the fascinating, assured study of quartal harmony by Médicis: ‘Koechlin quartomancien’ (quartal-diviner), which embraces comparison with Debussy and Milhaud, engagement with Koechlin’s theories, set theory, and in-depth analysis of the song ‘Amethyste’ (1905–8).

‘Musical Language’ ranges from Bachian traditions of counterpoint and fugue (Cathé), through Koechlin’s various methodological treatises, including that on orchestration and its mooted connection to his quartet writing (Florence Doé de Maindreville). Cathé’s other item, ‘Argumentative structure of some treatises by Charles Koechlin’, is a thought-provoking piece on the complex relationship between the composer as creative artist and as theorist. Meanwhile, Denis Huneau offers a questioning, perceptive assessment of the originality, durability, and flaws of Koechlin’s seminal Traité de l’harmonie.

Appropriately, the ‘Cinema’ section begins with Jérôme Rossi’s lavishly illustrated study, blending music examples and screen shots, to convey Koechlin’s film music for Victoire de la vie (1938). With thorough discussion of the context, scene-by-scene scenario, musical sketches, manuscripts, and edited scores, Orledge’s engaging contribution offers the reader a real insight into his meticulous process of ‘Editing Daisy Hamilton’. Finally, apropos Koechlin’s relations with his contemporaries, mention should be made of Collins’s concise, well-structured essay on what might seem, superficially, an unlikely ‘friendly and artistic’ alliance (p. 527) between Koechlin and Manuel de Falla, but one which is in fact supported by an extensive body of personal correspondence.

As a whole, the volume is generously illustrated: sixteen pages of photographic plates, a range of useful tabulations, diagrams, music examples, occasional manuscript facsimiles, and a notable amount of referenced quotation and poetic texts. With the unfortunate exception of a clanger involving reversed titles and page numbers in the contents for Cathé’s two contributions, it is reasonably well produced. Greater consistency in the presentation of music examples would nevertheless have enhanced the appearance: sometimes these are too small and faint for comfortable reading. The use of rigorous footnotes over endnotes is appreciated, but again the small font size can be a bit challenging. While the brief contributor biographies and indexes of names and works are helpful for the reader, a comprehensive index that also referenced concepts would have rendered the book’s contents more accessible. Equally, a selective bibliography of writings on and by Koechlin would have been a pertinent inclusion.

Overall, this substantial volume is strongly recommended and should fill an appropriate niche within French music studies, demonstrating the rich diversity of available material on Koechlin and hopefully generating further momentum in both French- and English-speaking scholarship on the composer.

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Roger Nichols’s biography of Ravel is a revision and amplification of his original 1977 volume on the composer—a cyclical return within his own scholarly output, musically speaking. It therefore seems a fitting moment to review his career. Spanning four decades and devoted predominantly to French music, Nichols’s work has been remarkable for its volume and variety: a monograph on Parisian life and music between the wars (The Harlequin Years (London, 2002)); multiple critical biographies (two of Debussy, two of Ravel, and one of Messiaen), an eminently useful series that compiles utterances and reminberances of individual composers (Debussy, Ravel, Satie, and Mendelssohn), interviews with significant historical figures (Madeleine Milhaud), editions of composers’ letters and correspondence (Debussy and Saint-Saëns), critical editions of musical scores (notably Ravel’s piano music and Duparc’s songs for Peters), and translations of important monographs by other authors from French into English (Jean-Michel Nectoux on Fauré, Harry Halbreich on Honegger), in addition to many radio broadcasts, liner notes, and book reviews. As impressive as these writings have been, the new biography of Ravel is surely his magnum opus.

In Ravel, Nichols weaves a multitude of facts and perspectives into an account whose coverage of the composer’s life and work is so comprehensive that it must now be considered the authoritative biography of Ravel. We should still consult other biographies, of course, for each is valuable in its own right: Roland-Manuel’s 1938 volume, irreplaceable for its intimacy with its subject; Arbie Orenstein’s 1975 study (as well as its subsequent revised editions) for the efficiency of its narrative and
enduring usefulness of its appendices; and Marcel Marnat’s 1986 work for its laudable attempt to situate this music within the seemingly limitless panorama of European culture at the fin de siècle. But Nichols’s Ravel is the most up-to-date and satisfying for the balance it strikes between a conservative focus on the composer and a more liberal admission of relevant context.

