Paris, c.1887-1900: Two Perspectives on the Musical Scene

In October 1887, a twelve-year-old Catalan boy accompanied by his mother left Barcelona for Paris to make arrangements for study at the Conservatoire, since 1795 the leading French institution for training musicians. Advised by Albéniz that this course was essential to assure his future as a pianist, Ricardo Viñes and his mother joined the resident group of Spaniards who had earlier come to France for a variety of reasons: political, economic and professional.

Before he was thirty, Viñes had become the leading pioneer in the performance of new music by Debussy, Ravel, Satie, Albéniz, Falla and other French, Spanish and Russian composers. Unstinting in his devotion to and promotion of the music of his contemporaries, Viñes lavished his energy in service to his art. Entries from his unpublished journal provide a remarkable view of the French capital at the turn of the century as seen through the eyes of a young, aspiring artist.

Along with Viñes's comments, contemporary accounts of visitors, working artists, writers and musicians, newspaper and journal reports make for a lively description of the cultural scene in Paris at the time.

Slides and tapes will enhance the presentation of the text.

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Viñes in Paris: New Light on Twentieth-Century Performance Practice

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The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed the birth of a new style of piano music. Though relatively short-lived, it has, in retrospect, eclipsed succeeding currents of piano composition, if not in critical then certainly in popular appeal. The emergence of this new piano style, in many ways the joint achievement of Debussy and Ravel, was, as the late Edward Lockspeiser has indicated, one of the most important events in early twentieth-century music.[1]

Although Debussy and Ravel knew one another and respected each other's abilities, the complexities of their relationship were such that they cannot be said to have been friends. As a young man, Ravel expressed both admiration for Debussy and a recognition of the older composer's influence on him. But later, about 1906, as the result of a misunderstanding—in fact, a disagreement nurtured by interfering journalists—a rift between them did indeed begin.[2] There was a bond, however, that both Debussy and Ravel shared in common: namely, their mutual friendship with the Spanish musician Ricardo Viñes.

A Catalan pianist with an extraordinary technique, a phenomenal memory, an insatiable intellectual curiosity, and a remarkable sense of responsibility not only to his contemporaries but also to posterity, Viñes

[1]Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, II (London, 1965), p. 33.
[2]François Lesure, "L''Affaire' Debussy–Ravel," *Festschrift Friedrich Blume zum 70. Geburtstag* (Kassel, 1963), pp. 231–234.

was the foremost champion of the new French, Spanish, and Russian piano music of the first three decades of the twentieth century. Alone, he introduced and repeatedly performed almost the entire piano repertory of Debussy and Ravel, innumerable pieces by Séverac, Fauré, and Satie, many compositions by his countrymen Granados, Falla, and Albéniz, and works of the Russians Mussorgsky, Borodin, Balakirev, Glazounov, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Prokofiev, composers whose music was at that time little known outside of their native land.[3] In later years, particularly while living in South America in the thirties, he offered first performances of piano pieces by dozens of aspiring young Latin American composers.[4] His repertory, as Jean-Aubry once said, was prodigious; perhaps no pianist ever had one like it. One wondered how he even had time to *read* all the music he actually played from memory.[5]

His most famous pupil was Francis Poulenc, a composer who was also an excellent pianist. It was Viñes, incidentally, who introduced Poulenc to Satie as a composition student. And of course it was Viñes who in 1919 offered the first public performance of the *Mouvements perpétuels,* at Poulenc's request since Viñes's performances of contemporary works were the surest guarantee of their success.[6]

Such a request was far from unique. Often asked to learn a piece from manuscript, sometimes in only a few days or merely a few hours, Viñes would nevertheless appear on the platform, completely at ease, to perform in as relaxed a manner as possible a work that but a short time earlier had been absolutely unknown to him. An indefatigable pianist (as Gilbert Chase has called him), he was constantly sought out when a new work was to be performed.[7] He never felt justified in denying his services to the young people who requested his assistance and was just as conscientious about learning, assimilating, and projecting a contemporary work as he would be if he were studying an established masterpiece by Beethoven or Chopin. Indeed, he often felt a greater obligation to perfect his performance of new works on the off chance that they might, through his efforts, become the classics of the future. Although much of what he played demanded incredible technical facility, there was no trace of the virtuoso about him. He was not an "ivory tamer" nor a "platform pounder" as some called them in those days.[8] His playing was so effortless that the audience was unaware of the difficulties.

[3]See Appendix for list of first performances.

[4]Some of them include Juan Aguirre, Humberto Allende, Mme Bringuet-Idiartborde, Eduardo Caba, Juan José Castro, Armando Chimenti, Louis Cluzeau-Mortet, Maris I. Currubeto-Godoy, José Gil, Adolfo V. Luna, Celestino Piaggio, Carlos Pedrell, Pascual de Rogatis, Hector Ruíz-Diaz, Alberto Williams.

[5]G. Jean-Aubry, *French Music of Today*, trans. Edwin Evans (London, 1920), p. 218.

[6]Francis Poulenc, *Correspondance (1915–1963)*, comp. Hélène de Wendel (Paris, 1967), p. 28.

[7]Gilbert Chase, "Falla's Music for Piano Solo," *The Chesterian* (1940), p. 41, and G. Jean-Aubry, *French Music of Today,* p. 215.

[8]Jean-Aubry, *French Music of Today*, p. 217.

