

Music through the Microscope



Gabriel Fauré

Après un rêve

A musical analysis

Music through the Microscope Volume 5

Introduction.....	5
Sources & acknowledgements	5
Genre	6
Après un rêve.....	6
Text.....	6
Translation (version 1)	6
Translation (version 2)	7
Structure.....	8
Tonality.....	9
Harmony: verse 1	10
Bar 1 to 4	10
Bar 4 to 6	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 7 to 8	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Cycle of fifths	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 9 to 11	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 11 to 12.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 12 to 13.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 13 to 15.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 15 to 17.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Harmony: verse 2	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 17 to 25.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Bar 26 to 28 (Neapolitan 6)	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 28 to 30.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Harmony: verse 3	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Incomplete cycle of fifths bar 29 to 34	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 31 to 33.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 34 to 36.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 37 to 39.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 39 to 41.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 42 to 44.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Bar 45 to 48.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Harmonic speed	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Motifs	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Motif Z & Y.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Motif Y.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Motif X	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Melody	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Verse 1.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Verse 2.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Verse 3.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Texture	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Metre & rhythm.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Reflection**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Score**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Nick Redfern**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

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Introduction

This document is a detailed analysis of Gabriel Fauré *Après un rêve*. The purpose of this analysis is to aid the study of the work by isolating aspects of structure, melody and melodic development, harmony, texture, rhythm, etc.

This study is not a critique of the composer and does not seek to explore the cultural, contextual or historical aspects of the music.

If some of the illustrations appear too small then a free copy of the illustrations can be downloaded as a PDF file from:

http://www.nickredfern.co.uk/Cloud_Factory_Publications.htm

Sources & acknowledgements

The primary source of this analysis is from the transcription by Tak-Shing Chan (Mutopia 2014/02/24-368) which is a public domain document which at the time of publishing is not available online. I offer my very sincere thanks to the publisher for this most valuable resource.

There are versions of the score available at IMSLP

[http://imslp.org/wiki/3_Songs,_Op.7_\(Faur%C3%A9,_Gabriel\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/3_Songs,_Op.7_(Faur%C3%A9,_Gabriel))

Many illustrations are from my transcriptions of the original score using Sibelius notation software. The transcription is available to download as a free PDF file form:

http://www.nickredfern.co.uk/Cloud_Factory_Publications.htm

Nick Redfern

Genre

The work is a Mélodie, which is a genre similar to the German Lied. The Mélodie is characterised by brevity and understatement, the refined nature of the art form standing in stark contrast to its more demonstrative and overtly dramatic German counterpart.

Après un rêve

Written 1877. Published 1878.

Text by Romain Bussine.

The work is part of 3 Songs, Opus 7 and resources are available at IMSLP

[http://imslp.org/wiki/3_Songs,_Op.7_\(Faur%C3%A9,_Gabriel\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/3_Songs,_Op.7_(Faur%C3%A9,_Gabriel))

Text

Translation (version 1)

In a slumber which held your image spellbound

I dreamt of happiness, passionate mirage,

Your eyes were softer, your voice pure and sonorous,

You shone like a sky lit up by the dawn;

You called me and I left the earth

To run away with you towards the light,

The skies opened their clouds for us,

Unknown splendours, divine flashes glimpsed,

Alas! Alas! sad awakening from dreams
I call you, O night, give me back your lies,
Return, return radiant,
Return, O mysterious night.

Translation (version 2)

In a sleep charmed by your image
I dreamed of happiness, ardent mirage;
Your eyes were softer, your voice pure and ringing,
You shone like a sky lit by the dawn;

You called me and I left the earth
To run away with you towards the light,
The skies opened their clouds for us,
Unknown splendours, divine flashes glimpsed,

Alas! Alas! sad awakening from dreams
I call you, O night, give me your lies,
Return, return radiant,
Come O mysterious night!

Translating this text is problematic in terms of achieving a balance between the dramatic and poetic intentions of the original with the narrative setting. These versions are by the author and are intended merely as a simple insight

into the text for musical reference and are not intended as true representations of a translation or a poetic translation from French to English.

