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THE MELODIE IN THE CHANSONS DE MER OF CHARLES-MARIE WIDOR,
A LECTURE RECITAL, TOGETHER WITH THREE RECITALS OF
SELECTED WORKS OF A. VIVALDI, R. STRAUSS, R. HAHN,
G. BINKERD, N. ROREM, G. BREVI, G. FAURE,
R. TRUNK, S. ADLER, D. PINKHAM,
D. ARGENTO, T. PASATIERI
AND OTHERS

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

by

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DeMent-Rutledge, Melanie, The Mélodie in the Chansons de mer of Charles-Marie Widor, A Lecture Recital, Together with Three Recitals of Selected Works of A. Vivaldi, R. Strauss, R. Hahn, G. Binkerd, N. Rorem, G. Brevi, G. Fauré, R. Trunk, S. Adler, D. Pinkham, D. Argento, T. Pasatieri and others. Doctor of Musical Arts (Vocal Performance), August, 1983, 62 pages, 26 examples, bibliography, 38 titles.

The lecture recital, given on April 18, 1983, began with biographical background that suggests the influences on the compositional development of both the composer, Charles Widor, and the poet, Paul Bourget, of the Chansons de mer. Widor, who is best remembered for his prosperous career as a virtuoso performer, teacher, and composer for the organ, composed his approximately sixty songs in two distinct periods: about forty-four were written before 1889 and his appointment to the Paris Conservatoire; the last fourteen comprise the Chansons de mer collection published in 1902 by Heugel. Two early songs were selected for comparative purposes, along with six songs from the Chansons de mer. Stylistic elements were detailed, demonstrating the evolution of Widor's song style from the romance genre of mid-nineteenth century French song to the more sophisticated mélodie. The expanded form, resulting from greater participation of the piano in preludes, interludes, and postludes,

along with an enlarged chromatic harmonic idiom and a more contemporary parlando vocal style are mélodie traits. These characteristics not only enhance Widor's poetic rendering, but impart to the Chansons de mer the more intellectual appeal often desired in today's concert repertoire. All pieces were performed from memory.

In addition to the lecture recital, three public solo recitals were performed. The first recital, performed on October 1, 1979, consisted of works by Vivaldi, Strauss, Hahn, Binkerd, and Rorem. The second recital, performed on October 20, 1980, consisted of works by Brevi, Fauré, Trunk, and Adler. The third recital, performed on November 30, 1981, consisted of works by Pinkham, Binkerd, Argento, and Pasatieri.

All four programs were recorded on magnetic tape and are filed, along with the written version of the lecture recital, as part of the dissertation.

Tape recordings of all performances submitted as dissertation requirements are on deposit in the North Texas State University Library.

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North Texas State University School of Music
presents

Melanie DeMent, soprano

in

Graduate Recital

assisted by

Louise Lerch, piano

Monday, October 1, 1979

8:15 p.m.

Concert Hall

PROGRAM

Motetto: O qui coeli terraeque serenitas
Recitative: Fac ut virescat tellus
Rosa quae moritur
Alleluia
Antonio Vivaldi

Assisted by:

Steve Erickson, violin
Terry Pollak, violin
Joanie Walker, viola
Diego Villa, cello
Rex Bozarth, string bass

Säusle, liebe Myrthe
Ich wollt ein Sträusslein binden
Amor
Richard Strauss

INTERMISSION

Les Fontaines
Dans la Nuit
L'énamourée
Le Printemps
Reynaldo Hahn

Her Silver Will
Mermaid Remembered
The Silver Swan
Alleluia
Gordon Binkerd
Ned Rorem

*Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts*

North Texas State University
School of Music
presents

Melanie De Ment, soprano

in

Graduate Recital

assisted by

Louise Berch, piano

Monday, October 20, 1980

8:15 p.m.

Concert Hall

PROGRAM

Cantata: Deliciae Terrenae
O quam est melius
Cari coeli, carae stellae
Nescit anima mea . . . gaudium mundanum
Ad polos ad Deum volare
Alleluia

Giovanni Brevi

Assisted by Diego Villa, cello

Four Songs
La fée aux chansons
Le papillon et la fleur
Arpège
Notre amour

Gabriel Fauré

Polacca: Son vergin vezzosa, *I Puritani*

Vincenzo Bellini

INTERMISSION

Four Merry Songs
Schlittenfahrt
Vertrag
Menuett
Brautwerbung

Richard Trunk

Homenaje a Lope de Vega
Cuando tan hermosa os miro
Si con mis deseos
Al val de Fuente Ovejuna

Joaquin Turina

Four Poems of James Stephens
The Wind
Chill of the eve
The piper
And it was stormy weather

Samuel Adler

*Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts*

North Texas State University
School of Music

presents

MELANIE DEMENT, Soprano

in

Graduate Recital

of

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN MUSIC

Assisted by:

Louise Lerch, piano

Diego Villa, cello

Cynthia Ross, harp

Christina Larson, violin

Gilberto Young, clarinet

Monday, November 30, 1981 4:00 p.m.

Concert Hall

PROGRAM

Letters from Saint Paul. Daniel Pinkham

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about
(Hebrew 12: 1 and 2)

Who shall separate from the love of Christ?
(Romans 8: 35, 37, 38, 39)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly
(Colossians 3: 16)

But of the times and the seasons, brethren
(I Thessalonians 5: 1-6)

Rejoice in the Lord alway
(Philippians 4: 4-7)

Now it is high time to awake out of sleep
(Romans 13: 11 and 12)

Secret Love. Gordon Binkerd
(cello and harp)

Songs About Spring.Dominick Argento
I who knows if the moon's a balloon

II Spring is like a perhaps hand

III in Just-spring

IV in Spring comes

V when faces called flowers float out of the ground

Intermission

Far from Love. Thomas Pasatieri
(clarinet, violin, cello, and piano)

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Lecture Recital

MELANIE DEMENT RUTLEDGE, Soprano

Assisted by:
Louise Lerch, Piano

Monday, April 18, 1983

5:00 p.m.

Concert Hall

THE MÉLODIE IN THE CHANSONS DE MER
OF CHARLES-MARIE WIDOR

Early Songs (published 1889)

Prière au Printemps
Contemplation

Selected Songs from Chansons de Mer (1902)

La Mer
Ce monde meilleur
Rosa, la Rose
Seul dans la nuit
Les Nuages
Repos éternel

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

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PREFACE

In the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, Charles-Marie Widor enjoyed a prosperous career as a virtuoso performer, teacher, and composer for the organ. His ten organ symphonies pioneered that form and his improvisational expertise founded him a wide following of students and admirers.

The end of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of the French mélodie, a sophisticated type of French art song developed particularly by Fauré, Duparc, Chausson, and Debussy, whose works in this field dominate the performing repertoire today. Among the many songs of the more obscure composers or composers better known in another compositional area are the sixty songs of Charles Widor.

Widor's vocal music, except for an occasional comment on his operas, is virtually unacknowledged in standard references. Yet many of his songs, particularly the last group, Chansons de mer, often approach the quality of Duparc's and Fauré's efforts in this field.

His songs appear to fall into two groups: the majority (about forty-four) were written before 1889 and his appointment to the Paris Conservatoire; the last fourteen

comprise the collection entitled Chansons de mer, published in 1902, after Widor had spent twelve years as Professor at the Conservatoire. In these last songs one finds not only valid concert repertoire, but a clear evolution from the romance to the mélodie in the maturation of Widor's song style.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to draw attention to an unfamiliar group of songs in a performing repertoire dominated by only a few composers, and (2) to reveal the curious development of the mélodie style in a composer so allegedly conservative. For comparative purposes, two early romances of Widor have been chosen along with six selected songs from Chansons de mer that best represent Widor's mélodie style.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

For any newcomer to Paris in 1870, as Charles-Marie Widor was, the hyperactivity of fresh ideas that interlaced the political, social, and artistic communities must have been overwhelming. Politically, the pessimism aroused by France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the subsequent Paris Commune tempered the carefree extravagance of the Second Empire.¹ The previously undisputed authority of the Church had steadily waned throughout the nineteenth century and was now openly challenged and questioned. On the positive side, this pessimism urged a re-evaluation of the Frenchman's cultural aesthetics.²

Socially, the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of the middle class. Beginning with the Revolution of 1789 and encouraged by the Industrial Revolution, composers, writers and artists faced a broader, more diverse audience. The establishment of public education brought about a new reading public and the need for a style of

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1. Martin Cooper, French Music from the Death of Berlioz to the Death of Fauré (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 8.
 2. Pierre de Bacourt, French Literature During the Last Half-Century (New York: MacMillan Co., 1912), 1-2.

writing that appealed to their tastes.³ Entertainment for the middle class incited public concerts such as J. Padeloup's Concerts Populaires.⁴ The aesthetic preferences of the bourgeoisie displaced the priorities of the nobility.