In a recent letter, Professor Nin-Culmell of Berkeley, a former student of Viñes, asks and then answers the question:

> What made his performances different from other performances? . . . They weren't performances. . . . They were the inner sharing of a discovery he had made on his own, but in which nothing of his own self remained. He *was* the *Pictures,* he *was* the *Nights in the Gardens of Spain,* he *was* the *Gallo Mañanero* of Joaquín Rodrigo. Viñes never played Viñes the way Segovia plays Segovia. It was almost a mystical approach to the art of interpretation. Disappear and the composition will come to life. Forget about yourself and Debussy or Ravel or Poulenc will speak out. He was self-effacing to the point of obliteration, but never quite. Viñes was always there, but always in good company. Chatter-box as he was, he never interrupted the music with personal gestures, or professional tics, or technical excesses, or limitation. His technique was there but only to be hidden. It was perfect in that it was never brought up.[9]

Born in 1875 in Lerida, Spain, Viñes, having had some theory and piano lessons in his home town, enrolled in 1885 at the Barcelona School of Music. After two years of study with Juan Battista Pujol, he won first prize in piano. Albéniz, for whom he auditioned privately, suggested to Mme. Viñes that she take her son to Paris to study. "Don't let him concertize too early," he warned. With a scholarship from the city of Barcelona, Viñes arrived in Paris on the 13th of October, 1887, and on November 7th was admitted as an auditor to de Bériot's class for superior students.[10] Ravel, the same age as Viñes, was still in the preparatory class. Mme. Ravel, who was of Basque origin, was delighted to find a Spanish-speaking compatriot, and became friendly with Mme. Viñes. Through their mothers, the sons became acquainted.[11] The first mention of Ravel's name in Viñes's journal occurs in an entry on Friday, December 21, 1888. Viñes describes his class at de Bériot's and says he spent the evening "chez le chevelu, c'est-à-dire Mauricio Ravel."[12]

The lives of Ravel and Viñes were closely interwoven from 1888 to about 1920. During that time, too, first Albéniz, Debussy and Séverac, and later Fauré, Satie, *Les Six*, and *Les Jeunes*, were all his close associates. His friends the Godebskis became Ravel's friends as well. At the home of the painter Paul Sordes, and later in Arceuil at Maurice Delage's, they all met regularly and discussed poetry, painting, literature, and philosophy and listened to and talked about new music usually performed by Viñes (or Viñes and Ravel playing four-hands) at the piano.[13] They called themselves the *Apaches*, a name derived from an

[9]Letter to the author written from Barcelona and dated July 15, 1971.

[10]On November 4, 1889, Viñes was finally admitted as a regular student. (Dates from Viñes's *Curriculum vitae* were provided by the family).

[11]Ricardo Viñes, unpublished Journal (in two volumes, typescript of a French translation prepared by his grand-niece, Nina Gubisch), p. 14. Future citations will simply include Journal and page number.

[12]*Ibid.*

[13]Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel* (London, 1947), p. 33. Also see Valentine Hugo,

epithet hurled at them one night as they were on their way to Sordes's studio. Viñes thought it was a good name for Ravel, who was already a "musical outlaw". Now all of them could call themselves the *Apaches*.[14]

As he became successful, Viñes concertized in numerous European cities and after having twice visited South America in the twenties, made his home there from 1930 to 1936. After a triumphal return concert in Paris, his star began to fade. Although he had been decorated by the French, Belgian, and Spanish governments, he received fewer commissions, gave fewer recitals (these with miserably low fees), and won less and less recognition. In 1943, having given his last concert on February 19th in the Palau de Música, he died alone and penniless on April 29th, in a hospital in Barcelona.

According to his friend, the critic M. D. Calvocoressi, Viñes was as keen on literature and painting as on his own art. Besides possessing a phenomenal memory for music, he showed exceptional facility with words.[15] He had an intimate knowledge of the drama, prose, and poetry of his compatriots in France and Spain, and spent many hours in literary discussions with his friends, often reciting to them from works he admired. Former students, too, speak of the way in which their lessons would go on for hours as Viñes animatedly called their attention to something or someone he had discovered: some poetry by Baudelaire, Rimbaud, or Poe (he taught himself English in order to read Poe in the original), or the works of the Symbolists Gustavus Adolphus Becquer, Georges Rodenbach, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Huysmans, and Mallarmé.[16] Viñes had almost no formal schooling, but he possessed the vigor and enthusiasm typical of the autodidact eager to share what he had learned. His many friends numbered the writers Léon-Paul Fargue, Léon Bloy, Collette and Willy, Jean Cocteau, Max Jacob, and Arnold Bennett, the dancer Loïe Fuller, the painters Picasso, Redon, and Maurice Denis, also Misia Sert, as well as musicians like Casella, Duparc, Rhené-Baton and Marcel Labey.[17]

Viñes's natural affinity for contemporary music, the apparent ease with which he communicated it to his audiences, and the great number of recitals and concerts that he devoted to modern music reveal a total dedication to his art. There are, for example, those who say that this liaison, this close association or coupling of his name with modern music may have been detrimental to his own reputation as a pianist. It would certainly have been easier to keep to the traditional road to stardom, particularly at that time when virtuosity was more honored for its own

"Trois souvenirs sur Ravel," *Revue Musicale* (1952), p. 138, and the plate of a 1903 oil painting of Viñes and friends (*Réunion de Musiciens*) by Georges d'Espagnat in Martin Cooper, *French Music* (London, 1951), facing p. 132.