The book is divided into nine chapters, a postlude, and several appendices, including an excellent chronology of the composer’s life. The nine chapters lay out his life in roughly equal portions: most span a densely lived three years, with the notable exceptions of his callow youth (1875–1902), mid-life military service (1914–20), and gradual decline (1928–37), all periods of lesser artistic productivity. The Ravel that emerges from this scrupulous investigation is generous, open-minded, curious, principled, honest to the point of bluntness, modest but aware of his own worth, and something of a tinkerer; in his most popular piece, the Boléro, Nichols finds that ‘Ravel’s interest, as so often, was in being homo faber—in kicking notes around and seeing what could be made of them’ (p. 302). But Nichols also wishes to avoid endorsing the time-worn and rather dismissive interpretation of Ravel as a mechanical engineer of notes, a composer supposedly too constrained in his poetics to take a risk. Consequently he introduces the notion of Ravel as ‘pirate’, which shifts attention away from the ‘skill and control of the clockmaker’ to emphasize instead his ‘daring and aggression’, particularly in his musical choices (p. 348).

Ravel relies most strongly on the composer’s correspondence—and justifiably so, since it is a biography and the correspondence is illuminating in many respects—but it also draws on many other sources. Examples of recent Ravel scholarship in French that may be less well known to Anglophone readers include Étienne Rousseau-Platto’s account of Ravel’s life in the Basque country and Philippe Rodriguez’s work on the Apaches, the artistic coterie to which Ravel belonged. Equally helpful is Nichols’s consistent citation of reviews for important premieres, whose placement immediately after the discussion of each work not only enlivens the narrative with other voices but also continually reorients our historical understanding of Ravel’s contemporary listeners. Indeed, his decision to include reviews of premieres in places other than Paris—Great Britain, in particular—reveals the variety of opinion and thus sheds light on the actual heterogeneity of this audience. Even the grand sweep of this biography cannot completely conceal an abiding interest in the multiplicity of perspectives on his subject: what else could have inspired Nichols to probe such relatively far-flung sources as the diary of Rosette Ibert, the memoirs of Louise Varèse, and the journals of Arnold Bennett for their possible references to Ravel?

Nichols’s multiple perspectives, to which his composer ‘remembrance’ series is further testament, flows from a general abundance of detail, a trait that pays frequent dividends in insights that modulate smoothly from the specific to the general and back again. When discussing Shehzade he affirms Ravel’s well-known admission of a Debussyan presence within the song cycle but also redirects focus away from harmony and form—the more typical indices of such influence—towards orchestration, which he finds to be ‘firmer and brighter than in Pelléas; the pale Mélisande is here given body as well as soul, and the prevailing texture of low, soft strings under high, clear woodwind suggests rather the voluptuous flesh under sparkling jewellery that we see in Gustave Moreau’s many studies of Salomé’ (p. 54). Later in the book he remarks that ‘une rose dans les ténèbres’—the final line from Mallarmé’s Surgi du croupe et du bond’, appearing as the third of Ravel’s Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé—‘also recalls the rhythm of Mélisande’s “je vois une rose dans les ténèbres” from Act III, Scene 1 of Debussy’s opera, forging a tenuous link between the mystery of her character and the alchimie du verbe of Mallarmé’s poem’ (p. 156). The rich commentary in both examples is the fruit of a persistent attention to detail, especially insofar as it may make new connections and engender new understandings.