French music of the nineteenth century underwent many phases. The Franco-Prussian War, stripping France of her financial opulence, undermined the Frenchman's predilection for the theatrical and the reign of the Italianate melody as exemplified in the operas of the period.⁵ Taking advantage of this opportunity, revivals of varied sorts took place. A new interest in sacred music and old music was reborn. The Société Nationale de Musique, founded in 1871, renewed interest in purely orchestral and chamber music and initiated a nationalistic calling.⁶ German music, particularly Wagner's, encountered prestige and criticism in musical, artistic, and literary circles. Amidst these disparate allegiances, a single Frenchman refused to be forced into a mold. With the example of his resolute individualism, Debussy freed French musicians to seek a more personal expression.

3. Denis Saurat, Modern French Literature, 1870-1940 (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1946), 30-31.

4. Romain Rolland, Musicians of Today, trans. Mary Blaiklock (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1928), 266.

5. Cooper, op. cit., 8-9.

6. Ibid., 13.

In literature, the constant flow of newly discovered scientific ideas became an additional influence.⁷ Realism and its more intensified form, naturalism, resulted from a reaction against the personalized revelations and idealizations of the romantic writers. The realists strove to represent the commonplace, a more humble and often vulgar reality.⁸ With the advent of Darwinism, the advances in experimental medicine and psychology, and the dubiousity of the status of religious faith in man's life, the philosopher and the scientist began to cross paths. Psychoanalysis entered the realm of literature.⁹

Advocating a return to order, the Parnassian poets, Charles Baudelaire, Sully-Prudhomme, and Théodore Banville repudiated romanticism with their return to form and control in poetry.¹⁰ In protest to the profuse subjectivity of the romantics, Baudelaire and other Parnassians turned to placid, impersonal description, particularly of nature.

Reacting against this exteriorization of the Parnassians, and conforming with the current probe into

7. Saurat, op. cit., 29.

8. William Nitze, A History of French Literature to the Great War (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1922), 623.

9. Saurat, op. cit., 30.

10. Harold Luckstone, "Nationalism and Period Trends in French Song from 1650 to the Present," NATS Bulletin XIV/1 (Oct. 1957), 8.

psychology, the Symbolists adopted the idea of the Impressionist painters of capturing the mind's impression of a given moment, in natural, preferably hazy sunlight. Poets replaced description with suggestion. Through the use of images, writers such as Mallarmé and Verlaine attempted to symbolize the responses of the soul. They gleaned from Wagner a more musical fluidity in their poetic phrase. They no longer desired to imitate natural phenomena, and tended toward "dehumanization through a detachment of human emotions."¹¹

The social atmosphere of the French artist at this time was conducive to the exchange of ideas. In the café gatherings, the great composers, painters, and literary figures mingled to debate contemporary concepts. Literary societies thrived and eventually provided the breeding ground for Wagner's theory of integration of all the arts.¹²

Under these dynamic circumstances, Charles-Marie Widor and Paul Bourget wrote, respectively, the music and poetry of the Chansons de mer. Published by Heugel in 1902, these fourteen songs represent Widor's final efforts at song composition. In contrast to the early songs, they are not

11. Ann Balakian, Literary Origins of Surrealism (New York: King's Crown Press, 1947), 97.

12. Kenneth Cornell, The Symbolist Movement (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 27.

limited by the conservative atmosphere of his Church position and vividly reflect the effect of his more liberal environment at the Conservatoire. An expansion of compositional style from romance to mélodie is clearly observed between the songs of 1889 and the Chansons de mer.

Chapter II

CHARLES-MARIE WIDOR: THE PRE-CONSERVATOIRE YEARS

For Charles-Marie Widor, a lifetime committed to the organ was almost inevitable. Born in Lyon, France, on February 24, 1844,¹ he received his earliest musical training from his father, also an organist, on an organ that had been built by Widor's grandfather, a builder for the firm of Callinet.²

The renowned organ-builder, Aristide Cavallé-Coll, affected Widor's development on two separate occasions. The church of St. François in Lyon, where Widor's father was titular, possessed a Cavallé-Coll organ. Cavallé-Coll stayed with the Widors during his visits to Lyon and upon hearing Charles play, suggested that he go to the Brussels Conservatory to study.³ Later, it would be Cavallé-Coll's recommendation that would win for Widor over Franck the position of grand organiste at the Church of St. Sulpice in

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1. Widor's year of birth is listed in various sources as 1844, in others as 1845. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians and Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians use the 1844 date.
 2. "Widor, Charles-Marie," The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 20 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), XX, 398.
 3. Michael Murray, "A Legacy and a Prize," The Diapason LXX/13 (Dec. 1979), 4.

Paris, an incident that eventually produced hostility between the two men.⁴

At Brussels, Widor received training steeped in tradition that would remain with him for the rest of his life. His organ teacher, Jaak Nikolaas Lemmens, one in a succession of organists descending directly from Bach,⁵ drilled Widor in accurate stylistic renditions of Bach's music. In addition, Widor studied composition with François-Joseph Fétis, whose examination of old music, particularly that of the Renaissance masters, advanced the science of musicology.⁶ Having chosen a career devoted to an instrument with origins that lie in the Church, an institution of tradition, and considering his formative environment, it is not surprising that Widor later in life would have to endure criticism and rejection for his conservatism.

After winning the organ competition at the Universal Exhibition in 1867, Widor moved to Paris, where he performed recitals as a virtuoso for the next three years. His appointment as organist to the Church of St. Sulpice in 1870

4. G. C. Ramsey, "An Interview with G. H. Byles," The American Organist XLIX/3 (March 1966), 17.
5. Michael Murray, "The Pure Tradition of Bach," The Diapason LXVIII/II (Oct. 1977), 4-6. The succession is from Bach to Johann Kittel (1732-1809), Johann Rinck (1770-1846), Adolf Hesse (1809-1863), and Lemmens (1823-1881).
6. "Fétis, François Joseph," The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 20 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), IX, 512.

began one of the longest tenures in that position ever, sixty-four years. Here he befriended Gabriel Fauré, who was choir organist for St. Sulpice at that time. Widor, who was a talented improviser, and Fauré frequently delighted in improvisational competitions in the 1870's.⁷ It is possible that this friendship inspired the early songs of Widor.

In addition to his duties as organist, Widor directed the Concordia, an oratorical choral society. Under the pseudonym of Aulétés, Widor wrote music criticism for the daily L'Estafette.⁸ Before his appointment to the Conservatoire in 1890, Widor had composed his first eight organ symphonies, a form he pioneered,⁹ the opera Maître Ambros, and over forty songs.

Widor's early songs, published by Hamelle in 1889, display several characteristics typical of the romance. Frits Noske describes the romance as a genre intended for the amateur salon singer, usually in strophic form, consisting of a vocal line more concerned with melody than textual interpretation, and supported by a simple, often figurative piano accompaniment of no consequence to the meaning of the text. He attributes the rather simplistic demeanor of the

7. "Widor," Grove, op. cit., XX, 398.

8. Hugues Imbert, Portraits et souvenirs (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1894), 37.

9. John Wilson, The Organ Symphonies of Charles-Marie Widor (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1966; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 67-319.

romance largely to its subject matter. In general, the poetry was pastoral, descriptive and uninvolved. In fact, the emotional lyric poetry of the romantics was partially responsible for the demise of the romance and the development of the mélodie in the nineteenth century.¹⁰

The poetry that Widor chose for his early songs implies that this was at first an insignificant form for him. The many dedications to unknown persons, particularly women, hint that the early songs were written perhaps as gifts, or souvenirs from the organ virtuoso.¹¹ A few of the poems were composed by well-known poets, Victor Hugo in particular, but generally, the poets appear to have been dilettantes.

Most of the features of Widor's early songs conform to those of the romance. The form is strophic or varied-strophic. The vocal melody is arranged in square phrases with regular cadences, in gentle contours that follow chordal tones. There is little that could be considered virtuosic or dramatic. The infrequent chromatic inflections in the form of tendency tones, that is, non-harmonic tones, particularly chromatic ones, that gravitate to a chordal tone, foreshadow the more developed chromaticism of his later songs.

10. Fritz Noske, La Mélodie française de Berlioz à Duparc (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954), reprint translated by Rita Benton, French Song from Berlioz to Duparc (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 1-12.

11. Widor's fascination with the charms of the opposite sex are discussed in W. L. Sumner's "Paris Organs and Organists in the Twenties," The Organ Yearbook II (1971), 53.

The accompaniment remains supportive. Seldom is there an indication of the complicated and contrasting textures he will use in the Chansons de mer of 1902. An organ influence can perhaps be seen in the use of beat-by-beat chordal patterns. In the early songs (c. 1885-1889) Widor had not yet incorporated into his song style the extended prelude/postlude features in the manner of Schumann. In general, he uses simple pianistic patterns that provide harmonic support for the voice, as is typical of the romance.

In keeping with Widor's conservative nature, the harmonic language of the early songs proves conventional. Even those features that provide interest are representative of the current harmonic usage, for example, his avoidance of the root position of chords until cadences. Harmonic stability or instability may correspond with relative sentiments in the text. His choice of chords includes tonic, subdominant, dominant, German-sixths, and dominant-sevenths, and he prefers excursions to the mediant and submediant key areas, frequently by means of common-tone modulation. Other harmonic features typical of the era found in Widor's early songs are change of mode, and harmonic movement over a held note, perhaps a carry-over from the organ pedal-point.