[14]Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel et hous* (Geneva, 1945), p. 59.

[15]M. D. Calvocoressi, *Music and Ballet* (London, 1933), p. 63.

[16]Stéphane Audel, ed., *Francis Poulenc: Mes amis et moi* (Geneva, 1963), p. 173f. and Journal, *passim*.

[17]Journal, p. 451, and *passim*.

sake, and a pianist with fleet fingers, a ravishing sonority, and a colossal repertory of audience favorites was a sure-fire success. But Viñes preferred another route, that of the pioneer interpreter. For him, interpretation became the substitute for creation. Unlike Chopin, Liszt, and other nineteenth-century pianists, who interpreted not only the works of others but also their own compositions, he was not a composer.[18] Most of the music he left is hardly worth mentioning. Yet, despite the absence of any original pieces that are of themselves important, his influence on the compositional style of both Ravel and Debussy, and through them on the music of their contemporaries, is undeniable.

One can, I believe, substantiate this claim through a comparison of the chronology and style of several piano compositions by Ravel and Debussy. One should say Ravel first, for although Debussy was the older of the two musicians, it was Ravel who met Viñes first, Ravel who was unquestionably more intimate with him, and Ravel whose pieces were the showcase for Viñes's type of pianism.

All of us recognize that the principal characteristics of Ravel's early works for piano, the *Jeux d'eau*, the *Sonatine*, the *Miroirs*, and *Gaspard de la nuit*, all continue to appear in the later *Tombeau de Couperin*. (And after the *Tombeau* [1917], except for the two concertos, Ravel wrote little for the piano.) In other words, most aspects of Ravel's unique style—a fondness for clear-cut formal structures, a carefully etched rhythmic line, a biting dissonance replete with consecutive major and minor seconds, extended stretches for both hands and much use of the thumb on two notes simultaneously, glissandi, extensive use of the pedal (particularly in the upper registers), and a preference for Hispanic elements as well as early dance forms—are present in his piano music from the first works of 1894 through the later pieces of 1917.

Ravel's pianistic conepts derive from Liszt. We know that Viñes always had tremendous regard for this composer. He regularly played his music, cultivated a Lisztian technique, wrote two articles about him in the centenary year,[19] and as a youngster often noted that he had had a *succes colossal* with the eleventh *Hungarian Rhapsody*. Other journal entries from this period refer to Ravel and to how they spent their time. On Monday, August 15, 1892, Viñes writes:

> We didn't go out today, but we spent a good day together, all the time at the piano trying out new chords, playing over some ideas we had, Maurice and I. Mama and Pepe were angry. I didn't even come home for dinner and they were waiting.

On Saturday, January 7, 1893:

> At three o'clock Ravel came to pick me up and we went to Maison Pleyel to rehearse on two pianos.

[18]The author has in her possession Xerox copies of all of Viñes's extant musical manuscripts as well as prints of the four published works: *Menuet spectral, En Verlaine mineur, Threnodie ou Funerailles antiques*, and *Crinoline ou La valse au temps de la Montijo*.

[19]"À Franz Liszt, génie boycotté," *Courrier Musical* (1911), p.. 400, and "Liszt, précurseur," *Musica* (August 1911).

On Wednesday, February 1:

> I went to find Maurice to go to Pleyel's to rehearse Chabrier's *Trois Valses*.

Wednesday, February 8, a week later:

> I awoke with a sore throat, but we still went to rehearse. This time Chabrier came and he stayed with us an hour and a half. He said we played very well and with a lot of taste.

Thursday, February 9:

> At two o'clock, I went to the Salle Erard for the second concert of de Bériot's students. First I played the Spinning Chorus from Wagner's *Dutchman*, arranged by Liszt, then the second movement of de Bériot's concerto with him at the second piano. To conclude, I played with Ravel the *Valses romantiques* and with Malats [another Spanish pianist] the finale from Godard's *Duo symphonique*. The hall was full, but Chabrier never appeared as he promised he would.

On January 29, 1898:

> Ravel brought me his *Menuet antique* today. He says he likes the way I play it and he's going to dedicate it to me. He's surprised that I intend to perform it next week.[20]

In view of this kind of relationship, wouldn't it be natural for Ravel to create his compositions with Viñes in mind?[21]

In 1894, the nineteen-year-old Ravel had completed only one or two pieces. By contrast, Debussy had already written several of his instrumental masterworks: the String Quartet, *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune*, and numerous songs and piano pieces. He had even begun some work on *Pelléas* at that time. In the decade between 1890 and 1900, Debussy composed some of the pieces that eventually became part of the *Suite bergamasque*. These works are somewhat different from his earlier pieces, but not radically so.

Debussy's first published piano pieces, the *Ballade, Danse, Mazurka, Nocturne*, and *Valse romantique* certainly point to Chopin and bear no resemblance to the works that followed. In 1901, however, after his meeting with Viñes, Debussy's piano style began to change. In January of 1902, Viñes introduced the *Pour le piano* suite, which, although incorporating some of the figurations and style of the earlier *Suite bergamasque*, actually looked to the future: to the *petites notes*, the glissandi, and the lyricism of the later works. Then after 1903, once Viñes had begun to establish himself as Debussy's favorite pianist, Debussy wrote the *Estampes*, the *Masques, L'Isle joyeuse*, the two sets of *Images*, and eventually the *Préludes*. These pieces are startlingly different from what Debussy had written before. I believe that these works,

[20]He was performing it at one of his salon concerts and then on April 18, 1898, at his second solo recital.

