MAURICE RAVEL'S CHANSONS MADECASSES

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ABSTRACT

MAURICE RAVEL'S
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By

Alexis Turkalo

Maurice Ravel has had the unfortunate distinction of being a composer who is relatively famous among the composers of the first half of this century, but, paradoxically, not well known. General textbooks on the history of music tend to mention his name in conjunction with Claude Debussy. His early compositions are the ones known to the general public, who treat Ravel as a follower or imitator of his great contemporary. Ravel's compositions after La Valse have, for the most part, been neglected, being considered weaker than his early works, which are more "Impressionistic."

During the year of the Centennary of Ravel's birth (March 9, 1875) it would be quite useful to begin a re-evaluation of Ravel's total output with emphasis on the post-1920 works. While this project was at first intended to be a study of five late works (Sonata for Violin and Cello 1922, L'Enfant et les Sortileges, Chansons Madecasses, Sonata for Violin and Piano) plus the earlier Le Tombeau de Couperin,

it became clear that a definitive description of the stylistic characteristics of Ravel's music would be impossible. The project was therefore limited to an analysis of a short but representative work of Ravel's late period, the song cycle Chansons Madecasses or Songs of Madagascar. A summary will be included pointing out significant features of the composer's style at this time with references to similarities to other works of the same general period.

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By

Alexis Turkalo

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THE COMMISSION OF CHANSONS MADECASSES

The creation of the Chansons Madecasses came about through a coincidence of events. The famous American patroness of the arts, Mrs. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, wanted a song-cycle with the accompaniment, if possible, of flute, cello and piano. This request was transmitted to Maurice Ravel in 1925, by cable-gram from the cellist, Hans Kindler. According to Alexis Roland-Manuel, apparently Ravel had recently acquired a first-edition of the works of the poet Evariste Parny, and was thinking of setting some of his poems to music. Thus, the composer happily set himself to picking three of Parny's Chansons Madecasses, being quite content, as Mozart had been, to submit to a task that had been assigned to him by another's will.

This chance request inspired the best of Maurice Ravel's post-war chamber works. He wrote:

> I think that the three Chansons Madecasses bring into being a new, dramatic, almost erotic element, resulting from the subject-matter of Parny's poems. They form a sort of quartet with the voice as the chief instrument. Simplicity is all-important. The independence of parts [shown there] is more obvious in the Sonata [for violin and piano].[1]

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[1]Alexis Roland-Manuel, Maurice Ravel (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972), p. 96.

At the time the Chansons Madecasses were commissioned, Ravel had just completed the lyric opera L'Enfant et les Sortileges, which was being given its first performances, and was also working on the Sonata for violin and piano, which was progressing very slowly, being finished in 1927. The Chansons Madecasses were finished quite quickly, within a year (Ravel was a meticulous composer who usually worked very slowly). He seems to have enjoyed the challenge which faced him, to evoke the atmosphere of that African island with the traditional instruments called for.

As a background to the texts of Chansons Madecasses, a short biography of the poet, Evariste Parny, follows, as well as a description of the original set of poems.

> Evariste Desire de Forges, Vocomte de Parny (1753-1814) was born in Reunion, raised in Creole surroundings, and sent at the age of nine to the College in Rennes, an atmosphere which he found dull and prison-like. Feeling a religious vocation, he entered the Saint-Firmin seminary, but after eight months left it for a military career in which he found ample time for diversions. With [Antoine] Bertin, in 1770, he founded the "Odre de la Caserne," a group of soldiers devoted to music, poetry and good fellowship who, among their projects included walks in the countryside. During a short sojourn in Reunion, in 1773, he had an affair with a young girl ("Eleonore") who inspired part of his poetry. In 1778 Parny published his Erotiques, widely praised as a master-piece well into the next century, especially by Sainte-Beuve and for the parts devoted to Eleonore, which created about the poet a legend, comparable to that of Saint-Preux in Rousseau's La Nouvelle Heloise, of the lover-hero in his despair.
>
> Parny's early aristocratic attitudes changed gradually, yielding to revolutionary ideals. The first strong evidence of this evolution was his Epitre aux Insurgents de Boston (1777). During the [French] Revolution, having been financially ruined by events, he took an active role in