Rhythm also attests to Widor's practicality in the early songs. Meter remains constant, and infrequent tempo changes occur only at new sections. Even though this genre

was not Widor's compositional forte, it is to his credit that the prosody of even the early songs shows an attempt to make rhythms correspond to proper syllabic durations.

The texture of the early songs is best described as uncomplicated and clean. This transparency is another trait consistent with the romance.

A few stylistic features in two early songs, "Contemplation" and "Prière au printemps," look ahead to the Chansons de mer. In "Contemplation," the piano participates somewhat in text portrayal; occasionally the piano and voice switch roles, the piano takes the melody while the voice accompanies on a repeated note, or the piano may carry on a dialogue briefly with the voice, that is, the voice remains silent while the piano has the melody. Several melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic features in "Prière au printemps" resemble characteristics of the mélodie. Widor uses sections of recitative at the beginning of the song and at the strophic return. Chromatically inflected tendency tones suggest the uncertainty of death's destiny as discussed in the poem. The almost complete avoidance of tonic corresponds to the need for the resolution that death will be amicable to the loved ones concerned. In fact, there are only three moments of tonic in 108 measures: measures 28, 83, and at the end of the song. Also, rhythm becomes more involved. For example, Widor may keep the rhythm in the piano active even though the voice is inactive in "Prière au printemps."

The effect of these two songs moves away from the amateur and towards the interpreter.

In summary, the early songs of Widor descend from the romance. Written before his appointment to the Conservatoire, these songs reveal little influence of the avant-garde musical ideas of the day. The somewhat protective environment of the Church no doubt delayed Widor's artistic growth as a composer during this period. In the 1870's, when Widor and Fauré were concurrently employed at St. Sulpice, Fauré had already published in 1865 his first volume of songs, also written in the romance vein, and the expansion of his song style into the mélodie would not begin until the 1880's.¹² In addition, the only theatrical music Widor had composed was the unsuccessful opera Maître Ambros, written in 1886, his first attempt at a genre he would turn to again. His appointment to the Conservatoire as Professor of Organ, upon Franck's death, instigated a new cultural climate for Widor, in which he would write his last songs, the Chansons de mer.

12. Barbara Meister, Nineteenth Century French Song: Fauré, Chausson, Duparc, and Debussy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 35-37.

Chapter III

CHARLES-MARIE WIDOR: THE CONSERVATOIRE YEARS

Widor's concentrated traditional training and his expertise on the organ helped him attain the position of Professor of Organ at the Paris Conservatoire upon Franck's death in 1890. When Dubois became Director in 1896, Widor assumed an additional position of Professor of Composition. Initially, Franck's circle of disciples resented this detached and indifferent replacement, who preferred intense technical discipline in the works of Bach to displays of virtuosity. Clarity in rhythm and phrasing, a legato touch, and changes of manual as opposed to changes of stops were part of Widor's creed. Widor exchanged Franck's camaraderie for a determined dedication to the progress of his students.¹

Widor's phenomenal talent as a performer was perhaps his greatest teaching tool. Continuing the Bach tradition taught to him by Lemmens, Widor passed on his organ method to Marcel Dupré, Albert Schweitzer, with whom he edited five volumes of Bach's organ works, and Louis Vierne. His discriminating style and his mastery of improvisation were unequaled, and according to Michael Murray, at St. Sulpice he succeeded in turning "the Low Mass into an organ recital,"²

1. Murray, "A Legacy," op. cit., 8. 2. Sumner, op. cit., 53.

after which he would entertain multitudes of admirers. After Franck's death, he re-established the French School of organ-playing and improvisation.³

In the midst of several antagonistic factions at the Conservatoire, such as the controversy between the Franckists and the Ars Gallica composers, Widor somehow managed to avoid taking sides. Isidor Philippe suggests that it was precisely this refusal to affiliate that agitated Widor's peers and may have contributed to the general neglect of his compositions.⁴ He apparently did not pursue the Wagnerian set, although he lunched at Foyot's Restaurant, a meeting place for artists and musicians. Perhaps also indicative of his prudent nature, he married extremely late in life, at the age of seventy-nine years.⁵ Exposed to many influences, Widor remained admirably independent, discreetly embracing those ideas compatible to his nature.

In spite of his aloofness, Widor achieved many honors and accomplishments during his lifetime. He was appointed to the esteemed position of Permanent Secretary of the Institute de France in 1910. He was awarded the Order of Knight of the Legion of Honor, and was a member of the

3. Ibid.

4. Isidor Philippe, "Charles-Marie Widor: A Portrait," The Musical Quarterly XXX/2 (April 1944), 126-127.

5. Rowland W. Dunham, "From Yesterday," The American Organist XXXVII/12 (Dec. 1954), 403.

Academies of Berlin, Brussels, and Stockholm. In addition to his criticism written for the Estafette, his numerous publications include a supplement to Berlioz's treatise on instrumentation entitled Technique de l'orchestre moderne, 1904, several essays and prefaces, and the five volume edition of Bach's organ works. Among his composition pupils are counted Nadia Boulanger, Darius Milhaud, and Arthur Honegger. Regardless of his detachment, Widor was respected and honored by his confreres.⁶

Widor's employment at the Conservatoire came at a most opportune time. The multiplicity of novel ideas, not only in music, but in literature, art, and the medical sciences, especially psychology, that teemed in the social meetings of French artist and leading figures, offered new outlets of expression. Despite Widor's reputation as a traditionalist, the music of the songs in Chansons de mer of 1902 exhibits several recent concepts and a marked evolution of song style towards the mélodie.

6. Wilson, op. cit., 18-19.

Chapter IV

THE POET OF CHANSONS DE MER--PAUL BOURGET, 1852-1935

The poet for the Chansons de mer, Paul Bourget, was in certain ways a kindred spirit with Widor. Both were conservatives: each took little from outside happenings and steered his own eccentric and often anachronistic path. Hugues Imbert implies a family relationship in his Portraits et souvenirs.¹ This would certainly account for Widor's choice of Bourget's poetry in a large song group, for Bourget is least known in this form, and among the Parnassians and Symbolists, superior poetry abounded at that time.

Bourget was born into a family concerned with education. His father taught mathematics first in Amiens, where Bourget was born in 1852, and then in Paris, from 1867. Bourget began to read at age three, and read all of Shakespeare's plays between the ages of five and seven. After the death of his mother in 1857, his father married the daughter of a Classics professor from whom Bourget acquired his knowledge of Latin.²

1. Imbert, op. cit., 34.

2. Armand Singer, Paul Bourget (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 11.

Religion would play an important part in Bourget's development. Abandoning Catholicism at age fifteen, Bourget entered a pessimistic period, after which he spent the rest of his life trying to reaffirm his faith. This aspect of the poet is reflected in the increasingly moralistic tone of his writing.³

Bourget's literary life was dominated by the scientific advances of the day. He entered a naturalism phase after the wave of pessimism following the War of 1870, and became a disciple of Taine, who advocated the use of emotional analysis of characters in one's writing.⁴ This positivism, as it was called, derived from the belief that it is possible to "explain and even foretell the mechanism of the passions, by the exact methods of biological sciences."⁵

Bourget's submergence into psychology was launched with his Essais de psychologie contemporaine of 1883. Here he applied psychological analysis to criticism with great success. His Cruelle énigme of 1885 initiated his novelist

3. Ibid., 11-12.

4. Maxwell Smith, A Short History of French Literature (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1924), 302.

5. C. A. Choquette and Christian Gauss, A Short History of French Literature (New York: F. S. Crafts and Co., 1935), 284.

period. Bourget almost single-handedly developed the psychological novel.⁶

Like Widor, Bourget was a conservative. He called for a return to the traditional family, and believed that only the Monarchy could restore stability to France. His works traverse an analytical to a moral tone.⁷

Bourget was aware, in his early literary efforts, of his bent toward emotion and imagination. Armand Singer observes that Bourget faulted his education for being " . . . too little supervised, for letting him read too much too early. His personality and his writing were fragmented into imitations of all the authors he read, books being no substitute for life."⁸

His poetry was his earliest effort at writing. Between 1872 and 1882, he wrote the collections Au bord de la mer, La vie inquiète, Les Aveux, and the narrative poem, Edel. Bernard Faÿ comments that his poetry

. . . revealed neither original inspiration, nor a powerful sensibility nor the gift of expression, but finesse, timidity and a love of suffering. His sensibility was thin, and at the same time, extremely eager. He knew his limits, and this knowledge was a source of pain. . . . He perceived his mediocrity and was tortured by it.⁹

6. Geoffrey Brereton, A Short History of French Literature (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), 233.

7. Singer, op. cit., 7-8. 8. Ibid., 18.

9. Bernard Faÿ, Since Victor Hugo: French Literature of Today (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1927), 94-95.