[21]According to René Chalupt, ed., *Ravel au miroir de ses lettres* (Paris, 1956), p. 69, in Viñes's inscribed copy of the *Jeux d'eau*, Ravel wrote "Au gardien de la clé des eaux." See the reproduction of this inscription at the conclusion of Viñes's article, "Trois aristocrats du son," *Le Monde Musical*, 12 (December 31, 1935), p. 358.

too, were composed with Viñes and his extraordinary technique in mind. True, these pieces may also have drawn something from Ravel's music. But Debussy and Ravel might almost be said to have had a symbiotic relationship, with Ravel first borrowing some of Debussy's concepts in instrumental music and Debussy later being inspired by Ravel's piano music, each feeding on the other and both stimulated by their mutual interpreter Ricardo Viñes.

Innovation—who was the first to do something—was a matter of pride to both composers. Ravel, however, maintained—even in writing (letter of February, 1906, to Pierre Lalo of *Le Temps*)—that he was the first to use "une écriture pianistique assez spéciale" which Debussy under no circumstances can be said to have initiated.[22] He was right, of course. The *Jeux d'eau* of 1901, that most astonishing piano piece of the new century, was something entirely different—revolutionary, we might say. Ravel knew it, but he probably would not have claimed that he was the first to introduce this style had Debussy not made contemptuous remarks about his works and the fact that many of the foremost critics, like Calvocoressi, were suddenly taking him seriously.

Let us nevertheless remember that the "Impressionist" style in piano music which we associate with Debussy actually originated in the works of Ravel. And I believe that one of the reasons for Ravel's earlier development was his long and intimate friendship with Viñes, a relationship that predated that of Debussy and Viñes by thirteen years.

Another reason may have been that Ravel was a better pianist than Debussy. Both composers, however, always knew how they wanted their compositions to sound. Casella said:

> Debussy was extremely exacting of interpreters. Rarely indeed have I seen him satisfied with a performance. He detested almost all the greatly celebrated virtuosi, who are generally quite unmusical; on the other hand he was well-disposed towards certain cultivated and intelligent interpreters who enjoyed no clamorous reputation, but who loved music with the same disinterested sacred love as he.[23]

Viñes was such a pianist.

The first Debussy piano composition that Viñes mentioned in the diary is the *Rêverie*. He bought it, and after playing it, gave it to Ravel to look over. In 1899, he discovered the *Chansons de Bilitis*. He lent his copy of the *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune* to Rhené-Baton, who made a four-hand arrangement which the two of them played at the home of their friend Dreyfus-Gonzalez on February 9, 1900. Viñes had already noticed Debussy there, but they had not been introduced. Viñes

[22]Lesure, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

[23]Alfredo Casella, "Claude Debussy," *Monthly Musical Record*, LXIII (1933), p. 2. René Chalupt, in *Ravel au miroir de ses lettres*, p. 70, says that Ravel was equally as demanding of interpreters. He relates that on one occasion Ravel told Viñes "joue comme tu veux" and then proceeded to comment on almost every note until in the end Viñes conformed completely to Ravel's wishes.

says that the first time he saw him, Debussy was playing the Prelude to *Tristan*, a piece which, when the Lamoureux orchestra performed it, regularly sent both Viñes and Ravel into rapturous ecstasy.[24] Debussy must also have heard Viñes play one evening, because on October 31, 1901, Viñes wrote: "Ravel tells me Debussy liked my playing."

On Saturday, November 30:

> I went to Debussy's house, 58 Rue Cardinet, to rehearse three pieces. And Debussy is pleased I know them by heart.

On December 14:

> Debussy says I'm better than he. And he played me two of the twelve pieces he is writing: six for two hands and six for two pianos.

On January 5, 1902, the last rehearsal with Debussy took place, and on January 11 he played *Pour le piano* at Salle Erard.

Viñes could always be given changes, even last minute ones, and still incorporate them in his final performance. For that reason, he willingly rehearsed up to the last moment so that he might achieve the best possible results. Of course, here it was a matter of a young man taking instructions from an established composer; but even in later years, Viñes's attitude toward contemporary composers always remained the same—to listen, to suggest, and then to do his utmost to achieve the desired interpretation.

In order to place in perspective the extent of his accomplishments on behalf of 20th-century music and musicians, I would like to call attention to the list of pieces that were given their first public performances by Ricardo Viñes; a short selection appears in the Appendix on p. 57. Among them you will notice not only music by Debussy and Ravel, but also well-known works by Satie, Falla, Fauré, Milhaud, Granados, and Séverac. Viñes also gave the first Paris performance of Prokofiev's *Sarcasmes*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Concerto* in C-sharp minor, and Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Among the famous pieces dedicated to him are Ravel's *Oiseaux tristes*,[25] Falla's *Noces in los jardines de España*,[26] and Debussy's *Poissons d'or*, which, incidentally, is one of the rare pieces that Debussy dedicated to a musician (the *Études* in memory of Chopin and the *Hommage à Rameau* being the others).

[24]Journal, p. 311.

[25]According to M. D. Calvocoressi, *Music and Ballet*, p. 66, Ravel, in dedicating this piece to Viñes, said "it was fun to inscribe to a pianist a piece that was not in the least 'pianistic'."

