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13 Nocturnes

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Preface

"In piano music there's no room for padding, one has to pay cash and make it constantly interesting. It's perhaps the most difficult medium of all, if one wants to do it as satisfyingly as possible" – thus wrote Fauré in a letter to his wife Marie in August 1910.¹ The composer's younger son Philippe later commented that his father's Nocturnes "are not necessarily based on night-inspired reveries or emotions [but] are lyrical, generally impassioned pieces, sometimes anguished, or pure elegies like the Eleventh [...]"² Since Fauré's lifetime, editions of his Nocturnes have been plagued by misprints and other editorial problems; the present edition incorporates literally hundreds of hitherto unprinted corrections, most of which come from Fauré's own pen.

Fauré's thirteen Nocturnes also chart their composer's evolution over the eventful half-century from the First Nocturne of the 1870s to the Thirteenth of 1921. (As perspective, in 1875 Ravel was born and Debussy turned thirteen; by 1921 Debussy had been dead for three years, Ravel's solo piano output had been completed four years earlier, and Stravinsky was well into his neo-classical phase.) Their total number is somewhat haphazard, for the Twelfth Nocturne almost became a barcarolle, under which title it would be equally apt.³ So would the Eighth Nocturne, but how this piece became a Nocturne, in the teeth of Fauré's intention, is a longer story related below. Pictorial titles meant little to Fauré: asked once what marvellous skies had inspired the opening of the Sixth Nocturne, he replied dryly, "The Simplon tunnel".⁴

Exactly when the first three Nocturnes were composed has to be guessed, for their manuscripts have vanished: they appeared in print in January 1884 under a single opus number that merely reflects the year of publication. The First Nocturne provides a possible hint by quoting, in its coda, from the song *Chanson du pêcheur* which Fauré had composed in the early 1870s.⁵ We may conjecture that if the Third Nocturne was completed in 1883, it provided the spur to Fauré's publisher Julien Hamelle to print the three Nocturnes by then extant. In 1885 Hamelle added Fauré's Fourth and Fifth Nocturnes to his catalogue; the Fourth Nocturne thus probably dates from early to mid-1884, since the Fifth Nocturne was composed that August, at the summer house of Fauré's parents-in-law at Bas Prunay (on the Seine, by Bougival).

Almost exactly a decade then elapsed until Fauré started his Sixth Nocturne during a stay in July 1894 with his friends Eugène and Mimi d'Eichtal; the piece was completed shortly before his Fifth Barcarolle, again at Bas Prunay, on 3 August. These magnificent pieces defy the gloom of Fauré's professional life at the time: at the age of almost 50 he was still blocked from teaching at the Paris Conservatoire, his application for a seat at the Institut de France had been outvoted, and he had to earn his keep as choirmaster at the Madeleine church, supplemented by mind-numbing provincial inspection tours for the Ministry of Education. His motivation, in the teeth of all that, emerges from a letter he wrote to Winnaretta de Polignac while putting finishing touches to the Fifth Barcarolle: "Modern piano music of any interest is *very hard to come by*, in fact there is virtually none!"⁶

By summer 1898 things had improved somewhat: Fauré's reputation had grown in England and he had finally been appointed professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire, though much of his time was still swallowed by Ministry of Education inspection tours plus church duties at the Madeleine where he was now organist. After the London triumph in June 1898 of his incidental music for *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Fauré spent August in Wales as the guest of Mr & Mrs George Swinton, where the company included his old friend John Singer Sargent. There Fauré completed his Seventh Nocturne,⁷ dedicated to Adela Maddison, his Anglo-Irish pupil (and fervent admirer).

What we now call the Eighth Nocturne is really the last of the *Pièces brèves* Op. 84. Having initially sold the *Pièces brèves* to Hamelle in summer 1902 as a set of seven pieces, Fauré unexpectedly found himself with the idea for an eighth piece, which he completed by 8 September that year. With typical openhandedness he threw it in free with the others, demanding only that Hamelle drop the idea of saddling the pieces with picturesque titles.⁸ Although Hamelle complied for the first print in 1902, temptation proved too much when the *Pièces brèves* came to reprint a year or two later, and Hamelle's added heading "8^{me} Nocturne" for the last piece cunningly let him detach it as an apparently new title.⁹ Only in 1923 did Fauré accept this as a *fait accompli*, one that had already forced him to number his subsequent Nocturnes accordingly.

