repeating chords below.

Similar technique and spirit pervade the *Élégie* of 1880 (Op. 24, published 1883). Apparently conceived as the slow movement for a sonata he never completed, the *Élégie* has enjoyed great success ever since its premiere. The noble, somewhat funereal atmosphere of the opening gives way to a contrasting section whose graceful theme is introduced by the piano ("art nouveau in music," suggests Fauré's biographer Ronald Orledge), and then to an uncharacteristically heart-on-the-sleeve outburst before fading into resignation and repose.

The *Romance* (Op. 69, published 1895) began life around 1870 as an “Andante” for cello and organ. In its 1894 revision for cello and piano, the piece underwent some transformations that could not have been anticipated. Two-thirds of the way through, for example, a straightforward, beat-to-beat accompaniment of organ chords becomes expanded in the piano version to cover a broader range (rather after the fashion of the coupling of organ manuals) and a low A is inserted to lie in the bass beneath the passage: the French would call it a *point d’orgue*, an “organ point,” describing the organist’s foot resting immutably on the pedalboard. As an extended cello song, the *Romance* is harmonically ambiguous in its unresolved cadences, and ravishing in its melancholy lyricism.

During the years separating the two versions of the *Romance*, Fauré composed a *Petite Pièce* for cello and piano (Op. 49, probably in 1887-88), which has been lost, and *Papillon* (probably 1885), which was written on request by the cellist Edgard Hamelle to serve as a companion piece to the *Élégie*. *Papillon* stands as a Gallic equivalent to Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Flight of the Bumblebee*; and, as it happens, considerable debate surrounded the choice of insect for the work’s title. Fauré favored calling it simply *Pièce pour violoncelle*, but Hamelle argued in favor of the *papillon* (butterfly) and the publisher pushed for *libellules* (dragonflies). When it was finally published fourteen years later, the cellist won out, and Fauré shrugged in annoyance, “butterfly or dungfly, call it whatever you like.” A technical tour-de-force, it is among the composer’s slighter inspirations.

Inasmuch as Fauré had succeeded Massenet, in 1896, as the Conservatoire’s chief composition teacher, it was natural that he should be asked to supply sight-reading pieces for the institution’s annual July examinations. His *Morceau de Lecture* for cello was the first of these; in ensuing years, Fauré would provide similar bagatelles for flute (1898), violin (1903), and harp (1904), of which only the violin piece would be published. Only twenty-five measures long, the piece mixes the naivete of Couperin with a yearning syncopation and, in a middle section, some oblique, chromatic harmonies. The version presented

here includes the pizzicato accompaniment for a second cello that Fauré added later.

Fauré’s final cello work of the 1890s is *Sicilienne* (Op. 78), which the composer resuscitated from his 1893 incidental music for Moliere’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and published in 1898 in two versions: for solo violin or cello (with piano) and as a movement of his incidental music to Maeterlinck’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*. The composer’s enduring fascination with – and transformation of – the *Sicilienne* is understandable; once heard, its lilting melody in 6/8 meter can not be forgotten.

The energetic *Sérénade* in B minor (Op.98) was written for (and dedicated to) Pablo Casals in 1908, by which time the Spanish cellist enjoyed a central position in Parisian concert life. Its neo-Baroque flavor (especially in some mid-movement sequences) might be read as tributes to Casals’ Bach-playing, and the strummed chords that close the brief movements surely evoke the guitars of Casals’ native Spain.

In 1905, Fauré had ascended to the directorship of the Conservatoire. Through an ironic twist of fate, he was beset at about the same time by hearing problems that would grow worse as the years passed. He was plagued not by deafness, but by an auditory distortion that would make him misperceive pitches and balances, and that would render certain musical sounds physically excruciating. In his later years, his eyesight also began to fail, and he suffered from sclerosis and emphysema. This encroaching decrepitude did not, however, impede his creativity. In fact, Fauré realized his creative height during his final decade, with a string of chamber masterpieces: the *Second Violin Sonata* (1916-1917), the two *Cello Sonatas* (1917 and 1921), the *Second Piano Quintet* (1919-1921), the *Piano Trio* (1922-23), and the *String Quartet* (1923-24) – all of these being minor-key works.

Though strikingly different in character, the *Cello Sonatas* share a sense of abstraction and contrapuntal conception, with extensive use of canon between the cello and piano lines. Both demonstrate meticulous attention to timbral coloration, and demand the performer’s precise attention to vibrato, voicing,

balance, and bow-work. Both stress ternary meters, and their melodies tend to evolve through a series of enormous, arch-like phrases (rather than undergoing traditional development based on motivic fragmentation and re-assembly).