[26]Julio Jaenisch, in *Manuel de Falla und die spanische Musik* (Zurich, 1952), p. 40, states that Viñes was responsible for Falla's transforming this piece from a piano solo to one for piano and orchestra. Viñes believed that only the orchestra could provide the denser texture required. Manuel de Falla, in "Notes sur Ravel," *Revue Musicale*, XX (1939), p. 83, mentions another instance of such a transformation. He writes that certain observations by Viñes on the difficulty of performing some passages four-hands prompted

When Viñes was a young man in Paris, recital programs generally included about a dozen pieces, half of which were virtuoso items guaranteed to whip up audience enthusiasm. Students at the Conservatoire regularly performed some works by their teachers or their teachers' teachers: men like Diémer, de Bériot, Franck, or Saint-Saëns. Transcriptions and arrangements were frequently programmed, as well as one or two sonata movements, not necessarily an entire sonata. For example, Viñes recalls one program where he heard the Funeral March and the Scherzo of the Chopin *Sonata* in B-flat minor—but given in that order, presumably because the Scherzo movement made a more effective close. Celebrated artists received applause not only after complete works or between movements (a trace of which still exists today), but also after each perilous stunt: a difficult scale, a long trill, or some wide skips at the keyboard. Viñes started to change some of these customs. His recitals were generally of a more homogeneous nature; he tried always to play complete works, not isolated movements, and he occasionally organized his programs along national or historical lines.

Contemporary reviewers commented not only on this new type of program but also on his keyboard style. As early as 1894, critics spoke of his solid yet supple technique, marvelous octaves, variety of pianistic color, dazzling trills, all handled with unforgettable delicacy and perfect style.[27] After each concert, reviews mentioned that he was repeatedly recalled to the platform by enthusiastic audiences.[28] In 1895, his irreproachable style, his warmth and his extraordinary use of the pedal were already mentioned.[29] In a concert in Brussels in 1898, a critic wrote that, in addition to the Beethoven *Variations in C minor*, the Bach-Tausig *Toccata and Fugue in D minor*, the *Albumblatt* by Grieg, and the *Intermezzo* in octaves by Leschetizky—all executed with sparkling brilliance—in the middle of the program Viñes had to encore the *Music Box* by Liadow.[30] His next recital, devoted to the works of the moderns Franck, Saint-Saëns, Dubois, d'Indy and Fauré, is "anticipated with much pleasure." Viñes thoughtfully had scheduled the two concerts in that sequence: first one traditional; next one modern.[31]

In 1911, the Société Musicale Independent sent Viñes to the Hochschule in Berlin to promote interest in French music. He had already visited Berlin in 1907, for the 70th birthday celebrations held there

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Ravel to orchestrate the *Rhapsodie espagnole*. This piece was the first in the series of transcriptions from piano to orchestra undertaken by Ravel.

[27]Journal, Annexe IV, 8, quoted from *Le Vert-Vert* (July 24, 1894).

[28]*Ibid.*, pp. 9f., reviews from *Le Monde Musical, La Revue Illustrée*, and *El Globo*.

[29]*Ibid.*, p. 9, quoted from *La Lanterne* (February 28, 1895).

[30]*Ibid.*, p. 11, quoted from *Le Guide Musical* (March 20, 1898).

[31]*Ibid.* At the time, the tradition in concerts of contemporary music was to program works requiring different performers: for example, *mélodies* for a singer with accompanist, a duo for a violinist and pianist, as well as solo piano pieces. Curiously, this custom continues today. See Madeleine Octave Maus, *Trente années de lutte pour l'art (1884–1914)* (Brussels, 1926), for the programs of the Libre Esthétique during the early twentieth century.

for Balakirev.[32] In a letter dating from that period, Viñes writes that the Germans must be shown that Russian music is not merely salon music but important in its own right as serious music though of a different nature from theirs. Later he began to give lecture recitals, often with Calvocoressi commenting on the Russian or French music, while he, Viñes, would demonstrate.[33] (Catulle Mendès and Debussy collaborated to publicize Wagner's music in similar fashion.)[34] For the respective centenaries of Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt, Viñes presented programs devoted exclusively to the works of those composers. And in the twenties and thirties he offered some recitals featuring only works dedicated to him.

Young Viñes labored tirelessly over the solo pieces and concertos of his teacher Charles de Bériot, to whom he felt eternally grateful. In addition to the normal veneration of student for teacher, Viñes saw de Bériot as one more link with Spain. De Bériot was the son of the celebrated soprano Maria Malibran and the Belgian violinist Charles de Bériot. In his teaching, de Bériot stressed the importance of sight reading. Countless evenings were spent with the de Bériot family reading over new music. One of the more unusual ways in which de Bériot trained his students was through flash cards,[35] each of which revealed different rhythmic configurations. Students who were accustomed to translating them immediately into sound usually had no trouble applying the same technique to their sight-reading.

As a student Viñes also performed the compositions of his other teachers at the Conservatoire: Godard, Dubois, and the elder musical statesmen of France, Saint-Saëns, Franck, and Massenet. He disliked Diémer intensely, and his obvious displeasure with the latter's first attempts at concerts of early music on original instruments probably led Viñes to forego this kind of music almost entirely. Although he did perform some earlier music on the piano, he never tried these works on a harpsichord; he just did not care for the sound,[36] although sonority, tone color, and variety of texture were qualities that he sought to develop and improve in his own playing all the time. Viñes loved Bach and Beethoven; he played the *Appassionata* at his debut recital in 1895; and Op. 111 very often in succeeding years. As a youngster he often practiced and sometimes performed the preludes and fugues of Bach; he regularly presented Schumann's *Études symphoniques*, *Carnaval*, or

[32]A photograph of Viñes with the caption "Avant le Festival Balakirew à Leipzig" appears in *Le Courrier Musical* (1907), facing p. 104.