> various administrative posts and lived in relative indigence. His anti-religious tract La Guerre des Dieux (1799) excluded him from the favors of Napoleon, but was widely admired by free-thinkers and, as reconciliation with the Church was forgotten, he was elected to the Institute. Parny's inauguration, in 1803, was a literary event of considerable notoriety, both in extent of admiration for his poetry and for the scandal of La Guerre des Dieux. A happy marriage guaranteed a calm existence during his last years, which he devoted to frequenting intellectual circles of well-known protectors of the arts and to an active interest in young writers. He died widely esteemed, having prepared a definitive edition of his works in 1808; his disciple Tissot composed the first complete biography. . .[2]

It is unclear exactly when the original Chansons Madecasses were written, but it is thought that they were included in a limited edition of Parny's works containing the Opuscules Poetiques and the Poesies Erotiques published in London and Paris in 1787.

> Because Parny had never been to Madagascar, it should be supposed that these little prose poems, of love and war, wherein one finds the echo of Lamartine, are his own invention, or that he had collected them individually from the mouth of a native of the island, a slave of the Bourbons.[3]

The Chansons Madecasses were originally a collection of twelve prose poems, dealing with various scenes of life on Madagascar in the French colonial period of the 18th century before the French Revolution:

Chanson I: In which the Chief Ampanani of the region welcomes a white visitor and has him fed and entertained by his daughters.

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[2]Biographical entry, A Biographical Dictionary of European Literature (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1967), p. 706.

[3]Raphael Barquissau, Les Poetes Creoles du XVIIIe Siecle (Paris: Jean Vigneau, 1949), pp. 63-64.

Chanson II: In which the Chief tells his daughter, Nelahe, to spend the night with his visitor and make him happy.

Chanson III: A glorification of a war being waged currently by Ampanani against a neighboring tribe, bringing booty and prisoners.

Chanson IV: A song of grief by Ampanani for his son, killed in the latest war. All the men and women of the tribe grieve.

Chanson V: A cry of rage: a warning to the inhabitants of the coasts to mistrust the whites, recounting a war in which the white colonialists were exterminated.

Chanson VI: In which Ampanani questions a young woman prisoner, first announcing that he will be her new lover, then, after hearing her pleas for mercy, lets her go to find her lost lover, missing in the war.

Chanson VII: Tribal prayers to Zanhar and Niang, the gods of good and evil.

Chanson VIII: A song of laziness, of the pleasure of lying around listening to women dance and sing.

Chanson IX: The story of a young girl, pleading with her mother not to sell her into slavery, to no avail.

Chanson X: In which the jealous Ampanani, finding that his mistress has run off to a new lover, has her and her lover brought before him, whereupon he slays them.

Chanson XI: The cry of anguish of a young mother to the god Niang, when she is forced by circumstances to drown her newborn son in the river, to save him the agony of later life.

Chanson XII: A love song of a lover for his beautiful mistress, Nahandove.

Parny's foreword to the Chansons Madecasses serves as a good description of the atmosphere of these poems.

> The island of Madagascar is divided into an infinity of little territories, belonging to as many chiefs. These chiefs are constantly at war with each other; and the object of these wars is to make prisoners to sell to the Europeans. Thus, without us this race would be quiet and happy. It would join the movement to intellectual growth. The race is good and hospitable. The inhabitants of the coast are understandably wary of strangers, and put into their treaties all the precautions dictated by prudence as well as ingenuity. The natives of Madagascar are naturally merry. The men live in idleness, and the women work. They passionately love music and dance. I have collected and translated some songs which can give an idea of their customs and their mores. They have no verse; their poetry is but careful prose; their music simple, sweet and always melancholy.[4]

From such a varied assortment of scenes from life on that great island, Ravel must have had a difficult choice in selecting the three poems he would use. He picked three poems, each depicting a different sentiment.

