2009

Charles Koechlin's Silhouettes de Comédie for Bassoon and Orchestra: An in Depth Study

Amelia Fannin
CHARLES KOECHLIN’S *SILHOUETTES DE COMÉDIE*

FOR BASSOON AND ORCHESTRA: AN IN DEPTH STUDY

By

AMELIA FANNIN

A Treatise submitted to the
College of Music
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Music

Degree Awarded:
Summer Semester, 2009
The members of the committee approve the treatise of Amelia Fannin defended on April 29, 2009.

________________________________________
Jeffrey Keesecker
Professor Directing Treatise

________________________________________
Richard Clary
Outside Committee Member

________________________________________
Eric Ohlsson
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members.
I would like to thank my husband, family, and teachers for their patience and support.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ............................................................................................................ v

1. BIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................ 1

2. EARLY COMPOSITIONS FOR BASSOON ................................................ 15

3. THE SILHOUETTES DE COMÉDIE ............................................................ 19

4. ANALYSIS OF EACH MOVEMENT IN CULTURAL CONTEXT............... 23
   I. Prologue ................................................................................................ 24
   II. Duetto ................................................................................................ 26
   III. “L’Éternal Clitandre” ........................................................................ 28
   IV. Isabelle ............................................................................................ 30
   V. Le Matamore .................................................................................... 31
   VI. Arnophe et Agnès .......................................................................... 32
   VII. Le beau Léandre ........................................................................ 34
   VIII. Les deux orphelines ..................................................................... 35
   IX. Colombine, danseuse .................................................................... 36
   X. Chanson Martiale ........................................................................... 39
   XI. Arlequin ......................................................................................... 40
   XII. Monsieur Prud’homme .................................................................. 42

CONCLUSION ................................................................................................ 44

APPENDICES ................................................................................................ 46

A. EXCERPTS FROM THE POETRY OF VERLAINE .................................... 46

B. EXCERPTS FROM *THE KNAVERY OF SCAPIN* BY MOLIÈRE .......... 49

C. EXCERPTS FROM *THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES* BY MOLIÈRE .......... 51

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................ 52

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ........................................................................ 56
ABSTRACT

Charles Koechlin composed the Silhouettes de Comédie for bassoon and orchestra in 1943. It is a monumental work for bassoon due to its length, scope, orchestration, and magnitude of difficulty. Because of these elements, the Silhouettes de Comédie has languished in obscurity. The purpose of this treatise will be to discuss in depth all aspects of the Silhouettes in order to bring this major work by a renowned composer back to the public awareness and add it to the bassoonist’s repertoire.

In addition to providing biographical information concerning Koechlin’s life and career, this treatise includes an in-depth study of each of the movements of the Silhouettes de Comédie. The character of each movement is indicated by a descriptive title. Some of the movements are dedicated to single characters from the Commedia dell’Arte tradition, but others are more likely to have been inspired by a combination of Commedia-influenced art, drama, poetry, film, and literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
CHAPTER ONE: BIOGRAPHY

Charles Koechlin was born in Paris in 1867, to a large, wealthy Alsatian family. Though he was raised in Paris, Koechlin always claimed his Alsatian heritage as a defining characteristic that set him apart from his Parisian peers. His paternal and maternal extended families, the Koechlins and Dollfuses, were leaders in the textile and manufacturing industries. Both families based their businesses in the industrial city of Mulhouse, located in the region of Alsace near the border of Switzerland.¹

When Koechlin was four years old, the strategically located, iron-rich regions of Alsace and Lorraine were annexed by Germany as a result of the Treaty of Frankfurt. Alsatians spoke a regional dialect, a combination of French and German. Upper-class children also learned proper forms of each language in addition to the local patois in preparation for careers beyond the region.² As Germany tightened control on the region, the public use of the French language was banned and its use was a punishable offense.³ Many of the French-speaking Alsatians immigrated to cities in France for better economic prospects and to avoid service in the German military. Koechlin’s father’s work as a textile designer allowed him to keep his family in Paris,⁴ though much of Koechlin’s extended family stayed in Alsace.⁵

Koechlin’s early musical efforts did not clearly indicate the passion with which he would later pursue his career. Throughout his youth Koechlin was frustrated by the distance between his musical goals and his skills, both in composition and piano. He began studying the piano at the age of six and was an unmotivated student. He was bored by children’s pieces but lacked the skills needed to successfully perform more interesting works. The musical studies of his older

⁴ Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 3.
sisters exposed Koechlin to the works of composers such as Jules Massenet (1842-1912) and Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). Counterpoint inspired by the works of Bach would become a key element of Koechlin’s distinctive compositional style. This sparked a new interest in music and by age thirteen, Koechlin had also discovered the compositions and writings of Hector Berlioz (1803-1869). Berlioz’s orchestration treatise served as starting point for Koechlin’s development into a master orchestrator. Koechlin’s piano skills improved as time passed and he eventually performed some of his own works, though he never sought to reach the level of skill required of a concert artist.

Koechlin enjoyed music, but did not at first consider it a possible career. After failing the science exam required for acceptance to the French Naval Academy, Koechlin enrolled at the Ecole Polytechnique in preparation for what his family still hoped would be a military career. Koechlin became very involved in extracurricular musical activities and transcribed a number of works for the student orchestra. Chronic poor health caused by typhoid and tuberculosis forced Koechlin to abandon his studies for months at a time. During his convalescences in southern France and Algeria, Koechlin began to study composition and also dabbled in photography. The lost time due to illness put Koechlin far behind his class and he decided to change his career ambitions. Though Koechlin’s mother supported his choice to become a composer, much of his extended family objected on the grounds that “officers make such fine marriages.” Koechlin later came to recognize that the life threatening illnesses of his college years allowed him to pursue his passion for music.

Upon his return to Paris in 1890, Koechlin enrolled at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique, where he began intense musical training. In addition to piano lessons, Koechlin explored other orchestral instruments. He learned to play the oboe and French horn, achieving a high level of competence on the latter. Both of these instruments have a special

---

6 Ibid., 3-4.


8 Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 4-5.

9 The Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique is commonly referred to in English as the “Paris Conservatory.” The English name will be used henceforth.
place in Koechlin’s repertoire of compositions, including several challenging solo works and important roles in his orchestral compositions. Koechlin also dabbled in conducting, often helping to rehearse and perform new works of fellow composers.\textsuperscript{10}

As a twenty-two year-old freshman at the Paris Conservatory, Koechlin was older than many of his classmates. Koechlin’s late start at the Conservatory put him in a unique position. Born in 1867, he was similar in age to well-established composers such as Claude Debussy (1862-1918) and Erik Satie (1866-1925), yet most of Koechlin’s classmates were much younger. He continued to actively associate with a younger generation of composers even beyond his Conservatory years.\textsuperscript{11} Koechlin was not interested in competing with fellow students for the \textit{Prix de Rome}, a contest designed to encourage French arts and culture. He felt the award process was politically motivated and preferred to invest his energies elsewhere. Koechlin did not let his “late bloomer” status distress him, saying, “a musical formation is not acquired in a day!”\textsuperscript{12}

In 1892 Koechlin joined Jules Massenet’s composition class. Massenet was a champion of the French Opera for its “tragic, sentimental, comic, and farcical” possibilities.\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{Silhouettes de Comédie} for bassoon and orchestra embodies all of those elements, reflecting the influences of Massenet — even late in Koechlin’s career. Robert Orledge suspects that Massenet’s advice to “never reject an idea that occurs to you,” may have encouraged Koechlin’s lack of self criticism and general aversion to editing or artistic compromise.\textsuperscript{14}

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924), Koechlin’s second composition teacher, had an even greater influence on his compositional style. Like Koechlin, Fauré loved counterpoint and held the music of Bach in high regard. According to Orledge, Koechlin “strove to recapture the classic simplicity and nobility of Fauré’s style with its balance of liberty and discipline.”\textsuperscript{15} The

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{10} Orledge, \textit{Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works}, 8.
\bibitem{11} Ibid., 5, plate 10.
\bibitem{13} Wilfred Mellers, \textit{Singing in the Wilderness} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 55.
\bibitem{14} Orledge, \textit{Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works}, 8.
\bibitem{15} Ibid., 8.
\end{thebibliography}
understanding of the critical balance between tradition and innovation is a concept that Koechlin would employ throughout his life, both in his compositions and teachings. Fauré also encouraged Koechlin’s pedagogical skills by entrusting him with fugue and counterpoint classes in his absence. Fauré respected Koechlin’s skills in orchestration and used Koechlin’s orchestrations of the incidental music for a staged version of *Pelléas et Mélisande.*

The Dreyfus Affair of 1894 brought the currents of anti-semitic, anti-socialist, and anti-minority sentiment in the French government out into the open and divided the French people. It presents an early example of Koechlin’s political involvement and identification with minority groups. Dreyfus, a Jewish-Alsatian officer in the French military, was accused and convicted of selling military secrets to Germany. Anti-semitism played an important role in achieving a conviction based on inconclusive evidence. Suspicions may have also been heightened against him because of his family connections to Alsace, which was part of Germany at the time. Dreyfus was sentenced to solitary exile even though evidence incriminating another suspect had surfaced.

The military court’s abuse of power drew the protests of writer Émile Zola, who was soon joined by other liberal artists and intellectuals, including Charles Koechlin. The main music schools of Paris joined the political debate, with the Paris Conservatory in support of Dreyfus’s innocence and the *Schola Cantorum* against. Vincent D’Indy (1851-1931), well known for his anti-semitic views, used the term “artistic Dreyfusardism” to describe the works of less conservative composers. Public outcry eventually resulted in Dreyfus’s exoneration.

Koechlin was an outspoken supporter of Alfred Dreyfus’s innocence. He and Dreyfus had much in common, both came from textile families based in Mulhouse, an industrial town in Alsace. The two families shared not only an Alsatian heritage, but a common commitment to utopian, socialist ideals. Coming from a Protestant family, Koechlin may have also identified


16 Ibid.

17 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2009, Encyclopædia Britannica Online, "Dreyfus, Alfred."


19 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Dreyfus, Alfred."

with Dreyfus, a Jew, because of his similar religious minority status. Koechlin was in actuality a panthiest, with high regard for both the teachings of Christ and the harmony of nature. He was also strongly averse to the dogmatism he perceived in the Roman Catholic Church \(^{21}\) that had dominated religious life in France for hundreds of years and had a powerful influence over politics and government. Partly due to the Catholic Church’s role in the Dreyfus Affair, laws were passed clearly separating church and state. Koechlin continued to speak out against antisemitism through articles and reviews, often in response to attacks on his Jewish colleague and close friend, Darius Milhaud.\(^{22}\)

Koechlin married Suzanne Pierrard in 1903 and continued to compose, supported by his family’s wealth. His earliest compositions are dominated by songs and other vocal works. In this period he set a number of poems by the French poet, Paul Verlaine (1844-1896). By 1911, Koechlin had begun composing chamber music, including three string quartets and nine solo sonatas. World War I caused disruption and destruction across Europe. Koechlin, too old to be required to serve in the French military, ran an ambulance service with his wife, a nurse. During this period Koechlin wrote a significant number of works based on ancient legends, with fairies, fauns and mermaids, perhaps as an escape from the stresses of the war.\(^{23}\) Soon after the war, Koechlin’s family wealth had been depleted and he was forced to find additional means of support for his wife and five children.