[33]M. D. Calvocoressi, *Music and Ballet*, p. 87.

[34]See my article, "La Famille Mendès: A Literary Link between Wagner and Debussy," *The Music Review*, XXXIII (1972), pp. 177–189, particularly p. 188.

[35]Information obtained from the sale catalogue of Pierre Beres, List No. 62, *ca.* 1950. This list included the portion of Viñes's library that was sold in the United States. Item No. 48 refers to "Cartes rhythmiques pour former les élèves," 2 boxes 4x4x3 inches, containing a series of hundreds of small cards bearing musical examples of various rhythmic patterns to be used in teaching advanced sight-reading.

[36]Journal, pp. 245f.

Fantasy; the *Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue* and the *Prelude, Fugue, and Variations* by Franck, and many Chopin works, particularly the C-sharp-minor and B-flat-minor Scherzos, the Barcarolle, the F-minor Fantasie, the A-flat, F-minor, and G-minor Ballades, a few Nocturnes, Mazurkas, and many, many Etudes and Preludes. As pianist, he preferred the Erard to the Pleyel piano; the repetition was easier and in all probability the terms granted the artist were more favorable. This was a consideration. Rather than practicing the exercises of Czerny and Hanon, Viñes worked on his technique through the pieces he performed. He used a dummy keyboard—one that he had ordered years before—for technical work; he was concerned lest practice make a passage lose its spontaneity.

From Viñes's description of several arguments he had with de Bériot, I believe that basically, with regard to digital or motor problems at the piano, he was an autodidact. He preferred a supple, relaxed wrist maintained at a lower level than was customary at that time so that he could touch the notes before depressing them, thus establishing absolute control over their tone. He had long fingers and a particularly versatile thumb; some say he was actually double-jointed. From his fingerings on music that I have seen, I sense that he preferred to keep his hand contracted as much as possible, reserving additional tension for those occasions when the music demanded wide stretches. He insisted that he had to listen to himself in order to sing at the piano. Given the choice, he preferred a messy performance, one with dropped notes but with the performer really penetrating the essence of the music to a perfect rendition that was at the same time cold and precise. "Pas d'âme" or "pas de coeur" he would complain. Or, despite "un mécanisme prodigieux, colossal, phénomènal, formidable, il est froid, ayant la stupide technique allemande et par conséquent, ce n'est pas sa faute s'il n'enthousiasme pas."[37] (That particular comment referred to the Portuguese pianist, Vianna da Motta.) Among those he regarded very highly were Blanche Selva, Harold Bauer, Emil Sauer, and the young Paderewski.

He disliked the whole concept of recordings and artificially created performances. For him, the audience was a *sine qua non* for a truly exceptional rendition. Without a public to listen to him, inspiration was lacking. He played a piece slightly differently each time, never in exactly the same way. One supposes that he objected to recordings because once captured in wax a piece always remained the same.

Intensely patriotic, Viñes thought constantly of Spain. It is completely possible that Debussy, who never actually spent time in that country, was able nevertheless to capture the essence of Spain in his music through Viñes. And one may think also of Ravel's Spanish pieces: the *Rhapsodie espagnole* with its *Habañera*, the *Pavane*, the *Alborada del gracioso*, the *Chanson espagnole* and *L'Heure espagnole*. A former

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 243.

student recalled the scene in a class when Viñes would discuss performing customs for the music of Albéniz, Debussy and Ravel:

> At first nobody would understand him. But gradually, as we became accustomed to his accent, we recognized that his use of language was far better than ours or any of our other professors. He would describe the Spanish countryside and then demonstrate how Séverac or Albéniz had translated this picture into music. Spain always came first.[38]

The foregoing has been an attempt to give a brief picture of Viñes as a man and as an artist. Further biographical details must be left for a forthcoming monograph, but I should like to record here my debt to Elvira Viñes-Soto, Viñes's niece, and Nina Gubisch, his grand-niece, without whose efforts and assistance I could not even have embarked on my research. They both very gallantly put at my disposal all materials, memorabilia, programs, letters, articles, photographs, and most important of all, the pianist's unpublished journal: four hundred pages in which he described the musical milieu in Paris from 1887 to 1914 in a totally fascinating way.

Viñes offers the reader a fund of knowledge. Who were the principal performers of the Paris in which he grew up? What were their programs? How did the audience respond? What were the vagaries of concert life at this time? What were the fundamental problems of existence for a young artist at the beginning of his career? What pieces did he study at the Conservatoire? What were the competitions like? What were the backstage rivalries between teachers at the Conservatoire and how did this affect their pupils? He explains the way a recital hall was engaged, how the Lamoureux could be hired by a young performer for a specific night with one or two rehearsals—all depending on price. He describes the pieces studied and the cuts and corrections made by his teachers. He reports what Grieg, Saint-Saëns, Duparc (a very close friend of Viñes's), Fauré, and Satie had to say with regard to specific performances of their music. He tells how the improved construction of the pedal changed the sound of the piano; how he, Viñes, responded to the newly invented double-keyboard piano (one manual having the bass on the right and the treble on the left, while the other remained the same as usual). He writes about all of these things in his journal.

