Ernest Chausson's *Viviane,* "Déwagnérisation," and the Problem of Descriptive Music

MARK SETO

On 27 January 1888, Ernest Chausson sent an apologetic note to his friend Robert Godet about the upcoming performance of his symphonic poem *Viviane,* op. 5, at the Concerts Lamoureux: "If you go to Lamoureux's concert on Sunday, please excuse Viviane's program. It is a work from my youth that I have redone in its entirety, in its composition and orchestration, but the core couldn't change. Allow it for this one time; I will not write any more program music."[1] Chausson had conceived *Viviane,* his first composition for orchestra, during a period when he was coming to artistic maturity. He drafted the work in short score in the summer and fall of 1882 and orchestrated it the following February, while still pursuing unofficial studies at the Paris Conservatoire. The program is based on Arthurian legend: the work opens with a love scene between Viviane (known as "Nimue" or "the Lady of the Lake" in some Arthurian sources) and the wizard Merlin. A trumpet sounds, summoning Merlin back to King Arthur's entourage. When the sorcerer attempts to escape, Viviane thwarts his departure by ensnaring him in an enchanted haw-

I am grateful to Walter Frisch, Karen Henson, Robert Hymes, Sylvia Kahan, Sean Parr, and the anonymous readers of this journal for their invaluable feedback on earlier versions of this article.

[1] "Si vous allez dimanche chez Lamoureux, excusez le programme de Viviane. C'est une œuvre de jeunesse que j'ai complètement refaite, comme composition et comme orchestre, mais le fond ne pouvait pas changer. Passez-le-moi pour cette fois-ci; je ne ferai plus de musique avec programme." The letter is simply dated "Vendredi," but since *Viviane* was performed at the Concerts Lamoureux on 29 January 1888, the letter presumably dates from 27 January. Reprinted in Ernest Chausson, *Écrits Inédits: Journaux intimes, Roman de jeunesse, Correspondance,* ed. Jean Gallois and Isabelle Bretaudeau (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1999), 202. A reproduction of the autograph letter appears in Gallois, *Ernest Chausson* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 194. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.

19th-Century Music, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 48–74 ISSN: 0148-2076, electronic ISSN 1533-8606. https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2017.41.1.48.

thorn blossom. Although Merlin fails to discharge his duties to the Round Table, the ravishing love music that concludes the work suggests submission to Viviane is not such a bad fate. In fact, Chausson dedicated the score to his fiancée, Jeanne Escudier, whom he would marry in June 1883.

Chausson's craft as a composer and orchestrator developed considerably in the years after he finished the first version. He completely reworked *Viviane* in 1887, excising more than 200 measures and leaving only the opening and closing sections relatively intact. In the material that remained, Chausson made significant changes to the texture and orchestration, and the published score from 1893 contains further emendations. While performances of the original version had received mixed reviews, the revised score enjoyed both critical and popular success.[2] In 1895 the composer could boast to Vincent d'Indy: "This *Viviane* is really irrepressible. It's a hit in the provinces and abroad. And now it's caught on again in Paris!"[3]

In light of his extensive revisions to *Viviane,* Chausson's self-deprecating note to Godet on the eve of the 1888 performance could be read on first glance as an apology for a work of juvenilia. More importantly, though, the composer had recently made two major shifts in his artistic outlook, and his remarks underscore this fundamental transformation. First, his enthusiasm for program music had cooled. In an 1886 letter to his friend Paul Poujaud, Chausson expressed his distaste for "descriptive music"—the composer's term for instrumental music that encodes a narrative—and outlined a new approach to orchestral composition that rejected explicit programmatic effects.[4] As his letter to Godet two years later indicates, he vowed not to write any more compositions in the same vein as *Viviane*. Indeed, *Viviane* was Chausson's first and last symphonic work based on a representational program.

Second, Chausson resolved to distance himself from the influence of Wagner—a figure who loomed large over all French composers of Chausson's generation. While Chausson made no secret of his veneration of the elder composer, his correspondence and writings from the 1880s and 90s reveal a consistent preoccupation with the influence of the *maître de Bayreuth*. As early as 1884, he complained to Poujaud of "this red specter of Wagner that does not release me. I've come to detest it."[5] Two years later, as he commenced work on the opera *Le Roi Arthus,* Chausson began to speak of the need to "dewagnerize" himself.[6] This struggle played out in the ensuing years as Chausson undertook the bulk of the composition of this magnum opus—a work whose Arthurian subject matter and musical material are prefigured in *Viviane*.[7]

---

[2]The original version of *Viviane* was premiered by the Société nationale de musique under the direction of Édouard Colonne in March 1883, and performed by Jules Pasdeloup's Concerts Populaires the following year. For a representative sampling of reviews, see Fracasse [Edmond Stoullig], "Échos de Théatres," *Le National,* 5 April 1883, p. 4; H. B. [Hippolyte Barbedette], "Nouvelles diverses. Concerts et Soirées," *Le Ménestrel* 50, no. 19 (6 April 1884): 151; Duvernoy, *La République Française,* [April 1884], cited in Gallois, *Ernest Chausson: L'Homme et son œuvre* (Paris: Seghers, 1967), 135; Ch. G., "Revue des concerts. Nouveaux-concerts," *L'Art musical* 27, no. 2 (31 January 1888): 12; V. W. [Victor Wilder], "Les Grands Concerts," *Gil Blas* 10, no. 2996 (31 January 1888): 3; and "Théâtres et Concerts," *Journal des Débats,* 30 January 1888.

[3]Letter dated "San Domenico di Fiesole, villa Rondinelli, mercredi 1895," *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925): 132 (special issue on Ernest Chausson): "Cette *Viviane* est vraiment infatigable. Elle fait la province et l'étranger. Et voilà encore qu'elle repique sur Paris!"

[4]Undated letter reprinted in *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925): 155. Chausson's biographer Jean Gallois claims this later is "undoubtedly" from July 1886. See Gallois, *Ernest Chausson,* 206. For an overview of the correspondence between Chausson and Poujaud, see Cécile Leblanc, "Ars Gallica? Paul Poujaud, confident du renouveau musical post-wagnérien en France," in *Le Paris de Richard Wagner suivi de Correspondances entre musiciens et entre écrivains et musiciens,* ed. Danielle Buschinger (Amiens: Presses du "Centre d'Études Médiévales," Université de Picardie—Jules Verne, 2005), 47–58.

[5]Letter dated "Villers-sur-Mer (Calvados), Villa Marie Camile, Route du Château, 1884," *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925): 144: "ce spectre rouge de Wagner qui ne me lâche pas. J'en arrive à le détester." See also Chausson's letter to Mme de Rayssac, 16 August 1884, *Écrits inédits,* 170.

[6]See, for example, Chausson's letter to Poujaud, dated "Cannes, 1886," reprinted in *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925): 155.

[7]The relationship between Chausson and Wagner has been one of the key issues in modern-day scholarship on the French composer, most recently in Marie-Hélène Benoit-Otis, *Ernest Chausson,* Le Roi Arthus *et l'opéra wagnérien en France* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, Perspektiven der Opernforschung, 2012). See also Steven Huebner, "A Tryst in Ernest Chausson's *Le Roi Arthus,*" in *Von Wagner zum Wagnérisme: Musik, Literatur, Kunst, Politik,* ed. Annegret Fauser and Manuela Schwartz (Leipzig: Leipziger

Thus, Chausson underwent an artistic crisis during the very period he reworked his first orchestral score, and his revisions to *Viviane* were a response to that crisis. More broadly, Chausson's revisions to the symphonic poem can be understood as a refraction of larger cultural and aesthetic debates in the 1880s about the influence of Wagner, the relationship between music and other art forms, and the nature of French musical identity. These debates culminated in several key events from the fall of 1886 through the spring of 1887, two of which had a direct impact on Chausson's career. On 18 September 1886, the poet Jean Moréas published the revolutionary Symbolist Manifesto in the literary supplement to *Le Figaro*. Chausson's biographer Jean Gallois notes that the composer's aesthetics were profoundly transformed by the nascent literary movement.[8] In Moréas's formulation, the Symbolists understood their poetry as the "enemy of teaching, declamation, false sensibility, and objective description"—a position that resonates with Chausson's rejection of representational program music in favor of more abstract modes of expression.[9]

That November, another revolution took place at the Société nationale de musique, the organization established in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War to promote the work of French composers. At the initiative of d'Indy, Chausson, and their *franckiste* allies, the Société amended its statutes to allow the programming of foreign works. Camille Saint-Saëns and Romain Bussine, the organization's two principal founders, resigned in conjunction with this turn of events, and D'Indy and Chausson were elected secretaries.[10] In this position, Chausson became more intimately involved in Parisian musical and intellectual circles, and came in contact with new artists and ideas. The following spring, debates about Wagner's place in French musical life reached a new level of intensity as Charles Lamoureux prepared to present the Paris premiere of *Lohengrin*. The political situation with Germany had become more volatile, and war seemed like a real possibility. Public leaders and press commentators urged Lamoureux to postpone the production. The premiere eventually took place on 3 May 1887, amid unruly demonstrations in the streets, but Lamoureux decided—most likely under intense pressure by the authorities—to cancel the remaining performances.[11]

It was in the aftermath of these seismic events that Chausson undertook his revisions of *Viviane* in the summer and fall of 1887. The changes to the symphonic poem can be understood within two frameworks: a reaction against

Universitätsverlag, 1999), 351–78, and the corresponding chapters on Chausson in Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Cécile Leblanc, "Ernest Chausson et la composition du *Roi Arthus:* de *Tristan* à *Parsifal,*" in *Wagnérisme et création en France, 1883–1889* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), 447–86; James Ross, *Crisis and Transformation: French Opera, Politics, and the Press, 1897–1903* (PhD diss., Oxford University, 1998); Tony Hunt, "Ernest Chausson's *Le Roi Arthus,*" in *King Arthur in Music,* ed. Richard Barber (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 61–89; Annegret Fauser, "Die Sehnsucht nach dem Mittelalter: Ernest Chausson und Richard Wagner," in *Les Symbolistes et Richard Wagner/Die Symbolister und Richard Wagner,* ed. Wolfgang Storch and Josef Mackert (Berlin: Hentrich, 1991), 115–20; and Mary Jean Speare, "Wagnerian and Arthurian Elements in Chausson's *Le Roi Arthus,*" *Arthurian Yearbook* 1 (1991): 195–214.

[8]Gallois, *Ernest Chausson,* 209–10.

[9]Jean Moréas, "Le Symbolisme. Un manifeste littéraire," literary supplement to *Le Figaro* 12, no. 38 (18 September 1886): 150: "ennemie de 'l'enseignement, de la déclamation, de la fausse sensibilité, de la description objective.'"

[10]Bussine resigned in the immediate aftermath of this vote. The exact timing of Saint-Saëns's departure from the Société is unclear, and may even have preceded the meeting in question. As Michael Strasser notes, the underlying reason for Saint-Saëns's resignation was not the admission of foreign music itself, but his increasing frustration with the Wagnerians among the organization's leadership. See Strasser, *Ars Gallica: The Société Nationale and Its Role in French Musical Life, 1871–1891* (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1998), 403–43. For Chausson's commentary on these events, see his letter to Pierre de Bréville, 10 November 1886, reprinted in *Écrits inédits,* 193–96.

[11]Léon Carvalho, the director of the Opéra-Comique, had intended to stage a production of *Lohengrin* in the spring of 1886, but abandoned the plan after he received death threats and promises of demonstrations if the performances proceeded. For an account of the affair, see "La Question Lohengrin (mars 1885-mars 1886), histoire, documents," *La Revue wagnérienne* 2, no. 2 (8 March 1886): 37–64. For a discussion of the controversy surrounding Lamoureux's 1887 production, see Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle,* 17–19; and Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 514–20.

Wagner on one hand, and against program music on the other. While these frameworks were discrete, they necessarily had some overlap in Chausson's milieu. Parisian orchestral societies performed selections by Wagner with unprecedented frequency in the years following his death in 1883. Symphonic excerpts like the "Ride of the Valkyries" and "Siegfried's Funeral Music"—examples of program music in the context of orchestral concerts—were the primary means by which Parisian audiences encountered Wagner's music in the 1880s.[12] Indeed, many critics and musicians, including the conductor Édouard Colonne, contended this repertoire was more effective in the concert hall than in the theater.[13] A lively debate flourished about Wagner's impact on French instrumental music, and some observers believed he had influenced symphonic composition as much as operatic practices. For instance, in his *Éléments d'esthétique musicale* (1884), the aesthetician and Conservatoire professor Antoine François Marmontel argued that the effects of the Wagnerian "system"—which Marmontel linked more to symphonic tradition than to the theater—were felt most acutely in "pure" music. Marmontel asserted that instrumental composition ought to be characterized by balanced proportions and to depend on the "energy and force" of the musical ideas themselves, and lamented that Wagnerian acolytes had sacrificed these ideals in favor of powerful sonic effects.[14]

The material record of sketches and revisions of *Viviane* will help to illuminate the work's ideological subtexts and sources of inspiration.[15] Although the sketches reveal a clear debt to César Franck, Chausson's teacher and mentor at the Conservatoire, which the composer did not attempt to hide, he suppressed evidence of Wagner's influence when he made his revisions. This process of "dewagnerization" itself was equivocal: Chausson excised moments of obvious Wagnerian mimicry, but *Viviane* would become more beholden to certain Wagnerian dramaturgical ideas. In the course of his revisions, Chausson brought *Viviane* more closely in line with sonata procedures, inviting the listener to appreciate the work on its purely musical merits during a period when the composer was becoming less sympathetic to the idea of "descriptive music." At the same time, connections between *Viviane* and *Le Roi Arthus* shed light on issues of influence and signification in Chausson's opera. At key moments in *Le Roi Arthus,* music without words speaks more clearly than texted music.