The first song was a setting of Chanson XII, the love song to Nahandove. The second song was the cry of fury and rage against the whites, Chanson V. The third song was the scene of lazy voluptuousness, Chanson VIII.

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[4]Evariste Parny, Oeuvres Diverses (Paris: Ches E. Debray, 1802), pp. 71-72.

The middle song Aoua! was written first and given a separate performance in 1925 by Jane Bathori, a soprano, at a concert in the Paris Salle Majestic. France had just become involved in a war with Morocco. Because of the strongly anti-white text of this song, there was a mixed reaction to its performance. The song was received quite enthusiastically by many, but an encore was prevented by the action of a member of the audience who announced "a haute voix": "Monsieur L... M... is leaving, not wishing to hear such a text a second time while there is fighting going in Morocco."[5]

The first complete performance of these songs took place the next year, by Miss Bathori, M. Baudouin, M. Hans Kindler (the man who sent Ravel the original request for these songs), and Alfredo Casella. This performance was reviewed by Henri Pruniers in the Revue Musicale in the July 1, 1926, issue. This review is included on page 65.

Below are the complete texts of the three Chansons Madecasses chosen by Ravel, with the English translation. Ravel made very slight alterations of the texts, indicated as follows: parentheses are used to indicate those lines (only in the first song, Nahandove...) which Ravel omitted from the original poem; brackets are used to indicate exclamations which Ravel inserted into the poems which were not in the original, i.e., "[O] reprends halein, me jeune amie" in Nahandove... and the cries "Auoa! Aoua!" in the second song, which bears that title. The only other difference is

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[5]Felix Aprahamian, jacket notes for Chansons Madecasses (Philips SAL 3704/839 733 LY).

the song Nahandove... again, where the phrase "c'est elle!" is stated three times by Ravel instead of only once as in the original. Thus, Ravel has used the texts in their original form, with only very minor changes.

NAHANDOVE...

Nahandove, o belle Nahandove! l'oiseau nocturne a commence ses cris, la pleine lune brille sur ma tete, et la rosee naissante humecte mes cheveux. Voici l'heure; qui peut t'arreter, Nahandove, o belle Nahandove?

Le lit de feuilles est prepare; je l'ai parseme de fleurs et d'herbes odoriferantes; il est digne de tes charmes, Nahandove, o belle Nahandove!

Elle vient. J'ai reconnu la respiration precipitee que donne une marche rapide; j'entends le froissement de la pagne qui l'enveloppe; c'est elle, [c'est elle, c'est elle], c'est Nahandove, la belle Nahandove!

[O] reprends haleine, ma jeune amie; repose-toi sur mes genoux. Que ton regard est enchanteur! que le mouvement de ton sein est vif et delicieux sous la main qui le presse! Tu souris Nahandove, o belle Nahandove!

Tes baisers penetre jusqu'a l'ame; tes caresses brulent tous mes sens: arrete, ou je vais mourir. Meurt-on de volupte, Nahandove, o belle Nahandove?

Le plaisir passe comme un eclair; ta douce haleine s'affaiblit, tes yeux humides se referment, ta tete se penche mollement, et tes transports s'eteignent dans la langueur. Jamais tu ne fus si belle, Nahandove, o belle Nahandove!

(Que le sommeil est delicieux dans les bras d'une maitresse! moins delicieux pourtant que le reveil.) Tu pars, et je vais languir dans les regrets et les desires; je languirai jusqu'au soir. Tu reviendras ce soir, Nahandove, o belle Nahandove![6]

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[6]Parny, Oeuvres Diverses, pp. 82-83.

(Translation)

Nahandove, o beautiful Nahandove! the nocturnal bird has begun his cries, a full moon shines overhead, and the nascent dew dampens my hair. It is the hour. Who can detain you, Nahandove, o beautiful Nahandove?