Faÿ believed that it was for this reason that Bourget abandoned poetry for the critical essay and the novel.

Bourget's fame lies in his psychological novel. His poetry, considered by most as atypical of the writer, is seldom discussed at length. Kenneth Cornell makes several observations appropriate to the poetry in Chansons de mer:

A manifestation of anxiety and unrest, a deep melancholy which at times verges on despair and nihilism, appears in the work of a poet who is difficult to ally with any movement. . . . Paul Borget's verse is in its diction more akin to the romantic movement and yet whose themes . . . are sometimes similar to those of Baudelaire. Debauchery, boredom, and death are the subjects of a delicate and refined analysis.¹⁰

Cornell points out that Bourget frequented the group called Les Hydropathes and briefly enrolled with Verlaine and Moreas in the group centered around La Nouvelle Rive gauche involved in the decadent phase of Symbolism.

Bourget's poetic evolution, terminating in his conversion to Catholicism and in the abandonment of poetry for the novel and essay, left a

reputation which bears little relationship with his youthful writings. His verse remains a testimony of another state of mind. Unoriginal in imagery, the author of lines which are much like those of Coppée¹¹ he is yet one of the poets who abandoned the universal

10. Cornell, op. cit., 23.

11. Cornell calls Francois Coppée, a contemporary of Bourget, the model poet of realism, and describes his poetry as descriptive of the humble and the commonplace, with traits of tenderness, irony and delicacy: Ibid., 15.

for the individual and who saw in the depths of his own sensation and meditation the subject for lyric expression. As such, he typifies the poetry of the years to come.¹²

The poetry of Chansons de mer proceeds from sentimental romanticism. It consists of rational, clear thoughts, lacking the metaphors and impressionistic images of the Symbolists. Bourget does succumb to the use of the voyage as a means of mental escape in the third poem, "Sérénade Italienne," and in the tenth poem, "Les Nuages."

He uses aspects of nature to parallel and magnify personal predicaments; for example, he equates the fear and withdrawal of a motherless person to the bird that dies of fright in the hand of a child in the eleventh poem, "Douleur précoce." This poem also foreshadows his psychological obsession and is possibly autobiographical. But his poetry is seldom merely descriptive of nature.

Of the fourteen poems in the Chansons de mer, there are two that concern voyages, five poems speak of death, and ten poems deal with love, with some overlapping of subjects. Only six actually mention the sea. His traditionalism is seen in his references to women, children, and homelife. The poems of love dwell on sacrificial love, suspicion of love, thwarted or bittersweet love, but seldom blissful love. Aside from the voyages, the sea has a negative connotation: it may represent death as in the last song, "Repos éternel,"

12. Ibid., 23.

or it may be the force that separates him from his love as in the first song, "La Mer." Bourget displays a rare touch of humor in the eighth poem, "Rosa, la rose," when he compares a girl named Rosa to the wild rosebush that pricks the hand that touches it.

Perhaps the humility and the accessibility of Bourget's poetry provide its greatest charm. The heartfelt sentiments in the Chansons de mer produce at once magneticism and mediocrity. His discomfort with the form can almost be sensed in the labor and awkwardness of his expression. Bourget's poetic romanticism appears to be a peculiar mistiming for one so active in the avant-garde literary circles of the day. But the poetry of Chansons de mer suits the comparatively reserved music of Widor and perhaps inspired Widor's only attempts in mélodie composition.

Chapter V

SELECTED SONGS FROM THE CHANSONS DE MER

The Chansons de mer of Charles Widor is a set of fourteen mélodies on poems by Paul Bourget, published in 1902 by Heugel and Company. Compared to the earlier songs of 1889, Widor has expanded these in several ways. The use of more piano preludes, interludes, and postludes increases the length of these songs. Two are particularly long: the fifth song, "La Petite couleuvre bleue," comprises 185 measures and the tenth song, "Les Nuages," 145 measures. A performance of the entire set would take over an hour.

Of the fourteen songs, ten begin in minor keys and end in the parallel major key. The other four songs are cast in major keys, but Widor's consistent borrowing of chords from the parallel minor and his avoidance of the tonic chord until the final cadence also has the effect of moving from dark to light. Both the first and last songs begin in the key of C minor and end in the key of C major. Key relationships between the other songs are varied and do not appear to be schematic.¹

1. The keys of the songs are as follows: number 1, C minor/major; number 2, B flat major; number 3, A minor/major; number 4, C minor/major; number 5, A flat major; number 6, E flat major; number 7, C sharp minor/major; number 8,

The most immediate stylistic growth from earlier works is discerned in the accompaniment. Much more attention is placed on detail, and on the interpretation and enrichment of the text. Whereas in the early songs, one texture sufficed throughout, here textures are more temperamental, from the dense and heavy accompaniment of the first song, "La Mer," depicting the surging sea, to the light-hearted accompaniment of the eighth song, "Rosa, la rose," echoing his romance style. Within a song, textures are varied and combined according to poetic demands. The pure strophic form is abandoned for through-composition, although in many songs Widor favors a return to the first phrase, as if his cautious nature would not allow him to leave a song open-ended.

Melodically, the voice enjoys a more dramatic, intense, declamatory and exclamatory delivery. Widor's earlier penchant for chromatic tendency tones expands to the use of tendency chords in the Chansons de mer. Tonicizations, that is, temporary modulations to other keys, are frequent. His avoidance of the tonic chord almost becomes a hallmark of his style. Changing tempi and meter between songs give variety to the set and an increased use of cross-rhythms and rhythmic motives provide much of the driving


A flat major; number 9, G sharp minor/A flat major; number 10, G minor/major; number 11, E minor/major; number 12, A minor/major; number 13, F minor/major; number 14, C minor/major.

impetus of these songs. All of these heightened traits point to the style of the mélodie. His first decade at the Conservatoire had obviously influenced the last songs and their more extroverted manner.

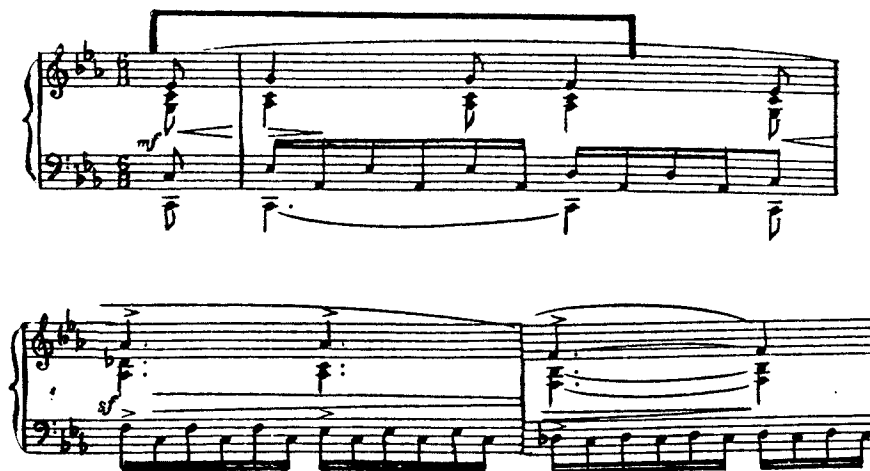
Six songs have been selected to demonstrate Widor's compositional style in this set and his assimilation of the traits of the mélodie at this time. These substantiate that while Widor eschewed allegiance to any one of the many musical fashions of the time, he nonetheless incorporated aspects of several into his distinctively conservative style.

If a single comparative could describe the style of the first song, "La Mer," particularly in reference to early songs, it would have to be more energetic. The tempo marking, Allegro con fuoco (with fire), and ♩ = 120, in a 6/8 meter, is enough indication that this is not a song in the romance style. "La Mer" consists of 109 measures, beginning in the key of C minor and ending in the key of C major. The form is through-composed, with sections of music occurring at new poetic thoughts, and a return of the opening phrases supplies the finale. This song has one of the most extended preludes and some of the most cohesive interludes of any of the songs.

At once Widor evokes the darkness and depth of the sea in the introduction through the use of the low register of the piano in tremolo-like sixteenths and a dense texture.

The rhythmic motive  as well as the melodic cell, the ascending third, that pervades throughout the song, are announced immediately in the right hand (Example 1). As is typical of Widor, the only feeling of the tonic key, C minor, is through a well-disguised tonic pedal note in the left hand. Throughout the song, when the tonic harmony occurs, it is briefly, as in the first eighth-note of the song, or not in root position. New is Widor's attempt to establish the tone of the poem in the piano introduction through the use of accompanimental motives that will serve to unify the song as well.

Example 1. Widor, "La Mer," Chansons de mer, measures 2-4.



The first cadence before the entrance of the voice, is on the submediant, A flat major. The first true cadence to tonic, C minor, is not until the eleventh measure, and is so subdued that it passes by unnoticed. There is modulation

to other than closely related keys or keys of a third relationship, for example a key change to B flat major. Not only a new key but a new register of the piano and texture correspond with the new poetic thought, "I hear the cries of the seagull, like him, my heart is wild," (Example 2).