Koechlin worked tirelessly writing textbooks, articles, encyclopedia entries, reviews, and biographies of other composers. He became well known as a critic, orchestrator, and teacher of music theory.\(^{24}\) Koechlin tutored younger composers such as Francis Poulenc (1899-1963), Darius Milhaud (1892-1974), and Cole Porter (1891-1964) in orchestration and counterpoint.\(^{25}\) Unfortunately, Koechlin’s writings and other pedagogical activities also resulted in the commonly held, yet erroneous, view that he was a theorist first and composer second. He wrote

\(^{21}\) Orledge, \textit{Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works}, 17.


\(^{23}\) Orledge, \textit{Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works}, 9, 103, 115.


\(^{25}\) Harrison, “Charles Koechlin and his Solo and Chamber Flute Works,” 10.
in his autobiographical study that his pedagogical work was “much less of vocation than a necessity (contrary to popular opinion).” This prejudice may have contributed to Koechlin’s difficulty in securing performances of his works.

A comparison can be made between Koechlin and his contemporary, the American composer Charles Ives (1874-1954). Ives worked in the insurance business, while Koechlin earned a living as a teacher, writer, and theorist. Both composers’ practical approaches to employment allowed them to support their families. This gave them the financial independence to compose without regard to the commercial appeal of their works, but at the same time detracted from their reputations as serious composers. Koechlin and Ives experimented with a wide range of compositional styles and drew inspiration from the folk music of their respective countries. Neither composer was afraid to break compositional rules to achieve the desired effect, but both experienced difficulty in securing performances of compositions and did not achieve a high level of fame during their life times. Ives stopped composing in 1927, spending the rest of his career editing and revising existing works. In contrast, Koechlin composed steadily throughout his life, often recycling material into new works rather than revising the old ones.

In 1918, the Alsace and Lorraine regions were officially returned to French control at the conclusion of World War I. This “reunification” was initially celebrated throughout France, but it soon became a complicated and controversial issue. During the forty-seven year German occupation, many German citizens had moved to the region and intermarried with Alsatian families. Though publicly proud of his Alsatian heritage, throughout his life Koechlin insisted on a French pronunciation of his last name rather than a more Germanic one, emphasizing his French-Alsatian loyalties. This may have been an attempt to distance himself from both Germany, France’s war-time adversary, and the Germanic-Romantic musical traditions that fell out of favor in the 1920s.

---

26 Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 11.


Members of the wealthy Alsatian upper class, including members of Koechlin’s extended family were enlisted by the French government to determine the loyalty of each resident of the province and decide whether they could be granted full French citizenship. An article from 1918 sums up the problem of provincial identity by saying, “They are not Germans, neither are they French; They are Alsace Lorrainers.” The process of determining citizenship soon soured, dividing families and communities as they competed for full citizenship status. In practice, citizenship was often granted on the basis of family wealth and respectability rather than a true test of loyalty to France. The uproar caused by the return of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to French control coincides with the beginning of the modernist movement of the 1920s.

Koechlin remained on the fringes of the Parisian music scene, possibly due to differences in age and outlook with the younger generation of composers. Christopher Moore describes the “lifestyle” modernism that was practiced by Les Six as part of a “cocktail culture” of Parisian artistic elites, a group who celebrated “the sophisticated commonplace.” Koechlin’s provincial heritage and Protestant religious background may have created a barrier between the composer and the modernist movement of the 1920s. Koechlin was known for being hardworking and practical, not fashionable or socially extravagant. In photographs of Koechlin and his classmates it is obvious that he did not attempt to adopt the fashions of the younger generation, and he is the only member with a distinctive full beard. In Koechlin’s autobiographical writings he described the disconnect between the Alsatian and Parisian attitudes (referring to himself in the third-person), “Koechlin has the naive ability to ‘take the truth for granted,’ which must seem quite very dangerous and quite ridiculous to witty and skeptical Parisians.” He often retreated to the

29 Harvey, “Lost Children or Enemy Aliens?” 542.
31 Harvey, “Lost Children or Enemy Aliens?” 542.
33 Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 300.
peace and quiet of the countryside, splitting his time between an apartment in Paris and modest vacation cottages in Normandy and the Côte d'Azur.\textsuperscript{34}

Koechlin actively promoted new music and his efforts in this area span his lifetime. One of his first endeavors was to join with Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) and Florent Schmitt (1870-1958) in creating the \textit{Société Musicale Indépendante} in 1909. This organization promoted new music, but also served as opposition to Vincent d’Indy’s more conservative \textit{Société Nationale}.\textsuperscript{35} After World War I, Satie invited Koechlin to join a group of composers to be called \textit{Les Nouveaux Jeunes} (The New Youth). Koechlin’s membership was somewhat anachronistic in that at the age of 51, he could hardly be considered a representative of the “Youth.” \textit{Les Nouveaux Jeunes} never gained public recognition but some of the younger composers, Francis Poulenc, Darius Milhaud, Louis Durey (1888-1979), Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983), Georges Auric (1899-1983), and Arthur Honegger (1892-1955), went on to become associated with the more famous \textit{Les Six}, a designation coined by the arts activist, Jean Cocteau.\textsuperscript{36} Neither Koechlin, Satie, nor Albert Roussel (1869-1937) were included in \textit{Les Six}. In his letters, Koechlin attributes the failure of \textit{Les Nouveaux Jeunes} and the success of \textit{Les Six} to the reluctance of the younger generation to be associated with older composers.\textsuperscript{37}

\textit{Les Six} was known for diverging from the established styles that reigned before World War I. Many artists believed that the post-war world needed something new and different. The musical “impressionism” of Claude Debussy and the Germanic-Romanticism symbolized by Richard Wagner became prime examples of outmoded styles. Particularly Milhaud, Auric, and Poulenc found inspiration in the music of the “everyday,” referencing “jazz, popular songs, American dances, and the atmosphere of the European circus.” Generally, they combined style elements from popular sources with post-war developments in harmony and orchestration.\textsuperscript{38}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 10.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Moore, “Music in France and the Popular Front,” 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Myers, “Charles Koechlin: Some Recollections,” 222.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Moore, “Music in France and the Popular Front,” 26.
\end{itemize}
Many of Koechlin’s compositions of the 1920s are highly contrapuntal, possibly influenced by his pedagogical activities. More than two-thirds of the works composed between 1925 and 1933 feature chorales, fugues, and other contrapuntal exercises. In addition, Koechlin adapted melodies written by his American student, Catherine Urner, for use in works such as the Sonatine op. 107 for organ. *La course de printemps* (1923), based on portions of *The Second Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), is considered by many to represent a turning point in Koechlin’s composition. According to Orledge, the use of polytonal harmonic language and multi-sectional structure in *La course* foreshadows Koechlin’s later works. *La course* is filled with Koechlin’s pictorial indications that reveal his cinematic intentions and future interest in film music.\(^3^9\)

Modernism was reinvigorated by the socialist movement that blossomed in France in the 1930s and 1940s. The political and social difference between the modernism of the 1920s and that of the 1930s and 1940s was the key to Koechlin’s increased activity and leadership in the music community. In the dissertation, “Music in France and the Popular Front,” Moore describes this “second wind” of modernism as “populist modernism.”\(^4^0\) He writes, “in contrast to lifestyle modernism, populist modernism is an aesthetico-political stance that aimed to incorporate popular sources not from American jazz and the circus grounds, but from folk music and revolutionary music.”\(^4^1\) Koechlin became very involved in both the political and musical aspects of the new “populist modernism.”

Koechlin once described himself as “a peculiarly Alsatian breed of Liberal Protestant.”\(^4^2\) He applied his liberal, socialist outlook to his compositions as well as political involvement. Koechlin attributed much of his sympathy for the working class to the examples set by his father and grandfathers, industrialists, who tried to provide higher wages and better living conditions for their textile workers. Koechlin championed music that would appeal to “the people,” always endeavoring to use simple folk-like melodies and “beautiful” harmonies, rather than turning to

---

39 Orledge, *Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works*, 143-147.

40 Moore, “Music in France and the Popular Front,” 33.

41 Ibid.

more academic styles. Orledge describes the “Alsatian temperament” that is evident in Koechlin’s compositions as “an energy, naivety, and an absolute and simple sincerity.”  

In the 1936 pamphlet, *La Musique et le peuple*, Koechlin outlined his visions for a new modern music. He wrote, “We dream of a modern art, rich with all the conquests of harmony, counterpoint and orchestration (or more stripped down, if the subject calls for it) or even made of collective songs that will rise up in the air, simple and naked, unaccompanied, as it was in the past.” Koechlin also wrote a series of articles on the subject of music education for *L’Humanité*. His primary belief was “that musical culture could not be optimally developed without a reorganization of society that allowed workers a greater amount of leisure time.” These beliefs about improvements to the life of the “worker,” were not simply a passing fad for Koechlin, but something that was a part of his family’s history as liberal industrialists.

Though Koechlin was always supportive of new composers he was not shy about offering criticism or advice. In the article, “True and False Popular Music,” Koechlin warns that when using popular music, especially the American dance forms, the composer must take care to elevate the subject matter with “elite compositional and harmonic procedures.” In contrast, Koechlin believed that the folk music of rural people did not require elevation and was a true and pure form of popular music. He did not advocate transcribing folk tunes for use in large scale symphonic works or operas, but did state that the study of folk music would provide composers with “clear and lively ideas, clean and significant harmonies.”

Koechlin worried that *musique mécanique*, including radio, recordings, and film would lead to the devaluation of music. Koechlin did make some concessions for commercial music that was well composed and performed, therefore justifying his own efforts in composing film

43 Orledge, *Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works*, 3.

44 Ibid., 35-36.

45 “Nous rêvons d’un art moderne, riche de toutes les conquêtes de l’harmonie, du contrepoint et de l’orchestration - ou plus dépouillé au besoin, si le sujet le comporte - ou même fait de chants collectifs qui s’élèveront dans l’air.”

46 Ibid., 104.


48 Ibid.
scores. Though many artists and musicians mourned the replacement of silent films by the “talkies,” Koechlin believed that sound films held greater possibilities and could become a high art form. According to his diary, Koechlin saw his first silent film in 1912, but very rarely attended the movie theater over the next twenty years.

Koechlin’s deep infatuations with female film actresses often blurred the lines between fantasy and reality. Koechlin’s interest in films and various starlets, peaking in the years between 1933-1938, resulted in a substantial body of film-inspired compositions. Koechlin believed that sound films held greater possibilities and could become a high art form. According to his diary, Koechlin saw his first silent film in 1912, but very rarely attended the movie theater over the next twenty years.

By 1930, sound films, complete with language dubbing, were commonplace in French theaters. Koechlin’s interest increased greatly at this point. Koechlin expressed his enjoyment of films based on literature such as Les Miserables by Victor Hugo or Gustave Flaubert’s Madame Bovary, but on a different occasion bemoaned the way film adaptations had ruined stories by Jules Verne and Hans Christian Andersen. Koechlin’s deep infatuations with female film actresses, peaking in the years between 1933-1938, often blurred the lines between fantasy and reality and resulted in a substantial body of film-inspired compositions. Works such as Seven Stars Symphony (1933), Album de Lillian (1934,1935), Danses pour Ginger Rogers (1937), and Le Portrait de Daisy Hamilton (1934-38) pay homage to film stars such as Lillian Harvey, Ginger Rogers, Greta Garbo, and Marlene Dietrich among others. Especially in the case of films starring Lillian Harvey, Koechlin often viewed them ten or more times. Milhaud, a friend and colleague, remembered that he would bring a stopwatch to the movies and take careful notes so that he could return home and compose more suitable music for the object of his infatuation.