In addition to shedding light on the Debussy–Ravel axis, this penchant for detail also penetrates into performance. Drawing on his experience as an editor of Ravel’s piano music, Nichols observes at one point how the composer’s fingering in a personal copy of Le tombeau de Couperin forces pianists to lift their entire hand from the keyboard before repeating the same motif, thereby interjecting small ‘respirations’ into a passage from the ‘Prelude’ that is often played breathlessly (pp. 192–3); indeed, it leaves me to wonder whether we shouldn’t reconceive much more of his supposedly strait-laced instrumental music in terms of greater freedom, one won through the performing body, whether dancer or musician. Nichols’s concern for the realization of Ravel’s music in performance also leads him to...
examine the history of recordings and the development of a performance practice for this repertory; examples include his insightful comparison of Paul Wittgenstein's recording of the Piano Concerto for the Left Hand with the one made by Jacques Fèvrier (p. 321), as well as the many references to performers' testimony that encompasses not only the usual suspects (the pianists Marguerite Long, Henriette Faure, and Vlado Perlemuter) but also the trombonist Léo Arnaud-Vauchant and the baritone Yvon le Marc Hadour.

Ravel benefits on every page from the discernment of a scholar who has worked with this material for decades. Towards the end of the book, Nichols sums up his experience as a biographer in an honest, if somewhat deflating conclusion: "Ultimately, trying to pin Ravel down is about as futile as trying to catch [the demon] Scarbo in a bucket: he is always one step in front—or to the side" (p. 356). Even though this statement is aimed equally at biographer and reader, I feel that Nichols does not always heed his own advice but instead occasionally 'pins Ravel down'. For example, when discussing a 1911 review in which a critic makes judgements over the French school's relative quietism and over the paramount value of idiosyncratic performance, he finds these assessments to be 'absolutely on the mark', especially when referring to the String Quartet and the Histoires naturelles (p. 121). 'To my mind, however, they do not deserve endorsement. We need only recall the first movement of the String Quartet to realize that this music is not passive and withdrawn, but rather, however delicately, is constantly shuttling among a range of affects—from the innocence of the primary theme to the melancholy of the secondary theme, the tribulation of the development, and the radiant nostalgia of the coda, to name only the most prominent stations within the form. In addition, 'idiosyncratic performance' is merely Nichols's euphemistic summary of the reviewer's take on the Histoires naturelles, which, as the product of an allegedly 'decadent French modern', is supposed to be so bizarre and nugatory as to rely entirely on the antics of a female vocalist to achieve any measure of success. Most of the time, Nichols seems to share my scepticism towards such stereotypes, for instance when he distances himself from "traditionalists for whom "a certain softness in expression" was a central, even determining quality of French music" (p. 228), but this only makes the exceptions stand out further.

To emphasize exceptional passages in a short review of a long book runs the risk of misrepresentation. However, it is a risk that I willingly assume in order to address an issue of particular importance to this journal's readership: the significance of the book for Ravel studies as an academic field. By adopting this perspective we are better able to identify those statements that may inhibit future scholarship. From among a range of possibilities, I will focus on three. The first is Nichols's discussion of the 1907 mélodie Ravel composed to set Henri de Régnier's poem, 'Les grands vents venus d'outremer'. 'Frankly the song must be regarded as a failure, certainly when compared with a piece in the same vein such as Debussy's "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest" [a prelude for solo piano]. This is one of the very rare occasions when Ravel's complexity descends into complication' (p. 92).

Nichols's opinion is not unusual: whenever previous surveys of Ravel's music come across this piece, the little they say about it is typically negative. But even if we agree that this song fails to conform to our sense of Ravel's characteristic and successful music, a perspective more appropriate to Ravel studies would be to investigate its possible raison d'être more deeply, rather than dismiss it altogether.

Later in the book, Nichols asserts that 'the "element of eroticism"' in the Chansons madécasses is 'almost unique in Ravel's mature work' (p. 279). This is also a familiar claim, since the composer's post-war music is usually conceived as having been 'stripped bare' (dépouillé) of its earlier, finisecular appeal to sensuality. However, it all depends on our definition of 'eroticism'. If we limit it to the explicit, textual evocation of sexual desire, then it is indeed uncommon in this stretch of repertory, appearing only in the Chansons and a few numbers from L'enfant et les sortilèges. But if we grant the semiclassics of eroticism freer range and admit its possible implication wherever we find exoticism, embodiment, and seductive repetition, then many more candidates arise: the dance music of Le tombeau de Couperin, La valse, L'enfant, and the Boléro, the ostinato-ridden Sonata for Violin and Cello, the eclectic Sonata for Violin and Piano (with the flirtatious blues of the second movement and the bachcanalian onslaught of the third), the charismatic Tzigane, and so forth. Indeed, the 'tension between control and anarchy' (p. 329) that Nichols discovers in La valse, the Boléro, and the finale to the G major Piano Concerto partakes of the aesthetics of eroticism that Stephen Downes has outlined in his study, The Muse as Eros (Aldershot, 2006)."
is Lawrence Kramer, not Simon Morrison, as stated in the hardcover edition on pp. 147–8.)