Initial Sketches

Preliminary sketches for *Viviane* appear at various points in one of Chausson's sketchbooks. The complete symphonic poem exists in three manuscript sources: a short score on four staves from 1882, an orchestral version dated 23 February 1883, and an orchestral revision dated 23 July to 15 November 1887 (see Table 1). Chausson made significant changes to the piece at each of these stages, and the score published by Bornemann in 1893 reflects further alterations. The sketch materials and initial drafts suggest that Chausson was aware of his stylistic debt to Franck and Wagner and actively sought to remove traces of the latter composer's influence. In a letter to Poujaud from 1884, Chausson acknowledged the extent of his borrowings with resignation: "I see clearly in observing myself all that I take from others, and I conclude that there is not a bit in all I can do that is entirely mine, and only mine. From

[12]See Strasser, *Ars Gallica,* 505–20; and Élisabeth Bernard, *Le Concert symphonique à Paris entre 1861 et 1914: Pasdeloup, Colonne, Lamoureux* (PhD diss., Université Paris I-Sorbonne, 1976), vols. II and III.

[13]In a journal entry from 5 May 1907, Romain Rolland recounts that he and Colonne shared this opinion about Wagner's music. See Romain Rolland, *Richard Strauss et Romain Rolland; correspondance; fragments de journal* (Paris: Albin Michel, [1951]), 151.

[14]Antoine François Marmontel, *Éléments d'esthétique musicale et considérations sur le beau dans les arts* (Paris: Heugel, 1884), 407, 434–36. For a discussion of Wagner's impact on French symphonic music, see Jess Bennett Tyre, *The Reception of German Instrumental Music in France Between 1870 and 1914* (PhD diss., Yale University, 2000), especially the section on "'Wagnériste Absolutism' in the Concert Hall," 309–28.

[15]My study owes a methodological debt to Carolyn Abbate's examination of Wagnerian traces in the drafts of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. See Abbate, "*Tristan* in the Composition of *Pelléas,*" this journal 5, no. 2 (1981): 117–41.

Table 1
Source Materials for Chausson's *Viviane*

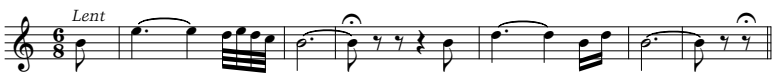
Location and Call Number	Dating in Chausson's Hand	Description and Contents
F-Pn, Musique Ms. 8837(1)		Sketchbook with material for *Viviane*. The volume has two distinct paginations; numbering begins with "1" at each extremity.
	[1879]	In the pagination beginning at the front of the volume: the trumpet melody appears on p. 3 with the annotation "Cri d'une marchande des rues, à Marseille."
	Étampes, August-September 82 (p. 24)	Sketches for *Viviane,* pp. 24–35, including a structural outline and motivic sketches.
	Paris—Vincennes, July 82 (p. 28)	In the pagination beginning at the rear of the volume: p. 28 contains sketches for the "love theme."
F-Pn, Musique Ms. 8774	Étampes, 16 September / Paris, 8 December [1882] (at end)	Short score version (version préorchestrale)
F-Pn, Musique Ms. 3943	Paris, 23 February 1883 (at end)	Orchestral version, "op. 4"
F-Pn, Musique Ms. 8775	Heiden [Switzerland], 23 July 87 (at beginning) Paris, 15 November 87 (at end)	Orchestral revision (brouillon de la réorchestration de 1887), "op. 6"
F-Pn, Musique Vm7. 7951		Published orchestral score, "op. 5." Paris: O. Bornemann, 1893. (Kalmus reprint)

there to asking myself if it wouldn't be better to do nothing, there is only one step."[16]

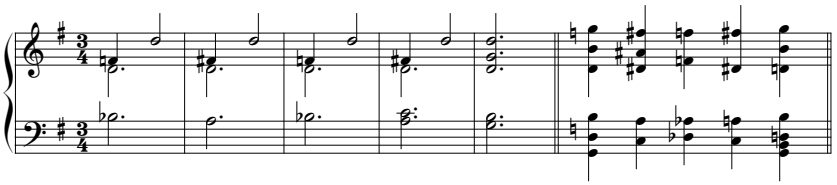
The earliest material for *Viviane* is a sketch of a trumpet call from the middle of the symphonic poem, when King Arthur's envoys search the forest for Merlin. This melody appears in Chausson's sketchbook with the annotation "Cri d'une marchande des rues, à Marseille" (Cry of a street merchant in Marseilles; see ex. 1). Jean Gallois dates this notation to a voyage to Cannes in 1879.[17] The melody appears on the same page as sketches for *Hylas,* an unfinished work for solo vocalists, chorus, and orchestra that Chausson labored on in 1879 and

[16]Undated letter, probably from the end of August 1884, reprinted in Chausson, *Écrits inédits,* 172: "Je vois clairement, en m'observant, tout ce que je tiens des autres, et je conclus qu'il n'y a pas une parcelle, dans tout ce que je puis faire, qui soit tout à fait à moi, et rien qu'à moi. De là à se demander s'il ne vaudrait pas mieux ne rien faire, il n'y a qu'un pas."

[17]Gallois, *Ernest Chausson,* 154.



Example 1: "Cri d'une marchande des rues, à Marseille." *F-Pn* ms. 8837, I, 3 (front pagination).



Example 2: Selected sketches for *Hylas*. *F-Pn* ms. 8837, I, 3 (front pagination).

1880. The *Hylas* sketches include a number of variants on a harmonic progression with double chromatic neighbor motion, two of which are reproduced in ex. 2. These chords bear a striking resemblance to the opening measures of *Viviane* that Chausson sketched several years later (see ex. 3b), so it is likely that he consciously transplanted the progression from the abandoned vocal work into the symphonic poem.

Chausson began work on *Viviane* in earnest in the summer of 1882. He worked out the melody Gallois labels the "love theme" or the "fairy's call" (*appel de la Fée*) on the reverse side of the same sketchbook on a page signed and dated "Paris—Vincennes / Juillet 82."[18] The front side of the volume contains twelve additional pages of material, dated "Étampes / Aout-Septembre 82."[19] Chausson's correspondence indicates that this work was laborious.[20] At the beginning of these sketches (p. 24; see Table 1) Chausson outlined a preliminary structure for the piece, shown in Table 2. This outline bears little resemblance to the work's eventual program. Sections A through D have no clear analogue in the completed score, and the theme for Arthur's march does not appear in any later materials. This early plan does, however, affirm the programmatic significance of the two sections that remained unchanged in Chausson's final version. The introduction evokes the magical forest of Brocéliande, and the conclusion—derived from the opening music—depicts Merlin's enchantment by Viviane.

Interspersed through the following pages in the sketchbook are annotated quotations of works by other composers, revealing possible sources of inspiration during the symphonic poem's gestation. On page 31 of the sketchbook (front pagination; see Table 1 for an explanation of the two paginations), Chausson writes out an excerpt from "Freyschütz" (presumably Weber's opera) whose melodic contour resembles a passage in the 1882 and 1883 versions of *Viviane*, but which Chausson removed from later versions. Other quotations reveal a debt to Franck, whose organ class at the Conservatoire Chausson attended as an *auditeur libre* between 1880 and 1883.[21] On one page, Chausson writes out a section from a "Franck Agnus Dei,"[22] and on another (see plate 1), he

[18]*F-Pn* ms. 8837, I, 28 (rear pagination). Chausson worked from both ends of this sketchbook, and thus there are two discrete paginations.

[19]*F-Pn* ms. 8837, I, 24–35 (front pagination).

[20]In a letter from Villers-sur-Mer (Calvados) from 4 September 1884, Chausson reported to Mme de Rayssac about another project: "*Hélène* also bothers me. I'm moving ahead; there are clearly so many things to do, especially so many things to change that I'll never finish by the end of the month. This is more or less similar to when I did *Viviane* in Étampes; let's hope it will not go wrong this time." [*Hélène* aussi me tracasse. J'ai beau avancer, je me vois tant de choses à faire, surtout tant de choses à changer que je n'arriverai jamais au bout d'ici la fin du mois. C'est à peu près dans une situation semblable que j'ai fait *Viviane* à Étampes; espérons que cela n'ira pas plus mal cette fois-ci.] Reprinted in *Écrits inédits,* 174.

[21]Gallois, *Ernest Chausson,* 118.

[22]*F-Pn* ms. 8837, I, 27 (front pagination). I have not been able to identify the source of this quotation. It does not correspond to the *Agnus Dei*—or any other movement—from Franck's one complete setting of the Mass, the Messe in A, op. 12 (premiered 1861, published with revisions and

Table 2
Chausson's preliminary structure for *Viviane*

Plan de Viviane
(?) Forêt enchantée (Prélude)
A = Phrase de Viviane
B = Phrase de Merlin (plus passionné)
C = Marche d'Arthus [based on a "vieux chant populaire breton," which Chausson notates at the top of the page]
D = Reprise de A et B, plus vite, très agité
E = Enchantement de Merlin et fin très calme

notates a three-chord progression beneath the annotation "Éolides"—a reference to a seminal thematic complex from Franck's first mature symphonic poem, *Les Éolides* (1875–76).[23] The latter quotation is in a different key and deviates slightly from the original, suggesting Chausson was reconstructing his teacher's composition from memory (ex. 3a). In *Les Éolides,* Franck moves away from the initial A-major tonic triad in contrary chromatic motion from the fifth scale degree. The first violins move from E up to F♮, and an octave below, the violas move from E down to D♯. The resulting chord—A, C♯, D♯, F♮—has a hazy whole-tone coloration. Chausson's version makes one chromatic modification. Whereas Franck holds the third of the tonic chord constant, Chausson moves the third of an F-major chord down to ♯$\hat{2}$, from A to G♯. The alteration results in a German sixth sonority—spelled up from the bottom, F, B♮, G♯, D♭—which sounds more functional than the original Franck progression. Further down the page, Chausson uses this misremembered progression at the beginning of a nine-measure sketch for the opening of *Viviane* (ex. 3b), which closely mirrors the final version (ex. 3c). While a composer's intentions and the patterning of influence can be notoriously difficult to prove, Chausson's explicit invocation of *Les Éolides* suggests a knowing awareness and emulation of the elder composer.

Another compositional influence runs throughout these pages—one just as significant as Franck, yet much more fraught—and perhaps for this reason, one that goes without explicit acknowledgment. I refer, of course, to Wagner. As Richard Taruskin notes in his reflections on Harold Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence, "acknowledged debts are the easy, discountable ones"—we confess our "easy debts precisely in order to hide the hard ones."[24] Although Chausson did not draw attention to this, several of his sketches for *Viviane* bear a strong resemblance to themes from *Parsifal*.

additions in 1872). Franck also composed a "Messe solennelle: O salutaris" in 1858, but this would not have been a complete setting of the Mass Ordinary. In his foreword to the Carus edition (1989) of the Messe in A, editor Wolfgang Hochstein notes that the *Credo* and *Agnus Dei* were "later revised or even completely rewritten" prior to the work's publication in 1872. It is thus conceivable that Chausson could be recalling an earlier version of the Franck Mass, although this scenario seems improbable. In November 1881, Chausson wrote admiringly about a performance of the Franck Mass—presumably of the published version. (See Chausson, *Écrits inédits,* 142–43.) Chausson is more likely referring to an unpublished work or an improvisation, which seems quite plausible given the close contact between the two men in the early 1880s. Alternatively, Chausson could have misremembered the source of the quotation.

[23]Franck had written one earlier symphonic poem, *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne* (after a poem by Victor Hugo), during the 1840s. Franz Liszt, who is often credited with inventing the genre, began composing his first symphonic poem—inspired by the same Hugo work—around the same time.

[24]Richard Taruskin, "Revising Revision," review of "Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence" by Kevin Korsyn and *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* by Joseph N. Straus, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46, no. 1 (1993): 137.