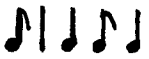
Example 2. Widor, "La Mer," Chansons de mer, measures 32-36.

The image shows a musical score for measures 32-36 of Maurice Ravel's "La Mer" from the "Chansons de mer" cycle. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in B-flat major and 3/4 time. The lyrics are: "J'entends cri - er le go - ç - iand. Comme lui mon". The piano accompaniment features a variety of textures and dynamics, including a soft section (s), a piano section (p), and a section with a fortissimo accent (sf). The piano part includes a chromatic line in the right hand and a more rhythmic bass line in the left hand.

Vocally, the melody is more demanding than in the earlier songs. Phrases are no longer predictable or regular. For an exclamatory effect Widor uses wider intervals, such as the major sixth for "O mer!" The poignant augmented-fourth is used melodically, not only in the voice (Example 3), and in the melodic cell (Example 4), but for harmonic purposes, that is, as a chromatic enhancement of the resolution tone. Augmented and large intervals and a declamatory nature better suit the depiction of a troubled soul than a melodically-inclined vocal line.

Example 3. Widor, "La Mer," Chansons de mer, measures 37-39.

Example 4. Widor, "La Mer," Chansons de mer, measure 16.

Rhythmic variety proves to be a stimulant in "La Mer." Cross-rhythms, like the voice changing to four against the 6/8 meter (Example 5), provide relief from the pervading  pattern. Changes in tempo are more subtle, occurring throughout and not just at the juncture of sections.

Example 5. Widor, "La Mer," Chansons de mer, measures 22-23.

Recurring melodic and rhythmic motives distributed between the voice and the piano provide unity. In addition to the rhythmic pattern and the ascending third found in the introduction, the piano has counter-melodies (Example 4). The piano counter-melody to the opening vocal phrase which ascends is in an opposing register and moves in opposite direction to the voice. The poet states that the sea keeps him from his beloved. If the piano were taken to represent the sea, these counter-melodies then seem to defy the voice. In addition, the piano, or the sea, has its own melodic material in interludes and transitions. Often the return of the introductory piano theme is fragmented and disguised. In measures 70-73, Widor uses the last four notes of the first piano phrase in the prelude (Example 1), creating a rhythmic motive that aids in unifying the song (Example 6). In measure 74, the piano recalls in the lowest octave the duple feeling against the 6/8 meter which the voice employed in measure 23.

Example 6. Widor, "La Mer," Chansons de mer, measures 70-73.

The image shows a musical score for measures 70-73 of "La Mer" by Widor. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in a single staff with lyrics underneath. The piano accompaniment is written in two staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 6/8. The lyrics are: "moi, d'après a - moura Nous pré - ci - tent vers notre". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some chords and arpeggios.

Changes in texture coincide with poetic verses and usually reflect a change of mood; for example, the dark opening with its references to the sea, is brightened, when the thought turns to the seagull, through a move to a new, major key, B flat, a higher piano register, and a change from tremolo-sixteenths to an eighth-note pattern (Example 2). Though through-composed, "La Mer" ends with the opening phrases to round-off the composition.

In the seventh song, "Ce Monde meilleur," modified ABA form is used and suits the poem very well. In the outer A sections, the poet speaks of death, and his desire for this world, even over Paradise, while the B section turns to more emotional thoughts of his beloved. The 34 measures of this song are almost equally divided between sections, the first A section consisting of 11 measures, the B section, 9 measures, and the second A section, 14 measures. With a key signature of four sharps, Widor further enhances the form by emphasizing an ambiguity of mode in the outer A sections and a clearer sense of key, F sharp minor, in the B section. The Lento tempo in a meter of 2/4 provides a slow eighth-note motion that suits the agonizing text. In the B section with its new poetic thought, Widor calls for a poco animato.

The opening unpleasant thoughts of death are illustrated in the piano by an unyielding eighth-note pattern that chromatically grows from an omnipresent C sharp. The song is written so as to command aural resolution to C sharp and the

dominant, G sharp. One may have tonal remembrance of only these two tones after hearing the song. Harmonically this is enhanced by an avoidance of resolution to the tonic chord (true tonic feeling occurs in three places, at the beginning and end of the B section, and at the end of the song), by an emphasis on dominant-function chords that would resolve to C sharp, by the pedal-like reiteration of C sharp, even with its own dominant chord, and by extensive use of the tonic-seventh chord. The lack of full cadences or expected resolutions help represent the vagueness of death (Example 7).

Example 7. Widor, "Ce Monde meilleur," Chansons de mer, measures 1-5.

Lento. .

Ce monde meilleur et tout autre,

The persistent, slow eighth-note pattern of the accompaniment amply depicts the one-dimensional mind of a soul obsessed with death. Relief comes when his thoughts

turn to his beloved. The vocal line is no longer confined to the emphasis of the C sharp, and the harmony truly modulates to the keys of F sharp minor and A major, resulting in a temporary feeling of resolution.

The vocal line seldom resembles a melody. Instead careful attention is paid to a refined prosody. It seems that Widor wished to project clarity of the diction and the meaning of the poem through rhythmic and dynamic detail.


As in "La Mer," when Widor uses the tonic chord in "Ce Monde meilleur," he implies the minor mode throughout the song but ends on the major chord. The resolution of chromatic tendency tones is often prolonged or disguised, as in the B sharp in measure 32, which is resolved in measure 33 in the lower octave (Example 8). Through an abundance of chromatic tones and emphasis of but not resolution to the tonic, Widor provokes a feeling of unrest and anxiety that is appropriate to the text.

Example 8. Widor, "Ce Monde meilleur," Chansons de mer, measures 31-34.

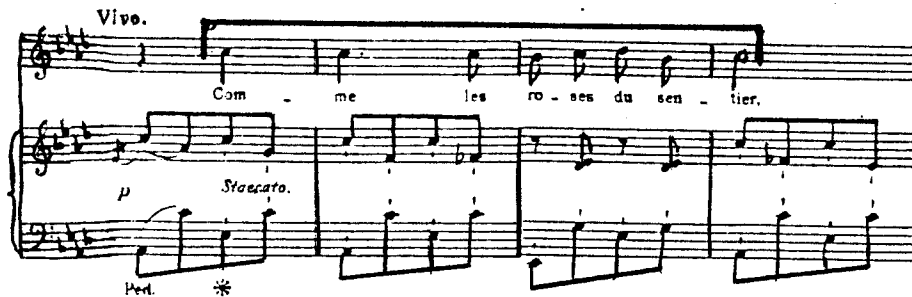


Amid the predominately melancholic and dismal Chansons de mer, the eighth song, "Rosa, la rose," is a breath of fresh air. The humor of the poem is reflected by a lighter texture, a more melodic vocal line, clear and stable A flat harmony, and in general, a lucidity and simplicity that recalls his romance style. Consisting of a total of 46 measures, this song is entirely built from the first vocal phrase. There are no interludes to amplify the text. The piano introduction exemplifies a frequent trait of Widor's songs. It is a measure of a single line that prepares a dominant feeling before the tonic chord, A flat, of the second measure. It has no musical material from the body of the song and therefore seems unrelated to it. The postlude merely repeats the opening phrase of the song.

In keeping with the brevity and simplicity of the poem, the resulting musical form is modest. There are eight vocal phrases that occur in pairs. The first four measures of the vocal line establish a melodic and rhythmic pattern which is repeated with some modifications, a step higher for the second pair of phrases, as in a sequence. The third pair of vocal phrases is modified melodically but retains much of the rhythmic form as before. The fourth set of phrases returns to the opening except for an embellishment of the final vocal cadence. The entire song is built on the first vocal phrase, resulting in an A A' A'' A''' form that

depends on consistent A flat major harmony and the rhythmic motive in 2/4:  (Example 9).

Example 9. Widor, "Rosa, la rose," Chansons de mer, measures 2-5.



The texture of the accompaniment is a two-part staccato counterpoint melody to the vocal line, that is appropriate to the humor of the poem. Widor uses the now old-fashioned turn and grace notes to embellish melodic lines. Other than the fermata in the twelfth measure and the ritard in the last phrase of the vocal line, the tempo and meter remain unchanged.

The harmony of "Rosa, la rose" also harkens back to his romance style. The key of A flat major is established at the outset and retained throughout the song, except for brief episodes, like the one in the supertonic, B flat minor (measures 13-20), which results from the sequential repeat of the opening vocal phrase. There is no true modulation and establishment of a new key.

The straight-forwardness, the lack of pretense, and the easy comprehension of this song not only point to the

romance, but provide a welcome relief midway through the rather somber Chansons de mer.

The ninth song, "Seul dans la nuit," returns to the minor mode, G sharp minor. This is another example where the prelude seems unrelated to the body of the song. The song opens with the piano presenting a single, meandering line that eventually leads to a cadence on the dominant harmony, which gives the impression of the solitude of which the poet will speak. Nothing from this line returns in the song. Widor then establishes the 9/8 meter and Andantino tempo of the song and the pervasive eighth-note accompaniment pattern (Example 10). In measure six is the two-note melodic motive occurring in the alto voice on beats four and seven, that acts as a descending appoggiatura. This motive is found throughout the song in the accompaniment, often alternating its major and minor form, giving the effect of indecision that is appropriate to the ambiguity of the poet's emotion. The form is through-composed with the two-note melodic motive acting as an unifying device.