---


52 Orledge, “Charles Koechlin and the Early Sound Film,” 1.

Koechlin often sent copies of his scores to the actresses, but their appreciation remained firmly in the realm of fantasy and his homages were only politely acknowledged, if at all. Koechlin even wrote a musical score and dramatic plot in which he and Lillian Harvey would co-star.\textsuperscript{54}

In an article for \textit{La Revue musicale} (1937), Koechlin labeled a group of composers \textit{“Les Sept”} — including Auric, Milhaud, Honegger, Roussel, Jacques Ibert (1890-1962), Daniel Lazarus (1898-1964), and of course, Koechlin himself. Perhaps Koechlin wished to recreate the iconic status of \textit{Les Six} under his own terms. This group had recently collaborated on a large scale \textit{Fédération Musicale Populaire} project for the Bastille Day celebration. In Koechlin’s contribution to the realization of Romain Rolland’s leftist play, \textit{Le 14 juillet}, a young girl sings a popular folk song that is then taken up by the chorus, symbolizing the masses.\textsuperscript{55} Koechlin’s \textit{Les Sept} never achieved the recognition of \textit{Les Six}, but according to Moore, the group of composers, united by socialist ideals, “represented the vanguard of modernist musical development in France.”\textsuperscript{56}

After the death of Albert Roussel, Koechlin served two terms as president of the \textit{Fédération Musicale Populaire}, or FMP, from 1937 to 1939 and from 1945 to 1950. The FMP was a cultural organization associated with the leftist Popular Front, designed to combat the threat of fascism in France. The respect that composers of both the new and old generation held for Koechlin extended to the FMP under his leadership.\textsuperscript{57} As president, Koechlin oversaw the organization of concerts and rallies designed to spread musical appreciation and encourage forms of communal music-making such as mass song. Koechlin, as well as former \textit{Les Six} members Milhaud, Auric, and Honegger, composed a variety of modern revolutionary songs, folk tunes, and modern folk-style songs that celebrated the French working classes, urban and rural, rather than the fashionable elite of the early twenties.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} Fulcher, \textit{The Composer as Intellectual}, 235.
\textsuperscript{56} Moore, “Music in France and the Popular Front,” 25.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 31, 78.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 33.
Koechlin went on to work for the musical committee of the *Association Frances - USSR*, and though he supported many of the goals of the Communist Party, he never became an official member. Koechlin summed up his feelings: “although on account of my independence of mind I did not belong to the Communist Party, it is nevertheless true that I have always been in sympathy with the aims of communism — so long as it respects freedom of thought and the rights of the individual — particularly in art.” Koechlin did not agree with the Soviet practice of requiring a new style specifically for the workers, rather he believed that the masses were capable of understanding good modern music of varied styles if given the proper opportunities and education.

In Koechlin’s late compositions (1938-1950), he focused on “*art monodique,*” an extension of his melody-first composition process. This is evident in the extravagantly orchestrated symphonic poems, such as *La cite nouvelle, reve d’avenir*, op. 170 (1938). Like many previous works, *La cite nouvelle* is inspired by a literary source, passages from H.G. Wells’s *Men Like Gods*. Most of Koechlin’s symphonic poems from this period are quite long and the melodic emphasis sometimes results in works that, while beautiful, are repetitive and lack structure. In a friendly criticism of Koechlin’s symphonic works, composer Max d’Ollone made these suggestions to Koechlin,

> In several of your works, I have already sensed that you allow yourself to meditate and dream. This is ideal when one conceives a piece, but should, to my way of thinking, cease when it becomes a question of completing it for an audience. Then one is no longer alone, and it is necessary to convince and move them. And for that, one has to have the courage to cut what will seem cold and long when it is eventually performed in the brightness of a concert hall full of people.

Koechlin ignored such criticisms, confident that multiple hearings of his large scale works would allow the listener more opportunity to share his vision.

Orledge suspects that Koechlin’s research into the capabilities of wind instruments for the *Traité de l’orchestration* (1948), may have been the impetus that prompted him to write a series

---


60 Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual*, 213.


62 Ibid., 33.
of solo works for woodwind instruments, with and without piano. The solos for flute, clarinet, oboe, and horn (1942-1944) are collections of miniature movements, some with programmatic titles. A set was also planned for bassoon, but Koechlin turned it into the *Silhouettes de Comédie* for bassoon and orchestra. These pieces are characterized by a refreshing simplicity not often found in Koechlin’s late symphonic works. According to Orledge, “refinement of expression is continued throughout these wartime pieces with their long, flexible melodic lines, frequent use of compound meters, and absence of regular barlines.”

In old age Koechlin settled full time in his home in Canadel, in southern France. He developed a very distinctive appearance, “wearing Bohemian clothing or a shepherd’s cloak with a broad brimmed hat” and a long white beard. Koechlin continued to regularly attended music and composition conferences. Myers recalls seeing him at the meeting of the I.S.C.M. (International Society for Contemporary Music) in Amsterdam, “walking the streets in his bedroom slippers and carrying all his possessions (he never used a suit-case) in a brown paper parcel tied with string.” Koechlin, perhaps to spite the French “powers-that-be” that denied him a teaching position at the Paris Conservatory, refused the *Légion d’honneur*. This may also illustrate the extent of the wounds caused by his largely unsuccessful search for critical acclaim and public acceptance. He remained active in old age, enjoying photography, swimming, gardening, and even climbing Mont Blanc. Koechlin died in 1950 at the age of 83.

---

63 Ibid., 207-208.
64 Ibid., 17.
66 The *Légion d’honneur* is the highest ranking order and decoration awarded in France.
67 Orledge, *Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works*, 16.
CHAPTER TWO: EARLY COMPOSITIONS FOR BASSOON

Koechlin devoted much of his artistic output in the years surrounding World War I to sonatas and chamber works. Both of Koechlin’s works for bassoon and piano, the *Three Pieces* and the Sonata op. 71, were composed during this period. Characteristics common to his compositions of this period include the use of modes, metric flexibility, and counterpoint. Mellers describes Koechlin’s style of the 1910s and early 1920s as “childlike but not infantile, the tunes are purely modal, and regular barring is dispensed with, the rhythms being free though never congested.” Koechlin’s works of this period are often compared to those of Satie, who was influential in Koechlin’s development. Koechlin’s melodies have a free, folk-like character and are usually paired with simple accompaniments. He prided himself on composing melodies first, without regard to the accompaniment, a technique also used by one of his orchestration influences, Berlioz.

Throughout his career, Koechlin often titled his compositions “Sonata” or “Symphony” with little regard to the traditional definitions of those terms. In an article published in the *Dictionnaire du Conservatoire* in 1921, Koechlin wrote that, “a symphony is not bound by ‘mathematical definition’: a composer may write a piece in any form, with any number of movements and performing forces, with or without a program, etc., and call it a symphony.” This view was not shared by many and Koechlin received criticism for his free and inclusive interpretation of formal structure.

Koechlin composed his first work for the bassoon over a period between 1898 and 1907, titled *Three Pieces* op. 34 for bassoon and piano. It was premiered in March of 1908 by bassoonist Édouard Flament and pianist Jules Berny. Koechlin’s trio of the same title, *Three Pieces* op. 34bis, for flute, bassoon, and piano was also premiered as part of the same concert. Koechlin joined Flament and flautist Phillippe Gaubert for the trio, performing the piano part

---

69 Mellers, *Singing in the Wilderness*, 56.


himself. Notably, Flament was a composer and conductor as well as a bassoonist and went on to conduct the Ballet Russes from 1930 - 1939. It took many years for the Three Pieces for bassoon and piano to be made available to the public, however they were published in 1989 and are now easily obtained.

The first movement of the Three Pieces op. 34 for bassoon and piano is titled simply “No. 1” and given the tempo marking, Lent. “No. 1,” only four minutes in duration, is the longest of the three movements. Koechlin writes an expressive soliloquy for the bassoon accompanied only minimally by chords in the piano. This movement is an early example of Koechlin’s emphasis on melody in the purest form. The harmonic pacing is very slow with only eight chord changes over the course of the movement. Koechlin bases “No. 1” in B minor, but obscures the tonality by using modal mixture and emphasizing the interval of a fifth instead of triadic harmony.

In “No. 2,” the second of the Three Pieces, Koechlin uses elements of the chorale style. Perhaps influenced by the chorales of Bach or by musical experiences in his own Protestant upbringing, the gentle, singable melody of the bassoon is accompanied by simple piano harmonizations. Koechlin marks the tempo andante moderato and instructs the bassoonist to play the melody smoothly or almost connected, as if playing the French horn. His choice of French horn for comparison may stem from his own experience playing the instrument.

Koechlin’s straight-forward use of D-flat major in “No. 2” is contrasted by much a more dissonant and harmonically complex third movement, “No. 3.” In place of simple harmonic progressions or truly singable melodies, Koechlin unifies this movement by repeating and developing a four-note, chromatic motive. His use of dense piano in the lowest octave contributes to the brooding quality of “No. 3.” Six bars before the end, Koechlin teases the

---


73 Orledge, *Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works*, 341.

74 Charles Koechlin, *Three Pieces*, op. 34 for bassoon and piano, (Paris: Billaudot, 1990). Unless otherwise stated, all future references to the Three Pieces are derived from this source.


76 “presque lié et comme un cor”

listener with two C major triads, only to dash any hopes of a major resolution with a prominent E-flat in the bassoon melody. The final chord in C minor is an unsettling and dark contrast to the more hopeful tone of the first two movements.

The Sonata op. 71 for bassoon and piano, composed in 1919, does not follow the traditional conception of a sonata. Even as a budding composer, Koechlin was not troubled by his lack of classical formal structures. He described his approach to form in his early works as, "I'll write what I want to, and modulate as I like, provided I don't end in the original key." Uncharacteristically, Koechlin made many revisions over the course of composing the Sonata, eventually discarding sketches for a fourth movement. Not one to waste a musical idea, Koechlin returned to the discarded fourth movement many years later, incorporating it into the Silhouettes de Comédie. Koechlin also made a version of the Sonata for French horn and piano, changing it very little.

The first movement of the Sonata, marked Andante moderato - allegretto scherzando, begins with a simple melodic line in the upper range of the bassoon accompanied by graceful arpeggios in the piano. With each statement Koechlin elaborates the melody, making it more dramatic but maintaining the original shape and character. The scherzo section introduces a lighthearted staccato melody. The movement concludes with a return of the first theme, but Koechlin works the scherzo theme into the piano arpeggios, gradually combining the two.

In the second movement of the Sonata, “Nocturne,” the piano opens with an eighth note pattern that is later developed into an ostinato and shared by both the bassoon and piano parts. According to Orledge, Koechlin’s ostinato is reminiscent of Frédérick Chopin’s Barcarolle, op. 60 (1846). Koechlin puts a modern twist into the twelve note pattern by adding a thirteenth note, creating an asymmetrical “6 ½ /4 in the rhythm of 5/4 + 3/8” The bassoon soon joins with a pianissimo melody that gradually builds in intensity even as it floats unhampered by metrical emphasis. At this point the bassoon and piano trade roles, continuing with the melody in the piano and the ostinato in the bassoon. For the final climax, the melody in the bassoon climbs

---


79 Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 118-119.
ascends to a high C-flat₄, the highest note in the Sonata op. 71 thus far. Koechlin intensifies the ostinato by accenting notes that emphasize the asymmetrical meter.