Eroticism is also at play in the third example, which involves the perennially tricky issue of Ravel’s dandyism. Nichols begins by acknowledging that ‘much has been made of Ravel’s inclination towards dandyism’ but then suggests that too little attention has been paid to what it ‘entailed’ (p. 17). To explain this more fully he cites the following passages from Baudelaire:

Dandyism is not, as some unthinking people appear to believe, an extravagant taste for one’s toilette and material elegance. For the perfect dandy, these things are only a symbol of the aristocratic superiority of his mind. Also, in his eyes, which are fastened above all on distinction, the perfection of his toilette consists in absolute simplicity, which is, indeed, the best way of distinguishing oneself. Dandyism is above all a burning need to fashion for oneself an originality that is contained within the outer limits of what is acceptable (pp. 17–18; italics reproduced from Nichols’s citation).

Here is the conclusion that Nichols draws from Baudelaire: ‘So a dandy should not provoke outrage; he should merely mark out for himself an individual position such as anybody could have assumed, if only they had thought of it. There is surely a link here with Ravel’s insistence later in life that any composer could have written what he had, if only they had been prepared to put in the hard work’ (p. 18).

It is possible that Nichols intends, in subtle fashion, to sound the false note in Baudelaire’s commentary by assimilating it alongside Ravel’s more blatantly outrageous claims, but the basic sincerity of tone throughout the biography leads me to conclude otherwise. If my perception is correct, then Nichols, too, has failed to explain ‘what dandyism entails’ by having taken both Baudelaire and Ravel at their word, rather than exposing the irony that they are using to repel literal interpretation either of them or of their actions. ‘Absolute simplicity’ is not obviously ‘the best way of distinguishing oneself’, nor is Ravel’s music the mere consequence of ‘hard work’. Nevertheless both statements do succeed at another level—namely, in demonstrating the dandy’s love of paradox. Indeed, to think of Ravel’s oeuvre as the work of a compositional Everyman is all the more hilarious when we realize that this claim, disguised as common modesty, could easily have slipped by without notice.

I am dwelling on the issue of Ravel’s dandyism because its potential importance to Ravel studies can hardly be overestimated. Despite its complexity, its deliberate conflation of life and art should be an extremely attractive prospect for scholars interested in pursuing biography and musical analysis simultaneously and exploring the consequences of their mutual implication. In other words, if dandies treat the self as an artwork, and if these dandies are themselves artists, then dandyism actively invites us to interpret their art as a mirror or even a surrogate for personal identity. This relation functions smoothly for biographers until they encounter some element in the art that they want to exclude from the life, and vice versa. In Ravel’s case this element is his sexuality, which was recognized as ‘enigmatic’ even in his own time: although some have argued for his heterosexuality and others for his homosexuality, no conclusive evidence for any particular sexuality has yet come to light. But even if it did, we would be mistaken to suppose that it would fundamentally alter our understanding of his music and his persona, since these have already been strongly defined by dandyism. As I have discussed elsewhere, dandyism is a queer relation to the world that intends to challenge bourgeois normativity in a variety of domains, including sexuality. As an individual, Ravel may well have had a specific sexuality, but the answers that his overarching dandyst persona provides to this question are themselves questions: Why do you want to know? Why must the answer be either/or? What makes you think that sexuality is a question that can be answered, whether in these terms or any others? Thus, my solution to Ravel’s ‘sexual enigma’ is to treat the enigma as its own solution.