Example 10. Widor, "Seul dans la nuit," Chansons de mer, measures 1-7.

The musical score for Example 10 is presented in two systems. The first system, labeled "Allegro moderato." and "PIANO.", shows measures 1 through 5. It features a treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 9/8 time signature. The melody in the right hand is marked with a piano dynamic (*p*). The second system, labeled "Andantino.", shows measures 6 through 7. It features a treble clef with the same key signature and time signature. The melody in the right hand is marked with a pianissimo dynamic (*pp*). The left hand in both systems provides a steady eighth-note accompaniment. A dynamic marking of *sf* (sforzando) is present at the beginning of measure 6, and a *pp* marking is present at the beginning of measure 7. A pedal point is indicated at the end of measure 7 with the marking "Ped."

Beginning with measure 14, the harmonic impression is one of anticipation of resolution with no resolution. Widor moves through the following key areas: E flat major, G flat major, A minor, G sharp major/minor, and ultimately ends on A flat major, the enharmonic major tonic key. Widor's harmonic style is interesting not for his modulations, but for the unique manner in which he postpones and even avoids the tonic chord within any key. Borrowing chords from the parallel mode, Widor constantly teases at tonic but refuses to make an outright statement of it. In the A minor episode shown in Example 11, he emphasizes the supertonic, or B, in the voice, while harmonically borrowing the major third, C sharp. He delays using the A minor chord; in fact, the lowered sixth scale degree, F natural, on the words, "tes yeux," is the first clue to the true tonality, until the use of C natural in the vocal line in the next measure. Even so, the A minor chord in root position does not occur.

Example 11. Widor, "Seul dans la nuit," Chansons de mer, measures 27-30.

The image shows a musical score for Example 11, consisting of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in treble clef and includes the lyrics: "Pourtant j'ai bu sur ta bouche ce miel; Tes yeux n'étaient pas un mensou". The piano accompaniment is written in bass clef and features a piano (pp) dynamic marking. The score spans measures 27 to 30, showing complex harmonic modulations and chromatic movement in both parts.

This avoidance of the tonic chord, ambiguity of mode, and borrowing from parallel modes gives Widor's music the sensation of restlessness and torment. Such borrowings were certainly not new at this time, but emphasis of the super-tonic and the subdominant chords often from the parallel mode, and occasionally the Neopolitan, along with the frequent neglect of the tonic chord, impart a distinctive flavor to Widor's harmonic sound. The sudden termination of all this stress with a final major chord, as in "Seul dans la nuit," and many other songs in the Chansons de mer, seems too facile and as a result, tends to give a rather naive quality to his music.

Widor attempts dramatic touches in "Seul dans la nuit." His fondness for the single melodic line in the piano is used fittingly when the poet asks, "Why do I find these shadows between your eyes and me, between their caress and my heart?" Here the piano portrays the void of which Bourget speaks (Example 12).

Example 12. Widor, "Seul dans la nuit," Chansons de mer, measures 38-41.

The image shows a musical score for Example 12, measures 38-41 of "Seul dans la nuit" by Widor. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "En - tre leur cares - se et mon cœur?". The piano part includes a dynamic marking of "pp" and a "Ped." instruction.

Widor does not repeat the opening phrase of the poem to conclude the song; instead he repeats the last question, in a major mode, giving the psychological effect that perhaps the poet already knew the answer. The postlude echoes the downward appoggiatura of the prelude, first in its major form and then its minor form. The use of motivic cells and the alteration of their modes allows Widor to provide psychological nuances that permit the piano to elaborate on the vocal text (Example 13).

Example 13. Widor, "Seul dans la nuit," Chansons de mer, measures 46-48.

The most outstanding quality of the tenth song, "Les Nuages," is the complexity and variety of the textures. The poem depicts a mental voyage to the Orient, but his journey is on a cloud, not the ocean. Though in the key of D minor, the opening highlights the dominant, D, not only in the high register tremolo D pedal in the piano, but through the chromatic C sharp in the vocal line (Example 14). The first section emphasizes the five note scale, G, A, B flat, C sharp, and D, with its augmented intervals, giving if not

truly Oriental, at least a non-Western flavor. As one of the longest songs, 145 measures, the quick tempo, Allegro con moto ($\text{♩} = 104$), alleviates the length of the song, and the persistent but plain patterns in the accompaniment suggest the impatience and eagerness of the poet to flee like the clouds to the Orient. The form is through-composed, consisting of contrasting sections with a modified return to the opening phrases as the finale.

Example 14. Widor, "Les Nuages," Chansons de mer, measures 1-6.

Allegro con moto. $\text{♩} = 104$

Les nuages vont vite, vite,

The first new section occurs at the point where the poet wonders, "Where do they flee?" The vanishing of the clouds is depicted in trills. Widor eludes the tonic chord and even his first undeniable cadence to it in measures 14-15, is foiled briefly by the added major sixth, E natural, in the piano melody that moves to F sharp and ultimately G.

The texture changes from the high tremolo in the right hand and the seesawing chords in the left hand, when the poet begins to think of the Orient, to descending arpeggios (Example 15). The new key, B flat major, brightens the tone and a feeling of elevation is established. Right and left hands reverse the material of the opening, but in its new stable harmonic guise and its middle register location, the previously anxious impression is relaxed to one of anticipation.

Example 15. Widor, "Les Nuages," Chansons de mer, measures 19-22.

The musical score for Example 15, measures 19-22, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for measures 19 and 20. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Ab!" and "Ce n'est". The piano accompaniment features descending arpeggios in the right hand and a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include piano (p) and piano fortissimo (pff). The second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for measures 21 and 22. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "pas Vers la mer - veil - leu - - - se con -". The piano accompaniment continues with the same descending arpeggio pattern in the right hand and eighth-note bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include piano (p) and piano fortissimo (pff).

A ritard ushers in another section when the poet remembers the placid, untroubled skies of the Orient and the scent of orange blossoms. The key of B flat major is confirmed with the low B flat pedal and tranquility is depicted in the use of the lower register of the voice and an unaccented, flowing middle register accompaniment (Example 16).

Example 16. Widor, "Les Nuages," Chansons de mer, measures 32-34.

The musical score for Example 16 consists of two staves. The upper staff is for the voice, and the lower staff is for the piano accompaniment. The key signature has two flats (B-flat major), and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line starts with the lyrics "En O - n - ent les cieux sont cal - - - mes,". The piano accompaniment features a low B-flat pedal point in the left hand and a flowing middle register accompaniment in the right hand. Performance markings include "p a tempo." and "Dolciss. pp".

The voice introduces a theme that returns frequently. At each return, this theme seems to lighten the previously intense music, perhaps serving as an aural recall of the Orient. More chromatic non-harmonic tones begin to appear when the poet realizes that the Orient is no place for a sad poet nor a cold, black cloud.

At this realization, a new texture and key, D minor, appears (Example 17). The D pedal of the opening returns but in the lower register of the left hand. Above this, accented sixteenth-note upbeats begin to invoke the storm and furious winds.

Example 17. Widor, "Les Nuages," Chansons de mer, measure 55.

Rising arpeggios that sequence upward by half-steps and ascending octave scales in the left hand accompany the words, "We depart," (Example 18).

Example 18. Widor, "Les Nuages," Chansons de mer, measures 59-61.

The tension in this section culminates with the prophetic line, "The waves sing funeral words," portrayed in the low octave rambling of the piano and the lamenting vocal line (Example 19).

Example 19. Widor, "Les Nuages," Chansons de mer, measures 74-77.

At the words, "Listen to them," tension is alleviated by modulating to the key of G major and by lightening the texture with simpler rhythms and a higher register. The sweet Oriental melody returns in the piano, representing the hope of spring to which the text refers. In this section, the voice and piano trade statements of the Oriental theme.

At the Animato, Widor restores the opening texture and phrases, but in a less disjointed manner. Material is reversed in the hands of the piano and placed closely together in the middle register. Throughout this section, Widor combines previous material in varying fashions.

The finale of the song is preceded by a ritard and fermata over a dominant-seventh chord on D in anticipation of a final cadence to G major. However, Widor employs a device similar to the false cadence of Fauré of which Barbara Meister speaks.² He first cadences to the lowered submediant

2. Mesiter, op. cit., 36.

key of E flat major, but the true cadence to the key of G major occurs several measures later. He moves the melody to the tonic note, G, as expected, but re-harmonizes it in the key of E flat major first, a refreshing harmonic turn that is in keeping with the hopeful ending of the poem (Example 20).

Example 20. Widor, "Les Nuages," Chansons de mer, measures 132-134.