Structure

The work is strophic:

Verse 1 bars 1 – 16 (bar 1 introduction)

Verse 2 bars 17 – 30

Verse 3 bars 30 – 48

Verse 2 repeats material from verse 1 to bar 26 whilst the third verse is an ecstatic diversion from the previous two rather than a strict variation. The work can be considered to be in *modified* strophic form, a more poetic structure, allowing the drama inherent in the text to be reflected in the music. But the third verse is so fundamentally different in its harmonic construction that the term, even with the prefix *modified* does appear to be somewhat inappropriate. **A, A1, B** is a logical analysis, with the final verse functioning almost as an extended coda. The dramatic departure from the more traditional strophic form is of course an element of word painting; the awakening dreamer longing to return to the euphoric illusions of the dream. If one were to adhere to a more traditional acceptance of the modified strophic label then one could justify an **A, A1, A2** in terms of the unity brought by the use of common Motifs.

This formal plasticity is common in works of the late Romantic and early Twentieth Century where the dramatic demands and implications of the text required a more responsive setting in sympathy with the intentions of the poet rather than with the strictures of Classical form.

Tonality

The *Mélodie* is in C minor although in works typical of this period the tonality is in a state of constant flux. The habitual resolving of evocative and nuanced dissonant chords onto dissonant chords creates a sense of tonal unrest and continual, if highly temporary, modulations. The extended use of complex chords such as the half diminished 7th and harmonic idioms such as chromaticism ensures that the home key is never truly anchored. Indeed the tonic chord is used very sparingly and a true sense of tonal repose is only achieved in the final seven bars of the work.

42 *p* *pp*
se, Re - viens, ô nuit mysté-ri - eu - - - se!
p *pp*

Figure 1 Returning to the tonic bar 42 to 48

Harmony: verse 1

Bar 1 to 4

The sumptuous late Romantic harmonic idiom is the work's most endearing feature with seamless harmonic motion, languid progressions and wealth of harmonic devices. There is such an abundance of harmonic devices that there is seldom a bar that does not contain some form of dissonance or harmonic extension.

Andantino dolce

Dans un som - meil que char-mait ton i - ma - ge

pp

Cm Cm Eb Δ 7 2nd inv. F 7/9 F7 Bb 7/9 Bb 7

Figure 2 Harmony bars 1 to 4

The cool tone of the introduction, a mere bar, is followed by three bars of sumptuous and beautifully prepared dissonance and release. The demure C minor triad melds effortlessly into the F 7/9, the major chord offering an exotic sonority which typifies the harmonic idiom of the song and indeed the era in which the work was written.

Bar 2 beat three with its semitonal D to E flat dissonance is the result of contrapuntally defined dissonance, the B flat and D falling neatly to A natural and C of bar 3, whilst the E flat and G hang over the bar as suspensions

highlighted with a box in the following illustration. The direction of the stems is to clarify the part movement. This linear descent continues from beat 3 of bar 3 to beat 3 of bar 4. Here the descending series of notes is again illustrated with the pitches represented with stems going upwards. The E flat of the F 7 chord of bar 3 beat 3 falls to D, C and B flat, which is a heterophonic version of the melody.

Figure 3 Harmony bars 2 to 4

This stepwise or conjunct harmonic motion is employed throughout to great effect and imbuing the work with a true sense of harmonic progression, logic and preparation. Here from bar 2 to 5 the outer notes of the chord are illustrated in conjunct descending motion but on closer inspection every note of the 3 to 4 part chords is in conjunct descending motion. It is this feature which brings to the work an inexorable sense of loss and melancholy coupled with the flavour of the encroaching fin de siècle harmonic idiom.

The image displays two systems of musical notation, labeled '2' and '4', illustrating descending conjunct harmony. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).
System 2: The treble staff shows a descending line of notes: G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3. The last two notes are grouped as triplets. The grand staff shows a descending sequence of chords in the right hand, with upward arrows indicating fingerings. The bass staff is mostly empty, with a few notes in the second measure.
System 4: The treble staff shows a descending line: G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3. The grand staff shows a descending sequence of chords in both hands, with upward arrows in the bass and downward arrows in the treble indicating fingerings.

Figure 4 Descending conjunct harmony bars 2 to 5