The bed of leaves is ready; I've strewn it with flowers and sweet-smelling herbs; it is worthy of your charms, Nahandove, o beautiful Nahandove!

She comes. I recognized the hurried breathing which quick walking brings; I hear the rustling of the loin-cloth which envelops her; it is she, [it is she, it is she], it is Nahandove, the beautiful Nahandove!

[O] catch your breath, my young friend; sit down on my knees. How enchanting is your gaze! how lively and delicious is the movement of your breast beneath the hand which presses it. You smile, Nahandove, o beautiful Nahandove!

Your kisses penetrate to my soul; your caresses burn all of my senses: stop, or I shall die. Does one die of voluptuousness, Nahandove, o beautiful Nahandove?

The pleasure passes like a flash; your sweet breathing weakens, your moist eyes close, your head hangs softly and your transports die away in languor. Never were you more lovely, Nahandove, o beautiful Nahandove!

(How delicious is sleep in the arms of one's mistress! Less delicious, however, than waking so.) You go, and I will languish in regrets and desires; I will languish until evening. You will return this evening, Nahandove, o beautiful Nahandove!

AOUA! AOUA!

[Aoua! Aoua!] Mefiez-vous des blancs, habitans du rivage. Du tems de nos peres des blancs descendirent dans cette ile; on leur dit: Voila des terres; que vos femmes les cultivent. Soyez justes, soyez bons, et devener nos freres.

Les blancs promirent, et cependant ils faisaient des retranchemens. Un fort menacent s'eleva; le tonnerre fut renferme dans des bouches d'airain; leurs pretres voulurent nous donner un Dieu que nous ne connoissons pas; ils parlerent

enfin d'obeissance et d'esclavage; plutot la mort! Le carnage fut long et terrible; mais, malgre la foudre qu'ils vomissaient, et qui ecrasait des armees entieres, ils furent tous extermines. [Aoua! Aoua!] Mefiez-vous des blancs.

Nous avons vu de nouveaux tyrans plus forts et plus nombreux planter leur pavillons sur le rivage: le ciel a combattu pour nous; il a fait tomber sur eux les pluies, les tempetes, et les vents empoisonnes. Ils ne sont plus, et nous vivons, et nous vivons libres. [Aoua! Aoua!], Mefiez-vous des blancs, habitans du rivage.[7]

(Translation)

[Aoua! Aoua!] Do not trust the whites, inhabitants of the shore. From the time of our fathers the whites descended on this isle; they were told: Here are lands; let your women cultivate them. Be fair, be good, and become our brothers.

The whites promised, and later retracted. A menacing fort was raised; thunder was conceiled in the mouths of cannon; their priests wanted to give us a God whom we did not know; they talked finally of obedience and slavery: rather death! The carnage was long and terrible; in spite of the thunder they belched forth and the entire armies they crushed, they were all exterminated. [Aoua! Aoua!] Do not trust the whites.

We have seen new tyrants more powerful and more numerous plant their flag on these shores: the sky fought for us; it made the rains fall on them, and tempests, and poisoned winds. They are no more, and we live, and we live in freedom. [Aoua! Aoua!] Do not trust the whites, inhabitants of the shore.

IL EST DOUX...

Il est doux de se coucher durant la chaleur sous un arbre touffu, et d'attendre que le vent du soir amene la fraicheur.

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[7]Parny, Oeuvres Diverses, pp. 71-72.

Femmes, approchez. Tandis que je me repose ici sous un arbre touffu, occupez mon oreille par vos accens prolonges; repetez la chanson de la jeune fille, lorsque ses doigts tressent la natte, ou lorsqu'assise aupres du riz, elle chasse les oiseaux avides.

Le chant plait a mon ame: la dance est pour moi presque aussi douce qu'un baiser. Que vos pas soient lents; qu'ils imitent les attitudes du plaisir et l'abandon de la volupte.