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is for the voice, with the lyrics "Là - bas" written below it. The middle staff is for the piano, with the instruction "Con fuoco, animato molto." written above it. The bottom staff is for the piano, with a "Ped." marking below it. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

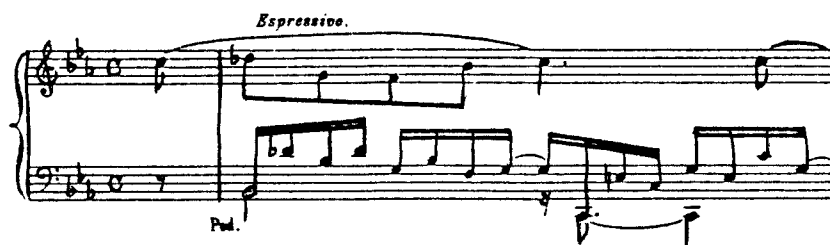
In "Les Nuages" the piano is virtually responsible for the success in the interpretation of the poem. Textures change to coincide with the mood of the text. The scales of balance between voice and piano are tipped in favor of the latter, the piano being a more capable instrument to portray such natural phenomena as storms and waves.

The last song of the set, "Repos éternel," is set in the same key as the first song, "La Mer," C minor, ending in C major, with an interior modulation to B major. Consisting of a length of 51 measures, the song is through-composed with a brief return to the opening theme before the finale. The accompanimental texture is a consistent flow of

sixteenth-notes, with more melodic responsibility than the voice. The Andante tempo remains constant, although the 4/4 meter is adapted to 2/4 for one measure of the piano prelude.

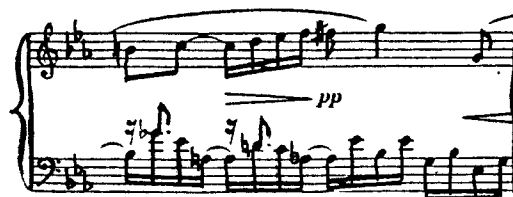
The plaintive prelude of "Repos éternel" features D flat and E natural, even though the key signature is three flats. The opening two measures gravitate harmonically to F minor, the subdominant of C minor. Even in this tonicization, Widor avoids stating the chord he is tonicizing, F minor (Example 21).

Example 21. Widor, "Repos éternel," Chansons de mer, measure 1.



Interchange of E natural and E flat provides an uncertainty of mode that corresponds to the subject of the poem, death, and sustains his indecision between C minor or its subdominant. The upward-resolving appoggiaturas whose dissonance falls on the beat furnishes a Wagnerian flavor (Example 22). The prelude sets the mood for the ominous poem, and establishes motives to be used throughout the song.

Example 22. Widor, "Repos éternel," Chansons de mer, measure 4.



The voice enters with a commentary-like line under the repeated prelude material of the piano. Two motives in particular return frequently. One is the theme or cells of the theme of the piano prelude which usually recurs in the accompaniment (Example 21). The other is the vocal motive of a descending fourth found in the last measure of Example 23 which returns in the piano.

Example 23. Widor, "Repos éternel," Chansons de mer, measures 8-10.

The use of recurring themes and cells in the accompaniment is especially significant in the song since the vocal melody is so unremarkable. It is frequently constructed of isolated groups of sixteenth notes often repeated on a single pitch. The burden of melody lies with the piano.

The voice duplicates the piano once, at the return of the opening theme, when the words read, "And when the waves sing," (Example 24).

Example 24. Widor, "Repos éternel," Chansons de mer, measures 34-35.

The image shows a musical score for Example 24, consisting of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in French: "Et lorsque chanteront". The piano accompaniment is in the left hand. The score is divided into two measures, 34 and 35. Measure 34 is marked "rit." and "f". Measure 35 is marked "a tempo." and "pp". The piano accompaniment features a German-sixth chord resolving to tonic in measure 35.

The use of the German-sixth chord resolving to tonic, C minor (Example 25) provides a peculiar harmonic flavor, particularly due to the manner in which the vocal line outlines the chordal tones. This section modulates to B major and has a lightening effect on the basically dark harmony of the song, although Widor dwells on the dominant, F sharp major, and never completely cadences to a B major chord.

Example 25. Widor, "Repos éternel," Chansons de mer, measures 22-24.

The image shows a musical score for Example 25, consisting of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in French: "Les jours où prodigant le rire et les sanglots". The piano accompaniment is in the left hand. The score is divided into three measures, 22, 23, and 24. The piano accompaniment features a German-sixth chord resolving to tonic in measure 24.

Widor makes effective use of a final theme that combines some of the intervallic sound of the piano prelude theme, though inverted and modified, in the rhythmic form of the descending vocal motive of Example 23. The finale of this song is the only undeniable statement of the home key, C. The final theme is first announced with the characteristic D flat inflection in the piano, and then echoed in its pure unchromatic form by the voice (Example 26). This ascending theme in its more exalted contour is suitable to the poet's final acceptance and refuge in death.

Example 26. Widor, "Repos éternel," Chansons de mer, measures 42-44.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Example 26. The first system shows a piano introduction with a vocal line starting with the syllable "- ne." The second system features the vocal entry with the lyrics "Pour char - mer le re - pos é - ter -" and piano accompaniment marked "Tranquillamente e dolce" and "p". The third system continues the piano accompaniment with a vocal line starting with "- nel,".

"Repos éternel" demonstrates Widor's compositional ability to work with themes and thematic fragments. His fondness of moving from dark to light, a consistent trait in these songs, is found here. The haunting D flat that opens the song is purged in the finale and becomes D natural. The initial C minor feeling concludes in C major.

These seven songs are representative of Widor's song style in the Chansons de mer of 1902. Certain of them highlight his peculiar harmonic idiom, others his vocal style. All show a maturation of musical style that allows for a more unified and sophisticated poetic rendering.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

The Chansons de mer affirm Widor's assimilation of contemporary ideas and elevate his songs from the amateur romance style to the serious mélodie composition. The expansion of many stylistic characteristics yields a more intriguing song style. More highly developed preludes, interludes, and postludes often help establish, sustain, or alter the mood. Occasionally the prelude seems unrelated to the body of the song. Widor's use of the single melodic line in the piano as an introduction seems to be an attempt to impart verbal expression through the piano with a recitative-like melody. The accompaniment at least equals and often dominates the voice and is no longer content with repetitive pianistic patterns, but seeks out contrasting textures that allow more fulfillment of the poem.

The vocal line favors a declamatory style. Square phrases of pure melody are absent. Often the accompaniment is more melodically inclined than the vocal line. Outstanding is Widor's predilection for harmonic ambiguity, as seen in his avoidance of tonic and of cadential resolutions in general, and in the numerous chromatically-inflected tendency tones and chords. The supertonic and the subdominant chords

usually borrowed from the parallel mode, or occasionally the Neapolitan chord, assist in the obscuring and prolongation of tonic resolution. By moving from minor to major harmony within a song, a feeling of harmonic movement from dark to light is accomplished. The added complexity of rhythm in the Chansons de mer allows more nuance in vocal utterance and accompanimental counterpoint that results in a more compact, integrated form.

Widor's conservatism is betrayed in his habit of rounding-out a composition by returning to the opening musical and poetical material and in his Picardy-third tendency, that is composing an entire song in a minor key only to raise the third in the final chord or closing section. Although Bourget's dolefully pensive poetry correlates well with Widor's penchant for melancholy, Widor's optimistic interpretation of the finale in the use of the major mode suggests a discrepancy between the natures of the two men.

It would be difficult to make an irrefutable case that these songs relate as a cycle, even if Widor intended it so. There is no motivic or other musical unity between songs. Only six of the poems actually refer to the sea, although one could possibly interpret the others as episodes of life between sea songs. Even when extracted, the songs stand well, alone, or re-grouped. One is not dependent, musically or poetically, on the other. Regardless of their

usage, the songs supply not only meritable but rewarding performing repertoire.

The Chansons de mer certainly would not be considered innovative for the time. More accurately, they are representative of the conservative phase of the mélodie. But for Charles Widor, a man who knew such diverse figures as Rossini and Milhaud, these songs show a decided endeavor at serious song composition. Isidor Philippe observes that Widor was disheartened by the fact that, other than the organ symphonies, his compositions were neither performed nor taken seriously.¹ The neglect of his compositions must have concerned Widor, being a Professor of Composition at the Paris Conservatoire in the early 1900's. This song group may have been one effort to break out of his conservative typecast, to venture new compositional ground, and thereby establish himself as a more versatile composer.

Regardless of the motivation behind their composition, the songs of the Chansons de mer reveal a stylistic maturity in Charles-Marie Widor that is seldom acknowledged and provide interesting and satisfying performance repertoire in a field generally dominated by a few composers.

1. Philippe, op. cit., 127.

APPENDIX
TRANSLATIONS

The Early Songs

"Contemplation"

Victor Hugo

French Text

Mon bras pressait ta taille, frele et souple comme le
roseau.
Ton sein palpait comme l'aile, comme l'aile d'un
jeune oiseau.
Longtemps muets nous contemplame le ciel où
s'éteignait le jour,
Que se passait-il dans nos âme, d'amour!
Comme un ange qui se d'évoile tu me regarder dans
ma nuit
Avec ton beau regard des toiles, regard qui m'éblouit.