Nocturnes 9–12 date from Fauré's years as Director of the Paris Conservatoire, a post unexpectedly conferred on him in summer 1905 (at the age of 60), at which time he also signed a contract with Henri Heugel who became his publisher until 1912. An annotation by Alfred Cortot dates the Ninth Nocturne to June 1908; the Tenth was mostly composed in Lausanne over a week in mid-September that year (as a break from work on the opera *Pénélope*) and tidied up early in November. The Eleventh Nocturne forms an elegy for Noémi Lalo, wife of the music critic Pierre Lalo and daughter of the singer Henriette Fuchs who in earlier years had premièred several of Fauré's songs. Composed in spring 1913, it was Fauré's first instrumental work after completing *Pénélope*, and his first offering to his new publisher Jacques Durand (his reason for leaving Heugel is unknown); it shares an opus number with the Tenth Barcarolle.

Between these and Fauré's last two Nocturnes came one of his happiest musical experiences, his meeting in 1912 with Robert Lortat, a Conservatoire laureate who astonished him with excellent performances – from memory – of all his existing solo piano music.¹⁰ In 1914 Lortat, with Fauré's participation, gave four concerts of Fauré's music in both Paris and London. This doubtless prompted the dedication of the Twelfth Nocturne, started in August 1915 while Fauré was editing Schumann's piano music for a French wartime edition. On 7 September Fauré wrote to his wife that both the Nocturne and the Twelfth Barcarolle "are well advanced. But I'm licking them all over, like bears with their cubs!"¹¹ (He must have licked tenaciously, because the Nocturne took another seven months to appear in print.) Six years later Fauré, who had retired from the Conservatoire at the ripe age of 75, completed an amazingly fruitful year of composition with the Thirteenth Nocturne, his last piano piece. Letters to his wife reveal that he started it in autumn 1921 in Paris, completing it on the evening of 31 December in Nice, a fortnight after the death of his old teacher and lifelong friend Saint-Saëns.¹²

As with his songs and chamber works, Fauré's earliest Nocturnes show an astonishingly mature command, and the first page of the First Nocturne sets a confident benchmark of quality and inspiration for the whole volume. His ingenuity is well exemplified by the Fifth Nocturne, whose metronome markings indicate an equivalence of ♩ = ♩ across the sections despite the contrast of perceived tempo. Among several rhythmic augmentations and diminutions that result, the climax from bar 121 recapitulates an earlier theme, sounding at its original speed but now in hemiolas against the contrasting 6/8 metre (an effect masterfully anticipated in bars 65–67, where Fauré's bass rests show him already thinking in 6/8 metre). As an added passing detail, this whole page effectively sounds in B major, despite the key signature and the total absence of a B major chord anywhere in the piece. Fauré may have had a soft spot for this Nocturne, for it echoes in the allegretto section of his Sixth Nocturne (as is vividly audible if one plays from bar 39 of the former directly into bar 45 of the latter). Comparison of the

À Madame M. Baugnies
1^{er} Nocturne

Op. 33 No. 1

Gabriel Fauré
(1845–1924)

Lento ♩ = 52

cantabile espressivo

p sempre

simile

poco a poco cresc.

pp

21 ⁽¹⁾ (Un poco più mosso ma non tanto) *cantando*

p m.d. 6 6.

24 *cresc.*

27 *f sostenuto* [*f*] *sempre*

30 *p*

33 *p*

(1) See Critical Commentary Voir Commentaire critique Vgl. Kritischer Bericht

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

RH = right hand

LH = left hand

BnF, mus. = Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, music department

Editorial procedure and source priority are described in the prefatory **Editor's Note**. The default source normally followed is the last edition dating from the composer's life (or exemplars Fauré marked up for that purpose), departures or variants from which are noted. Nuances, phrasing and articulation that appear only in prints or the default source are incorporated without comment unless they raise or bear on an editorial problem; the same goes for accidentals missing in autographs but present in all prints, unless the omission provides a viable variant. Cautionary accidentals are tacitly incorporated as necessary from any source that supplies them, including occasionally Fauré's piano rolls when the context allows no doubt; redundant accidentals that serve no cautionary purpose are tacitly omitted. The earlier Nocturnes often omit to repeat accidentals at the same staff position following octave transpositions; the present edition tacitly adds these, provided they involve no editorial problem, where the 1924 re-edition has not already done so. Dynamics which sources place above or below the system (mostly because of restricted space in the autographs) are relocated between the staves as the printed sources often do, except where musical logic suggests they were intended for just one hand or voice. In other respects the placing of dynamics and nuances follows autograph sources when available, unless the placing in printed sources is so different as to suggest deliberate relocation. Orthographic variants (*mezzo piano*, *mezzo p*, *m.p.*; *dimin.*) are tacitly standardized (*mp*; *dim.*); the occasional *dim.* (or *dimin.*) written by Fauré inside a > sign is rendered, for printing reasons, as *dim.*>. Fauré's ambiguous use of "8" against bass notes to mean either *8a bassa* or *col 8* is clarified and explained below according to context. Layout across staves is occasionally tacitly modified for clarity, provided polyphonic sense and implied hand distribution are not obscured.