Le vent du soir se leve; la lune commence a briller au travers des arbres de la montagne. Allez, et preparez le repas.[8]

(Translation)

It is nice to lie in the heat under a shady tree, and to wait for the evening breeze to bring the coolness.

Women, come forward. While I rest under a shady tree, divert my ear with your prolonged tones, sing again the song of the young girl while she plaits her hair, or when sitting by the rice, she chases away the voracious birds.

The song pleases my soul; the dance is for me almost as sweet as a kiss. Let your steps be slow; let them imitate the postures of pleasure and abandonment to voluptuousness.

The evening breeze rises; the moon begins to shine across the trees on the mountain. Go, and prepare the meal.

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[8]Parny, Oeuvres Diverses, p. 76.

SOME COMMENTS ON THE USES OF THE FOUR VOICES OF THE ENSEMBLE

The extreme independence of the parts used in the Chansons Madecasses was a relatively new technique at the time, but was certainly not an invention of Ravel's. Arnold Schoenberg's Pierrot Lunaire of 1914 was probably the first significant chamber work with voice which effected the development of this type of composition. Ravel's exposure to those techniques were through Stravinsky:

> Stravinsky at Clarens [Switzerland] had composed Three Japanese Lyrics for voice and solo instruments. They were inspired by Schoenberg's Pierrot Lunaire, which pointed the way for music to escape the enormous workings of the full orchestra. Ravel visited near Clarens for two months to write a revision of Moussorgsky's Khovantchina at Diaghilev's request. Stravinsky played him his Three Japanese Lyrics. These two friends, united by musical interests which were closely related until the composition of The Nightingale, talked about Schoenberg, for whom Ravel never ceased to profess deep admiration...
>
> Ravel understood Schoenberg's lesson, but did not follow the composer of Pierrot Lunaire on the path of atonality.[9]

The increased emphasis on the independence of parts in Chansons Madecasses brings about a decreased emphasis on harmony and a growing concern with counterpoint. In the works of Maurice Ravel, the three compositions which most emphasize counterpoint were the Sonata for violin and cello, the

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[9]Collaer, A History of Modern Music, p. 174.

Chansons Madecasses and the Sonata for violin and piano. In the violin and piano Sonata and the Chansons Madecasses, however, the linear writing is more pronounced because of the differences in timbres of the instruments.

Here are some of Ravel's thoughts on the relation of the Chansons Madecasses to Pierrot:

> You must never be afraid to imitate. I myself followed Schoenberg's footsteps to write my Poemes de Mallarme and especially the Chansons Madecasses, which like Pierrot Lunaire, have a very strict counterpoint underlying the atmosphere. If they are not totally Schoenbergian, it is because in music I am not so afraid of the element of charm which he avoided to the point of asceticism, even martyrdom.[10]

The voice is the most important element of the quartet in the Chansons Madecasses, not only for the obvious reason of stating the text, but also because it has substantially more notes than the other instruments.

In the score, Ravel labels the voice part simply "canto," not specifying whether it is a male or female voice, and these songs have been performed by both men and women. The style of the voice part resembles recitativo in that the text is stated syllabically. In fact, the only melismas which occur at all are in the second song, Aoua!, where in several places a syllable receives two notes; otherwise, in all the songs the setting is purely syllabic.

Furthermore, the voice part is diatonic, as are the other parts, for the most part. It is also rather chant-like

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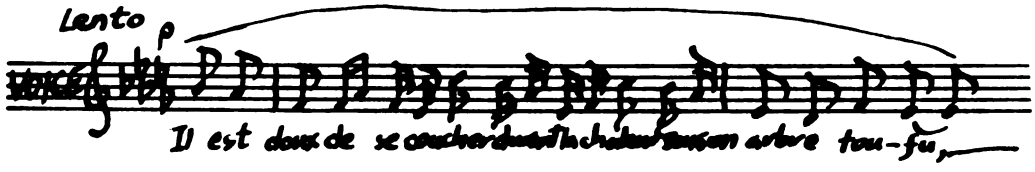
[10]Collaer, p. 177.

in intervallic style. There are few leaps of any difficulty, conjunct motion and skips of thirds and fourths being the usual intervals used. The most unusual interval is one diminished octave in the third song, Il est doux... (Example 1) and that is not difficult because the low d# is the tonal center which is always returned to:

Example 1. Il est doux..., m. 33-35.