The last movement of the Sonata op. 71, “Final,” is a spirited allegro. After the brash and triumphant opening, Koechlin quickly defies expectation by developing the melody through a series of pianissimo passages in which the bassoon and piano are equal partners. Koechlin then treats the melody in the style of the previous movement, yet this time the ostinato is an ominous rumble in the piano. The movement closes with a return to a triumphant style, marked by duple rhythms in the predominantly triple meter. The highest note in the piece, a D-sharp₅, occurs in this movement, but Koechlin has provided the option of playing it an octave lower. This can be compared to Koechlin’s later work for bassoon, the Silhouettes de Comédie, in which no options are provided for this and higher notes. Perhaps because the Sonata op. 71 was also adapted for French horn, the option is given in case of fatigue at the end of a performance. Another possible theory is that the level of performance and instrument technology rose so greatly in the years between 1919 and 1943 that special range options were not necessary.

Koechlin struggled with the difficulties of getting his compositions performed and published. When possible, he funded his own performances, but was often disappointed with the quality of the performance or critical reception. Koechlin’s diaries reveal that he made approximately 400 mostly unsuccessful attempts to interest conductors and publishing houses in his music between the years 1897 and 1950. This work went unperformed for almost twenty years before the premier on February 25, 1938. Gustave Dhérin, the Professor of Bassoon at the Paris Conservatory joined with pianist Jules Guieysse to perform the work at a concert given at the École Normal de Musique. Though the Sonata op. 71 for bassoon and piano remained unpublished for many years, with the first printed edition produced in 1990, it is now readily available.

80 For the purposes of this treatise, Scientific Pitch Notation will be used to identify the note and octave. For reference, Middle C = C₄

81 Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 22.

82 Fletcher, The Paris Conservatoire and the Contest Solos for Bassoon, 22.

83 Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 355.
Charles Koechlin’s *Silhouettes de Comédie* op. 193 for bassoon and orchestra, is one of his last compositions. During his late compositional period, Koechlin worked on many large projects simultaneously and used a variety of compositional styles and techniques, including counterpoint, romantic lyricism, and atonality. This piece is much more complex and technically challenging than Koechlin’s earlier solo works for bassoon.

The *Silhouettes de Comédie* was not performed until well after Koechlin’s death. The 1993 premier featured Klaus Thunemann and the Bern Symphony Orchestra. Though Gustave Dhéruin was still the Professor of Bassoon at the Paris Conservatory in 1943, there is no evidence that Koechlin wrote this work with him in mind or expected Dhéruin to premier it as he had the Sonata op. 71 for bassoon and piano. The cultural politics of the Vichy Regime (1940-1944) complicated artistic life in France and Koechlin’s earlier involvement with the leftist FMP put him at odds with the new right-wing government. Milhaud recalled that Koechlin would painstakingly prepare scores and parts by hand for all of his compositions and keep them stored in his cellar, ready in case anyone was interested in performing them. Of Koechlin’s twenty-two compositions from the Vichy period, op. 175 through op. 197, only one was premiered before the end of World War II and many remain unperformed today.

In the spring of 1942, Koechlin first composed and notated all of the melodies for the *Silhouettes*, as was his usual method. He then put the *Silhouettes* away for more than a year to work on another large project, *Offrandre musicale sur le nom de Bach*. Koechlin returned to harmonize the *Silhouettes* between August and September of 1943 and completed the orchestration by November of the same year. Koechlin’s early drafts reveal that he considered the title, *Suite Carnavalesque*, but abandoned it in favor of the *Silhouettes de Comédie*. Early

---

84 Ibid., 392.
87 Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 388-394.
drafts also showed the movements arranged differently, ending with what finally became the tenth movement, the “Chanson martiale des gardes françaises.” The movements, “Pierrot,” “Monsieur Pickwick,” and “Scaramouche et Polichinelle” were discarded at the melody stage. Of the twelve movements in the final version, Koechlin’s drafts and sketches show that the sixth movement, “Arnolphe et Agnès” was probably the latest addition. As Koechlin harmonized the melodies for each movement he settled on the final order, moving “Arlequin” to the eleventh position and putting “Monsieur Prud’homme au bal des humoristes” last. By doing so, Koechlin chose to close the Silhouettes with material discarded from the Sonata op. 71 for bassoon and piano almost twenty-five years earlier.

Koechlin draws upon a variety of sources for the Silhouettes de Comédie, but all of these sources, with the exception of the gardes françaises, are based in some aspect in the Commedia dell’Arte tradition. This theatrical form originated in the fifteenth century and quickly spread from Italy across the whole of Europe. Around 1750, the term Commedia dell’Arte was adopted to describe the genre. Troupes of traveling actors performed a combination of fully scripted plays, improvised humor, slapstick, and mime. Stock characters roles were often passed down through families and actors sometimes assumed their character name in daily life. The comic relief came from the lazzi, described as “comic routines that were planned or unplanned and that could be performed in any one of dozens of plays.” Examples of lazzi can be divided into a number of categories by topic, including Acrobatic, Food, Social-class Rebellion, and Sexual/Scatological routines. Despite the unrefined nature of much of the humor, Commedia performances were very popular across the social classes from about 1550 to 1750. Commedia continued to influence the arts, often translated into the culture of the realm. Influences of the Commedia can be seen in examples of opera buffa, such as Pergolesi’s La Serva Padrona (1733), Mozart’s The Marriage of Figaro (1786), and Rossini’s The Barber of Seville (1816). Puppet

88 Ibid., 198, 392.
89 Ibid., 198.
shows for children featuring *Commedia* characters were a common sight in the parks of Paris even into the twentieth century.\(^92\)

The characters of the *Commedia dell’Arte* are often organized into “families” by the roles they fill. Some of the traditional character families represented in Koechlin’s *Silhouettes de Comédie* include Harlequin, Pantaloon, Isabella, The Captain, The Soubrette, and The Lover. Each family is united by a set of stock characteristics, including social class, age, beauty or ugliness, courage or cowardice, and elements of costume. Within the family of characters some variation occurs, often due to the traditions of the locale and changes in society and politics over time.\(^93\)

The *Commedia* tradition experienced a resurgence of popularity in the late nineteenth through early twentieth century. The renewed interest in *Commedia* is often connected with the period’s “revolt against Wagnerism” as artists discarded worn Romantic and Symbolist ideals and looked to fragmentation, irony, and parody as new methods of expression.\(^94\) Anti-German sentiment may have fueled the search for a new style that French artists could embrace as their own. Paris served as the epicenter of the *Commedia*’s resurgence, but the movement quickly expanded to other European centers such as Munich and St. Petersburg, and later to London and New York.\(^95\) The rise of *Commedia* was most apparent during the period of 1890-1930, but influences are still present even in current art and culture.

In Paris, Koechlin would have been surrounded by *Commedia*-influenced art and music. Koechlin was very familiar with Arnold Schoenberg’s (1874-1961) *Pierrot Lunaire*, evidenced by his article for the Lavignac *Encyclopédie* in which he complimented Schoenberg’s polytonal counterpoint. Koechlin may have offended the anti-German sensibilities of the Parisian music community, many of whom vehemently opposed the methods of the Second Viennese School, when in the same article he asserted that, at least in the case of *Pierre Lunaire*, the atonal style


\(^{95}\) Ibid., 25.
had “proved itself worthy.”

Through his involvement with the FMP, Koechlin also served on a committee charged with reforming the programming of the Parisian Opéra-Comique.

*Commedia* characters and themes were common in novels, poems, and plays by generations of French writers such as Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), Molière (1622-1673), Henry Monnier (1805-1877), Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), and Paul Verlaine (1844-1896), and it is likely that works by these writers inspired Koechlin’s *Silhouettes*. One of Koechlin’s discarded sketches for the *Silhouettes*, titled “Monsieur Pickwick,” also reveals the influence of the British novelist, Charles Dickens (1812-1870). Koechlin’s use of literary sources for inspiration in composing the *Silhouettes de Comédie* is supported by his statement, “A composer depicts. He has a subject, visual, literary or otherwise. The general sentiment and its particular nuances will then guide the arts.”

Films also bore the influences of the *Commedia* tradition. Gautier’s popular novel *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, explicitly credited by Koechlin as a source of inspiration for the *Silhouettes*, was made into films by a number of different directors during the 1920s. Even Charlie Chaplin, of whom Koechlin was very fond, portrayed an American translation of the *Commedia* character Pierrot in his “Little Tramp.” Koechlin admired Chaplin’s dual persona, recognizing a character that was “On one hand, essentially comical, funny, amusing,—on the other, sad, painfully deep,—true.”

---


99 Ibid., 231.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF EACH MOVEMENT IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

Koechlin gives each of the twelve movements of the *Silhouettes de Comédie* a title indicating the subject that is depicted. Some of the movements are dedicated to single characters from the *Commedia* tradition, but others are more likely to have been inspired by a combination of *Commedia* influenced art, drama, poetry, film, and literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Koechlin treats the romantic and serious characters differently than the comic characters. He uses triple meters for movements based on romantic characters such as the “Prologue,” “L’Éternal Clitandre,” “Isabelle,” “Le beau Léandre,” and “Les deux orphelines.” In contrast, “Duetto” and “Le Matamore,” both movements dedicated to comic characters, are in duple meters and the melodies have a much more vertical, percussive quality.

Koechlin also uses the tone quality characteristics of the different ranges of the bassoon to reinforce the difference between comic and serious subjects. In the monograph, *Les instruments à vent* (1948), he writes,

> the character of the bassoon is extremely diverse: like the oboe it can traverse the entire range of feelings . . . It can represent comic and even grotesque characters, as in my Suite for bassoon and orchestra,\(^{101}\) where it depicts the ridiculousness of Géronte [no. 2] and Arnolphe [no. 6]. But in the same Suite, the lively humor of Zerbinetta in the higher register, the rather foolish naivety (and in the low register, the cunning) of Agnès . . . find the best of interpreters in the bassoon.\(^{102}\)

In the movements depicting comic characters, “Duetto,” “Le Matamore,” “Arnophe et Agnès,” “Arlequin,” and “Monsieur Prud’honne,” Koechlin uses the full range with an emphasis on the lowest octave. Use of the bassoon’s low range to evoke the lowly or comical can be traced to Berlioz’s orchestration, an early influence in Koechlin’s musical development.\(^{103}\) For the serious or romantic characters, Koechlin writes the bassoon in the high and what he calls the “upper-middle” register. Koechlin may be referring to what is sometimes called the “tenor” register of

---

\(^{101}\) Koechlin is referring to the *Silhouettes de Comédie* op.193 for bassoon and orchestra

\(^{102}\) Orledge, *Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works*, 199.

the bassoon, which he describes as centered around “the E-flat, E, and F above the bass
clef.”¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵ Koechlin goes on to write that the range is “imbued with an indescribable poetry,
with a certain Romantic and old-world charm that immediately imposes itself on any
unprejudiced ear.”¹⁰⁶

The orchestration of each movement of the Silhouettes de Comédie is unique and reflects
the character of each subject. Koechlin’s careful study of orchestration and the characteristics of
wind instruments in the 1940s may have prepared him to create a surprisingly transparent work
for bassoon soloist and extravagantly large orchestra. Koechlin advises in his Traité de
l’orchestration of 1944, that “volume is not always the cause or antithesis of intensity. It depends
on the circumstances.”¹⁰⁷

I. Prologue

Le château de la misère du Capitaine Fracasse

This movement is inspired by Théophile Gautier’s novel, Le Capitaine Fracasse. The
novel was first printed in 1863, but maintained huge popularity and was adapted into both silent
and sound films. It is unclear whether Koechlin was inspired by the film or the novel or the
combination of the two forms. The wandering story line is full of Romantic clichés, including
crumbling castles, secret identity, forbidden love, and buried treasure.¹⁰⁸ In the title, Koechlin
indicates that this movement is meant to evoke the dilapidated ancestral home of the young
Baron, who later takes the stage-name, “Captain Fracasse.” The first chapter of the novel is
dedicated to setting the lonely scene. Room by room, Gautier describes the moth-eaten glory of

¹⁰⁴ Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 199

¹⁰⁵ In the subsequent study of each of the Silhouettes, the term “upper-middle” will be used to describe this
part of the bassoon’s range.