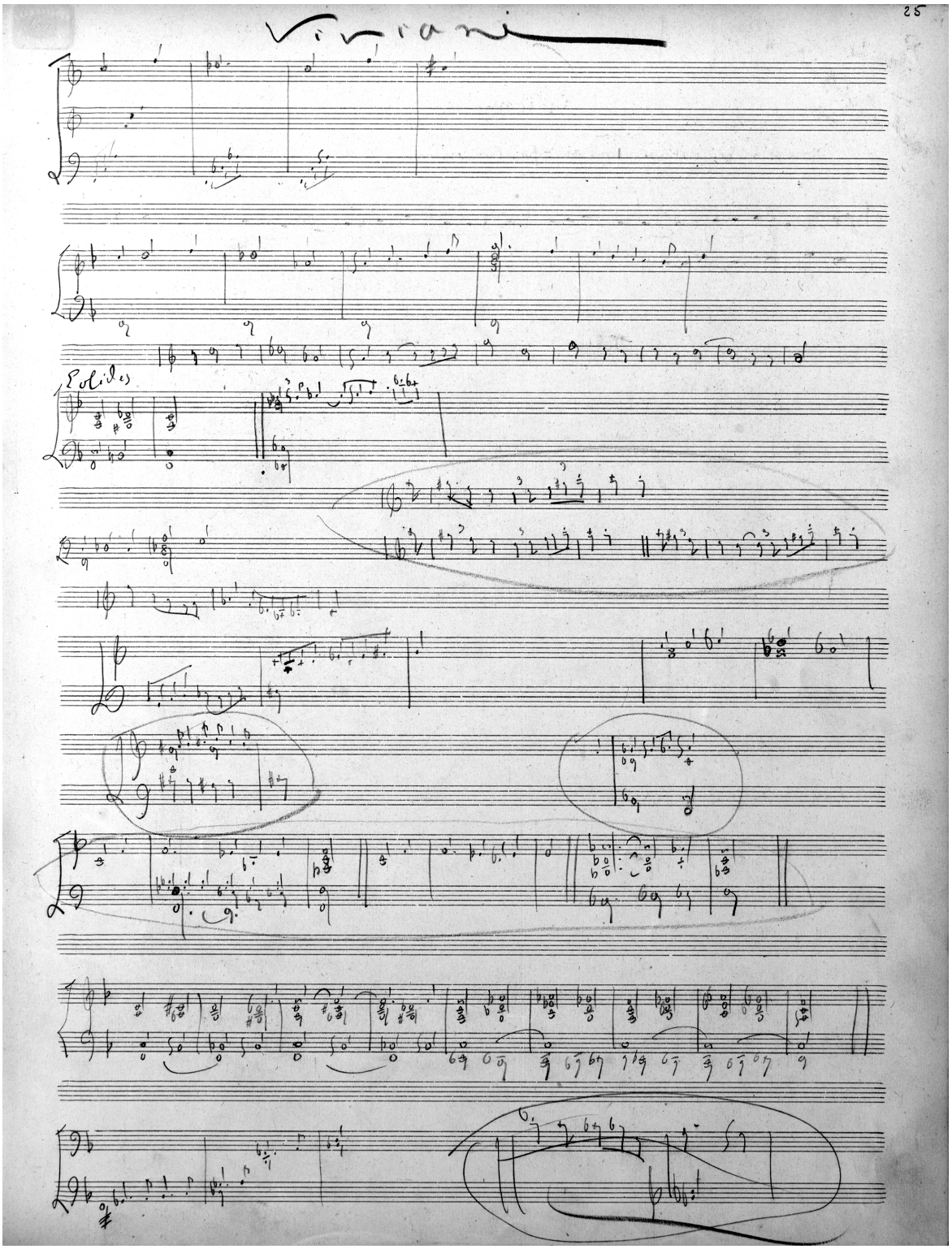
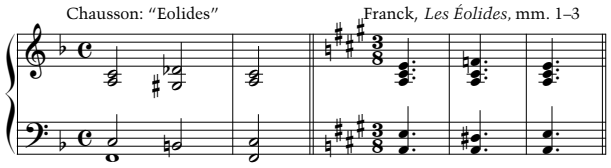
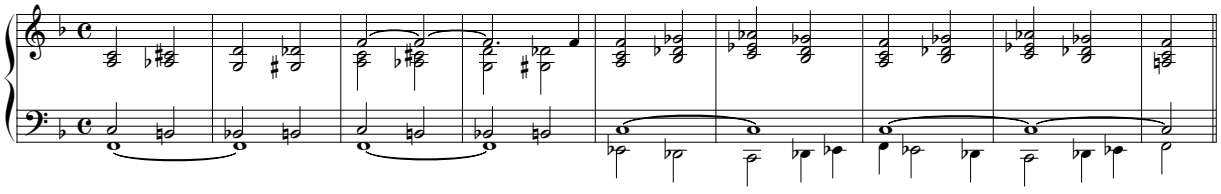


Plate 1: Sketches for *Viviane, F-Pn* ms. 8837, I, 25, front pagination
(reprinted by permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique).

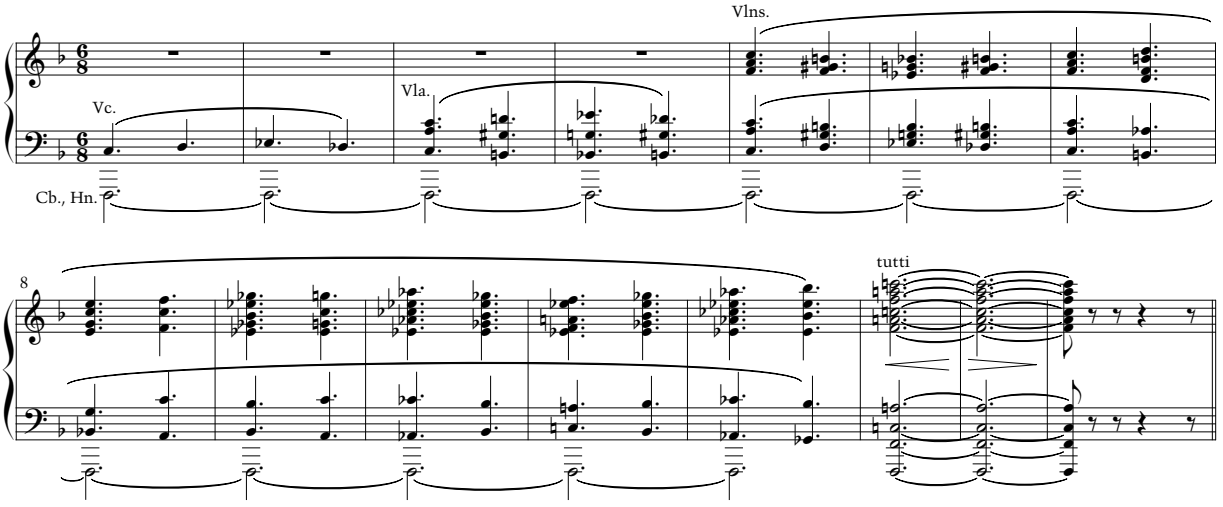
a. Chausson's quotation of *Les Éolides, F-Pn* ms. 8837, I, 25 (front pagination); Franck's original.



b. Chausson's first sketch for the opening of *Viviane, F-Pn* ms. 8837, I, 25 (front pagination).



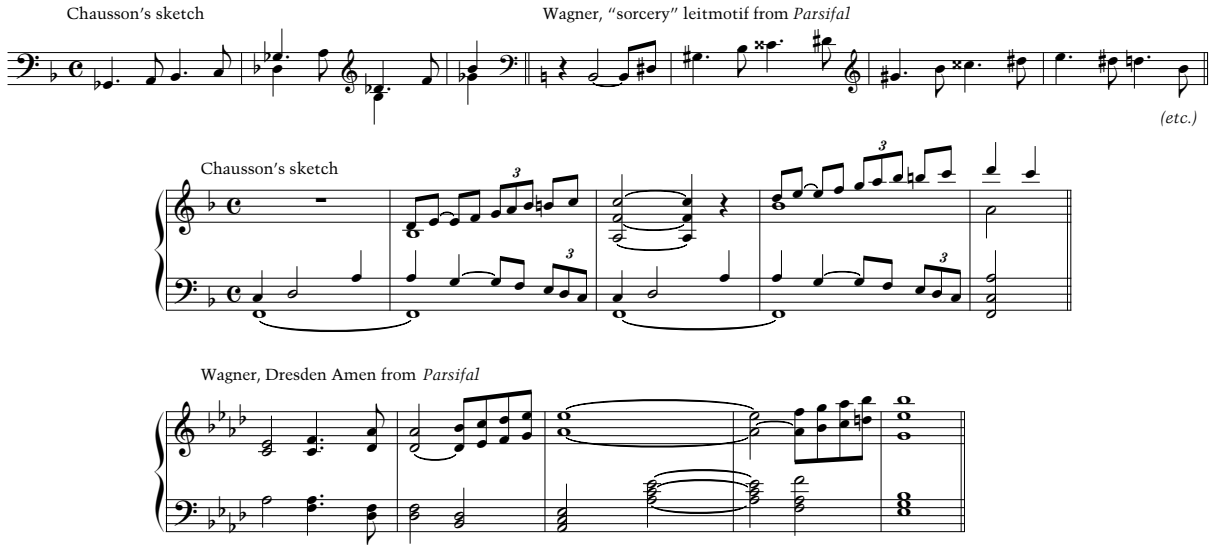
c. Chausson, *Viviane,* mm. 1–15 (identical in 1883, 1887, and 1893 versions).



Example 3

One idea (p. 25, front pagination) recalls Wagner's "sorcery" leitmotif in its rhythm, contour, and chromaticism. Another (p. 26, front pagination), while obviously patterned on the "Franck Agnus Dei," also seems like an amalgamation of the opening measures of the *Parsifal* prelude and the Dresden Amen (ex. 4). Wagner's final music drama was certainly on Chausson's mind at the time he drafted these ideas. Chausson, like many French musicians and artists (such as Vincent d'Indy, Catulle Mendès, Judith Gautier, and Léo Delibes), traveled to Bayreuth in the summer of 1882 to attend the premiere of *Parsifal*. In an extensive review in *L'Art musical*—published the same month he sketched the material for *Viviane*—Chausson praised Wagner's opera as "one of the most astonishing works of modern genius."[25]

[25]Chausson, "*Parsifal,*" *L'Art musical* 21, no. 32 (10 August 1882): 250: "A mon avis, c'est une des œuvres les plus étonnantes du génie moderne." The review was serialized in three volumes of the journal: 21, no. 32: 250–51; 21, no. 33 (17 August 1882): 257–59; 21, no. 34 (24 August 1882): 265–66.



Example 4: Possible echoes of *Parsifal, F-Pn* ms. 8837, I, 25, 26 (front pagination).

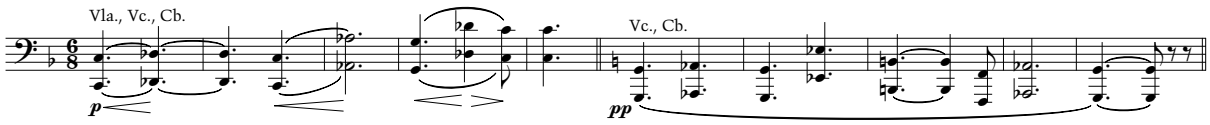
Wagnerism Reconsidered

When Chausson worked the drafts for *Viviane* into a short score later that fall, he excluded the sketch materials with obvious echoes of *Parsifal,* but other traces of Wagner's influence remained. These traces did not escape the notice of the musical press. In an 1884 review of the symphonic poem, the writer from *La République Française* dismissively concluded that Chausson "seems more concerned with implementing certain methods of Wagner than in serving us a dish of his own making!"[26] The most striking sonic parallels are with *Tristan,* a work that Chausson had in his ears during the preparation of *Viviane*. In a letter to Vincent d'Indy from 1883, he writes: "This morning I have to correct the copies of a symphonic poem that I have the presumptuousness to present at the Société [nationale de musique], and beforehand, I would like to play several pages of *Tristan*. That's legitimate, right?"[27] Several moments at the opening of *Viviane*—the only section of the piece that Chausson left relatively intact through the revision process—bear notable resemblances to famous moments in Wagner's drama. A haunting unison passage for unaccompanied low strings echoes the pitch sequence, instrumentation, and mood of the closing measures of the *Tristan* prelude (ex. 5). A sequence several measures later recalls the Tristan chord and its resolution. As Wagner does in his prelude, Chausson moves from a half-diminished sonority (m. 31) to a less dissonant, but still unstable chord (the D-major chord in first inversion in m. 33), with a chromatic ascent in the upper voice. As in the opening of *Tristan,* this progression is immediately repeated a third higher, and eventually settles on an extended dominant chord (the G_9 in m. 37; see ex. 6).[28]

[26]Duvernoy, *La République Française,* [April 1884], cited in Gallois, *Ernest Chausson: L'Homme et son œuvre,* 135: "L'auteur nous paraît plus soucieux de mettre en œuvre certains procédés de Wagner, que de nous servir un plat de sa façon!"

