

An Exploration of Interpretive Possibilities:

Gabriel Fauré's *Chant Funéraire*

Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic

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“To those readers who may criticize this detailed analysis in the belief that it destroys the spontaneity of the music, the author can only state that only after much analysis does one really know what takes place within a phrase; and the artist that is forearmed with this knowledge has a conviction to his playing or singing that can be obtained in no other way.”

-James Thurmond in *Note Grouping*

Elements of Interpretation

Ingesting the Score

- What is the form?
- What kind of piece is this?
- What is the mood we are trying to portray?
- What kind of sound do we want?
- What is the tempo?
- What dynamic schemes can we use?
- What are the phrasing and expression concepts?
- What is the concept of articulation?

Form

Chant Funéraire is in modified sonata form as follows:

A Theme	meas. 1 – 38
B Theme	meas. 39 – 60
Episode (development)	meas. 61 – 70
Return of A & B Themes	meas. 71 – 89
Coda	meas. 90 – 99

Background

- *Chant Funéraire* was premiered in 1921 by the Gardé Republicaine Band at the Hotel des Invalides, under the direction of Guillaume Balay.
- Composed for the centennial ceremony of Napoleon's death.
- Fauré included this music in his Cello Sonata no. 2, op. 117, II. *Andante*.
- Fauré's thoughts on death and study of his *Elegie*, op. 24 and *Requiem*, op. 48 can inform this interpretation.

Tempo

Tempo is integral to the interpretation of this piece. Is the piece a funeral march, a dirge, or a song of praise? Study of the following elements may be considered.

- The original score by Balay is marked *Lento* ♩ = 60
- Moss's edition marks the tempo *Andante* ♩ = 63

Tempo cont'd...

- Study of favored recordings, the Cello Sonata and other funereal music can be informative, often slower.
- Examining these elements in combination with your own musical intuition results in a process of tempo “triangulation,” helping to define your own tempo selection.

Articulation

Articulation issues in *Chant* reside mostly in the accompaniment. Careful consideration of the printed markings is needed.

Mood

Study of the above elements conjures certain moods and the character of the piece. We have found *Chant Funéraire* to be simultaneously

- Reflective
- Pensive
- Celebratory
- Introspective
- Sentimental
- Reverent
- Meditative
- Solemn

Defining how the mood of the music should be expressed throughout the piece will better allow the interpreter to shape the sound of the ensemble.

Expressive and Phrasing Concepts

Studying the writings and works of David Blum (Casals), Elie Siegmeister, James Thurmond, John Krell (William Kincaid), Ed Lisk, Weston Noble, and others is of prime importance for interpreters of serious music. Absorption of these concepts will inform both your musical intuition and purposeful interpretation. In turn you will help establish your own musical leadership.

Sources:

Blum, David. *Casals and the Art of Interpretation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977.

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Lisk, Edward S. *The Creative Director: Intangibles of Musical Performance*. Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Meredith Music Publications, 1996.

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Thurmond, James. *Note Grouping: A Method for Achieving Expression and Style in Musical Performance*. Camp Hill, PA: JMT Publications, 1982