The *First Cello Sonata*, in D minor (Op. 109, published 1918), was written in the southern French town of Saint-Raphael during the brief span of July and August 1917, during the darkest days of the First World War. The *First Sonata* is unremittingly serious. Its opening Allegro proposes an unaccustomed sense of urgency, which is only slightly tempered by the serenity of its second subject; and its explosive melodic leaps, restless cross-rhythms, and furious down-bow accents only emphasize the tautness of its construction. In contrast, the second movement (an Andante) is mournful; what begins as a limpid dirge grows in pathos and intensity before drifting into a peaceful calm (as the *Élégie* had nearly forty years earlier). Cast in D major, the finale (Allegro commodo) leads towards a more optimistic conclusion, though its dense textures are far from sunny. The movement exhibits the harmonic complexity engendered by Fauré's superimposing modal elements over classic tonality: towards the end, a flattened seventh proves hard to resolve, turning the entire conclusion into an extended, circuitous cadence with plagal overtones.

After fifteen years at the head of the Conservatoire, Fauré was invited to resign in 1920. His admiring biographer Emile Vuillermoz related the composer's dismay at "that painful period when the state, noticing that its prisoner, weakened by age and infirmities, could no longer perform as many duties for it, brutally notified him of his dismissal and cast him, almost without funds, into the Parisian jungle." Fauré enjoyed immense prestige, and Vuillermoz's reports of his destitution seem exaggerated. Nonetheless, his admirers rallied to help stabilize his situation. Among them was the cellist and composer Charles-Martin Loeffler; as an expression of thanks, he was honored as the dedicatee of Fauré's *Cello Sonata* in G Minor (Op. 117), written in 1921 and published the following year.

Today the *Second Sonata* far surpasses the first in popularity. Certainly it is less threatening in its modernity. Its genesis can be traced to a celebration of the

centenary of the death of Napoléon, held at the Hôtel des Invalides on May 5, 1921. Fauré composed a *Chant Funéraire* for the occasion (though he left its orchestration to the leader of the Orchestre del la Garde Republicaine, which performed it). This grave masterpiece served as the basis for the C-minor Andante that stands as the *Sonata's* second movement. Its dignity is in no way diminished by the eloquence of a prayerful episode in A-Flat Major. Discreetly, without ostentation, Fauré makes time stand still.

It will be no insult to the outer movements to suggest that the *Second Sonata* peaks in its Andante. The opening Allegro, firmly grounded in its sonata form, is unstinting in its melodic wealth, fleeting in its lyricism. The closing movement is a sparkling Allegro vivo in which each of three principal themes is introduced by the piano before being taken up by the cello, sometimes in canon. The piano is given a virtuosic workout, with rapid scales, arpeggios and figuration; and the composer draws on a full panoply of the cello's resources. Each of the sonata's movements begins in the minor key and finishes in the major.

The buoyancy with which Fauré's piece ends belies that it flowed from the same pen that inscribed (in a letter to his wife, on August 21, 1921): "I'm suffering from bronchial, stomach, liver, and kidney ailments. I've had to stay in bed and diet, living on drugs and milk." But Fauré's artistry seemed often to exist on another plane from the rest of his life, and his love affair with the cello concluded with the ardor of an infatuated youngster. "For me," he wrote, "art – and music especially – consists of raising ourselves as high as possible above that which is real."

– James M. Keller

In addition to serving on the staff of *The New Yorker*, James M. Keller is critic and columnist for *Piano & Keyboard*.

As soloist, chamber musician, and master teacher, **Steven Doane** has earned a reputation as an artist of unusual range and versatility. Formerly principal cellist with the Milwaukee Symphony and Rochester Philharmonic, he has appeared as soloist with these orchestras and with the orchestras of San Francisco, Baltimore, Dublin, and the Moscow Radio. A member of the Naumburg Award-winning New Arts Trio from 1977-85, Mr. Doane is currently a sought-after guest cellist at music festivals across North America and Europe. He has been Professor of Cello at the Eastman School of Music since 1981, and regularly gives duo recitals with his colleague Barry Snyder.

On this recording, Mr. Doane plays a cello made by David Techler (Rome, ca. 1720).

Barry Snyder's career has encompassed solo, concerto and chamber repertoires. Since winning three prizes at the 1966 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition (Silver Medal, Pan American Union and Chamber Music), Mr. Snyder's performances have drawn high praise for their broadly-ranging interests. Barry Snyder's performances have taken him throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, South America and Asia. He has been Professor of Piano at the Eastman School of Music since 1970.

On this recording, Mr. Snyder plays a Steinway D.

Kurt Fowler was a student of Alan Harris at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and is currently a Doctoral student at the Eastman School of Music, where he serves as Steven Doane's teaching assistant. Mr. Fowler is currently Instructor of Cello at Houghton College and is principal cellist of the Corning Philharmonic.

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The performances on this recording are dedicated to the memory of two beloved friends: my teacher, Richard Kapuscinski (1921-1991), and his wife Lucy Meister Kapuscinski (1925-1992). – Steven Doane

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