Nichols deals with this issue differently. He acknowledges at the end of the book that Ravel ‘never seems to have made open avowal of any brand of sexuality’ and even identifies homo-, hetero-, and bisexuality as all potentially applicable (p. 350), but elsewhere he rehearses familiar arguments to foreclose the possibility of Ravel’s queerness, citing the necessity of solitude for the creation of his art and an overly strong attachment to his mother (p. 199). He also mentions the anecdote in which Jacques Durand invites Ralph Vaughan Williams, in Ravel’s presence, to visit a female brothel; although the anecdote does not say anything about Ravel’s actions, he nevertheless concludes the paragraph by asking whether Durand ‘would have made the suggestion unless it was presumed [Ravel] might accept?’ (p. 96). Nichols obviously supposes the answer to be ‘no’, but I do not find good justification for this assumption, regardless of whatever Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht may have said to
Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt about Ravel's interest in female prostitutes (p. 117).

Equally questionable is Nichols's collaboration with Manuel Rosenthal in attacking Alma Mahler's testimony about Ravel. Mahler writes that Ravel 'was a narcissist. He came to breakfast rouged and perfumed, and he loved the bright satin robes that he wore in the morning. He related all things to his bodily and facial charms. Though short, he was so well-proportioned, with such elegance and such elastic mobility of figure, that he seemed quite beautiful' (p. 221). Nichols responds by saying that the charge of 'narcissism' is an exaggeration that might stem from Mahler's own narcissism in Ravel's apparent indifference to her 'bodily and facial charms'. He then introduces a rebuttal by Rosenthal, who not only declares that Ravel 'absolutely never used make-up' but also admits that he did, indeed, have

a Japanese dressing gown—black with gold embroidery. But what was important about that? That's how he was and one could well understand that he wanted to compensate for his lack of height (which he knew people were always thinking about) through a kind of dandyism. He liked to look stylish [il était coquet]. So what? There was no call to be shocked by it. It was merely an entertainment and he himself was entertained by it. Whenever he'd bought a new suit, a new tie, a new shirt, he would show them to his friends and say 'Isn't it nice?'—At heart he would have liked to be a playboy. He wouldn't have objected to being a strapping young fellow. (p. 221)

Once again, I do not read these texts the way that Nichols does. Regardless of whether Ravel actually wore make-up, perfume, and satin robes when staying with Mahler in Vienna for a few weeks in autumn 1920, it is easy to comprehend her impression of him as a 'narcissist', since the term is strongly related to dandyism and the two might even have been synonymous to her. Moreover, she seems to ascribe a rather positive meaning to it as she reaches her conclusion that he was a 'beautiful' man. Rosenthal's comments, however, express so much defensive-ness about the possibility of Ravel's queerness that it seems to make him the unreliable narrator, not Mahler, in contrast to Nichols's subsequent assertions about her faulty recollection. (Nichols does later cast doubt on Rosenthal's reminiscences, but only in the less contentious matter of the orchestration of the Don Quichotte songs (p. 334).) If Nichols had wished, he could have supported Mahler's claims by mentioning that Ravel would later appear in drag at a party in 1928 (p. 294). Instead, he begins the next paragraph by telling us that Ravel's other hosts in Vienna, Berta and Emil Zuckermandl, gave Ravel the nickname 'Ariel', which I assume is an allusion to the androgynous sprite in The Tempest (p. 222). It is difficult to say whether this bit of apparently unintended irony trumps that in Rosenthal's defence of Ravel's heterosexuality, where his assertions of the composer's wish to have been 'a playboy' and a 'strapping young fellow' could just as easily express homoerotic desire.

Fascinating but infuriating, the dandy is a bird of paradise who preens his plumage and perfects his aplomb upon a lofty perch while we rage about in vain below, struggling to salvage something univocal from his legacy of equivocal words and deeds. A case in point is 'L'indifférent' from Shéhérazade. In discussing this song, Nichols quotes the well-known passage in which Ravel's longtime friend Emile Vuillermoz identifies it as an 'exceptional confession'—presumably of the composer's homosexuality, since its sweet languish seems to adopt the perspective of the putative male narrator in Tristan Klingsor's poem, rather than the 'indifferent' boy for whom he lusted (p. 57). As we might expect, Nichols uses various arguments to reject Vuillermoz's interpretation, but there is, once again, more room for speculation than Nichols is willing to acknowledge. For example, it is also possible that Vuillermoz was simply using 'L'indifférent' as an opportunity to express something he knew with certainty about Ravel through other means but did not want to utter directly; moreover, the mention of 'shame' in Ravel's later admission that Shéhérazade is 'full of things I am ashamed today to have written'—a comment that Nichols cites on the same page, but not to this effect—begs understanding in personal as well as musical terms.

