

French 2

Crystal Mandal

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Question 1

Assigned Poet: Charles Pierre Baudelaire

- Dates: 9 April 1821 - 31 August 1867
- Bio
 - Father passed at age 10, mother remarried in a year
 - “aimless” in life: travelled to Kolkata in 1839
 - Published *Les Fleurs du mal*, first collection of poetry, in 1857 (age 36)
 - suffered a stroke in 1866, passed in 1867 - stroke was likely caused by a lifetime use/abuse of laudanum(opium) and alcohol.
- Best Known For
 - *Les Fleurs du mal*, 1857 (The Flowers of Evil)
 - *Petits poèmes en prose*, 1868 (Little Prose Poems)
- Works Set by Debussy (Acc. to “A French Song Companion”)
 - *Le balcon* (The balcony)
 - *Harmonie du soir* (Evening harmony)
 - *Le jet d’eau* (The fountain)
 - *Recueillement* (Meditation)
 - *La mort des amants* (The death of lovers)
 - Lieder [dot] net has a few more entries, totalling ten works set by Debussy
- Approximately 135 texts in total have been set by composers in approximately 438 settings (according to Lieder [dot] net)
- Harmonie du soir
 - almost obsessively frugal in motivic material
 - striking, inventive harmonies

- Le jet d'eau
 - reminds me of Ravel's *Jeux d'eau*
 - rhythmically playful
 - countermelody in piano crossing hands with quicker, textural figuration - reminiscent of Debussy's own *Images*

Question 2

For this Question, I could not find an orchestrated version of Hahn's setting, so I compared the Fauré setting for which I could find the version with the string quartet.

Notably, I could not find a score for the string parts of this piece, and it seems, as detailed in the liner notes of the Columbia Masterworks *Chamber Music from Marlboro* CD, that, while the performance with string quartet seems intentional by Fauré, the printed score has been lost.

Piano Accompaniment

- a very bright arrangement + sound
- the triplet piano figure could be a reference to Beethoven's *Moonlight* Sonata
- very pianistic

With String Quartet

- due to the instrumentation, *much* warmer
- countermelodies taken by different instruments
- very indicative of Fauré's "stillness" in harmonic contexts

Overall, though the piano has my heart, I do prefer to hear the version with both piano and string quartet. The added warmth, colour, and clarity of countermelody are most appreciated. I will admit, however, that the quiet intimacy of a simple piano accompaniment is lost in a larger ensemble; this is - like the contrast between R. Schumann's *Widmung* and the Liszt arrangement - the most important deciding factor outside of sound. Is it "worth it" to lose out on the intimacy factor for a warmer sound? I think it is, but only by a small margin.

Question 3

Debussy - 1882 version

- dramatic, passionate
- conventional chordal piano texture with lilting rhythm
- less 'muted' than other settings

Debussy - Fêtes galantes

- pentatonic-adjacent melody
- interesting "rocking" piano texture at "Au souffle berceur t doux"
- never louder than piano

Fauré

- piano counter melody!
- arpeggiated figuration reminiscent of Mendelssohn
- LOTS of suspensions used for colour (left unresolved)

Hahn

- hilariously, the piano motive reminds me of Gershwin's 'Summertime' from Porgy and Bess, which, interestingly enough, has a similarly slow/somber tempo and sound (though the lyrics wildly differ in tone).
- beautiful piano counter melodies.
- harmonic stability/stillness (the harmony rarely changes)

Poldowski

- HUGE dynamic range
- each stanza is given a distinct treatment (new textures and melodies)
- reminds me of the first movement of Beethoven Op 101 or the second movement of Bach's 5th Brandenburg Concerto (both movements could, by Shenker, be reduced to a simple, though heavily extended, V-I Cadence)

Similarities

- very slow (tempo and rhythmic divisions)
- slow harmonic movement + unresolved 'non-tonal' figures
- each composer likes to keep the melody on one note for a long time (be it repetition or simply meandering around a particular note).