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## PREFACE

*Romances sans paroles* is French for 'Lieder ohne Worte' or 'Songs without words'. Fauré's only three pieces in the genre, suggesting a youthful homage to Mendelssohn, were his first piano pieces to be published. Exactly when he composed them is uncertain, though most of his biographers suggest it could have been any time from 1863 onwards (the year he turned eighteen). An unpublished piano duet version of the first piece – whose opening prefigures his Third Nocturne – was dated by the composer 'Tarbes, August 1864', and may have been intended to go with another duet written there in January 1864, titled 'La Chanson dans le jardin', which later became the 'Berceuse' of the *Dolly* suite, Op. 56.<sup>1</sup> Alfred Cortot left a reference to a manuscript (now untraced) of the second *Romance* dated December 1869 – though it is uncertain if that date marks the piece's composition or just Fauré's dedication of the manuscript to a young lady. A query over the date of the third *Romance* might be posed by a passing affinity with 'Petit mari petite femme' from Bizet's *Jeux d'enfants*, published in 1872 (compare bars 24–32 of Fauré's piece with bars 17–46 of Bizet's). This could however be fortuitous, remarkable though it is; there seems no possible way that Bizet could conversely have known Fauré's piece, which was not published until well after Bizet's death.


At least the first two *Romances sans paroles* can thus be dated between Fauré's last student years at the École Niedermeyer and his four-year stint as organist at the church of St Sauveur in Rennes – a job that bored him to such distraction that it was with some relief that he finally managed to get himself fired early in 1870, after a series of ecclesiastical misdemeanours that included being found in evening dress in the organ loft one Sunday morning, after an all-night ball. Some social relief in Rennes came from the friendship of families whose children he taught, notably the sisters Valentine and Laure de Leyritz, to the latter of whom is dedicated the lively second *Romance sans paroles*. (He must have taught her well if she managed to play the piece.)

In those early years Fauré had no chance of publishing such pieces, and only in 1880, after the success of his violin *Berceuse* Op. 16, did he find a regular publisher in Julien Hamelle. In the last months of 1880, Hamelle accepted a major batch of works from Fauré including the First Piano Quartet Op. 15, the *Romances sans paroles*, the three songs of Op. 18, and the *Ballade* Op. 19 in its original form for solo piano.<sup>2</sup> The *Romances sans paroles* duly appeared early in 1881, and the first two were first heard in public in Paris on 25 February that year, played by Pauline Roger at a concert of the Société nationale de musique. The third *Romance* was first heard in public almost eight years later, at a similar concert on 19 January 1889, played by the picturesquely named Kasa Chatteleger (a name that more immediately calls to mind the second or fourth movements of Fauré's *Dolly* suite).

Around 1908 Fauré recorded the third *Romance* on a Hupfeld reproducing piano roll (later reissued on the better-known Ampico system). This recording, besides confirming the clear and simple lines of Fauré's piano playing, reveals his inventive penchant for variation, adding some bass octaves and elaborating the final bar. While these variants cannot be taken as definitive, their logic is consistent enough to justify printing them here on auxiliary staves.

In fact the *Romances sans paroles* are not easy, given the pianist's dual occupation with complex accompaniments and melodies that sometimes echo imitatively across voices. (Fauré was ambidextrous, and the pieces might be viewed in several ways as *études*.) It was thus not surprising that they soon became as popular, if not more so, in arrangements by Jules Delsart for violin or cello accompanied by piano, published by Hamelle in 1896. Whether on Delsart's or Hamelle's initiative, these transcriptions bowdlerise many of Fauré's more daring passing harmonies, specially in the second *Romance*; the music's full adventurousness, manifest in the piano version, has therefore been long masked from many listeners and performers.

### Editor's Note

Editorial ties and slurs in the present edition are printed ; other editorial additions are placed in square brackets [ ]. Cautionary accidentals in parentheses ( ) come from the source and are not editorial. Auxiliary staves labelled 'R' in the third *Romance* show variants from Fauré's piano roll recording. In the third *Romance* the vertical slurs from bar 42 onwards signify arpeggiation across the right hand (as in Chopin's F# Prelude, Op. 28 no. 13). At bar 32 of the first *Romance* the first edition places the two final *bf* dyads on the lower staff, resulting in some confusion of stemming; although the present edition relocates these for clarity, hand distribution can in any case be read either way. In other works Fauré often takes low-lying right-hand notes to the lower staff to minimise ledger lines, and similar textures in his Sixth, Tenth and Twelfth Nocturnes (in particular) suggest that in bars 32–38 of the first *Romance* he may have envisaged the right hand taking all but the bass line and the tail end of the tenor melody at bar 32. This, however, is essentially a matter for individual taste and size of hands. Fauré's pedalling from bar 39 of the first *Romance* can be read as indicating the technically essential element of the pedalling, without ruling out discretionary pedalling immediately around it.

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Roy Howat

<sup>1</sup> Regarding 'La Chanson dans le jardin' see Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré, a musical life*, transl. Roger Nichols, Cambridge, 1991, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> *Gabriel Fauré, his life through his letters*, ed. Jean-Michel Nectoux, transl. J. A. Underwood, London, 1984, p. 100 n1.

# 3 Romances sans paroles, Op. 17

Gabriel Fauré  
(1845–1924)

## I

À Madame Félix Lévy

Andante, quasi allegretto

*p*

5

9

13

*sempre*

17

*dolce* *cresc.*