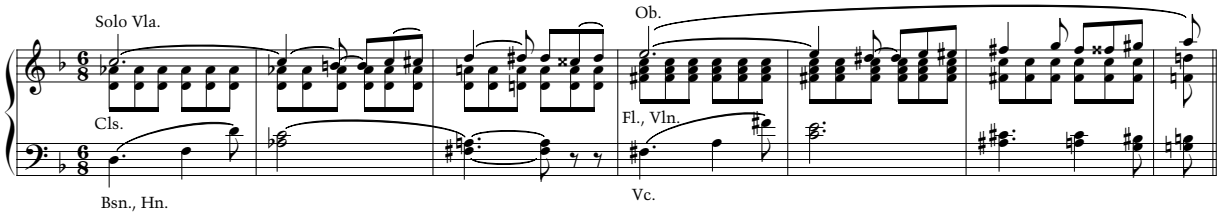
[27]Letter dated "Paris, mercredi matin [1883]," *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925): 129–30: "Il faut ce matin que je corrige les copies d'un poème symphonique que j'ai l'outrecuidance de présenter à la Société, et, auparavant, je voudrais jouer quelques pages de *Tristan*. C'est légitime, n'est-ce pas?" The symphonic poem in question is certainly *Viviane,* since it was Chausson's only orchestral composition to date.

[28]The Wagnerian nature of this gesture has less to do with the progression from a half-diminished seventh to another unstable chord than with the teleological voice leading between these harmonies, a distinction that Andrew Deruchie articulates in his study of Chausson's Symphony in B♭ Major. Critics since Chausson's time have linked the harmonic idiom of the Symphony to Wagner, in large part because of the prevalence of half-diminished sonorities.

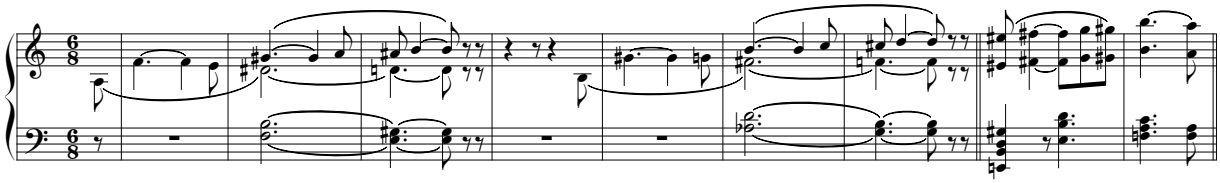


Example 5: *Viviane* (final version), mm. 21–25; *Tristan und Isolde,* end of Prelude to act I.

a. *Viviane* (final version), mm. 31–37.



b. *Tristan und Isolde,* opening; mm. 16–17.



Example 6

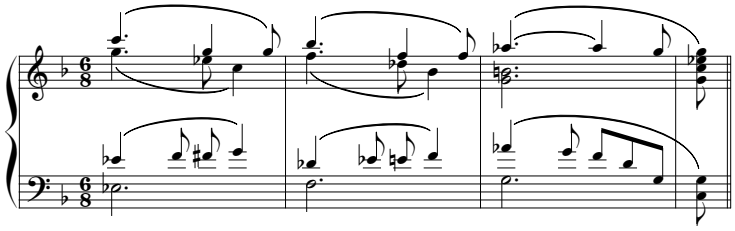
Later in the 1883 version of the piece, the violas and cellos play two rising four-note gestures (E♭, F, F♯, G; D♭, E♭, E♮, F) whose rhythm and chromatic shape strongly echo Wagner's "desire" motive (see ex. 7). This incidence of mimicry occurs at the first moment when the 1883 orchestral version differs from the 1882 short score, with mm. 127–29 in the 1883 manuscript replacing six unrelated measures in the earlier version (see Table 3).[29] Chausson's decision to replace this passage suggests that he devoted particular attention to these measures and may strengthen the possibility that he was aware of the resulting similarity to *Tristan*. When Chausson made more substantial revisions to the piece in 1887, he removed this section in its entirety. Since the later changes were coincident with Chausson's goal of "dewagnerization" in the mid-1880s, the suppression of the "desire" motive echo—the most explicit musical invocation of *Tristan* in the 1883 version of *Viviane*—suggests that Chausson took pains to avoid the most obvious quotations of the elder composer.

Beyond these surface features, Wagner remained a powerful dramaturgical model. As several recent commentators have noted, the program of *Viviane* foreshadows the central elements of *Le Roi Arthus:* an illicit love; a man torn between duty and passion; and ultimately, a character powerless in the face of oppressive external forces.[30] Both works, in turn, have Wag-

Deruchie notes, however, that Chausson's characteristic treatment of this chord in the Symphony is "palpably un-Wagnerian and dissimilar to the *Tristan* idiom." He notes: "while in Chausson, as in Wagner, a dominant seventh succeeds the 'Tristan Chord,' little sense of motion or progression between the two harmonies develops. . . . Indeed, the half-diminished seventh in Chausson's theme does not so much resolve to the dominant as morph into it, and consequently conveys little charge to it." See Deruchie, *The French Symphony at the Fin de Siècle: Style, Culture, and the Symphonic Tradition* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 143–44. In contrast, the half-diminished chord as Chausson uses it in *Viviane* has a greater syntactical similarity to the Tristan chord.

[29]My sonata terminology is adapted from James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[30]See Leblanc, *Wagnérisme et création en France,* 457–58; Benoit-Otis, *Ernest Chausson,* Le Roi Arthus *et l'opéra wagnérien en France,* 38–41; and Deruchie, *The French Symphony at the Fin de Siècle,* 121.



Example 7: *Viviane* (1883 version), mm. 128–31.

nerian dramatic elements. The symphonic poem and the opera reveal broad parallels with *Tristan und Isolde,* beginning with the origins of the subject matter: like Chausson's characters, the Tristan legend is rooted in Arthurian lore.[31] Chausson was almost certainly aware of this connection because of his long-standing interest in Arthurian legend; he registered at the Luxembourg library in 1875 in order to study the subject.[32]

As Marie-Hélène Benoit-Otis articulates in her recent study of *Le Roi Arthus,* Chausson's musical and dramaturgical appropriations of Wagner are best understood as discrete, yet intertwined, phenomena. Benoit-Otis suggests that the libretto of *Arthus* underwent a relatively linear process of "dewagnerization" during the opera's gestation, whereas Chausson's musical allusions to *Tristan* became more precise in the course of successive iterations of the act I love duo, "Délicieux oubli des choses de la terre."[33] In contrast, the revision history of *Viviane* suggests that Chausson pursued the opposite trajectory in the symphonic poem: the composer removed the most obvious musical references to Wagner, yet the thematic resonances became more pronounced when he revisited the work in 1887.

The plot of *Viviane* resonates strongly with that of act II in Wagner's drama.[34] Like Tristan and Isolde, Chausson's protagonists rendezvous in seclusion. Both Wagner and Chausson cast private romance in tension with public duty and fealty to the crown. Tristan is torn by his bond to King Marke; Merlin hears the summons of King Arthur and wishes to serve. Chausson reinforces this Tristanesque subtext in the 1887 revision by placing the private/public opposition in sharper relief. He does this through two subtle changes to the work's program. First, Chausson adds a reference to Merlin's sense of duty. Second, he makes explicit mention of the trumpet calls that announce King Arthur's envoys (see Table 4).[35]

The latter modification corresponds to a significant change in the dramatic structure of the symphonic poem. In the 1883 version, the trumpet calls (mm. 191*ff.*) are first stated after the love scene finishes. The melody closely corresponds to the street merchant's tune that Chausson had notated in his sketchbook some years earlier, and the accompaniment—a bare tremolo

[31]Raymond Thompson, "Tristan and Isolde," in *The Arthurian Encyclopedia,* ed. Norris J. Lacey (New York: Garland, 1986), 575–78.

[32]Gallois, *Ernest Chausson,* 377; Leblanc, *Wagnérisme et création en France,* 456–57. Moreover, as Wagner's music entered the Parisian musical mainstream in the 1880s, concert promoters took pains to note the French origins of several of Wagner's works in order to defuse potential opposition on nationalist grounds. When the Concerts Lamoureux presented the prelude to *Tristan* in November 1886, for instance, the program notes indicated that the story was borrowed from French myths from the Middle Ages. In preparation for a performance of *Lohengrin* later in the 1886–87 season, Lamoureux's annotator noted: "the myth of Lohengrin belongs to the legendary cycle of poems of the Holy Grail, and it is therefore of French origin." ("Le mythe de *Lohengrin* appartient au cycle des poèmes légendaires du Saint-Graal, et qu'il est par conséquent d'origine française.") Program of the Concerts Lamoureux, 28 November 1886.

[33]Benoit-Otis, *Ernest Chausson,* Le Roi Arthus *et l'opéra wagnérien en France,* 101.

[34]Alternatively, Leblanc has suggested that in *Viviane* love is a destructive force that leads man away from his ideals, and therefore *Parsifal* is the more significant Wagnerian hypotext: "The model of Viviane is thus Kundry rather than Isolde." *Wagnérisme et création en France,* 457–58.

[35]Programs of the Société nationale de musique, 1871–1928, *F-Pn* Rés. 2483 (1–5). At the time of *Viviane*'s premiere, concert programs of the SNM typically included the scenarios of programmatic works (as they appear in the scores, where applicable) but no further commentary or explication.

Table 3
Structural revisions to *Viviane*

<table>
<tr><th>1882 SHORT SCORE
(MS 8774)</th><th>1883 ORCHESTRAL SCORE
(MS 3943)</th><th>1887 REVISED SCORE
(MS 8775)</th><th>1893 PUBLISHED SCORE</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">mm. 1–36. Forêt enchantée (Prélude), F major, 6/8, Andante (1882: Lent; 1883: Lent et mystérieux).
Identical in all sources except for minor changes in orchestration.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">37–55. Opening music continued</td><td rowspan="4">–</td><td rowspan="4"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">56–126. Allegro (1882)/Animé (1883), loosely based on opening themes</td></tr>
<tr><td>[6mm.]</td><td>Replaced by 127–29. (See ex. 7)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">130–37</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">–</td><td colspan="2">37–46. New material over expanded G⁷ (V⁷/V); functions as transition.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">138–55. Plus lent (1882) / Un peu plus lent (1883), A major</td><td colspan="2">47–64. Love theme played by violas and cellos in C major (V); functions as second theme (S).</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">156–90. Love theme continued</td><td colspan="2">–</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="4">–</td><td colspan="2">65–70. S continued</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">71–85. Varied reprise of opening (F major)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">86–91. S dissolved, 3/4</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">92–99. Slow, quiet trumpet call</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">[172–90]</td><td colspan="2">100–12. Reprise of S</td></tr>
<tr><td>191–202. Trumpet calls
in C (unaccompanied)</td><td>191–202. Trumpet calls
in C (over pedal C tremolo)</td><td colspan="2">113–23. Trumpet calls in E♭ (over changing tremolo)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">203–12. New material, A major, 2/2, Con moto
(notated in tuplets, 1882)</td><td colspan="2">–</td></tr>
</table>

Table 3 *(continued)*

1882 SHORT SCORE (MS 8774)	1883 ORCHESTRAL SCORE (MS 3943)	1887 REVISED SCORE (MS 8775)	1893 PUBLISHED SCORE
[1½ pp. crossed out]	–	–	
213–32. Trumpet calls in imitation, 6/8. 217–18 are analogous to 1887/1893: 124–25			
233–328. Animé. Develops themes from mm. 56*ff.* and mm. 138*ff.*			
–		124–219. 2/2, Allegro. "Development," reworks trumpet call, love theme, etc. [2mm.] = 1m. (131) [4mm.] = 2mm. (138–39)	
329–46. 6/8 *fff* climax on G half-diminished seventh over C pedal, winding down to a low bare C		220–27. 2/2	
347–55. Beaucoup plus lent, 6/8 "Retransition" over C pedal. 1887/1893 versions add trumpet theme echo		228–36. Lent, 4/4	
356–76 "Recapitulation" (cf. 1893 m. 25) in opening key (F major), meter, and tempo		237–57	
377–92 Transformation of love theme. Mm. 378–83 in 1883 version is deleted in 1887/1893.		237–57	
393–413 Authentic cadence in F major (functions as essential structural closure). Final statements of 1st and 2nd themes.		268–88	

Table 4
Revisions to program of *Viviane*

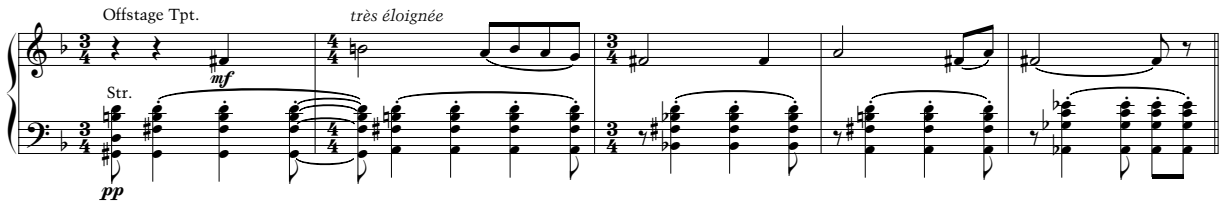
1883 Concert Program	1893 Published Score
Viviane and Merlin in the forest of Brocéliande. Love scene.	Viviane and Merlin in the forest of Brocéliande. Love scene.
King Arthur's envoys ride through the forest in search of Merlin.	**Trumpet calls.** Envoys of King Arthur ride through the forest in search of the Enchanter.
Merlin hears them and wishes to join them.	**Merlin remembers his mission; he wants to flee and escape Viviane's arms.**
Viviane, after trying in vain to keep him, locks him up forever in an enchanted hawthorn bush in bloom.	**Scene of Enchantment.** To keep him, Viviane puts Merlin to sleep and encloses him in a hawthorn bush in bloom.
Viviane et Merlin dans la forêt de Brocéliande. Scène d'amour.	Viviane et Merlin dans la forêt de Brocéliande. Scène d'amour.
Les envoyés du Roi Arthus parcourent la forêt à la recherche de Merlin.	**Appels de trompette.** Des envoyés du Roi Arthus parcourent la forêt à la recherche de l'Enchanteur.
Merlin les entend et veut les rejoindre.	**Merlin se rappelle sa mission; il veut fuir et s'échapper des bras de Viviane.**
Viviane, après avoir vainement essayé de le retenir, l'enferme à jamais dans un buisson enchanté d'aubépines en fleurs.	**Scène de l'Enchantement.** Pour le retenir, Viviane endort Merlin et l'entoure d'aubépines en fleurs.

in the low strings—is minimal. Chausson preserves a similar statement of the trumpet call in the revision (mm. 113*ff.*), but he now precedes it with a slow, dreamlike version played offstage during Viviane and Merlin's love music. It is as if the melody were filtered through the lovers' subjectivity, or introduced as a hazy premonition of the rupture to come. Following this statement, Chausson reprises the love theme proper one more time. Then the trumpet calls sound in tempo, as in the original version, and Merlin's struggle begins.