¹⁰⁶ Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 199.

Matthews, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 139-146.

¹⁰⁸ Joanna Richardson, Théophile Gautier; His Life and Times (London: Reinhardt, 1958), 181-184.
the once beautiful mansion, “Castle Misery,” using a tone that seems more wistful and nostalgic than macabre.\(^{109}\)

Gautier’s tone is mirrored by the melancholy and gentle character of Koechlin’s melody. The motive of falling eighths is repeated throughout, colored by changes in orchestration and tessitura. The bassoon melody is closely shadowed by a complementary countermelody in the viola. Koechlin adds contrapuntal lines, making the texture more complex as the intensity builds towards the climax. He then introduces a secondary rhythmic motive in the bassoon and begins to thin the texture. The movement ends much in the way it began, with the melody in bassoon, but the countermelody this time in the violin. The final pianissimo chords, marked “velvety,”\(^{111}\) settle in B-flat major.

The “Prologue” is the longest movement of all the Silhouettes and it maintained the opening position throughout Koechlin’s drafts and changes in order.\(^{112}\) Koechlin begins the “Prologue” by obscuring the E-flat major quality of the melody with a C pedal. Koechlin mixes major and minor tonalities throughout. His use of mixed meters, mostly alternating between 15/8 and 12/8, contributes to the flowing quality of the melody. The bassoon melody hovers in the “middle-high” and upper registers, frequently reaching high D\(_5\), but rarely dipping down to the bottom of the bass clef staff, only once reaching low F\(_2\). By using the “middle-high” and upper range of the bassoon in depicting the old mansion, Koechlin also acknowledges the serious and noble nature of its inhabitant, the Baron de Sigognac.

Koechlin orchestrates the movement carefully to avoid overpowering the bassoon soloist, often notating “solo strings” in sections that might otherwise become too overbearing. He uses two flutes, piccolo, oboe d’amore, oboe (doubling on English horn), two clarinets, and bass clarinet. The woodwinds in this movement provide color and often have melodic passages, but rarely play simultaneously with the bassoonist. Even so, the bassoonist is given few breaks in the constantly flowing melody. Though Koechlin uses additional bassoon and contrabassoon in

\(^{109}\) Le château de la misère


\(^{111}\) “très velouté”

\(^{112}\) Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 198, 392.
later movements, in the “Prologue” he leaves the solo bassoon on its own. Koechlin uses the harp only sparingly in this movement to reinforce the bass notes of chords. The bass drum and timpani occasionally provide a gentle rumble and the three horn parts are confined to supportive whole notes for most of the movement.\footnote{Charles Koechlin, \textit{Silhouettes de Comédie}, op. 193 (Paris: Billaudot, 1991). Unless otherwise cited, all further references to the score of the \textit{Silhouettes} come from this source.}

\section*{II. Duetto\footnote{Pierre Louis Duchartre, \textit{The Italian Comedy} (New York: Dover, 1966), 192.} \footnote{Ibid., 182.}}

(Zerbinette et Géronte)

The second movement showcases both the bassoonist’s technique in all ranges and Koechlin’s skill in orchestration. The bassoonist must portray two opposing characters, Zerbinette and Géronte. It is helpful to understand the role each character plays in the \textit{Commedia} tradition. Géronte is derived from the character family of Pantaloon. He is usually portrayed as an older man, who may be a merchant or peasant, but because of his trusting and gullible nature is always being cheated or fooled by other characters. The Pantaloon type of character is often a gossip or busy-body and is always being tormented by his daughters or servant girls. He often falls in love with inappropriately young maidens who mock his affection.\footnote{Ibid., 182.} Zerbinette is a name commonly used for the role of The Servant-maid or \textit{soubrette}. This character is usually the fast-talking, flirtatious, “funny-girl,” in contrast to Géronte’s (Pantaloon) role of “straight man.”

This movement likely owes its title and programmatic elements to the French playwright Molière’s \textit{The Knavery of Scapin}, a \textit{Commedia}-based farce about mistaken identity. The convoluted plot also incorporates various \textit{lazzi} for comic effect. In \textit{The Knavery of Scapin}, Géronte, a rich, miserly merchant, is busily arranging a profitable marriage for his son. Instead, the son has fallen in love with the Gypsy girl, Zerbinette, and schemes to marry her against Géronte’s wishes. The love-sick son and the wily servant, Scapin, play a series of tricks on Géronte in order to collect the money needed to purchase Zerbinette’s freedom from the Gypsies.
Zerbinette learns of the plans to trick Géronte out of his money, and feels compelled to share the funny story with anyone who will listen. She has never met Géronte, and therefore does not realize her error in telling the tale of trickery to the victim. Géronte becomes increasingly angry as he learns of how he has been duped. Zerbinette does not realize her mistake until Géronte issues a series of insults and curses and stomps away.116 This scene bears a strong resemblance to the programmatic indications of Koechlin’s second movement, the “Duetto.”117

Koechlin clearly marks in the score which passages belong to each character and orchestrates them accordingly. The two “voices” are differentiated by the predominant use of the high register for Zerbinette and the lowest octaves for Géronte. In addition, Zerbinette’s passages are orchestrated lightly, with high woodwinds, piano and harp, while Géronte is accompanied by heavy, low strings, percussion, and brass. Both lines share a staccato character with wide leaps and constant motion. The meter fluctuates from duple to triple regardless of the character being portrayed, changing more frequently as the tension builds. Zerbinette opens the movement and goads Géronte into greater explosions of anger and frustration. As the conversation escalates, the range of each melodic section becomes ever wider. Géronte’s increasingly muscular passages are accompanied by outbursts of E-flat clarinet and xylophone. Koechlin uses performance instructions such as “grumpy,” “pushing, shoving, bad temperedly,” “mocking,” and “as if a curse.”118 As in The Knaveries of Scapin, Géronte gets the last word in the musical argument, ending with a fortissimo, low B♭.

Koechlin makes huge demands of the solo bassoonist in the “Duetto.” The melody leaps between the extremes of high and low, using not only the bassoon’s lowest note, B-flat1, but also the highest E5 and F5. For comparison purposes, the infamously high bassoon solo of Igor Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring (1913) starts on a C5 and climbs only to a D5. The “Duetto” employs a wide variety of instruments and generally requires a larger orchestra than most of the other movements. The woodwinds include two flutes, piccolo, oboe, English horn, two clarinets, E-


117 Excerpts from Scene III of The Knaveries of Scapin can be found in APPENDIX B.

118 “bougon,” “presser, bousculé, rageur,” “persiflard,” and “Malédiction”
flat clarinet, bass clarinet, and contrabassoon. The brass section plays a much greater role in this movement, with parts for four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, and a tuba. The percussion required is also significant. Koechlin calls for timpani, bass drums, snare drum, side drum, suspended cymbal, antique cymbal, tam-tam, xylophone, and triangle, as well as celeste and piano. Koechlin manages to combine large forces with the relatively limited dynamic range of the bassoon by only rarely using the entire ensemble at once. In addition, the staccato nature of the themes of the “Duetto” allow for greater transparency.

III. “L’Éternal Clitandre”

The third movement of the Silhouettes de Comédie is named for one of The Lovers in the Commedia tradition. Clitandre is gallant, polite, and forever falling in love with young ladies. Paul Verlaine’s poetry collection, Fêtes galantes, was a popular source of material for composers and included the beloved poem, “Clair de Lune.” The character of Clitandre appears in both “Mandoline” and “Pantomime” of the same collection. In an autobiographical study, Koechlin recalls that Debussy’s setting of “Mandoline” (1882) was all that he knew of the influential composer when he entered the Paris Conservatory. Koechlin was especially interested in Debussy’s opening chord progression and he admitted being inspired to use a similar progression in one of his own song settings. Fauré also set the same text in 1892. In the following excerpt from “Mandoline,” Verlaine describes young lovers, including the ever-hopeful Clitandre, trying to melt maidens’ hearts with poetry and music in a moonlit garden.

The serenaders
And their lovely listeners,
Exchange trivial banter
Under the singing boughs.

119 Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 5.
It is Tircis and Aminte,  
And the tiresome Clitandre,  
And Damis, who for many a  
Cruel woman writes many a tender verse.\textsuperscript{120} \textsuperscript{121}

Koechlin’s use of quotation marks around the title of this movement, reinforces the connection to “l’\textit{éternal Clitandre}” of Verlaine’s poem “Mandoline.” Other literary references to Clitandre are minor, but bear mentioning. In the first stanza of Verlaine’s “Pantomime,” he compares the clown, Pierrot, to Clitandre;

\begin{center}
Pierrot, no polite Clitandre,  
in the flask leaves no remainder,  
and, practical fellow, cuts a pie.\textsuperscript{122} \textsuperscript{123}
\end{center}

Molière also uses the Clitandre character for a minor role in the \textit{Commedia}-influenced play, \textit{The Misanthrope} (1666). In this scenario, Clitandre is a foppish marquis courting the lovely Célimène, but he is one of many suitors and ultimately unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{124}

“L’Éternal Clitandre” is in the style of a \textit{sicilienne}, a rustic dance in triple meter, but it is much more complex. Koechlin uses elements of the graceful dotted-eighth rhythms of the \textit{sicilienne} to create a secondary rhythmic motive of two sixteenth-notes followed by an eighth-note. He then uses this motive to throw the dance slightly off-balance with hemiolas. Koechlin also varies the meter constantly, adding asymmetrical 5/8 and 7/8 bars. Similarly to the “Prologue,” the bassoon melody stays in the “middle-high” and upper registers of the bassoon, rarely warranting a bass clef.

Koechlin creates a texture of interweaving solo lines, perpetually in motion. There are few instances of “accompaniment” in this movement. The orchestration includes two flutes, piccolo, oboe, oboe d’amore, English horn, clarinet, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, and the notable addition of soprano and alto saxophones. It is interesting to note Koechlin’s use of saxophone in


\textsuperscript{121} The original French text of this excerpt can be found in APPENDIX A.


\textsuperscript{123} The original French text of this excerpt can be found in APPENDIX A.

certain movements of the *Silhouettes de Comédie*. He used the saxophone in a number of his other compositions and also wrote solo works for the instrument. Even so, Koechlin only uses the saxophone in four of the twelve *Silhouettes*. All of the movements that Koechlin orchestrates with saxophone are dedicated to the romantic, masculine characters.

**IV. Isabelle**

Isabella,\(^{125}\) the subject of the fourth movement, is a member of a class of characters known in the 16th century as The Inamoratas. This character type appears as the beautiful love-interest in almost every *Commedia* plot. Portrayals of Inamoratas ranged from innocent and modest to manipulative and flirtatious.\(^{126}\) These characters, and the actresses who portrayed them, were considered to be of a higher class than The Servant-maid characters, such as “Zerbinette” or “Colombine.” Because the character of Isabella is so common, one cannot easily pinpoint the source of Koechlin’s inspiration.