Standard procedure in the investigation of the music of any historical epoch involves an examination of the performance practice of that period. How did the music sound at the time it was composed? Who were the performers for whom it was written? What were their special talents and predilections? Unfortunately, no genuine study of performance practice of this period in musical history has yet been made. Indeed, despite the obvious significance of his *avant-garde* recitals given during a time when a new style of pianism was evolving, no major work

[38]Jean Claude Gabriel, "Apprentis sorciers," *Synthèse*, (September 1936).

on Viñes has appeared. Although he is mentioned in almost every book about Debussy, Ravel, Falla, Satie or Poulenc, the material about him is so scattered that it is almost impossible to gather the entire story without some assistance. Here I have tried to offer that assistance; to present a picture of the accomplishments of a man of whom Jean-Aubry said already fifty years ago, "We should probably be the poorer by several of the best piano works, if he had not been here to play them.[39]

A Selective List of Viñes's First Performances*

Albeniz

Triana from *Iberia*
October 27, 1912. Concerts Classiques, Association Artistique de Marseille.

Evocación and *El Puerto* from *Iberia*
December 4, 1912. Sociedad Filarmónica, Madrid.

Rhapsodie espagnole for two pianos. Played by Viñes and Abreu
November 12, 1918. Sociedad Nacional de Música, Madrid.

Torre bermeja
February 3, 1924. Les Petits Concerts, Lyons.

Balakirev

Valse di bravura
April 13, 1901. Société Nationale, Paris.

Scherzo No. 2
March 19, 1903. Salon de la Libre Esthétique, Brussels.

Sonate
March 3, 1906. Société Nationale, Paris.

Borodin

Au Couvent
March 22, 1902. Société Nationale, Paris.

Mazurka and *Sérénade* from *Petite Suite*
October 26, 1917. Sociedad Nacional de Música, Madrid.

Chabrier

Scherzo-Valse, No. 10 from *Dix Pièces pittoresques*
October 26, 1917. Sociedad Nacional de Música, Madrid.

Chausson

Paysage
November 28, 1913. Sociedad Filarmónica, Madrid.

[39]Jean-Aubry, *French Music of Today*, p. 216.

*First time anywhere or first time in a particular city or country. [Dates and places are indicated in Viñes's journal and programs.]

DEBUSSY

Pour le Piano (Prélude, Sarabande, Toccata)
January 11, 1902. Société Nationale, Paris.

Nocturnes (Nuages, Fêtes, Sirènes). Transcription for two pianos played by Viñes and Debussy.
April 21, 1903. Schola Cantorum, Paris.

Estampes (Pagodes, Soirées dans Grenade, Jardins sous la pluie)
January 9, 1904. Société Nationale, Paris.

Masques, L'Isle joyeuse
February 10, 1905. Salle Aeolian, Paris.
February 18, 1905. Société Nationale, Paris.**

Images I (Reflets dans l'eau, Hommage à Rameau, Mouvement)
February 5, 1906. Salle des Agriculteurs, Paris.
March 3, 1906. Société Nationale, Paris.**

Images II (Cloches à travers les feuilles, La Lune descend sur le temple qui fut, Poissons d'or)
February 21, 1908. Cercle Musical, Paris.

Les Collines d' Anacapri, La Fille aux cheveux de lin, and *Sérénade interrompue* from *Preludes I*
January 14, 1911. Société Nationale, Paris.

Minstrels from *Préludes I*
February 10, 1911. Salle des Agriculteurs, Paris.

Les Fées sont d'exquises danseuses, La Terrasse des audiences du clair de lune, and *Feux d'artifices* from *Préludes II*
April 5, 1913. Société Antionale, Paris.

Iberia (Par les Rues, Les Parfums de la nuit, and Le Matin d'un jour de fête).
Transcription for two pianos by André Caplet. Played by Viñes and Debussy.
June 19, 1913. Comédie des Champs Elysées, Paris.

La Cathédrale engloutie from *Preludes I*
December 1, 1913. Sociedad Filarmónica, Madrid.

Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest from *Préludes II*
October 31, 1917. Sociedad Nacional de Música, Madrid.

Sonate pour piano et violon. Played by Viñes and Cousin.
September 14, 1918. Gran Casino, San Sebastián.

DE FALLA

Cuatro Piezas españolas (Aragonesa, Cubana, Montañesa, and Andaluza)
March 27, 1909. Société Nationale, Paris.

Noches en los Jardines de España
September 13, 1916. Fran Casino, San Sebastián.

Romance del pescador and *Danza gitana del fin del día* from *El Amor brujo.*
Transcription for piano.
November 5, 1918. Sociedad Nacional de Música, Madrid.

Seguidillas
March 20, 1919. Salle des Agriculteurs, Paris.

**Cited in other sources

Danza del molinero from *El Sombrero de tres picos*. Transcription for piano.
November 9, 1920. Teatro Odeón, Buenos Aires.

Danza ritual del fuego from *El Amor brujo*. Transcription for piano.
February 3, 1924. Les Petits Concerts, Lyons.

FAURÉ

Impromptu, A-flat major
May 6, 1910. Ateneo de Madrid, Madrid.

Nocturne, E-flat minor, Op. 33, No. 1
November 30, 1912. Sociedad Filarmónica, Madrid.