"Contemplation"

Melanie DeMent-Rutledge

English Text

My arms embraced you, frail and supple like a reed.
Your heart fluttered like the wing of a young bird.
For a long time in silence we contemplated the sky,
Where the day was extinguishing itself;
What was happening in our souls, Love!
Like an angel that unveils itself, you looked at me
this night,
With your beautiful starry eyes,
Eyes that dazzled me.

"Prière au printemps"

Sully-Prudhomme

French Text

Toi, qui fleuris ce que tu touches, qui dans les bois
 aux vieilles souches, rends la vigueur!
 Le sourire a toute les bouches, la vie au coeur.
 O printemps, alors que tu t'aime que s'embellit,
 la tombe même verte au dehors.
 Fais naître un renouveau supreme au coeur des morts,
 Qu'ils ne soit pas au seule qui monde
 Pour qui tu reste infeconde, saison d'amour!
 Mais fais germer dans leurs poussière l'espoir divin
 et la lumière!

"Prayer to Spring"

Melanie DeMent-Rutledge

English Text

You who make everything you touch blossom,
 Return life to the woods of dead stumps,
 Return a smile to all mouths, and life to the heart.
 O Spring, while everything loves and grows more
 beautiful,
 The tomb itself, green outwardly,
 Gives birth to a supreme renewal in the heart of the
 dead,
 May they not be the only ones in the world,
 For whom you remain infertile, season of love!
 But let germinate in their dust
 The divine hope of light and of return.

Chansons de mer

"La Mer"

Paul Bourget

French Text

La mer énorme se soulève. Je suis comme un enfant
perdu.
O mer! Quand m'emporteras-tu vers le pays où vit
mon rêve?
J'entends crier le goëland, comme lui mon coeur est
sauvage;
Il eût jadis son doux servage, d'oiseau caressé,
mais tremblant . . .
Le vent creuse les lames hautes. Je sens passer
soudain en moi
Un peu du frissonnant émoi de ces lames le long des
côtes . . .
Elles et moi, d'après amours nous précipitent vers
notre astre;
Et le même odieux désastre nous fait rouler bien loin,
Toujours . . . toujours . . .

Songs of the Sea

"The Sea"

Melanie DeMent-Rutledge

English Text

The enormous sea swells, I am like a lost child.
O sea! When will you take me to the country where
lives my dream?
I hear the cries of the seagull.
Like him, my heart is wild.
It had once the sweet bondage of a bird caressed,
but trembling . . .
The wind hollows out the high waves.
I suddenly sense in me a little of the shivering
emotion
Of these waves along the seashore.
They and I, bitter lovers, cast us toward our star,
And the same odious disaster makes us tumble forever,
forever.

"Ce Monde meilleur"

Paul Bourget

French Text

Ce monde meilleur et tout autre, le Paradis, je n'en
veux pas.
Tout mon souvenir tient au nôtre, toute ma vie est
ici bas.
La belle enfant que j'ai choisie, ses cheveux,
sa bouche et ses yeux,
Sa jeunesse et sa poésie, Je ne les aurai pas aux
cieux!
Si la chair n'est pas immortelle, si les formes
doivent périr,
Je ne reconnaitrai plus celle qui m'a fait aimer et
souffrir.

"This Better World"

Melanie DeMent-Rutledge

English Text

Paradise, this better world and quite different,
I do not want any part of it.
All my memories are linked to earth, my whole life
is here.
The beautiful maiden that I have chosen,
Her hair, her mouth, and her eyes,
Her youth, and her poetry,
I will not have them in heaven.
If the body is not immortal, if forms must perish,
I will no longer recognize her who made me love and
suffer.

"Rosa la rose"

Paul Bourget

French Text

Comme les roses du sentier, la petite Rose est
farouche.
Tout son charme est encore entier comme les rose du
sentier.
Et son coeur est un églantier où se pique la main
qui touche.
Comme les roses du sentier, la petite Rose est
farouche.

"Rosa, the Rose"

Melanie DeMent-Rutledge

English Text

Like the roses of the pathway, little Rosa is wild.
All her charm is completely like the rose of the
pathway,
And her heart is a wild rosebush that pricks the
hand that touches it.
Like the roses of the pathway, little Rosa is wild.

"Seul dans la nuit"

Paul Bourget

French Text

Seul dans la nuit et trop loin de tes yeux,
 Je ne sais pas si tu m'aimes, je doute!
 Et ma pauvre âme en peine plonge toute en un gouffre
 silencieux. Oh non!
 C'était un trop sublime songe!
 Tant de bonheur ne fut jamais réel!
 Pourtant j'ai bu sur ta bouche ce miel;
 Tes yeux n'étaient pas un mensonge,
 Ils se levaient sur moi, fous de lueur;
 Ton âme errait sous tes paupières sombres.
 Pourquoi trouvé-je, entre eux et moi, ces ombres,
 Entre leur caresse et mon coeur?

"Alone in the Night"

Melanie DeMent-Rutledge

English Text

Alone in the night, and too far from your eyes,
 I do not know if you love me.
 I doubt and my poor, suffering soul is plunged
 completely in a silent abyss.
 Oh no! It was too sublime a dream!
 So much happiness was never real!
 Yet I have tasted on your mouth this honey;
 Your eyes were not a lie,
 They looked upon mine full of languish;
 Your soul wandered under your somber eyelids.
 Why do I find between them and me, these shadows,
 Between their caress and my heart?

"Les Nuages"

Paul Bourget

French Text

Les nuages vont vite, vite, au fond du ciel couleur
de fer,
Et ces faux amis m'ont tout l'air de fuir la ville que
j'habite.
Où s'envolentils? Ah! Ce n'est pas vers la
merveilleuse contrée
Où ma pensée est demeurée, en Orient, làbas, làbas . . .
Flottent dans le vent, si léger qu'il agite à peine
les palmes.
Et sous ce ciel trop doux á voir, je ne sais pas de
place prête
Pour un pâle et triste poète, ni pour un froid nuage
noir.
Enfuyons-nous par les espaces, chevauchons les vents
furieux,
Enfuyons-nous et partons pour les sombres cieux
Qui luisent sur la mer des glaces;
Grandioses et desolées les caps sont noyés de ténèbres.
Les flots chantent des mots funèbres. Écoutons-les!
Mais au printemps la neige en pleurs ruisselle des
collines vertes,
Comme des blessures ouvertes ruisselle le sang des
douleurs.

"The Clouds"

Melanie DeMent-Rutledge

English Text

The clouds go quickly to the depth of the sky, color
of steel,
And these false friends give the impression of fleeing
from the city that I live in.
Where do they flee? Ah! It is not to that wonderful
country where my thoughts have remained,
Over there, in the Orient.
In the Orient the skies are calm,
The scent of orange blossoms floats through the air,
so lightly, that it hardly moves the palm trees.
And under this too sweet of a sky to see, I don't
know what,
A place ready, neither for a pale, sad poet nor a cold,
black cloud.
Let's escape through space, let's ride the furious winds!
Let's flee, let's leave for the somber skies
That shine on the sea of ice, grandiose and desolate,
The caps are drowned by darkness.
The waves sing funeral words. Let's listen to them!
But in the spring, the snow in tears streams down the
green hills,
Like from open wounds, streams the blood of pain.

"Repos éternel"

Paul Bourget

French Text

Lorsque la mort, posant son doigt blanc sur mon front,
 Fera que pour toujours mes yeux se fermeront a la
 beauté vivrante,
 Choisissez-moi, vous tous à qui je serai cher, une
 tombe au soleil,
 Sur le bord de la mer infinie et mouvante.
 Les jours où prodiguant le rire et les sanglots
 Le vent labourera l'azur sombre des flots,
 J'écouterai gronder leur masse exaspérée,
 Et je me souviendrai des fureurs d'autrefois,
 Lorsque dans tout mon coeur retentissait la voix
 Des folles passions qui montaient leur marée.
 Et lorsque chanteront les grands flots apaisés
 J'entendrai résonner des anciens baisers la musique
 lointaine;
 Pour charmer le repos éternel, c'est assez des trésors
 de douleur
 Et de joie amassés, dans une vie humaine.

"Eternal Rest"

Melanie DeMent-Rutledge

English Text

When death, placing his white finger on my forehead,
 Will close my eyes forever on living beauty,
 Choose for me all of you to whom I will be dear,
 A tomb in the sun upon the shore of the sea,
 infinite and moving.
 The days when there were laughter and tears,
 The wind will plough the somber azure of the waves.
 I will listen to the roar of their exasperated mass,
 And I will remember passions of other times,
 When in my heart resounded the voice of foolish
 passions, which returned like the tide.
 And when the great subsided waves will sing,
 I will hear former kisses resound, the distant music.
 In order to charm the eternal rest,
 The treasures of sorrow and joy are enough in one's
 life.

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