

FLÛTE FRANÇAISE: INFLUENCE OF THE LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH FLUTE SCHOOL ON FLUTE PLAYING TODAY

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The French flute school

By the end of the nineteenth century, one of the most powerful and famous flute schools was about to undergo significant changes. At that time, a new version of the flute had been created, and so the flute world was divided into two groups: those who believed in the power and possibility of the new instrument and those who did not want to betray the classical wooden flute. France was one of the first countries in the world in which the majority of flutists quickly accepted the new flute with its exciting new possibilities.

The French flute school is one of the most important and famous flute schools in the world. This school was founded during the late nineteenth century, and it blossomed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The famous flutists of the period, like Paul Taffanel, Marcel Moyse, and Philippe Gaubert, created their own style and school of flute playing. I would like to see if a link can be found between the French flute tradition from over a century ago and that of today in order to understand whether the traditions of the French flute school still exist, and if so, who the players are who represent it.

I briefly want to explain why the research interests me. When I began playing flute in Ukraine, I did not clearly follow any particular school at all. Only later, while studying in Switzerland, I understood that differences exist between flute schools. The French flute school is famous because of the supple timbre, with its very light and colorful tone that you can associate with impressionist paintings. The use of vibrato is also one of the key elements of the early French flute school. It became faster and more refined than, for example, the English vibrato. The historical English school is characterized by a slower use of vibrato. The sound can also be very direct and loud. The “German” sound is generally darker, more intense, and more powerful.

With the help of the knowledge gained from my written work I am also developing my sound in order to achieve more colors and suppleness. During my studies, I have managed to adopt aspects of the French tradition in the way I play, but there are still things I aim to achieve in my final concerts.

Plan for the written work

One of the most important flute schools in the world was founded in France during the nineteenth century and was developed further during the twentieth century. Many of the world’s most famous flutists were part of this extraordinary tradition, and its legacy lives on today. The idea for my written work is to look into the history of the French flute school to understand its impact on today’s flute playing. My starting point has been to understand the foundation of this school and use this knowledge to look for similarities and differences between its early days and its later developments. This school did not only influence flute technique, but also greatly affected the repertoire which we have available today.

The work follows the history of the French school starting from the great teacher Paul Taffanel and then focuses on other famous French flute soloists of the following generation. These soloists had

significant impact on the composers of the time, who ended up composing some of the most important flute music ever written. These works are today at the center of the modern flute repertoire, and their influence can be heard in many compositions of today.

My main focus has been to improve my understanding of the technique, style, and sound which lie behind the flute music of the time. In this sense the written work is closely related to my artistic work and my concerts and has greatly helped me improve my understanding of this music. While the French flute tradition is large and includes a large number of works and composers, the core of this tradition and the most important French works composed for flute do not include so many works. The five concerts which have been planned as the artistic part of this doctoral arts study program has given me an opportunity to present a large part of this very important music and flute culture. It has also given me great insight into this musical tradition, and has been an invaluable opportunity to increase my knowledge and fully focus on this important topic.

My work deals with the legacy of the French flute school, from both a technical and musical standpoint, in order to understand what has changed and what has remained. To understand the history and this period, I have studied the early flute professors at the Paris Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique, Paul Taffanel, and his student Philippe Gaubert, who effectively developed the modern French flute school. Taffanel and Gaubert wrote exercises and teaching materials which are still used today. I have also tried to identify and understand changes the flute sound has undergone since the early twentieth century. I have studied early recordings from the beginning of the twentieth century by Philippe Gaubert, his student Marcel Moyse, and George Barrère, who were part of the development of the modern French flute school. These recordings can offer unique insight into their way of playing.

Because of these professors, the following generation of flautists saw a number of expert players who quickly became noticed by some of the greatest French composers of all time. Composers such as Debussy, Ibert, Jolivet, Poulenc, and Roussel all wrote music for flute, which was now regaining its popularity as a solo instrument. Because of the new sound possibilities of the modern metal flute, many composers saw new possibilities and ways to use the flute in chamber and orchestral music. This was primarily due to the increased sound volume of the new flute model, which allowed combinations of instruments in which the flute previously would have been overpowered. The new sound colors also inspired many composers to look for new ways of combining the flute with other instruments in order to create unique tone combinations.

Many of the greatest flutists today are students of teachers within the French tradition. This includes many of the most important flutists in Finland as well. Their technical abilities and playing style has had a clear impact on contemporary composers and on how the flute is played today. This is the reason why a concert with contemporary music fits naturally into the suggested concert program.

The question I aim to answer with my research is how much of the old tradition still exists. What has stayed the same since the nineteenth century and what has changed or developed? I would also like to describe precisely what the characteristics of the French flute school are and what makes it so special. Listening to old recordings and reading contemporary documents from this time helps me answer these questions.

My doctoral concerts

My concert programs consist of French music, starting with music from the eighteenth century and ranging all the way to contemporary music. All my concerts are based around specific ideas which

have served as a theme when choosing repertoire. In previous concert I have played music by the following composers: Boismortier and Hotteterre, Debussy, Poulenc, Bonis, Taffanel, Ph.Gaubert, Martinů, Enescu, Widor, Jolivet, and Bolling.

My upcoming fourth doctoral concert will be *The art of collaboration* on 23 November 2019 at 16.00 in Organo Hall at the Music Center.

This concert presents the flute in different instrumental combinations while simultaneously serving as an experiment between the flutist Iryna Gorkun-Silén and the visual artist Aino Koski in search of connections between music and visual art.

Program: Edgar Varèse (1883-1965), *Density 21.5 for flute solo* (1936), André Jolivet (1905–1974), *Sonatine pour flute et clarinette* (1961), Claude Debussy (1862–1918), *Trio-Sonata for flute, viola and harp* (1915), Maurice Ravel (1875–1937), *Chansons madécasses for flute, voice, violoncello and piano* (1925- 26), André Jolivet, *Sonata for flute and piano* (1961)

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