Ravel usually avoids successions of intervals which form either scale-wise passages or the outlines of triads. It is most common for him to follow a step by the skip of a third or fourth (Example 2):

Example 2. Il est doux..., m. 9-10.



The range of the voice part is also rather restrained. In Nahandove, the extreme limits are $c\sharp_1$ (only one) to f_2 (also only one). In Aoua!, the most vehement song, the limits are $c\sharp_1$ to $g\sharp_2$, and in Il est doux..., the most restrained song, they are d-flat$_1$ to $d\sharp_2$. Within these limits, the voice is not asked to skip from one extreme to the other. Because of the basically low tessitura, the instrumental accompaniment must be of necessity light so as not to cover

the voice. The Chansons Madecasses would seem to be best suited to a mezzo-soprano or baritone voice.

Taken by itself, the voice part seems relatively easy. However, because of the rhythmic independence of the parts, plus the fact that there is often more than one mode sounding simultaneously in the other parts, it becomes clear that the singer must be exceptional to handle these difficulties and still be able to bring out the text with clear diction. This is all the more important because the text is stated only once, with no repetition of words (except in the case stated earlier). This is essentially in keeping with Ravel's usual treatment of texts, such as Scheherazade, Histoires Naturelles, Trois Poemes de Mallarme and Don Quichote a Dulcinee.

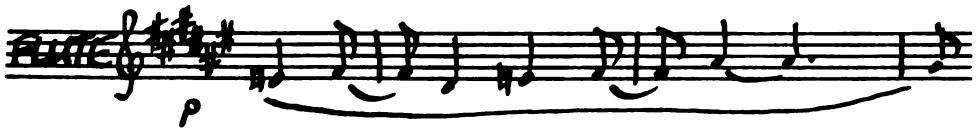
In contrast to the voice, which is usually rather active throughout the songs, the instrumental accompaniment is much sparser, especially in the last two songs. Ravel was very concerned with creating atmosphere through the use of instrumental effects, and though all the instrumental writing is not like this, that is where the emphasis lies.

The flute player is called upon to switch to the piccolo in several places. In terms of notes, there is amazingly little for the flute player to play. In Nahandove, he plays a short figure of two repeated notes:

Example 3. Nahandove, m. 29-30.

After a short rest, the piccolo plays a six-measure figure, following which the flute plays a passage in the extreme low end of its register (Example 4). This is barely a whisper. Then the piccolo plays three measures at the very end.

Example 4. Nahandove, m. 55-58.



In the first half of the song Aoua!, the flute is confined to playing an ostinato pattern centering on d# and c# (Example 5).

Example 5. Aoua!, m. 6-7.

In the second half (Allegro feroce), the flute has the unusual direction "quasi tromba": it is to sound like a trumpet, with the dynamic fortissimo, though at the extreme low end of its register, not an easy feat, especially to be heard over the voice and piano. Miss Jane Bathori wrote that the flute player Louis Fleury was driven nearly mad by this direction.[11]

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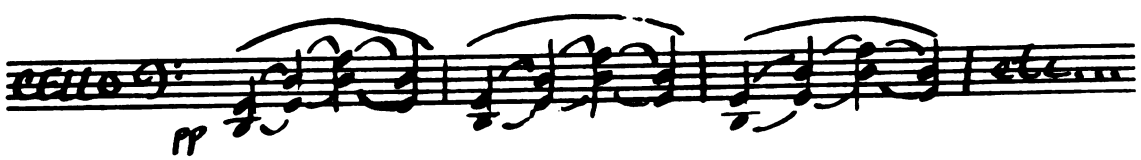
[11]Jane Bathori, "Souvenir," La Revue Musicale, December 1938, p. 180. From a special issue of this periodical, commemorating Maurice Ravel, who had died the year before.

