

Rather than stressing the possible shortcomings of the fifteen-page-long concluding chapter, however, one should celebrate the impressive analytical and theoretical insights presented in the first three hundred pages of the book. Mirka is successfully walking the fine line between “hardcore” analysis, cognitive psychology, and thorough exegesis of eighteenth-century treatises, and the resolutely “common sense” theoretical conclusions she arrives at after combining them seem convincing throughout. (To mention but one example, the author’s modeling the “finding of meter” as a series of three accents—the first two generating a “projection,” and the third fulfilling it—could not be more simple, but proves highly insightful in the discussion of several later examples.) Even more importantly, Mirka’s analyses are much more than rigid applications of the foregoing theoretical insights, thanks primarily to her keen interest in the “musical surface”; the direct aural experience of the listener. At the same time, she is also aware that the musical background of the imaginary audience would have a strong bearing on their metric perception—due to this, her interpretations of the most complex passages aim less at determining a single “correct” reading than at identifying the competing metric cues, thus helping the reader appreciate precisely the ambiguity of such moments. For this reason in particular, one wishes this volume could break through the borders not merely between music theory and historical musicology, but also between musicologists and performers: it should be delightful to experience in actual quartet performances the sensitive musical interpretations the volume offers.

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Jean Cras, Polymath of Music and Letters. By Paul-André Bempéchat. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009. [xxviii, 569 p. ISBN 9780754606833. \$99.95.] Music examples, illustrations, maps, bibliography, index.

Paul-André Bempéchat reassesses Jean Cras (1879–1932) within a changing political cultural context. As a naval officer, inventor, scientist, philosopher, composer,

and deeply religious man, Cras’s creative output is varied. An exploration of his work is complex, not least because his responsibilities took him around the world, including during World War I. His inventions led to his developing “the first wireless communication system for the French Navy” (p. 42) and a navigational ruler-compass, *La Règle-Rapporteur* (pp. 527–28). Bempéchat aims to readdress the balance between Cras’s various legacies: “France’s Navy continues to laud one of its heroes and his great achievements; even musical. It is the musical community that, until now, has faltered and failed to acquiesce to the Ravelian stature he once enjoyed. This book is committed to its restoration” (p. xxi).

In order to give “a more complete image of Jean Cras” across his various careers and artistic interests, and to “humanize” him (p. xxii), especially in terms of his family relationships, Bempéchat makes use of letters in the form of diary extracts and reflections that Cras sent to family and friends, as well as diary extracts of his that appear to have been only for personal use—writings collectively referred to as Cras’s *Correspondance*. Bempéchat’s research is expansive. He explicates Cras’s compositional method by means of the latter’s frequent comments regarding his working processes on board ship, though significantly the kernel of his character is projected through his “fervent Catholicism” (p. 5). In chapter 1, “Background,” Bempéchat discusses the history of Brittany, outlining religious practices and marine pastimes, situated within the France of the composer’s time, which enforced usage of the French language as part of its cultural-political agenda. The separation of the French state from the Church was finalised in 1905, and Breton was removed from institutional working practices: “It is forbidden to spit on the floor or to speak Breton” (from a school notice of the 1920s; p. 11).

Cras was little affected by “Brittany’s cultural anomalies and dichotomies” (p. 17) and the imposition of the French language, and the reason for this resides much in his frequent departures from his homeland and due to his understanding of many cultures through experience. Thus he could write to the parish priest to ask that his vessel be blessed on departure by the ringing of the bells in response to his ship’s cannon

fire (p. 33). On his missions around the French colonies, Cras spent time learning exotic instruments and studying other musical systems. At Dakar, on his first mission during 1898–99, “Cras first encountered black Africans, whose music he began studying; indeed, compiling indigenous melodies into his notebooks became *de rigueur* and these would serve him well in the years to come” (p. 61). His faith guided him, but he rarely wrote religious music—unlike Franck, whose influence otherwise manifested itself throughout his career, as illustrated in chapter 8, “Franckian Engagement and Disengagement: The Early Works (1899–1910)” (pp. 211–67).

The book is divided into two parts, separating the historical-cultural context of Cras’s career from the analysis of his musical style. Part 1, “The Life of Jean Cras,” summarises Brittany’s history and his upbringing, career, and social-religious affiliations. This is vital to interpreting his musical career, though he does not appear in detail until page 102. Readers already familiar with Cras will be able to form musical connections, others less so. Part 2, “The Works: Struggle and Evolution” is dedicated to his compositions, analysing the autobiographical nature of the works. Bempéchat deals with ethnographic considerations: with regard to both Breton folk song and instruments (pp. 201–02) as well as non-Western musics (p. 169), especially the instruments and harmonic structure of exotic musics (pp. 173–74). Bempéchat uses the *Correspondance* in both parts as the prime source of evidence to substantiate autobiographical information as well as to present critics’ views. This creates a cohesive narrative but one must note that because so many of the comments by critics, other artists, and colleagues are those cited by Cras himself, the reader necessarily interprets Cras’s reception through the composer’s subjective selection of reactions.

