

Gabriel Fauré: Complete Works. Series V, Volume 3 (Trio, op. 120; String Quartet, op. 121). James William Sobaskie (editor). Bärenreiter BA 9464 (XXX + 172pp cloth)

César Franck: String Quartet (Urtext). Christiane Strucken-Paland (editor). Bärenreiter TP 421 (study score)

Maurice Ravel: String Quartet (Urtext). Juliette Appold (editor). Bärenreiter TP 413 (study score)

Aside from his ever-popular Requiem, Fauré's works remain undervalued. The prospect of a complete edition is an exciting and important one, offering both scholars and music lovers the opportunity to appraise his entire output, which is larger and more extensive than you might suspect. As a composer of chamber music Fauré was one of the three supreme masters of the late romantic period, the other two being Brahms and Dvorák. This first issue in Bärenreiter's projected edition of the complete works contains his last two pieces: the Piano Trio, and the String Quartet--his only chamber composition that omits the participation of the piano. If the lion's share of this review is dedicated to a discussion of the latter work, it is because this is where the primary importance of the present volume lies. Indeed, editor James William Sobaskie's work is a model of its kind.

Sobaskie summarizes the compositional history of both works in his detailed introduction (considerately printed in French, German, and English). Fauré composed his Quartet in 1924, completing it just a few weeks prior to his death on 4 November of that year. Knowing that the end was near, and unable to continue with detailed polishing of the manuscript, he dictated his final wishes regarding the new piece:

"I desire that someone ask [Jean] Roger-Ducasse to indicate the movements, nuances, and other indications that I have not had the time to write. He is very used to my music and will know how to find his way about in it better than anyone. That done, I desire that the Quartet not be published and played until after having been tried out before the small group of friends who always have heard my works first: Dukas, Poujaud, Lalo, Bellaigue, Lallemand, etc. I have confidence in their judgment, and it is to them that I confide the care of deciding if this Quartet must be published or destroyed. If it is performed, I would like that the first audition be given for the benefit of the Alumnae Society of the Conservatoire."

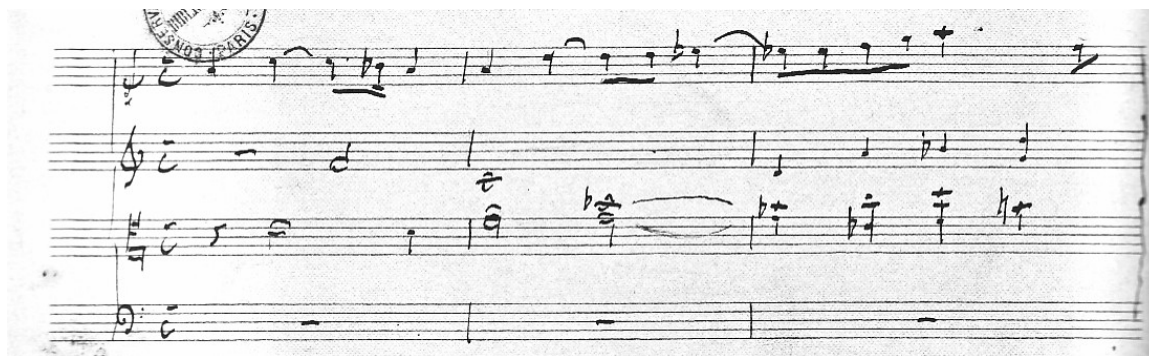
The rest, as they say, is history. Fauré's Quartet passed muster, and was duly published by Durand, edited by Roger-Ducasse. This is the edition that has been in use ever since. Sobaskie, to his credit, does not take the opportunity presented by publication of a new critical edition to trash a predecessor whose efforts, after all, had the express sanction of the composer. Nevertheless, Roger-Ducasse's work was not seen as beyond criticism, even in 1925. Publication of the manuscript facsimile at the same time as Roger-Ducasse's edited score, as Sobaskie explains, "revealed

striking differences between autograph and edition, effectively highlighting the interpretation that had been imposed by Roger-Ducasse.”

To be sure, some amount of editorial interpolation is necessary. Fauré’s manuscript lacks numerous markings relating to dynamics, accents, phrasing, and articulation. What Sobaskie has done, effectively, is to remove the grossest of the “Roger-Ducasse-isms,” bringing the text into closer conformity with the manuscript, in as much as this is practicable. At the same time, the volume includes the complete manuscript facsimile, so that performers can look at Fauré’s original text and see exactly what has been added. The result thus contains all of the information that modern players need to study the work and arrive at the most effective (and accurate) interpretive solutions.

In order to see the differences between these various versions, I give an example below of the opening of the central Andante movement, first in the manuscript:

Andante (Manuscript):



As you can plainly see, aside from the tied notes, there is nothing else in the way of dynamics, phrasing, or articulation markings. In the edition published by Durand, Roger-Ducasse proposed the following solution:

Andante (Durand Edition):



Sobaskie's new edition removes the dynamic hairpins, leaving them to the discretion of the players. All of the added phrasing and expression indications are clearly delineated, either in brackets [], or in the case of slurs, with a line through them:

Andante (Bärenreiter Edition):

The image shows a page of a musical score for a piece titled "Andante" with a tempo marking of quarter note = 76. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of four staves. The top staff is the first violin part, marked with a bracketed dynamic of [p espressivo]. The second staff is the second violin part, marked with a bracketed dynamic of [p]. The third staff is the cello part, also marked with a bracketed dynamic of [p]. The bottom staff is the bass part, marked with a bracketed dynamic of [p]. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, phrasing slurs, and dynamic markings.

The result is clean, unfussy, and true to the source. This new release does not supplant Roger-Ducasse's edition, but rather supplements it. In a sense, the Durand print is easier to use in that it leaves less up to the players' discretion. But for those groups who want to take the time and trouble to study the work in depth, as well as for lovers of Fauré's music generally, Sobaskie's work undoubtedly gets closer to the spirit of the composer's final thoughts. It need only be added that the same sensitivity and dedication characterizes his work on the Piano Trio, although in this case much less remains the subject of conjecture.

Bärenreiter has also released study scores of two major French quartets, well worth mentioning here. Perhaps the more important of the two is the new issue of Franck's Quartet, another extremely important and little-known major work. Having an Urtext version ready to hand in a modern edition is helpful for any number of reasons, not the least of which is the ratification of the "sempre vibrato" indication in the cello part of the first movement--one of so many bits of score evidence that makes nonsense of what the period instrument movement has been telling us about "authentic" 19th century performance practice. It's also very nice to have such an attractively printed study edition of Ravel's quartet available as well. Of course, the cheap Dover score is ready to hand (as is Durand), but it looks somewhat cluttered and seedy at this late date. Moreover, editor Juliette Appold's preface makes very interesting reading, and goes a long way toward justifying purchase of the new Bärenreiter edition. Chamber music collectors take note.

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April 2011