In Il est doux... the flute is given a slightly more extended melody to play, which it does twice, accompanied first by cello, then joined by the voice. At the end of the song, the piccolo plays a short echo of a previous vocal line (Example 6) and that is the extent of the part.

Example 6. Il est doux..., m. 31.

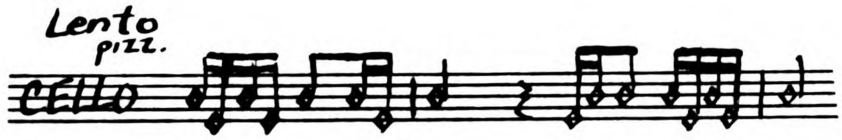
The cello part is scarcely more extensive. It gets the most use in Nahandove, where it mostly reiterates a descant of ambiguous tonality, with the fourth being the most prominent interval. There is slight use of harmonics, which are barely heard, but which provide a subtle coloring to the flute part which is in the low register. In Aoua!, the main purpose for the cello is to provide an ostinato background, making use of its open strings to clash against the prevailing tonality of d# minor (Example 7).

Example 7. Aoua!, m. 8-10.



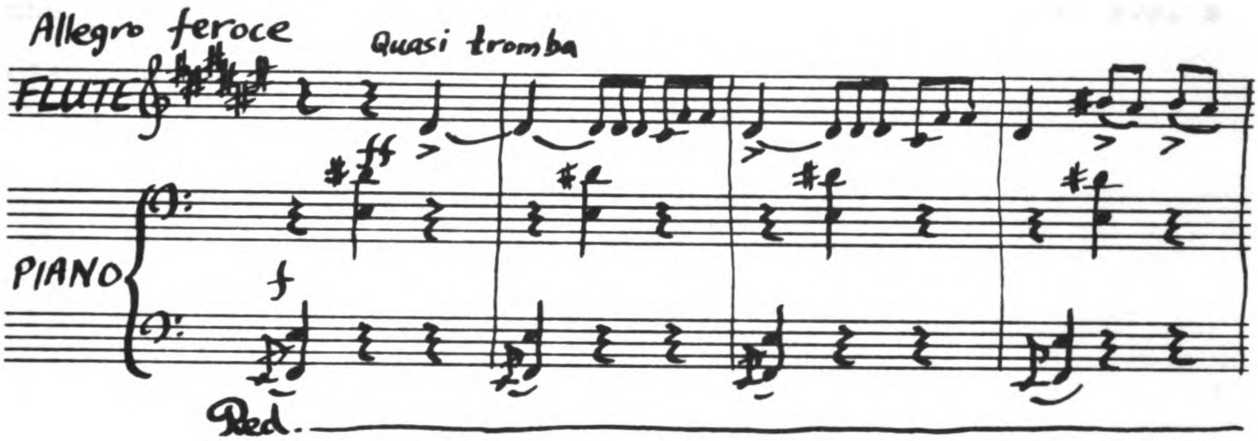
In Il est doux... the cellist plays a short accompaniment to the flute melody using artificial harmonics. In the second half of the song an exotic effect of imitating a calabash by the use of pizzicato harmonics is used:

Example 8. Il est doux..., m. 31-32.