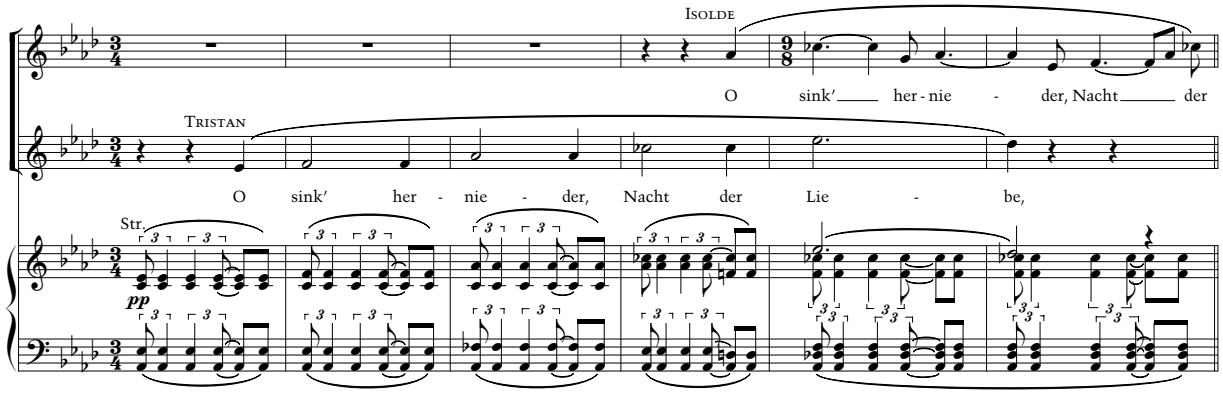
By placing King Arthur's summons against the backdrop of the love scene, Chausson's revision frames the offstage trumpet call as an explicit interruption of the tryst. As Andrew Deruchie notes, the "trumpet-call-as-turning-point" is a device that *Viviane* shares with Liszt's *Les Préludes* and Beethoven's Second and Third *Leonore* Overtures.[36] The scenario also recalls Brangäne's offstage warning about the impending daybreak in act II, sc. 2 of *Tristan:* "Habet acht! Bald entweicht die Nacht." In these cases, an invisible voice signals the intrusion of the public sphere into the private, presaging an end to blissful calm. The parallels with Wagner extend to the musical setting: the hushed string accompaniment, pulsing in syncopated, slow-moving harmonies, are a powerful sonic evocation of Tristan and Isolde's love scene (see ex. 8)—which, in turn, would serve as the hypotext for the act I love duet in *Arthus*. The 1887 manuscript reveals that Chausson originally wrote this passage in $\frac{4}{4}$ meter and

[36]Deruchie, *The French Symphony at the Fin de Siècle,* 119–21.

a. *Viviane* (final version), mm. 92–96.



b. *Tristan und Isolde,* act II, sc. 2, *Mässig langsam*.



Example 8

later modified the rhythmic values to remove one beat from each measure (see plate 2). In the published score, the first full measure of the melody (m. 93) remains in $\frac{4}{4}$, but the rest of the passage is in triple meter—a shift that strengthens the music's similarity to *Tristan*. While Chausson excised certain moments of facile Wagnerian mimicry throughout the composition and revision of *Viviane,* the most significant programmatic change in the 1887 revision results in a more Wagnerian scenario. The aural resemblance may be subtle, but the connection in overall effect is compelling because the musical and dramaturgical parallels to *Tristan* reinforce one another. Paradoxically—as Benoit-Otis and Steven Huebner have suggested in the case of *Arthus*—this heightened similarity places the differences between the two works in greater relief.[37] In *Tristan,* love wins out; in *Viviane,* it is a pernicious force that lures man away from his ideals.

[37]Benoit-Otis, *Ernest Chausson,* Le Roi Arthus *et l'opéra wagnérien en France,* 110; Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle,* 370.

Musique descriptive, musique pure

Chausson's revisions to *Viviane* were motivated by additional concerns beyond wishing to mute Wagnerian influences. Although he expressed satisfaction with the work's premiere in 1883, Chausson conceded to d'Indy that there was room for improvement: "As for the details, I believe some would do well differently orchestrated. It isn't *clever*. . . . The next time I hope to do better."[38] Chausson took this self-criticism to heart and completely reorchestrated significant portions when he revisited the symphonic poem four years later. The 1887 manuscript contains numerous revisions *in situ* that demonstrate an increasingly imaginative and confident approach to orchestral texture and

[38]Chausson to Vincent d'Indy, dated "Paris, 26 avril 1883," *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925): 130: "Quant aux détails, il y en a bien qui gagneraient, je crois, à être différemment instrumentés. Ce n'est pas *roublard*. . . . La prochaine fois j'espère faire mieux."

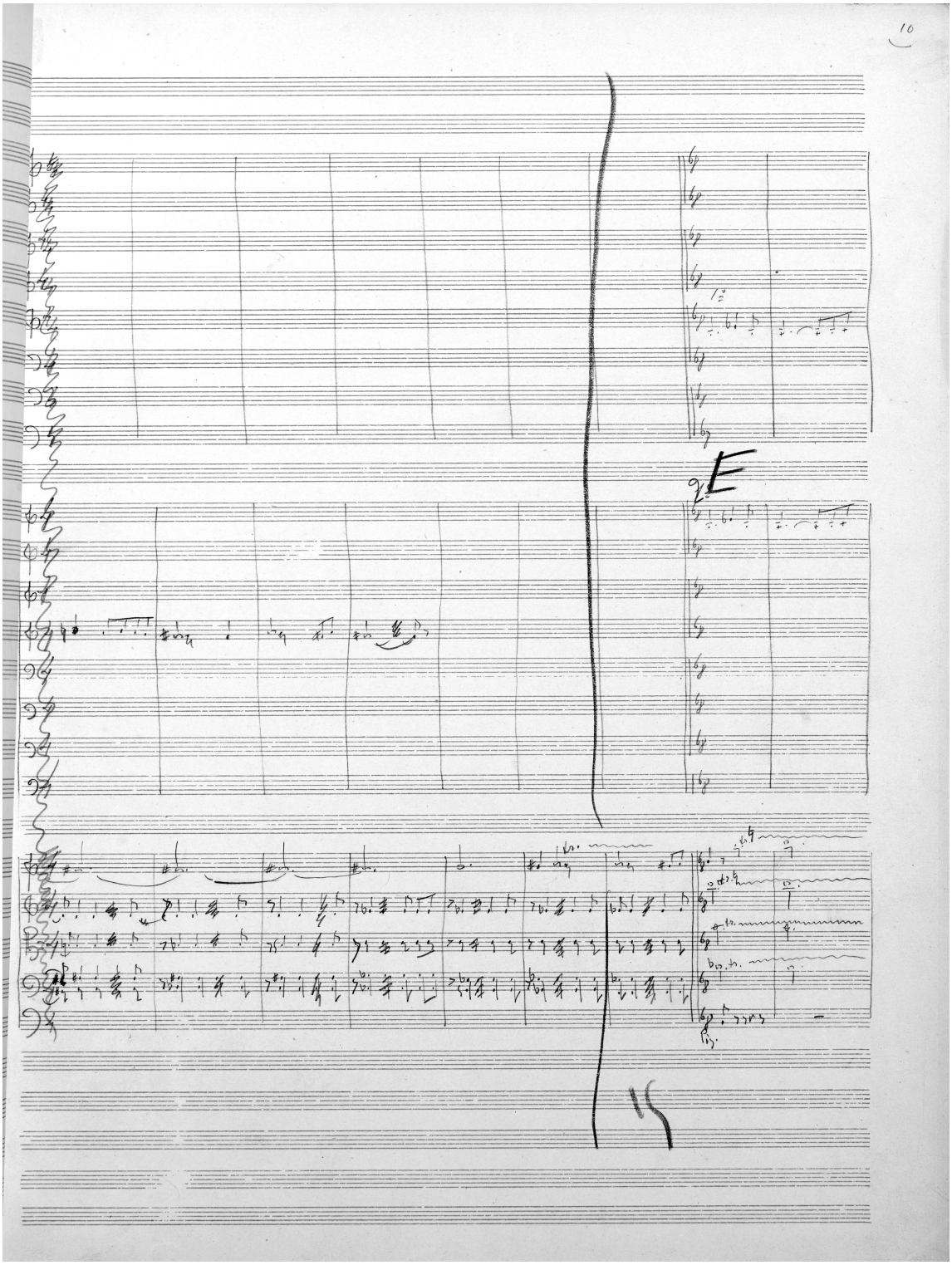


Plate 2: *Viviane,* 1887 manuscript (*F-Pn* ms. 8775), p. 10[r]
(Reprinted by permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique).

color.[39] Indeed, the critic for *Gil Blas,* most likely the Wagner enthusiast Victor Wilder, spoke favorably of the revisions to *Viviane* and singled out the "charming color" of the new instrumentation.[40]

Chausson's most significant revisions, however, were structural. As noted above, the programmatic changes Chausson made in 1887 affected the ordering of certain thematic events. Chausson also streamlined the narrative by deleting several passages from the original version whose dramatic significance was unclear (see Table 3). At m. 56 in the 1883 version, for instance, Chausson had begun an extended section in a faster tempo, marked "Animé." The thematic material is based on the opening music, implying an extension of the love scene, but the character is incongruously lively. After the trumpet calls sound (mm. 191–202), Chausson introduces a new, agitated theme marked "Con moto" (mm. 203–12). The written program might suggest that this represents Merlin's attempt to join King Arthur's subjects, but Chausson cuts off the melody and begins another series of trumpet calls (mm. 213–32), immediately followed by a reprise of the love theme (mm. 233*ff.*). Perhaps this section is meant to depict Merlin's struggle, but the themes being used do not make this clear.

By removing these ambiguous sections and replacing others, Chausson clarified *Viviane*'s program and tightened its structure. These dramatic and musical considerations are mutually reinforcing; the definitive version of the piece conveys the program more effectively and is also architecturally more satisfying. Whereas the original score moves discursively between themes and key areas, the final version has a clear trajectory, apparent even to a listener unfamiliar with the work's program.

Chausson attains this coherence by placing *Viviane*'s structure in dialogue with the principles of sonata process. In its final incarnation, the symphonic poem is not a sonata form in the strictest sense of the term, but the similarities are extensive enough to make a comparison productive.[41] The three major programmatic segments—the love scene, Merlin's attempt to escape, and Viviane's enchantment—correspond loosely to the tripartite sequence of exposition (mm. 1–123), development (mm. 124–236), and recapitulation (mm. 237–88). The outer sections share key, mood, and thematic material, creating musical symmetry and promoting programmatic associations. The middle section fragments and reworks themes from the opening and is set apart in tempo, meter, and character.

Sonata principles are evident on a local level as well. The sections that Chausson preserved from the original score (opening, love theme, climax, and scene of enchantment) are recast as guideposts in the form. If the opening music serves as a primary theme, the first new passage in the 1887 score (mm. 37–46) functions as a transition, modulating to the dominant and ending with a half cadence in the new key area (the G^6_5 chord in m. 46). The "appel de la Fée" (mm. 47*ff.*) plays the role of second theme both in key (in C major, the dominant) and in character (lyrical, "feminine"). After the second theme in a normative sonata form, one might expect a cadence in the new key and a closing theme. Chausson provides neither, eliding the structural "deformation" with a programmatic rupture: it is at this point that the trumpet call intrudes.