Thème et variations, Op. 73
Barcarolle, A minor, Op. 26
Nocturne, E-flat major, Op. 36
October 26, 1917. Sociedad Nacional de Música, Madrid.

FRANCK

Variations symphoniques for piano and orchestra
February 28, 1903. Bordeaux.

Les Djinns for piano and orchestra.
November 29, 1908. Société Sainte Cécile de Bordeaux, Bordeaux.

GRANADOS

Danzas españolas
January 9, 1904. Société Nationale, Paris.

El Fandango del candil from *Goyescas*
September 13, 1916. Gran Casino, San Sebastián.

Quejas o la maja y el ruiseñor from *Goyescas*
January 12, 1919. Società del Quartetto di Milano, Milan.

MILHAUD

Saudades do Brazil
February 3, 1924. Les Petits Concerts, Lyons.

MOMPOU

Scènes d'enfants
January 7, 1922. Société Nationale, Paris.

Fêtes Lointaines
February 11, 1925. Les Salons de Madame André, Paris.

MUSSORGSKY

Tableaux d'une exposition
March 23, 1905. École des Hautes Études Sociales, Paris.

POULENC

Mouvements perpétuels
April 5, 1919. Concerts Huygens [Lyre et Palette], Paris.

Suite pour piano
April 10, 1920. Société Nationale, Paris.

PROKOFIEV

Sarcasmes, Op. 17, Nos. 1–5
June 12, 1917. Salle des Agriculteurs, Paris.

RAVEL

Sites auriculaires for two pianos. Played by Viñes and Dron.
March 5, 1898. Société Nationale, Paris.

Menuet antique
April 18, 1898. Salle Erad, Paris.

Sérénade Grotesque
April 13, 1901. Société Nationale, Paris.

Jeux d'eau
Pavane pour une infante défunte
April 5, 1902. Société Nationale, Paris.

Miroirs (Noctuelles, Oiseaux tristes, Une Barque sur l' océan, Alborada del gracioso, La Vallée des cloches)
January 6, 1906. Société Nationale, Paris.

Rhapsodie espagnole. Played by Viñes and Ravel.
1908. Société Nationale, Paris.

Gaspard de la nuit (Ondine, Le Gibet, Scarbo)
January 9, 1909. Société Nationale, Paris.

Five O'Clock (Fox-Trot) from *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*
September 9, 1923. Salle des Fêtes du Casino, St.-Jean-de-Luz.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

Concerto, C-sharp minor for piano and orchestra
January 8, 1905. Conservatoire National de Musique, Société des Concerts, Paris.

SATIE

Véritables Préludes flasques pour un chien (Sévère Réprimande, Seul à la Maison, On joue)
En Habit de cheval for piano four hands. Played by Viñes and Ravel.
January 16, 1911. Société Musicale Indépendante, Paris.

Descriptions automatiques
June 5, 1913. Société Musicale Indépendante, Paris.

Croquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois
January 10, 1914. Société Nationale, Paris.

Celle qui parle trop from *Chapitres tournées en tous sens*
January 14, 1914. Société Musicale Indépendante, Paris.

Gymnopédie, No. 1
October 31, 1917. Sociedad Nacional de Música, Madrid.

Gnossienne, No. 1
November 5, 1918. Sociedad Nacional de Música, Madrid.

Trois Nocturnes
June 7, 1920. Salle Erard, Paris.

Sarabande, No. 2
November 9, 1920. Teatro Odeón, Buenos Aires.

SÉVERAC

En Languedoc (Vers le mas en fête, Sur l'Etang le soir, À Cheval dans la prairie, Coin de cimetière au printemps. Le Jour de la foire au mas)
May 25, 1905. Schola Cantorum, Paris.

Les Muletiers devant le Christ de Llivia from *Cerdaña*
December 4, 1912. Sociedad Filarmónica, Madrid.

Sous les Lauriers roses (La Banda municipal, La Nayade de Banyuls, Scherzo-Valse, Alla Barcarola, L'Ombre charmante du vieux Daquin, Les Coucous)
January 24, 1921. Toulouse.

TURINA

Sevilla
February 5, 1910. Société Nationale, Rennes.

Mujeres de España
June 12, 1917. Salle des Agriculteurs, Paris.

Exaltación
December 5, 1922. Les Mardis de la Musique, Paris.

Andalucía sentimental
February 3, 1924. Les Petits Concerts, Lyons.

Discography*

ALBÉNIZ

Granada: Columbia LFX 73
Seguidillas; Orientale: Columbia LF 42
Tango in A; *Sérénade espagnole:* Victor 4331
Torré bermeja: Columbia LFX 73

ALLENDE

Tonadas chilenas: Victor 4467

BLANCAFORT

Le Parc d'attractions: Columbia LFX 73

BORODIN

Scherzo: Columbia LF 41

BUCHARDO

Bailecito: Victor 4467

DEBUSSY

Poissons d'or: Columbia LF 41
Soirée dans Grenade: Columbia D 15245

*Copies of these out-of-print recordings are available on records from the International Piano Archives, 215 West 91st Street, New York, N.Y. 10024.

FALLA
Danse de la frayeur et récit du pêcheur; Danse rituelle du feu: Columbia LFX 72

GLUCK-BRAHMS
Gavotte: Columbia D 13102

SCARLATTI
Sonata in D: Columbia D 13102

TROIANI
Milonga: Victor 4467

TURINA
Les Jardins de Murcia; Miramar: Columbia LF 12