Exemplars have been studied of pianists with musical or family connections to Fauré, notably Dominique Merlet, Vlado Perlemuter,¹ Marguerite Long and Alfred Cortot (Médiathèque musicale Mahler, Paris), and Robert and Gaby Casadesus (BnF, mus., Vm. Casadesus 244, 268–9 and 824).² No musical annotations in their scores are in Fauré's hand; those that bear on editorial problems are mentioned below. Maurice Ravel's exemplar of the 7^e Nocturne (BnF, mus., Vmg 19433 (7)) shows fingerings and two corrections in Ravel's hand. Exemplars belonging to Marguerite Hasselmans, Roger-Ducasse and Saint-Saëns are untraced; those of Robert Lortat (studied by Jean-Michel Nectoux) and Ricardo Viñes (studied by David Korevaar) contain virtually no corrections and nothing in Fauré's hand. Marguerite Long's *Au piano avec Gabriel Fauré* is referred to as a secondary source when it bears on editorial problems.

SOURCES

Nocturnes 1–7, secondary source

RD Preface by Roger-Ducasse to the 1924 collected edition of Nocturnes 1–8 (variously **E2** or **E3** below), including numerous short music examples but excluding discussion of the 8^e Nocturne. Roger-Ducasse prepared this with the help of André Lambinet (see *Roger-Ducasse, lettres à son ami André Lambinet*, pp. 144–5 and 154). **RD** is referred to only when it bears on editorial problems.

1^{er} Nocturne

E1 First edition, J. Hamelle, Paris, [1883] (J. 2121.H.). Nocturnes 1–3, issued at the same time, have the same illustrated title page headed 'Trois Nocturnes', with the three pieces listed underneath along with their keys, opus numbers and dedicatees.

AA Annotations by Fauré on an exemplar of **E1**: BnF, mus., Rés. Vma 235 (donated in 1978 by the composer's daughter-in-law Blanche Fauré-Fremiet). The front cover and title page list Nocturnes 1–7, dating the print to post-1898;³ on the cover's top right corner Fauré has written 'Corrections' in blue pencil. The musical annotations, in black ink, are all repeated in the margins.

E2 Amended reprint of **E1**, revised by Fauré and Roger-Ducasse, Hamelle, [1924], issued both singly (with a new title page) and in the collected volume of Nocturnes 1–8 prefaced by **RD** (see above).

2^e Nocturne

E1 First edition, J. Hamelle, Paris, [1883] (J. 2122. H.). Title page as for 1^{er} Nocturne.

E2 Amended reprint of **E1**, J. Hamelle, [1897 at latest]. The only variant from **E1** concerns accidentals in bar 72.

AA Annotations by Fauré on an exemplar of **E2**: BnF, mus., Rés. Vma 235; provenance and dating of print as for **AA** of the 1^{er} Nocturne. The cover is marked by Fauré 'Corrections / corrigé', with musical annotations indicated as in the 1^{er} Nocturne.

E3 Amended reprint of **E2**, revised by Fauré and Roger-Ducasse, Hamelle, [1924]; same presentation as 1^{er} Nocturne, **E2**.

F Secondary source: feuilleton publication in album supplement to *Musica*, no. 77, February 1909 (issue devoted to Fauré). Clearly based on **E2**, **F** is mentioned below only when it differs from **E2** (a few obvious minor misprints are ignored).

3^e Nocturne

E1 First edition, J. Hamelle, Paris, [1883] (J. 2123.H.). Title page as for 1^{er} Nocturne.

AA Annotations by Fauré on an exemplar of **E1**: BnF, mus., Rés. Vma 235 (3); from Fauré's personal library (via the 1991 Hamard bequest)⁴

E2 Amended reprint of **E1**, revised by Fauré and Roger-Ducasse, Hamelle, [1924]; same presentation as 1^{er} Nocturne, **E2**.

R1 Secondary source: reproducing piano roll recorded by Fauré in mid-May 1908: Hupfeld roll 53082.⁵ The roll encodes the duration of each key depression, pedalling and (to some extent) dynamics from the original performance. The system is less sophisticated than Welte's (see **R2** below), and a few octave variants towards the instrument's extremes should be regarded with caution.⁶ Since dynamics and tempi from piano rolls are debatable, any rolls consulted for the present edition have served mainly for verifying basic details of pitch or rhythm. Obvious mistakes in the performances are ignored.

R2 Secondary source: reproducing piano roll recorded by Fauré probably in 1912, issued November 1913: Welte roll no. 2775.⁷ The roll encodes the duration of each key depression, pedalling and (to some extent) dynamics from the original performance (clearly a different one from **R1**). Editorial treatment is as for **R1**.