Chausson returns to material from the original version next at the climax of the piece (m. 220), a shattering *fff* tutti punctuated by the

[39]Compare, for instance, the recto sides of pages 7 and 8 of *F-Pn,* Musique Ms. 8775 with the revision on the verso sides of pages 6 and 7. In extended drafts, Chausson typically used the recto side of a manuscript to notate the first version of music and reserved the verso of the preceding page for corrections. For further discussion of Chausson's working methods, see Benoit-Otis, *Ernest Chausson,* Le Roi Arthus *et l'opéra wagnérien en France,* 91.

[40]V.W. [Victor Wilder], "Les Grands Concerts," *Gil Blas* 10, no. 2996 (31 January 1888): 3: "l'instrumentation est d'une couleur charmante."

[41]My approach here is loosely based on the principles of Sonata Theory developed in a series of publications by James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, most extensively in *Elements of Sonata Theory*. For selected applications in nineteenth-century program music, see Hepokoski, "Beethoven Reception: The Symphonic Tradition," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music,* ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 424–59; and idem, "Fiery-pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero? Strauss's *Don Juan* Reinvestigated," in *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and His Work,* ed. Bryan Gilliam (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 135–75.

only entrance of cymbals and bass drum in the entire work. The harmony begins with a strident G half-diminished-seventh chord over a C pedal and winds down to a bare C in the low strings and timpani (mm. 224–27). This dominant pedal continues through the following section (mm. 228–36), which functions as a retransition by preparing the arrival of F major. The final third of the piece (mm. 237–88) exhibits all the salient hallmarks of a sonata-form recapitulation: a reprise of the principal theme, a recomposition of the secondary theme that cadences in the tonic, and a valedictory codetta that reaffirms the work's key.

In recomposing *Viviane,* why did Chausson (consciously or not) turn to sonata form? I believe these architectural changes represented the composer's solution to the artistic crisis he faced in the mid-1880s. As Chausson noted in his 1888 letter to Godet, he had completely revised *Viviane,* but could not change its programmatic "core." By providing a purely musical framework for experiencing the piece, he could redeem the composition despite its origins as descriptive music, now problematic. This approach accords with a formalist tradition of criticism that had been articulated most forcefully in France by Charles Bannelier, who had translated Eduard Hanslick's *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* for *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* in 1877. While Bannelier expressed enthusiasm about the burgeoning school of French orchestral composition exemplified by Saint-Saëns, Massenet, d'Indy, and their contemporaries, he was ambivalent about the symphonic poem as a genre. Bannelier believed that instrumental works ought to be judged solely on their musical merits; in his estimation, that music might be able to convey a narrative was irrelevant to its value. For example, when evaluating Saint-Saëns's *Le Rouet d'Omphale,* one of the most popular French symphonic poems of the 1870s, Bannelier praised the work's "charming" musical logic while dismissing its program.[42] Throughout his criticism, Bannelier argued that formal coherence could make a symphonic poem palatable, but formal looseness could not be justified on programmatic grounds.[43] Chausson voiced a complementary sentiment as early as 1879 in a letter to his patron Berthe de Rayssac: "There is a phrase by Schumann that is terrible and that always resounds in my ears like the trumpet of judgment: 'One is only a master of thought when one is completely a master of form.' I feel the truth of this thought more and more, and it leaves me no rest."[44]

[42]Charles Bannelier, *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 42, no. 52 (26 December 1875): 415. For more on French debates about program music at this time, including the French reception of Hanslick, see Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, 1834–80* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 172–79; Timothy Jones, "Nineteenth-Century Orchestral and Chamber Music," in *French Music Since Berlioz,* ed. Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 73–82; and Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 229–30.

[43]In his review of the revised version of *Viviane* for *Le Ménestrel,* the influential critic Amédée Boutarel voiced an analogous criticism about Chausson's symphonic poem: "The *Ruy Blas* overture, by Mendelssohn, was inspired, it is said, by Victor Hugo's drama. But this information has no importance, because the work is purely musical, and its own merit suffices without the intervention of programmatic explanations, which are always a little questionable. For example, the program of the symphonic poem *Viviane,* by M. E. Chausson, although very short, can be all the more easily criticized because it is very explicit. With a little good will it is easy to find the program's promises fulfilled in the work, but the musician's concern, description, has prevented him from giving his musical thought the necessary scope. The figurative effects are interesting, but they dominate to the detriment of the whole." [L'ouverture de *Ruy Blas,* de Mendelssohn, a été inspirée, dit-on, par le drame de Victor Hugo. Mais ce renseignement n'a aucune importance, car l'œuvre est purement musicale, et son mérite propre lui suffit sans qu'il soit utile de faire intervenir les explications d'un programme toujours un peu sujet à caution. Par exemple, celui d'un poème symphonique de *Viviane,* par M. E. Chausson, bien que fort court, peut être d'autant plus facilement critiqué qu'il est très explicite. Avec un peu de bonne volonté il est facile de retrouver dans l'ouvrage l'exécution des promesses du programme, mais la préoccupation du musicien, qui s'efforçait surtout de décrire, l'a empêché de donner à sa pensée l'ampleur nécessaire. Les effets figuratifs sont curieux, mais ils dominent au détriment de l'ensemble.] Boutarel, "Concerts et Soirées," *Le Ménestrel* 54, no. 6 (5 February 1888): 47–48. Another reviewer opined, in contrast, that *Viviane* was "ordered very simply" [ordonnée très simplement], and praised Chausson for conveying the program "with a charming poetry" [avec une poésie charmante]. "Théâtres et Concerts," *Journal des Débats,* 30 January 1888.

[44]Letter dated "Munich, 23 août [1879]," *Écrits inédits,* 126: "Il y a une phrase de Schumann qui est terrible et qui résonne toujours à mes oreilles comme la trompette de jugement: 'On n'est maître de la pensée que lorsqu'on est complètement maître de la forme.' Je sens de plus en plus la vérité de cette pensée et elle ne me laisse pas de repos."

By the mid-1880s, Chausson had also amended his beliefs about what a symphonic poem can, and ought to, express. In a letter to Paul Poujaud from July 1886—a year before revising *Viviane*—the composer expressed his distaste for "descriptive music" and outlined a different approach to musical signification. Notably, Chausson did not disavow all symphonic poems, just those with explicit narratives. He advocated instead a new type of symphonic poem that evokes only sentiments. His views offer a fascinating aesthetic manifesto and are worth quoting at some length:

> I haven't told you about the country because I've hardly looked at it, although I have admired it and *felt* it a lot. I should even be very grateful to it, because it has just provided me with an idea that I've long searched for in vain. You know my antipathy for descriptive music. However, I've felt incapable of writing pure music like Bach and Haydn. So it was necessary to find something else. I've found it. The only thing left is to see if I will have the strength in me to express what I feel. As long as I'm only thinking about it, I'm full of confidence; once the pencil is in my hand, I find myself reduced to a small boy. Yet I've begun. In the winter I will show you a symphonic poem that is scarcely an attempt. It is already rather far along; the sketch would even be finished if I hadn't been stopped about a week ago due to an idiotic practical difficulty: I have to write about thirty measures to reach the end, which I'll write rather quickly, I think. Regarding the title, I haven't found one that suits me. At the moment, I'm calling it *Dans les bois* [In the Forest], but I would like to find something better. Especially since this doesn't at all depict what I want to express, and, in that case, it might be better not to include a title.
>
> Think of the *Fontaine aux lianes,* by Leconte de Lisle. Ignore the exotic aspect (Indian flowers, etc.), and the semi-dramatic aspect (the *dead man with his eyes wide open*) and you can get a rough idea of the symphonic poem in question. I don't know if I'm expressing myself clearly or if you understand me. *I want a* poem *that I make only in my head and of which I give only a general impression to the public; I want above all that everything remain absolutely musical, so that the listeners who do not follow me entirely would be sufficiently satisfied by its musical aspect. There is no description, no tale; there are only feelings.* I am thinking of writing four or five symphonic poems of this sort, all at my leisure, among which there will be *La Nuit,* which I am obviously not in the processes of writing this summer. I am already thinking of a *Printemps* (Botticelli) and of a *Chant de la terre*. Do not speak about any of this and tell me what you think of it [emphasis added].[45]

Of course, Chausson was not the first composer to privilege the expression of sentiments over the representation of a narrative. Beethoven had famously claimed that his *Pastoral* Symphony exemplified "more the expression of feeling than its depiction"—a preemptive defense, as Mark Evan Bonds notes, against predictable charges that he had placed superficial "tone-painting" over expression.[46] Indeed, Chausson articulated his understanding of this distinction in Beethoven's music. In a journal entry from 13 February 1876, Chausson recounted

---

[45]Reprinted in *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925): 155–56. "Je ne vous ai pas parlé du pays parce que je l'ai peu regardé, tout en l'admirant et le *sentant* beaucoup. Je dois même lui être très reconnaissant, car il vient de me fournir une idée que je cherchais vainement depuis longtemps. Vous connaissez mon antipathie pour la musique descriptive. En même temps, je me sentais incapable de faire de la musique pure comme Bach et Haydn. Il fallait donc trouver autre chose. J'ai trouvé. Il ne me reste plus qu'à voir si j'aurai en moi la force d'exprimer ce que je sens. Tant que je ne fais qu'y songer, je suis plein de confiance; une fois le crayon à la main, je me trouve tout petit garçon. Pourtant, j'ai commencé. Je vous montrerai à la rentrée de l'hiver un poème symphonique qui n'est guère qu'un essai. Il est déjà assez avancé; l'esquisse en serait même terminée si je n'étais arrêté depuis une huitaine de jours par une difficulté matérielle idiote: il me faut trouver encore une trentaine de mesures pour arriver à la fin que je ferai, je crois assez vite. Quant au titre, je n'arrive pas à en trouver un qui me convienne. Dans le moment, je l'intitule *Dans les bois,* mais je voudrais trouver mieux. Surtout que cela ne rend pas du tout ce que je veux exprimer, et, dans ce cas, il vaudrait peut-être mieux ne pas mettre de titre.

Pensez à la *Fontaine aux lianes,* de Leconte de Lisle. Retranchez-en le côté exotique (floraison indienne, etc.), et le côté semi-dramatique (l'homme *mort aux yeux grand-ouverts*) et vous pourrez approximativement vous faire une idée du poème symphonique en question. Je ne sais si je m'exprime assez clairement et si vous me comprenez bien. Je veux un *poème* que je fais seul dans ma tête et dont je ne sers que l'impression générale au public; je veux pardessus tout rester absolument musical, si bien que les auditeurs qui ne me suivraient pas entièrement puissent être suffisamment satisfaits par le côté musical. Il n'y a aucune description, aucune affabulation; il n'y a plus que des sentiments. Je pense faire quatre ou cinq poèmes symphoniques de ce genre, tout à mon aise, et parmi lesquels se trouvera *La Nuit* que je ne suis décidément pas en train d'écrire cet été. Je songe déjà à un *Printemps* (Botticelli) et à un *Chant de la terre.* Ne parlez pas de tout cela et dites-moi ce que vous en pensez."

[46]Bonds, *Absolute Music,* 213.

his epiphany at a performance of the *Pastoral* Symphony:

> I must admit, for my part, that today for the first time I thoroughly understood the Andante. First, the title given by Beethoven himself can mislead. "Scene by the Brook." One thinks very easily of a love scene; in this case, it is absolutely finished, Beethoven's symphony remains impenetrable. The Pastorale is in no way descriptive music as we understand it now. Since Beethoven titled his Andante "Scene by the Brook," I imagine gladly that I am at the edge of a brook, but I am careful not to go further. This is music of feeling and not of image.[47]

Chausson's renunciation of program music provides some context for his reformulation of *Viviane*. By recasting the work in dialogue with sonata principles, Chausson makes it less dependent on a narrative, and the listener can be "sufficiently satisfied" by the musical aspects of the piece. As his letter to Poujaud attests, the composer's wariness about descriptive music was not at odds with his plans to write more symphonic poems. He merely believed that such works ought to be impressionistic rather than explicitly representational, as if the poetic inspiration had been sublimated during the compositional process.

Apart from *Solitude dans le bois* (the name Chausson eventually gave to the work he mentioned to Poujaud, but later destroyed), Chausson never managed to complete any of the other symphonic poems he envisioned in his letter. His intention of conveying "no description . . . only feelings" is nevertheless evident in the orchestral works he did compose. In 1897 and 1898, Chausson wrote his final symphonic poem, *Soir de fête,* op. 32. As Jean Gallois notes, the work contains "no description, no story strictly speaking in the manner of a genuine symphonic poem, but only the search for a musical evocation of felt sentiments."[48] Chausson's most celebrated work, the *Poème* for violin and orchestra (op. 25, 1896), exhibits a similar distillation of feeling. Although inspired by "The Song of Triumphant Love," a novella by Ivan Turgenev, the piece does not attempt to narrate the story, but rather to capture its atmosphere. As in the scenario he outlined to Poujaud, Chausson had a poetic idea in mind but revealed only a general impression to the audience. The successive titles that Chausson gave to the work epitomize this process of abstraction: he originally christened the piece *Le Chant de l'amour triomphant: poème symphonique pour violon et orchestre,* then shortened the title to *Poème pour violon et orchestre,* and in the end simply labeled it *Poème*.[49]

From *Viviane* to *Arthus*

As Chausson's only orchestral composition built around an explicit narrative, *Viviane* is an outlier in his oeuvre, difficult to square with his later proclamations about programmatic music. Perhaps it is fitting, then, that *Viviane* took on a second life in the most representational of genres. In 1886, the same year that he spoke of his distaste for descriptive music, Chausson drafted a scenario for *Le Roi Arthus,* a project that would occupy him on and off until 1895. The opera continued Chausson's exploration of Arthurian legend and drew on the backstory and imagery of *Viviane*. Arthus (King Arthur) is betrayed by his wife, Genièvre (Guinevere), and his favored knight, Lancelot. In the opera's central episode near the end of act II, the distraught king summons Merlin to his aid. Chausson described his initial conception of the encounter in a letter to Paul Poujaud:

> Ah! if Merlin were there, he who had supported [Arthus] so often, who had helped him establish his kingdom. He disappeared one day and no one since has known what became of him. Arthus calls for his aid.