Koechlin’s reference to *Le Capitaine Fracasse* in the first movement of the *Silhouettes* suggests that he would have been aware of Gautier’s Isabelle. In *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, Isabelle, an actress, captures the heart of the young, impoverished Baron (Captain Fracasse). In a lucky twist of fate revealed very early in the novel, Isabelle is the illegitimate daughter of a prince. Proof of her noble blood erases the Baron’s reluctance to court a common actress and his love for her grows over the course of their adventures. Gautier describes Isabelle as childlike, modest, and charming, both onstage and in daily life.\(^{127}\)

This movement is second in length only to the “Prologue,” unfolding over approximately four minutes. The opening motives of the “Prologue” and “Isabelle” are similar, perhaps suggesting the relationship between the young Baron and Isabelle in *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. Koechlin begins “Isabelle” softly with the bassoon accompanied only by strings. The movement is marked *andante tranquillo*, and the stately melody is soon answered by solo viola and clarinet.

---

\(^{125}\) Koechlin uses the French spelling of this name for the title of the fourth movement, “Isabelle”  

\(^{126}\) Duchartre, *The Italian Comedy*, 271.  

The middle section, though based on the same melody, is much more playful in character. Koechlin closes the movement with a return to *andante tranquillo* and the simple opening melody. This movement is beautiful, but also very serious, much like the Isabelle of *Le Capitaine Fracasse*. Even the playful middle section of “Isabelle” is more reserved in character than Koechlin’s interpretation of the flirtatious Servant-maid, Colombine (Movement IX).

According to Orledge, the mood and theme may be borrowed from the opening movement of Koechlin’s First String Quartet op. 51 (1911-13). It was not uncommon for Koechlin to return to discarded sketches or earlier works for inspiration, even many years later. Koechlin uses strings and upper woodwinds, but omits the soprano and alto saxophones found in the previous movement. Koechlin also chooses not to use any percussion or brass.

**V. Le Matamore**

The fifth movement of the *Silhouettes de Comédie*, “Le Matamore,” refers to a Captain-type character. The name “Matamore” can be translated to mean “the braggart.” Pierre Duchartre, gives a colorful description of such a character, writing, “the eyes of Captain Matamoros gleam like steel, his mustache bristles, and his huge nose and immense sword quiver with rage incessantly, somewhat in the same manner as a peacock’s tail during mating season.” Captain-type characters are a swaggering mix of courage and cowardice. Their costumes include military dress of the period and the ubiquitous oversized, yet ill-used sword. Captain-types are usually the butt of jokes rather than the romantic hero.

Though Captain-type characters are plentiful, Pierre Corneille’s play, *The Theatrical Illusion*, is one of few sources to specifically feature Captain Matamore. Written in 1636, the successful play was forgotten after Corneille’s death in 1684. *The Theatrical Illusion* experienced a revival of interest in the twentieth century and was performed to great acclaim at the *Comédie Française* in 1937, only five years before Koechlin began work on the *Silhouettes*.

---


130 Ibid., 229.
In *The Theatrical Illusion*, the swashbuckling Captain Matamore is proud and boastful, often launching into extended monologues extolling and inflating his virtues in war and romance. Captain Matamore avoids confronting his rivals, hiding his cowardice by saying that he cannot be both handsome and valorous at the same time.¹³¹

Another possible source, the Captain Matamore of Gautier’s *Le Capitaine Fracasse* freezes to death in a snow storm early in the novel. Though in this case Captain Matamore’s role is minor, Gautier’s descriptions are still useful in understanding the character. He describes the ill-fated Matamore as,

painfully thin-scarcely more than skin and bones - a living skeleton with a large hooked nose, set in a long narrow face, a huge mustache turned up at the ends, and flashing, black eyes . . . The swaggering air suitable to his part had become habitual with him, and he walked always with immense strides, head thrown back, and hand on the pommel of the huge sword he was never seen without.¹³²

One of the shortest of the miniatures of the *Silhouettes*, Koechlin’s vision of Captain Matamore is full of frenetic energy. The bassoon soloist leaps and bounces in virtuosic manner, accented by outbursts of percussion and brass. Koechlin’s quick tempo propels the staccato, march-like melody. The highly dissonant accompaniment reflects war-like nature of the character and Koechlin’s use of snare drum reinforces militaristic imagery. Koechlin’s orchestration uses the full range of woodwind colors; two flutes, piccolo, oboe, oboe d’amore, English horn, clarinet, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, and contrabassoon. Large brass and percussion forces are also used.

**VI. Arnophe et Agnès**

Molière’s play, *The School for Wives*, may have been the source of programatic elements found in the sixth movement, titled “Arnolphe et Agnès.” Written in 1662, this play reflected widely held misogynistic attitudes towards the role of women and fears about the increasingly educated and independent female. Arnolphe, another Pantaloon-type character, was played by

---


Molière in the original performances. Arnolphe is pompous, scheming, and has a tendency to lapse into long-winded, pedantic monologues. He adopted Agnès as a young child and carefully supervised her upbringing in order to create the perfect wife. According to plan, when Agnès reaches adulthood she is totally innocent, uneducated, and completely ignorant of the ways of the world. Just as Arnophe feels the time is right to marry Agnès, he discovers that she is being courted by a younger man, who wins her heart in the end.\textsuperscript{133} Though the music does not strictly adhere to the dialogue, this movement seems to recall a portion of Act III of \textit{The School for Wives}, in which Arnolphe delivers a lecture on the “proper” role of wives. He gives Agnès a book containing maxims for wifehood, including such advice as “she must not adorn her person except in a manner which satisfies the husband whose property she is.”\textsuperscript{134,135}

Koechlin musically illustrates both the incompatibility of Arnolphe and Agnès, but also the old-fashioned nature of Arnolphe’s ideas about the “perfect wife.” The two themes representing each character are in different styles and seem totally unrelated. Arnophe’s staccato and accented theme is alternated with the sweet and simple melody representing Agnès. Koechlin heightens the contrast by using duple meter for Arnolphe and triple meter for Agnès. Arnolphe’s theme is highly contrapuntal, possibly in parody of old-fashioned composition techniques and pedagogical exercises.\textsuperscript{136} His theme is also dominated by the full gamut of double reeds playing in the low registers. The ridiculous character of Arnolphe’s theme is furthered by Koechlin’s use of solo contrabassoon for the final notes of most of the phrases. Agnès’s theme ends the movement, paralleling her eventual triumph over Arnolphe in \textit{The School for Wives}.

The orchestration of this movement is very different from the other movements of the \textit{Silhouettes de Comédie}. The ensemble is smaller, with fewer woodwinds and no brass. The reduced woodwind section leaves an ensemble that is heavy on the double reeds and low

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{135} Arnolphe’s lecture from Act. III of \textit{The School for Wives} can be found in APPENDIX C
\textsuperscript{136} Orledge, \textit{Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works}, 198.
clarinets. This is the only movement in which Koechlin adds a second bassoon in addition to the soloist and contrabassoon.

**VII. Le beau Léandre**

(Aubade)

The character, Léandre, comes from the family of The Lover. Like Clitandre of the third movement, Léandre is usually young, handsome, courteous, and gallant, sometimes to the point of being ridiculous. Léandre or in Italian, Leandro, appears frequently in *Commedia* inspired literature and poetry, making it difficult to determine a single source. In *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, Léandre is vain and thoroughly consumed by the possibility of attracting the attention of a rich noblewoman. Molière’s play, *The Knavery of Scapin*, on which the “Duetto” is based, also features a lover-type character named Léandre.

Koechlin uses the term *aubade* in the title of “Le beau Léandre.” In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an *aubade* would be performed in the morning, often in honor of important guests. The twentieth century *aubade* is a much more generic title, often used for short character pieces. The melody of “Le beau Léandre” is light and capricious, yet more graceful and legato than Koechlin’s depiction of the other Lover-type character. In contrast to the complex contrapuntal texture of “L’Éternal Clitandre,” the bassoon melody is the main focus in “Le beau Léandre.” The ornamented line is sometimes intertwined with complimentary solo lines in the cello, violin, or flute. Koechlin uses a flute, piccolo, clarinet, and bass clarinet, but eliminates all double reeds except for the solo bassoon. Similar in orchestration that of the third movement, soprano and alto saxophone are added to the ensemble.

---

137 Duchartre, *The Italian Comedy*, 286.


139 *Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press, 2009), "Aubade."
VIII. Les deux orphelines

In the late nineteenth century Adolphe D’Ennery collaborated with fellow French dramatist Eugene Corman to write the play Les deux orphelines.\footnote{in English, The Two Orphans} D’Ennery also created the libretto for Massanet’s opera Le Cid, based on Pierre Corneille’s play of the same title. Les deux orphelines was first performed in 1874 in Paris at the Théâtre Porte St. Martin. The play was also adapted into a successful silent film by D. W. Griffith in 1922. The film, titled Orphans of the Storm, starred Lillian and Dorothy Gish as the heroines.\footnote{Glen Hughes, “Introduction to The Two Orphans,” (New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc., 1939) 2-6.} D’Ennery and Cormon’s play shares many of the same devices found in the works of Gautier, Corneille, and Molière. Les deux orphelines has themes of secret identity, forced marriage, and impossible love between a nobleman and a commoner. Though it uses elements of the Commedia tradition, Les deux orphelines is not comical and the plight of the heroines is taken very seriously.

In D’Ennery’s play, the beautiful Henriette and blind Louise are newly orphaned sisters. They arrive unescorted in Paris from Normandy to enter the service of a family friend. At the train station, Henriette is kidnapped by an evil nobleman, leaving Louise, sightless and alone, on the streets of Paris. Unable to fend for her self, Louise is taken in by a family of beggars. A kind nobleman rescues Henriette and soon falls in love with her. Both sisters are heartbroken by their separation and vow to find each other. Through unbelievable twists of fate Louise and Henriette are reunited. Henriette marries the nobleman, Louise’s sight is restored, and everyone lives happily ever after.\footnote{Adolphe d’Ennery and Eugene Cormon, “The Two Orphans,” trans. N. Hart Jackson, (New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc., 1939).}

Koechlin’s counterpoint is a defining feature of “Les deux orphelines,” the seventh movement of the Silhouettes de Comédie. The orchestration is for bassoon and strings only, making the contrapuntal lines especially clear. The opening bassoon melody is echoed a beat later by the solo viola, playing a fifth lower. This pairing may be meant to represent the two sisters of the title and remains constant through most of the movement. Sometimes the viola is reinforced or replaced by the solo cello or bass but the tone color remains similar. In the sixth
bar, a new melody is introduced by the bassoon, but cello joins two beats later, now a sixth lower. Next Koechlin increases the distance between entrances to three beats and pairs the melody in the bassoon with its inversion in the solo cello. In subsequent variations Koechlin starts to bring the two primary voices closer together, but also adds additional contrapuntal lines. In the measure before the resolution there are five independent contrapuntal lines. Perhaps Koechlin is representing the experience of the two orphans, Henriette and Louise, (together - parted - reunited and surrounded by loved ones) with the progression of the counterpoint.