By dividing Cras’s oeuvre into five periods the reader is easily guided through the changes in compositional process. It is unfortunate that the works are thus less treated by subject matter as there are relationships between pieces that are not explicitly raised. Periods are organised as follows: 1895–99, incorporating his early strophic works; 1899–1910, following a Franckian manner with cyclic forms and

variations; 1909–22, including *Polyphème*, in which a “thematically unified” work “personified its composer’s quest for systematic spiritual integrity and oneness” (p. 290); 1922–29, including *Légende* (1929), which incorporates Breton folk melodies; and finally 1930–32, identified for its “provincial pictorialism” as represented in Cras’s Piano Concerto with its combination of both sacred and secular Breton melodies (p. 198).

Cras has been identified as a Franckian composer (he was also the sole pupil of Duparc), a neoromantic with a leaning toward impressionism. Bempéchat presents him as an independent composer who “struggle[d] for individuation” (p. 119), a struggle ironically assisted by his modest degree of conventional musical training. Because Cras worked outside of the musical hotbed of Paris, stylistic fields are connected to him in a unique manner. Characteristic stylistic features include melody based on “traditionally tonal motive[s]” (p. 154), with a proliferation of perfect intervals and tritones. Rhythmic clarity exists, most noticeably exemplified by his “evident fixation” (p. 206) with Lombard rhythms (pp. 206–07). Textures are more complex than in Claude Debussy’s music, and less contrapuntal than in that of Dukas (see pp. 288–89 and 308–09). The use of extended harmonies within a tonal framework is reminiscent of Franck.

Three issues arise throughout: sincerity and originality; autobiography; and identity (Breton and French, naval and musical, catholic and scientist). The issue of sincerity and originality occupied composers who were contemporaneous to Cras, as Carlo Caballero has shown (*Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001]). Although Bempéchat does not situate Cras’s reflections on sincerity in the context of other composers, his remarks resonate with those of Gabriel Fauré and his friend Paul Dukas. Cras’s only teacher, Henri Duparc, stipulated the importance of sincerity in a remark published in the 26 March 1904 issue of *La revue bleue*, which bears affinity to Cras’s own thought: “[T]he musician speaks his own language in writing music and should not concern himself with anything but expressing his soul’s emotions to other souls; music that is not the gift of oneself is nothing” (cited in Caballero, 16).

Cras's *Correspondance* acts as a mirror to cultural events and to his own aesthetic development. His self-reflective nature and attempts to objectify issues illustrate his creative decisions. Cras notes that "[i]t's enough that one's work be sincere" (p. 66). The personal connection to his art draws on his "governing moral and metaphysical precepts," to which Cras applied himself as polymath (p. 67). The personal dimension of *Journal de bord* ("Ship's Log") (1927) (pp. 436–47), is "preceded by an actual page of his ship's log" (p. 437). His fellow Breton, Paul Le Flem, identified it as a "work of discerning sincerity" (p. 144).

The autobiographical reading is reinforced by Cras's faith-based perspective that he was "only a voice through which the Unknown has chosen to manifest itself" (p. 67). Rather than acknowledge the musicological notion of voice, Bempéchat engrosses his text with Cras's own comments, which makes for a fluid accessible narrative for both historians and musicologists, though it leaves open issues regarding Cras's different personas as expressed through his oeuvre. For example, two distinct personas occur in his *Correspondance*. During the composition of his only completed opera, *Polyphème* (1921), Cras utilized a second persona within the text to question himself. A clear example of what Bempéchat calls "the phantomatic despot" (p. 275) is seen in an entry dated 22 July 1916:

"He" told me: "You will finish the second scene today." I began to work ferociously. By 6.30 I had [developed] a headache. I felt that I had come to my wits' end. . . . "A bit more courage! Finish [it] before dinnertime," ["He" said]. And I finished [it]."

The dual Cras character projected in these *Correspondances* reflects his multiplicity in general, from careers to artistic styles (neoromantic, impressionistic and exotic). The despot in his letters (pp. 94–95) is an active outlet for his struggles with objectivity (p. 164) and a way in which to deal with the isolation he felt during naval service.

Bempéchat's study is billed as an introduction in order to justify its boundaries. He honestly introduces the reader to its limitations and the scale of the research he has achieved. This is the first major study of Cras and will stand as a good reference to all who are interested in approaching him, Bretagne composers, regionalism and nationalism, the legacy of Franck and Duparc, polymaths, and those interested in cultural activities in France. The bibliography is thorough. Copious music examples, maps and images support the text. Students of both music and history will find it accessible.

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