[47] *Écrits inédits,* 72–73: "J'avoue, pour ma part, que c'est aujourd'hui pour la première fois que j'aie [*sic*] compris à fond l'andante. D'abord, le titre donné par Beethoven lui-même peut égarer. 'Scène au bord du ruisseau.' On pense très facilement à une scène d'amour; dans ce cas, c'est absolument fini, la symphonie de Beethoven reste impénétrable. La Pastorale n'est nullement de la musique descriptive, telle que nous l'entendons maintenant. Puisque Beethoven a donné le titre de 'Scène au bord du ruisseau' à son andante, je me figure très volontiers que je suis au bord d'un ruisseau, mais je me garde bien d'aller plus loin. C'est ici une musique de sentiment et non d'image."

[48] Gallois, *Ernest Chausson,* 487.

[49] Ibid., 442.

A hawthorn bush in blossom suddenly appears, in the middle of a very soft, greenish glimmer. The bush parts and we catch a glimpse of Merlin on the ground, seeming to be asleep. He is entirely surrounded by flowers and seems to be one with the shrubs. (See the figure of Botticelli's *Printemps*.) He speaks without opening his eyes. He replies to each question enigmatically and in few words. However, he must announce, in sufficiently clear terms, the impending destruction of their common work and the mysterious death of Arthus. Arthus presses him with increasingly close questions, and since at the end, Merlin no longer wants to reply, Arthus, becoming violent, moves toward him with a threatening gesture, but immediately everything disappears. Then he remembers Viviane who loved him and whom he rejected; is she not taking revenge? He moves away sadly, with slow steps, while he hears joyous horn fanfares in the distance.[50]

Chausson's description of the magician replicates the scenario of *Viviane* almost word for word. Merlin appears amid a hawthorn bush in blossom, encircled by flowers, indicating that the action of the symphonic poem has already taken place. It is notable that Chausson invokes the image of Flora, the goddess of flowers and spring in Botticelli's *Primavera,* since he also envisioned the painting as the basis of a future orchestral work. Thus *Le Roi Arthus* resonates with one completed symphonic poem and another yet to be written. At the conclusion of this letter, Chausson muses about his return to old subject matter: "The appearance of Merlin tempts me greatly. You may well think that the old *Viviane* is going to rise from the ashes and become a virgin again. One could object that this scene hasn't been well prepared, but because of the way it occurs, I think it can be defended."[51] The exchange between Arthus and Merlin marks the wizard's only appearance in the opera. Hence Chausson anticipates that the scene might be criticized for an apparent lack of preparation. As Huebner notes, though, Merlin's appearance can be perceived as justified because of the epic nature of the Arthurian subject: "Merlin emerges from a past long before the beginnings of *Le Roi Arthus* and predicts a future long after its conclusion."[52]

In its final form, *Arthus* echoes both the scenario and the music of *Viviane*. Documentary sources suggest that Chausson decided to recycle musical material from the symphonic poem at a later stage in the opera's gestation. In 1892 he wrote to Henry Lerolle, his wife's brother-in-law:

> Do you want me to tell you about Arthus? I'm working at the moment on the scene change. I've even just written to Vidal to find out from the stagehands at the Opéra how many minutes they will need to set the secluded courtyard where Merlin has to appear. If it's more than four or five minutes, I'll be very unhappy. That would require an enormous piece of music.
>
> Regarding the appearance of Merlin, I've made a change in the text. At first, I had Merlin appear asleep and speak without opening his eyes. But Arthus, too, has to seem to sleep, at the end of the third act. It's too much! I see now, the future usher will joke that it's my music that puts all my interpreters in that state. So I've gotten rid of Merlin's slumber, I'll permit him to open his eyes, but all manner of gesture will remain forbidden for him.
>
> What would you say if the trees parted, at the moment of the appearance, to the chords from the beginning of *Viviane?* I feel like doing it. I think that that would be lovely. And besides, if I look for other chords, there's a good chance that what I find will be

[50]Letter dated "Cannes, 1886," *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925): 152–53: "Ah! si Merlin était là, lui qui l'a soutenu si souvent, qui l'a aidé à fonder son royaume. Il a disparu un jour et nul depuis, ne sait ce qu'il est devenu. Il l'appelle à son secours.

"Un buisson d'aubépines en fleurs apparaît soudain, au milieu d'une lueur verdâtre, très douce. Le buisson s'entr'ouvre et l'on aperçoit Merlin couché et qui semble dormir. Il est tout entouré de fleurs et paraît ne faire qu'un avec les arbustes. (Voir la figure du Printemps de Botticelli.) Il parle sans ouvrir les yeux. A chaque question, il répond en peu de mots et d'une façon énigmatique. Il doit pourtant annoncer en termes suffisamment transparents l'anéantissement prochain de leur œuvre commune et la mort mystérieuse d'Arthus. Arthus le presse de questions de plus en plus précises, et, comme à la fin Merlin ne veut plus répondre, Arthus devenu violent s'avance vers lui avec un geste menaçant, mais, aussitôt tout disparaît. Il songe alors à Viviane qui l'aimait et qu'il a repoussée; n'est-ce pas elle qui se venge? Il s'éloigne tristement à pas lents, tandis qu'on entend dans le lointain de joyeuses fanfares de cors."

In this preliminary sketch, the encounter between Arthus and Merlin occurs in act II, sc. 1. Chausson eventually moved this episode to the second half of act II.

[51]Ibid., 155.

[52]Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle,* 363.

less good. I'm not quite there yet. There is Arthus's big solo scene, important and difficult.[53]

The *Viviane* music frames Merlin's twelve-minute scene and recurs at key moments in his exchange with Arthus. As Benoit-Otis observes, this quotation serves both a formal and dramatic function: it gives the scene musical coherence even as it enriches the narrative by referring to an event that precedes the action of the opera.[54] The king summons the magician with an impassioned plea: "Come! Where are you? Merlin, hear my voice!"[55] Against a prevailing key of C minor, the orchestra punctuates Arthus's entreaty with a dramatic F^6_4 chord, setting up the expectation of a cadence on F—the key of *Viviane*.[56] The trees part and Merlin appears, accompanied by the *Viviane* chords, but Chausson recasts the quotation in the remote key of F♯ major. Two subtle timbral changes reinforce the otherworldly character of the scene: the strings play tremolo instead of sustained chords (as they do in the symphonic poem), and "cymbales froissées" rustle softly in the background (see ex. 9).[57]

Subsequent recurrences of the *Viviane* music suggest the wizard's magical powers. The chords return as Merlin cryptically declares: "Green apple trees, prophetic apple trees, which reveal the magical words, under your deep foliage how many centuries have gone by!"[58] The same harmonies sound as Merlin pleads silence. Alluding to his enchantment by Viviane, he implores: "Question me no more, oh King! My tongue must remain silent. I left my secret prison to tell you, accept your fate!"[59] Merlin foretells that Arthus will soon depart this life but is destined for a glorious return. As he makes this final proclamation, the uppermost chromatic line from the *Viviane* progression, which has underpinned the entire prophecy, joins in counterpoint with a brilliant brass statement of one of the opera's central motives, labeled by Gallois "le grand thème d'Arthus" (see ex. 10).[60] Arthus is sanguine about his fate, but presses Merlin about the crime that threatens his kingdom. He asks (Chausson indicates "avec hésitation"): "Genièvre . . . Genièvre and Lancelot are innocent, aren't they?" Merlin does not respond. Arthus becomes increasingly agitated and declares: "Know that your silence condemns them! Merlin, I am your King! Speak, I command you!"[61] Yet Merlin remains mute. The trees close up, the vision of Merlin disappears, and the *Viviane* music sounds for a final time. As Arthus suggests, Merlin's silence implicitly confirms the lovers' adultery. But in-

[53]Undated letter, *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925): 176–77: "Tu veux que je te parle d'Arthus? Je travaille en ce moment au changement de décor. Je viens même d'écrire à Vidal pour qu'il me sache par les machinistes de l'Opéra combien il faut de minutes pour planter la cour cloîtrée où doit apparaître Merlin. S'il faut plus de quatre ou cinq minutes, je serai très malheureux. Ça devient un énorme morceau de musique.

"A propos de l'apparition de Merlin, j'ai fait un changement dans le texte. Merlin devait apparaître endormi et parler sans ouvrir les yeux. Mais Arthus, lui aussi, doit paraître endormi, à la fin du troisième acte. C'est trop! Je vois d'ici, la plaisanterie de la future ouvreuse, que c'est ma musique qui met tous mes interprètes dans cet état. Je supprime donc le sommeil de Merlin, je lui permets d'ouvrir les yeux, mais toute espèce de geste lui demeure interdit.

"Que dirais-tu si les arbres s'entr'ouvraient, au moment de l'apparition, sur les accords du commencement de *Viviane*? J'ai envie de le fair. Je crois que ça me donnera quelque chose de joli. Et, de plus, si je cherche d'autres accords, il y a bien des chances pour que je trouve moins bien. Je n'en suis pas encore là. Il y a la grande scène d'Arthus seul, importante et difficile."

[54]Benoit-Otis, *Ernest Chausson,* Le Roi Arthus *et l'opéra wagnérien en France,* 139.

[55]Act II, five measures after rehearsal 79: "Viens! Où donc es-tu? Merlin, entends ma voix!"

[56]The piano-vocal score (Paris: Editions Salabert, 1995) mistakenly has an F^6_4 chord at this point (act II, two measures before rehearsal 80). The orchestral score, reproduced in manuscript facsimile (Munich: Musikproduktion Höflich, 2008), has the correct minor sonority.

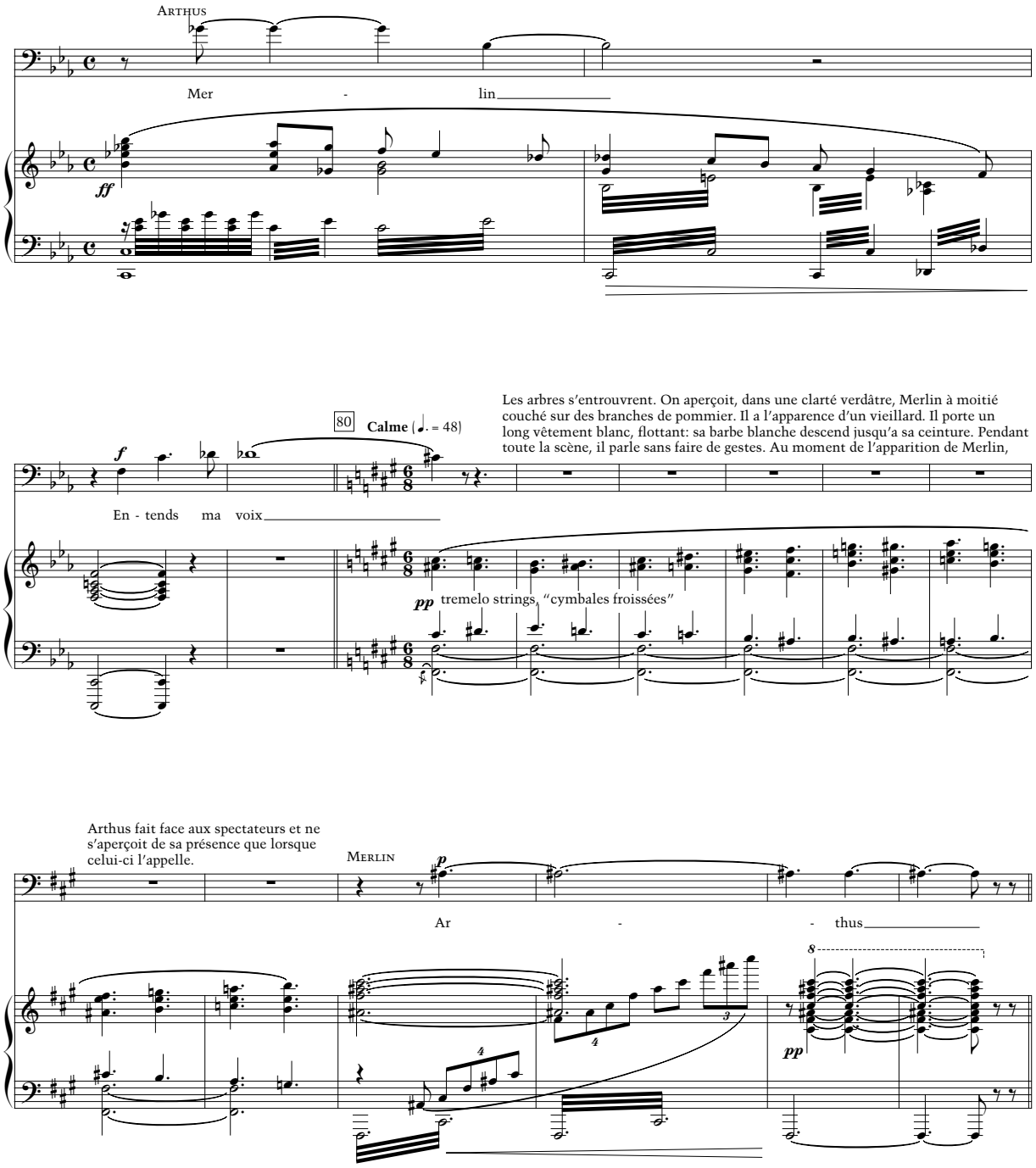
[57]This unusual percussion effect, literally "crumpled cymbals," produces a soft metallic buzz similar to a roll on an open hi-hat. One player holds a pair of crash cymbals horizontally, and almost touching, while a second player rolls gently on the top cymbal. The distance between the two cymbals determines the volume and timbre of the buzz. The effect is also found in Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin*. I thank Jeffrey Milarsky for this explanation.