IX. Colombine, danseuse

The character of Colombine comes from the The Servant-maid of the Commedia and was often cast as Isabella’s servant and confidante. French manners and flirtatiousness were hallmarks of seventeenth-century actress Catherine Biancolelli’s popular interpretation of the Colombine character and her performances influenced the subsequent generations of actresses. Colombine is usually found in art and plays as a companion and friend to Harlequin. Colombine is always in love with someone, usually a “rascally valet.” Though a servant class character, she possesses a keen intellect that gets her out of sticky situations.¹⁴³

Three of Verlaine’s poems from the Fêtes galantes refer to Colombine. The first, “Pantomime,” also features a number of other Commedia characters, including Clitandre, Cassandre, Harlequin, and Pierrot. The following excerpt from Verlaine’s “Pantomime” portrays a naive and vulnerable Colombine.

That scoundrel Harlequin designs the kidnapping of Colombine and makes four pirouettes with art.

Colombine dreams, surprised to find she feels a heart along the wind and hears strange voices in her heart.¹⁴⁴ ¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Duchartre, The Italian Comedy, 278.

¹⁴⁴ The original French text of this excerpt can be found in APPENDIX A.

Though she is not named outright in the following poem “Puppets,” it is likely that Verlaine is referring to Colombine when he speaks of the Doctor’s daughter. In this portion of “Puppets” she has evolved from the naivety of “Pantomime” to sneaking out in the garden at night.146

The doctor from Bologna picks
herbs to medicine the sick
in the grasses sere and brown.

But his daughter with piquant eye
to the arbor, on the sly,
glides half-naked on a quest

for her fine buccaneer of Spain,
whose anguish cries in the loud pain
the nightingale pours from his breast.147 148

In “Colombine,” also drawn from Fêtes galantes, she has become a beautiful manipulator.149 Verlaine describes the way she uses her womanly charms to control her suitors. In the English translation of this excerpt, Colombine is referred to as “the implacable flirt” and “bad, but pretty.”

Do, mi, sol do!
See everyone go
    with a laugh and a ditty;
dancing they whirl
before a bad girl
    but pretty.

whose eyes, green
as a cat’s and obscene
    (she has cause
to guard her full-blown
    charms), cry: “Keep down
your paws!”


148 Original French text can be found in APPENDIX A

-Forever they go!
Stars who foreknow,
say, to what
dismally dull
and pitiful
lot

this implacable flirt,
lifting her skirt,
rose in hair,
misleads her troupes,
poor gulls and dupes,
where?\textsuperscript{150} \textsuperscript{151}

Though Koechlin’s musical depiction of Colombine seems to emphasize a flirtatious rather than manipulative nature, the Colombine depicted in Verlaine’s \textit{Fêtes galantes} provides a possible model.

Just over a minute long, the ninth movement is one of the shortest of the \textit{Silhouettes de Comédie}. This graceful, pastoral movement is a \textit{sicilienne}, a designation reinforced by Koechlin’s title “Colombine : danseuse (dancer).”\textsuperscript{152} The highly ornate melody requires great agility from the soloist. Constantly in motion, the bassoonist receives only one bar of rest. Koechlin may intend for the quick tempo, dance rhythms, and ornamentation to evoke the girlish flirtation of Colombine’s character. Koechlin’s orchestration of “Colombine” is very spare, using only one each of flute, piccolo, and clarinet, and strings. Koechlin’s use of the celeste, piano, and triangle complete a very delicate accompaniment.

\textsuperscript{150} Original French text can be found in APPENDIX A
\textsuperscript{152} Orledge, \textit{Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works}, 199.
The *Gardes Francaises* grew from the elite troops created in 1563 to protect the French royal family and ensure court security. The regiment on which Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870) based his novel, *The Three Musketeers*, was a branch of the *Gardes Francaises*. However, the *Gardes Francaises* may have held more meaning for Koechlin as a symbol of the triumph of “the people” in the French Revolution (1789-1799). King Louis XVI had stationed regiments of the *Gardes Francaises* in Paris to keep order, only to have the troops join the revolutionaries. Members of the *Gardes Francaises* assisted in the storming of the Bastille and later joined the National Guard to protect the newly formed republic. Though no connection to the *Commedia* has been found for this movement, it is linked to the history and culture of the French people.

At the opening of this brief march, Koechlin includes instructions reminding the performers that the eight notes should be held for their full value (in 12/8 time). The rhythmic material and character is different from most of the other movements. Koechlin uses two flutes, alto flute (or alto saxophone), two clarinets, bass clarinet (or tenor saxophone), but no double reeds in addition to soloist. He brings in the brass for color but keeps limits the instrumentation in order to let the bassoonist be heard. The brass section for this movement consists of two horns, two cornets or trumpets, and one trombone. The timpani is only used for a few notes and Koechlin saves the military side drum for the final flourish.

Koechlin’s instructions to the soloist can be translated as “determinedly, sustained, robust, and full.” This simple movement can be divided into three sections, all in a similar style. In each, the bassoon is joined by different combinations of instruments. The final section opens with the the same melody, ascending with increasing volume to a high E-flat. This third

---


155 “décidé, soutenu, solide, cossu”
section brings the entire ensemble to a boisterous climax. The trombone only plays in the last two measures, giving the ensemble an extra boost of volume. Koechlin, seeming to foresee the temptation, gives special instructions that the trombonist should play “without drowning out.”

**XI. Arlequin**

Arlequin, also known as Harlequin or Arlecchino, is one of the oldest characters in the *Commedia* tradition. He comes from a class of thieves, schemers, and buffoons that also includes the related characters, Pierrot and Scaramouche. Arlequin’s colorful costume evolved from the mismatched patches of poverty and he is often seen in engravings and paintings wearing a black half-mask. Arlequin usually possesses great agility in tumbling, sparring, or dancing and can be quite charming when he is seducing young ladies. Especially in the twentieth century, Arlequin often appears as Pierrot’s rival for the affections of Colombine.

In the poem, “Pantomime,” from Verlaine’s *Fêtes galantes*, Arlequin is both graceful and sinister, while in “Colombine” he watches and schemes from behind the traditional half-mask.

That scoundrel Harlequin designs
the kidnapping of Colombine
and makes four pirouettes with art.

Harlequin, droll wag but no fool
and brisk,
is dressed for the show -
and his eyes glow
through his mask.

---

156 “sans couvrir”


161 Original French text of both excerpts can be found in APPENDIX A
The “Arlequin” movement is only rivaled by the “Duetto” for the most varied instrumentation. Koechlin calls for two flutes, piccolo, oboe, oboe d’amore, and English horn. This is the only movement of the Silhouettes de Comédie requiring four clarinets, including E-flat, bass, and contrabass clarinets. Koechlin also adds contrabassoon, soprano saxophone, and alto saxophone. He uses no horns, but two each of trumpets and trombones, and a tuba. Harp, piano, and celeste are also part of the ensemble. In addition to xylophone and marimba, Koechlin uses a range of battery percussion, notably including castanets and tambourine. He creates a light, varied texture in spite of the enormous ensemble by expertly weaving the melody and accompaniment through all the instrument but rarely letting them all play at once. Koechlin sometimes distributes sweeping runs over five or six instruments, each only playing a few notes.

“Arlequin” showcases some of the most spectacular technical passages of all the Silhouettes de Comédie. Koechlin’s melody leaps and tumbles with an agility often associated with the character of Harlequin. The structure is episodic, with rhythmic sections that are often interrupted by more contemplative cadenza-like fragments. In the opening bars, the solo line climbs to a high E₃ and F₃, but facility in the lowest register is also required. Koechlin briefly showcases the soprano saxophone before returning to the rollicking bassoon melody, once again hitting a high E₃. The cadenza is highly chromatic and technically challenging. A brief yet beautiful episode in which a simple melody is accompanied by harmonics in the strings may be intended to acknowledge the romantic aspect of Arlequin’s character. The bassoon solo is quickly off and running again, traversing the entire range of the instrument before a burst of timpani seems to signal a big, flashy ending. According a collection of his sketches, Koechlin drafted six different endings. He considered endings in G major, B-flat major, and finally B major. According to Orledge, this search for the perfect ending “reveals Koechlin’s concern for using the entire range of the bassoon.”

Surprisingly, Koechlin finishes the light and playful coda with a diminuendo.

---

162 Orledge, Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works, 247-248.
The character of Monsieur Prud’homme has a long history, with roots in the Commedia tradition. Molière adapted the Pantaloon character-type for the title role in his comic play, The Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme. The character endured in the French consciousness, and was adapted by artists and satirists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Monsieur Prud’homme, the embodiment of French bourgeois complacency, was created by Henry Monnier in a series of collected lithographs published between 1830-1860. Born in Paris in 1799 to a family of middle class civil servants, Monnier is thought to have drawn upon his own experiences as a copy clerk in the post-Napoleonic bureaucracy in creating the Prud’homme stories. Edith Melcher sums up Monnier’s Prud’homme,

Physically he is short and stout, with a round bald head adorned with a single tuft of hair on top and a fringe behind, prolonged in side whiskers which extend well over his cheeks. His full double chin is clean shaven. The curve of his mouth with its protruding lower lip indicates complacency as well as stubbornness, and belies the benevolent effect of the round spectacles behind whose rims the eyes have an expression of perpetual and naive surprise . . . His voice is strong and resonant, and he speaks with a precision of diction which matches the preciousness of his language. His pompous style has an opulence of form which only too often masks the poverty of its thought.

The character of Monsieur Prud’homme outlived the creator, appearing in poetry, art, and literature over a century after the death of Monnier in 1877. Paul Verlaine wrote of “Monsieur Prudhomme” in his Poèmes Saturniens (1866).

He’s the mother of all fathers. Gravitas, Mayor to boot, false collar high as a neck-brace, Untroubled eyes on journeys into space. Radiant Spring makes his carpet-slippers shine.

163 Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009, Encyclopædia Britannica Online, "Monnier, Henry"
164 Melcher, The Life and Times of Henry Monnier 3-22.
165 Ibid., 187-188
What use to him the Golden Orb, the pergola
Where dawn birds chorus in the shade, what use
The sky, green meadows, silent lawns? Mr.
Pomp and Circumstance\textsuperscript{166} has got it planned:\textsuperscript{167} 168

Koechlin specifically indicates that this last movement was inspired by a painting by Jean
Veber (1864-1928), titled \textit{Monsieur Prud‘homme au bal des humoristes}. Translated into English, the title means \textit{Mr. Prud‘homme at a the Humorists‘ Ball}. Two of Veber’s more famous political cartoons include depictions of the British King Edward VII’s face superimposed on the bare behind of a personified Brittania, and the Chancellor of the German Empire, Otto von Bismarck, in the guise of a butcher. Veber was well loved in France and despised abroad for his nationalistic cartoons. He was held in such high esteem in France that he was awarded the \textit{Légion d’honneur} in 1907.\textsuperscript{169}

Veber’s nationalistic work was at its height during World War I (1914-1918). The origins of this movement date to 1919 when Koechlin discarded it in favor of having only three movements in the Sonata op. 71 for bassoon and piano. Many years later, Koechlin revived the discarded sketches, eventually selecting it as the closing movement for the \textit{Silhouettes de Comédie}.