Regardless of the composer's actual orientation, his dandyist persona suffices as an interpretative lens and is arguably even preferable to others. From this perspective one of the most attractive aspects of Klingsor's poem is its ability to evoke a complex response with a few simple strokes: the narrator's unrestricted desire arouses our sympathy, the lack of reciprocity between lover and beloved amuses us (albeit somewhat darkly), and the Proustian paradox that desire thrives on its frustration edifies us beyond any specific scenario. Ravel's compositional performance of this text interpellates us respectively in the lush sound of the opening, the pointed interruption at 'musique fausse' near the mid-point—which gently but unmistakably punctures the bubble of the narrator's narcissistic fantasy—and the resumption of the

A summary of significant dates and places in Karel Husa’s life suggests a successful career as a composer. Born in Prague in 1921, he studied at the Prague Conservatory from 1941. Then on to Paris in 1946, where he lived for eight years, a pupil of Honegger, Nadia Boulanger, and André Cluytens (for conducting). An offer of a job at Cornell took him to America in 1954, where his career continued to flourish as a well-regarded American university composer and conductor. He retired with full honours in 1992. Those with a knowledge of Czech political history, however, will note the significance of these dates. On 17 November 1939 Czech universities were closed by the Nazis, thwarting Husa’s original plan to study civil engineering. The Prague Conservatory was not a university-level institution and thus not closed, and Husa, who had shown some interest in music, registered there to avoid being drafted as a labourer in German factories. When the war ended he moved to the newly created university-level Prague Academy of Performing Arts with his teacher, Jaroslav Řídký. By the time of the Czech Communist putsch in 1948 he had been in Paris for a couple of years, following a well-trodden path for Czech composers such as Martinů and Kaprálová. Was he instructed by the Czech authorities to return? This question is not answered at first, but towards the end of the book Vysloužil writes: ‘When after the Communist putsch in February 1948 he was not allowed further study abroad by the Czechoslovak authorities, he decided to remain in Paris’ (p. 154). The fact that he was listed as a Czech composer at the Brussels ISCM festival in 1950 caused official disfavour (p. 36) and Husa was thereafter regarded by the authorities as a renegade exile, not permitted, for instance, to attend the funerals of his parents. It was only forty years later with the fall of the Communist regime in 1989 that Husa was able to return to his homeland—not permanently but to accept the honours that Czech institutions began to bestow on him.

Now 91, Husa is (at the time of writing) still alive, as is the author, Jiří Vysloužil, publishing this substantial book at the age of 87. Ironies pile up as one contemplates the combination of these elderly gentlemen. In 1948 Vysloužil was an ambitious young Communist apparatchik who would have had no option but to go along with the banning of a promising Czech composer living abroad. The author of many other works including a definitive biography of Hába, Vysloužil is one of the great survivors in Czech musicology. While no doubt a thorn in the flesh of the older musical professoriat (he became effectively head of department by the 1960s), he used his strong political standing to maintain a fine department of musicology in Brno, which, especially after the failed Prague Spring, increasingly served as a safe haven in a politically uncertain world. A politically compromised member of his staff was not dismissed but simply taken off teaching duties, devoting his time instead to an immensely useful dictionary of Czech musical culture. The annual Brno colloquia became one of the chief meeting places for East and West German musicologists. It seems somehow fitting in what might well be his last musicological act that Jiří Vysloužil should write the first Czech monograph on Karel Husa and welcome him within the pantheon of Czech composers: ‘With the return of Karel Husa to Bohemia, with the return of his musical works, a new living chapter began to be written in Czech music from which he had been unjustly excluded before’ (p. 152).

New Grove II (2001) characterizes Husa as an ‘American composer and conductor of Czech birth’ and provides purely American literature