[58]Act II, rehearsal 81: "Pommiers verts, pommiers prophétiques, qui révélez les mots magiques, sous votre feuillage profond combien de siècles s'écoulèrent!" Jean Gallois notes that apple trees have spiritual resonances in Celtic tradition, symbolizing knowledge and the choice between earthly and spiritual existence. *Ernest Chausson,* 397.

[59]Act II, two measures after rehearsal 87: "Ne m'interroge plus, ô Roi! Ma langue doit rester muette. J'ai quitté ma prison secrète pour te dire, résigne-toi!"

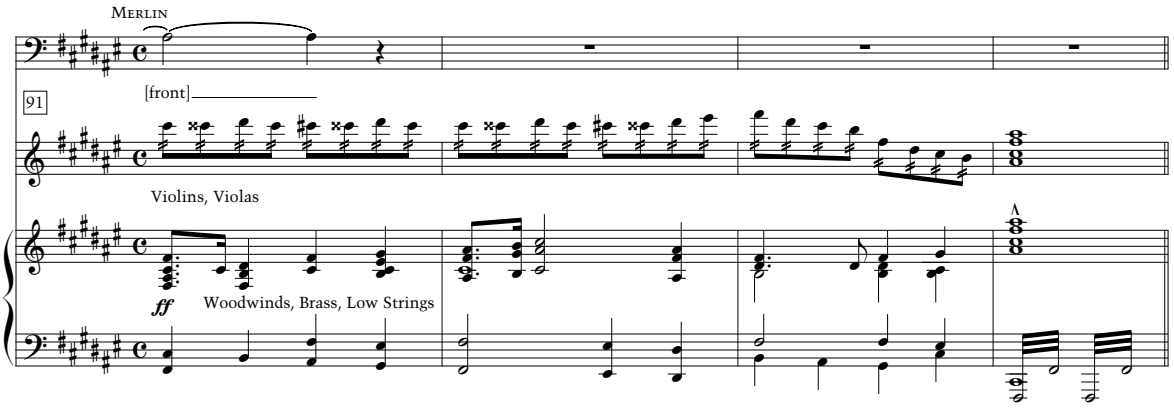
[60]Gallois, *Ernest Chausson,* 387.

[61]Act II, four measures before rehearsal 93: "Genièvre, n'est-ce pas, Genièvre et Lancelot sont innocents?" Act II, seven measures after rehearsal 93: "Songe que ton silence les accuse! Merlin, je suis ton Roi! Parle, parle, je l'ordonne!"



[The trees part. We see, in a greenish light, Merlin half lying on apple tree branches. He has the appearance of an old man. He wears a long white robe, floating: his white beard comes down to his belt. Throughout the scene, he speaks without making gestures. At the moment of Merlin's appearance, Arthus faces the audience and does not notice his presence until Merlin calls to him.]

Example 9: *Le Roi Arthus,* act II, four measures before rehearsal 80 to twelve after 80.



Example 10: *Le Roi Arthus,* act II, rehearsal 91.

stead of voicing his accusation, Merlin allows the orchestra to speak for him. The episode can be read, then, as a metaphor for Chausson's aesthetic of musical signification. Pure sound can convey what words—and voices—are unwilling or unable to express.[62]

The exchange between Merlin and Arthus has several additional layers of symbolic resonance. In the concluding moments of *Le Roi Arthus,* the first part of Merlin's prophecy comes to pass. Lancelot dies and the Round Table disintegrates. Alone, with his life's work shattered, Arthus implores God to grant him comfort in eternal sleep. An invisible chorus sings the *Viviane* chords in dulcet, wordless tones; a barge filled with angelic women approaches the shore. Arthus boards the vessel and settles into a peaceful slumber. The barge floats off into the golden light of the setting sun as the chorus intones the chromatic *Viviane* line in a radiant peroration. The music from the Merlin episode thus returns, again without text, to catalyze the apotheosis of the drama's protagonist.

The Merlin scene also catalyzed a breakthrough for the drama's composer. The illicit affair between Lancelot and Genièvre has obvious parallels to the legend of Tristan and Isolde, and Chausson was acutely aware of these similarities throughout the composition of *Arthus*. In 1886, his first year of work on the project, he remarked to Poujaud: "The greatest shortcoming of my drama is no doubt the resemblance of its subject to that of *Tristan*. That wouldn't be so bad if I could manage to dewagnerize myself. Wagnerian in the subject and Wagnerian in the music, isn't that too much at the same time?"[63] Chausson seems to have made his peace with the opera's thematic similarities to *Tristan* ("That wouldn't be so bad . . ."), but he continued to wrestle with the *maître de Bayreuth*'s musical legacy (". . . if I could manage to dewagnerize myself"). The Merlin scene marked a turning point in this struggle. From this point on, Chausson found a more confident and individualized musical voice. In 1893 he confided to Claude Debussy: "I've resumed, without too much trouble, my third act. I am rather pleased with what I am writing at the moment. It seems to me that it is becoming clearer and dewagnerized. My wife, for whom I played the first scene, told me she hardly recognized me. But I suppose that she is exaggerating. Other-

[62]As a young man, Chausson confessed that he preferred the ineffability of music to the specificity of text or poetic ideas: "I cannot make up my mind to *speak,* to express in words what I feel. Symphonic music is a purer, more profound language and it is the only one I could use well. I have always abhorred words." [Je ne peux me décider à *parler,* à exprimer par des mots ce que je sens. La musique symphonique est une langue plus pure, plus profonde et c'est la seule que je pourrais bien employer. J'ai toujours eu horreur de la parole.] Entry in Chausson's journal, dated 17 October [1875], reprinted in *Écrits inédits,* 42.

[63]Letter dated "Cannes, 1886," reprinted in *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925): 155: "Le plus gros défaut de mon drame est sans doute l'analogie du sujet avec celui de *Tristan*. Cela ne serait rien encore, si je pouvais arriver à me déwagnériser. Wagnérien par le sujet et wagnérien par la musique, n'est-ce pas trop à la fois?"

wise, you would see me obliged to redo the first two acts once again!"[64]

Chausson's contemporaries also acknowledged this stylistic shift. When *Le Roi Arthus* received its posthumous premiere at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels in 1903, critics agreed that the opera's Wagnerian tint, while notable at the beginning, becomes less pronounced over the course of the work. For instance, Gabriel Fauré criticized the opera's similarity to *Tristan,* but limited the comparison to the first two acts of *Arthus*.[65] Several writers singled out the Merlin scene for special praise. While acknowledging the correspondences between *Tristan* and act I of *Arthus,* Charles Joly claimed that Chausson "freed himself from all influence" in the second act and noted that the composer's personality "becomes more pronounced with an elegiac charm especially in the splendid evocation of Merlin."[66] Pierre Lalo praised the Merlin episode's "singular and profound emotion," attributing the scene's poignancy to its personal resonance with Chausson. Lalo writes, "if the musician is so eloquent here, it is because herein his innermost voice finds expression."[67] Gustave Samazeuilh's review in *Le Guide musical* describes the Merlin episode as an "exquisite scene where Chausson's lyricism manifests itself in full." Samazeuilh notes that the encounter demonstrates greater dramatic strength than the opera's first act, "but it is incontestably in the final two scenes of the drama that the musician, now aware of himself and having found his true way, soars and surpasses himself."[68]

Compared to the beginning of the opera, the final act employs notably more modern timbres and harmonic colors: the snarl of a contrabass clarinet, whole-tone motives, and parallel block chords. In Huebner's formulation, the work ends "with frieze-like patterns painted in dark instrumental hues" in contrast to the symphonic/Wagnerian discourse of the opera's outset.[69] The conclusion of *Le Roi Arthus* thus features two transformations: that of the title character, who drifts peacefully beyond the horizon; and that of Chausson himself, who transcends the legacy of *maître de Bayreuth* over the course of the drama's three acts. Chausson effects this dual transformation—within the world of the opera, and in his life as an artist—by invoking the Merlin music from *Viviane*. While the composer's musical language had evolved between the revision of *Viviane* and the completion of *Arthus,* the quotation is a fitting, self-referential nod to the work in which Chausson first wrestled with the two major preoccupations of his career. He recast *Viviane,* his only programmatic composition, in a setting where representationalism was not a liability, but an asset. And by referencing his first attempt at "dewagnerization," Chausson demonstrates how far he has come in asserting his independence as a composer. In a journal entry from 20 February 1892, the composer mused: "To create oneself—that is the whole effort of life."[70] It was an effort that Chausson made throughout his career, from his first orchestral score to the concluding minutes of his magnum opus.

Abstract.
Ernest Chausson made two major aesthetic decisions in the mid-1880s: he resolved to "dewagnerize"

[64]This undated letter is in response to Debussy's letter from 24 October 1893. Reprinted in *La Revue musical* 7 (1925): 123: "Moi, j'ai repris, et sans trop de peine, mon troisième acte. Je ne suis pas mécontent de ce que j'écris en ce moment. Il me semble que ça se clarifie et déwagnérise. Ma femme a qui j'ai joué la première scène m'a dit qu'elle ne me reconnaissait presque pas. Mais je suppose que c'est tout de même exagéré. Sans cela, me voyez-vous obligé de refaire encore une fois les deux premiers actes!"

[65]Review of *Le Roi Arthus, Le Figaro,* 1 December 1903, 4.

[66]Charles Joly, "*Le Roi Arthus,*" *Le Théâtre* 122, January 1904 (II): 14: "la personnalité d'Ernest Chausson se dégage de toute influence; elle s'accuse surtout avec un charme élégiaque dans la splendide évocation de Merlin."

[67]Pierre Lalo, review of *Le Roi Arthus, Le Temps,* 22 December 1903, 3: "une émotion singulière et profonde"; "si le musicien a ici tant d'éloquence, c'est que ses voix intimes s'expriment en lui."

[68]Gustave Samazeuilh, "*Le Roi Arthus,*" *Le Guide musical* 49, no. 49 (6 December 1903): 841: "cette scène exquise, où le lyrisme de Chausson se manifeste tout entire"; "Mais c'est incontestablement au cours des deux derniers tableaux du drame que le musicien, conscient désormais de lui même et ayant trouvé sa vraie voie, a pris son essor et s'est surpassé lui-même."

[69]Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle,* 391.

[70]*Écrits inédits,* 295: "Se créer soi-même, c'est là tout l'effort de la vie."

himself and declared that he would no longer write program music. These developments were coeval with Chausson's revisions of *Viviane* (composed 1882–83, revised 1887 and 1893), a symphonic poem that shares musical material and subject matter with the composer's magnum opus, *Le Roi Arthus* (1886–95). Drawing on unpublished sketches and manuscripts of *Viviane,* I trace how Chausson's evolving aesthetics manifested themselves in his revisions of the work. While he suppressed evidence of Wagnerian mimicry, the process of "dewagnerization" was equivocal; *Viviane* ultimately became more beholden to certain Wagnerian dramaturgical ideals. At the same time, Chausson brought *Viviane* more closely in line with sonata procedures, inviting the listener to appreciate the work on its purely sonic merits at a time when the composer was becoming less sympathetic to the idea of "descriptive music." I conclude by discussing the connections between *Viviane* and *Le Roi Arthus* and exploring how Chausson's reuse of material from the symphonic poem sheds light on issues of influence and signification in the opera. Keywords: Ernest Chausson, French Wagnerism, program music, sketch studies, revision

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE (FALL 2017)

ARTICLES

J. Mackenzie Pierce: To Write at the Speed of Sound: Musical Inscription beyond the Phonograph

Erinn Knyt: "A History of Man and His Desire": Ferruccio Busoni and Faust

Amanda L. Lalonde: Flowers over the Abyss: The Nineteenth-Century Musical Uncanny and the Ombra Topic