For the last movement Koechlin uses a large ensemble, with full sections of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and a contrabassoon. The brass section is well represented with two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, and a tuba. Koechlin also writes for enough percussion to require four performers in addition to the timpanist. “Monsieur Prud‘homme,” is one of the longest and most repetitive movements in the \textit{Silhouettes de Comédie}, and can be loosely divided into three sections. In the first, the melody begins in the lowest register of the bassoon and is repeated over and over. As other instruments join with the same melody but at different pitch intervals, the parallel motion creates a striking effect. Koechlin was an expert on the rules of counterpoint, but

---

\textsuperscript{166} an English translation of the name “Monsieur Prud‘homme"


\textsuperscript{168} Original French text can be found in APPENDIX A

Robert Orledge suggests that like “Arnolphe and Agnès,” the pedantic nature of this movement may be another parody of old-fashioned or unimaginative compositions. In the second section of “Monsier Prud’homme,” Koechlin combines celeste, piano, and harp with light percussion to introduce a different mood. The new accompaniment is graceful and delicate, yet the bassoon repeats the same low melody, seemingly oblivious to the change in atmosphere. Finally the soloist sheds some of the stodgy Prud’homme character, joining the rest of the ensemble in a graceful arpeggiated flourishes. The last section is shorter than the first two and might be considered a coda. The melody returns in its original form, accompanied by the full ensemble at pianissimo. With each repetition, the volume increases. The final chords are brassy and offer a clear perfect-authentic cadence. Considering the subject, the complacently bourgeois Prud’homme, Koechlin’s heroic final chords are the crowning touches on the farce.

**CONCLUSION**

Charles Koechlin’s *Silhouettes de Comédie* is a fascinating example the lasting influence of the *Commedia dell’arte*. Constantly evolving, this theatrical tradition spread from Italy, across Europe, and eventually even to the United States. The characters depicted in Koechlin’s *Silhouettes* range from icons of the Commedia tradition, such as Harlequin, to modern interpretations such as Monsieur Prudhomme. Koechlin’s choice of subjects for the *Silhouettes* also reflects his personal tastes in literature, poetry, and drama. Romantic literature such as *Le Capitaine Fracasse* and *Les Deux Orphelines* emphasizes chivalry, honor, and true love as well as incorporating elements of the Commedia. The tenth movement, the “Chanson Martiale des Gardes Françaises,” is the only movement that seems to be without Commedia influence, though

---


171 Orledge, *Charles Koechlin, His Life and Works*, 198.
the Romantic themes of patriotism and liberty are complementary to the sentiment of the work as a whole.

Charles Koechlin’s *Silhouettes de Comédie* is a monumental work for bassoon due to its length, scope, orchestration, and magnitude of difficulty. The *Silhouettes de Comédie* provides the performer opportunities to shape the expressive melodies and to display virtuosic technique in all ranges of the bassoon. Hallmarks of Koechlin’s compositional style, such as melodic emphasis, modal mixture, metrical flexibility, and the use of counterpoint are evident in this work. The twelve *Silhouettes* are well ordered and work as a unit, but it would also be possible to select a few contrasting movements for a shorter performance. Koechlin’s transparent and varied orchestration is a key element of interest, but a piano reduction is also available for rehearsals or performance in smaller venues. This beautiful and challenging set of miniature movements deserves a more prominent position in the bassoonist’s repertoire.
APPENDIX A

EXCERPTS FROM THE POETRY OF VERLAINE
IN THE ORIGINAL FRENCH

Excerpts from “Mandoline”

Les donneurs de sérénades
Et les belles écouteuses
Échangent des propos fades
Sous les ramures chanteuses.

C’est Tircis et c’est Aminte,
Et c’est l’éternal Clitandre,
Et c’est Damis qui pour mainte
Cruelle fait maint vers tendre.


Excerpts from “Pantomime”

Pierrot, qui n’a rien d’un Clitandre,
Vide un flacon sans plus attendre,
Er, pratique, entame un pâté.

. . .

Ce faquin d’Arlequin combine
L’enlèvement de Colombine
Et pirouette quatre fois.

Colombine rêve, surprise
De sentir un coeur dans la brise
Et d’entendre en son coeur des voix.

Excerpts from “Fantoches” (Puppets)

Cependant l’excellent docteur
Bolonais cueille avec lenteur
Des simples parmi l’herbe brune

Lors sa fille, piquant minois,
Sous la charmille en tapinois,
Se glisse demi-nude, en quête

De son beau pirate espagnol,
Dont un langoureux rossignol
Clâme la détresse à tue-tête.


Excerpts from “Colombine”

Arlequin aussi,
Cet aigrefin si
Fantasque,
Aux costumes fous,
Ses yeux luisants sous
son masque,

- Do, mi, sol, mi, fa, -
Tout ce monde va,
Rit, chante
Et danse devant
Une belle enfant
Méchante

Dont les yeux pervers
Comme les yeux verts
Des chattes
Gardent ses appas
Et disent: « À bas
Les pattes! »
- Eux ils vont toujours! -
Fatidique cours
   Des astres,
Oh! dis-moi vers quels
Mornes ou cruels
   Désastres.

L’implacable enfant,
Preste et relevant
   Ses jupes,
La rose au chapeau,
Conduit son troupeau
   De dupes!


Excerpts from “Monsieur Prudhomme”

Il est grave : il est maire et père de famille.
Son faux col engloutit son oreille. Ses yeux
Dans un rêve sans fin flottent, insoucieux,
Et le printemps en fluer sur ses pantoufles brille

Que lui fait l’astre d’or, que lui fait la charmille
Où l’oiseau chante à l’ombre, et que lui font les cieux,
Et les prés verts et les gazons silencieux?
Monsieur Prudhomme songe à marier sa fille

Zerbinette has just learned of the tricks played on her lover’s father, Géronte.

Zer: Ha, Ha, I must have a breath of air.
Gér: I swear you shall pay for this.
Zer: Ha, ha, ha, ha, what a good joke! what a fine dupe to make of the old man!
Gér: There is nothing amusing in it, or anything that should make you laugh.
Zer: What? What do you say, Monsieur?
Gér: I say you ought not to laugh at me.
Zer: You?
Gér: Yes.
Zer: Why, who dreams of laughing at you?
Gér: Why are you laughing here in my very face?
Zer: It has nothing to do with you; I was laughing by myself at a story I have just heard, the most amusing imaginable. It may be because I am interested in the matter; but I never heard anything so ridiculous as the trick which a son has just played off on his father, to squeeze some money out of him.
Gér: By a son on a father, to squeeze some money out of him.
Zer: Yes. If you want to hear it you will not find it difficult to get it out of me for I never can keep to myself the tales I hear.
Gér: Pray tell me this story.
Zer: Willingly. I shall not risk much in telling you, for it is an incident that will not long remain secret. Fate decided that I would fall into the hands of a troop of Gypsies, who, wandering from province to province, tell fortunes, and do many other things. On arriving in this town, a young man saw me and fell in love with me. From that moment he dogged my footsteps, at first acting like all other young men, who think they have but to speak, and, at the least word they say, attain their end; but he found a resistance that soon corrected his first thoughts. He told his passion to the people who held me captive, and he found them willing to let him have me for a certain sum. But the trouble of the matter was that my lover was in the condition in which most young men of birth often are, he was somewhat short of money; he has a father, who, although he is rich, is an avaricious boor, the most sorry wretch living. Stay. I wonder if I can remember his name. Ah! Try and help me. Cannot you tell me the name of some one in this town who is known to be a miser of the deepest dye?
Gér: No.
Zer: There is a ron, . . . ronte in his name. Or, . . . oronte. No. Gé . . . Géronte; yes, Géronte, exactly; that is the wretch, I have got it, he is the boor I told you of. Well, to go on with my tale, our people wish to leave this town today; and my lover was going to lose me, because he had no money, if he had not found a helper in his servant in the task of getting
it out of his father. I remember perfectly the name of the servant: he is called Scapin; he is a wonderful fellow and deserves all possible praise.

Gér: Ah! you rascal!
Zer: This is the stratagem he used to take in the dupe. Ha, ha, ha, ha. I cannot help laughing heartily whenever I think of it. Ha, ha, ha. He went to find this dog of a miser, ha, ha, ha; and said to him that, in walking along the harbor with his son, he, he, they saw a Turkish galley on which they were invited to go; a young Turk gave them luncheon, ha; and, whilst they were having it, the galley was put out to sea; then the Turk sent him back alone to the shore, in a skiff, with orders to tell his master’s father that he would take his son away to Algiers if he did not immediately send him five hundred crowns. Ha, ha, ha.

He could not make up his mind to wrench the sum out of his heartstrings; and the pain it gave him caused him to think of a hundred ridiculous ways to redeem his son. Ha, ha, ha. He wished to send law officers on the sea after the Turkish galley. Ha, ha, ha. He besought his valet to offer himself as a substitute for his son, until he had collected the money he did not intend to give. Ha, ha, ha. He gave him four or five old suits to sell, to make up the five hundred crowns, though they were not worth thirty. Ha, ha, ha. The valet gave him to understand, at each attempt, how preposterous his propositions were, and, every time the thing came back to his mind, he out with a wailing: “what the devil was he doing in that galley! The traitor of a Turk!” In the end, after several attempts at evasion, after having sighed and groaned for ever so long . . . .But you are not laughing at my tale. What do you think of it?

Gér: I think the young man is a hangdog, an insolent puppy, who will be punished by his father for the trick he has played him; that the Gypsy is a jade, an impertinent minx, to insult a man of honor, who will teach her to come here and corrupt children in a family; and that the valet is a scoundrel, who will be sent by Géronte to the gallows before tomorrow morning.

APPENDIX C

Molière, *THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES, ACT III*

*Arnolphe (sits down)*: Agnés, put your work down and listen to me. Raise your head a little and your face this way. That’s right. Now keep looking at me when I’m talking and mind you take in every word. I’m going to marry you Agnes. You should give thanks a hundred times a day for the good fortune your fate has brought you. You must reflect on the common condition to which you were born and at the same time admire my generosity which had raised you from your lowly rank of village girl to the position of a respectable lady and now enables you to share the bed and enjoy the affections of a man who has always avoided such entanglements and refused to grant to a score of very presentable women the honor he proposes to do to you. You must never lose sight, I say, of the humble station which you would occupy if it were not for this advantageous offer of marriage, so that the thought of it will teach you more effectively to deserve the position to which I’ll have raised you. Always remember what you are and behave in such a way that I shall never have cause but to congratulate myself for taking this step. Marriage, Agnés is not a game. The rank of wife carries strict duties and I have no intention of elevating you to that estate for you to be flighty and have a good time. Your sex was made to be dependent: power and authority belong with the beards. Men and women might be the two halves of society but these halves are not equal. One is the upper half and the other the lower. One is subservient to the other which is in charge. The obedience with which the disciplined soldier behaves to the officer who commands him, the valet to his master, children to their father, the lowliest of monks to his superior, comes nowhere near the docility, obedience, humility, and profound respect which a wife should show her husband who is her chief, her lord and her master. Whenever he turns a stern eye on her, it is her duty to lower her eyes and never look him in the face until he deigns to pardon her with a friendly glance. . . .

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009, Encyclopædia Britannica Online, "Monnier, Henry"

Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009, Encyclopædia Britannica Online, "Dreyfus, Alfred."

Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009, Encyclopædia Britannica Online, "motion picture, history of the."


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A native Texan, Amelia Fannin began her bassoon studies at the age of eleven. She earned degrees in Music Performance and Music Education from The University of North Texas in 2004, where she studied with Kathleen Reynolds. While studying at The Eastman School with John Hunt, Amelia earned a Masters Degree in Performance and Literature, as well as the Catherine Filene Shouse Arts Leadership Certificate. She enrolled in the doctoral program at The Florida State University in the fall of 2006, and studies with Jeffrey Keesecker. Amelia is bassoonist and contrabassoonist of the Tallahassee and Pensacola Symphonies and freelances throughout the Southeast.