The main coloristic function of the piano part is that of imitating percussion instruments such as drums, gongs and bells. In the following example, for instance, the reiterated major 7ths punctuate the flute's "trumpet call" in Aoua!:

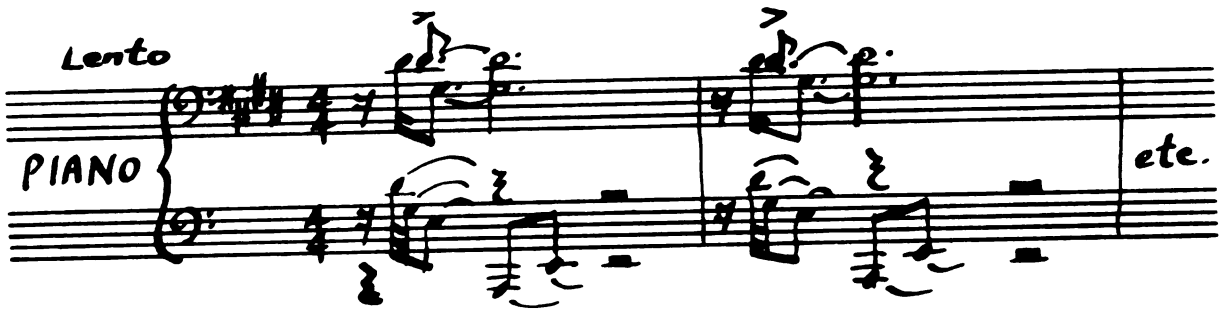
Example 9. Aoua!, m. 38-41.



These ringing major 7ths are the dominating sonority of the piano in this song.

In Il est doux..., in conjunction with the pizzicato notes, the following figure also suggests bells and drums:

Example 10. Il est doux..., m. 30-31.



These small touches in the instrumental parts are just enough to evoke the atmosphere of the text. The setting of the Chansons Madecasses is a perfect example of Maurice Ravel's classical restraint.

THE FORMAL STRUCTURE OF THE THREE CHANSONS MADECASSES

Before proceeding with the harmonic analysis of the three songs, we must say a few words about Ravel's formal outline in setting the music to the texts, as well as his use of key signatures.

There are no real structural key relationships between the songs, and also each song has a non-classical tonal organization. Only the third song begins and ends in the same key, and the last line of the text is set in an ambiguous way.

The use of key signatures is somewhat inconsistent. In the first song, Nahandove, all parts of the quartet have the same key signatures at all times. As will be illustrated later, this does not necessarily mean that the parts are always in the same key: there is a certain amount of bitonality in this song, though not as much as in Aoua! In most cases, the key signature represents the basic tonal center (either major or minor) with the modal degrees of the scale represented with accidentals not found in the key signature.

In the last two songs, different key signatures in different parts of the quartet become the rule. In these two songs the bitonality is much more obvious than in Nahandove, especially in Aoua!, where the bitterness of the text makes it necessary to represent the incompatibility of the races.

The first song, Nahandove, is the longest. In its original form, as written by Parny, it consists of seven short paragraphs, or prose verses, and Ravel's main musical divisions fall mainly in setting off these paragraphs from one another.

A main structural feature is the refrain "Nahandove, o belle Nahandove," which appears eight times in the text and provides clues about the analysis of the song. It appears at the beginning of the song and at the end of each verse. The song begins Andante quasi allegretto in the Dorian mode on d. The first part consists of the first two verses which the voice sings with the accompaniment of the cello alone. This first part, at the dynamic level of piano, moves from d through the Lydian mode on C (the 2nd Nahandove refrain) to the Dorian mode on a (the 3rd Nahandove refrain).

The 2nd section, Piu animato, is a setting of the 3rd verse, with the voice accompanied first by the piano only, being joined at "c'est elle" by the cello and then the flute in a forte climax in the dual tonality of C and F, both Lydian (the 4th Nahandove refrain).

The 3rd section (the 4th verse) begins with a ritardando, with the voice in e minor accompanied by the piano reiterating a major 3rd c-e and the cello providing very spare counterpoint. This short section ends pianissimo and very slowly (Piu lento) with quintal sonorities in A major.

The voice, piccolo and cello continue in d♯ (tempo 1), while the piano is in F♯ major, as the 5th and 6th verses are combined in the next section. After the 5th "Nahandove

refrain" the tempo increases, and the parts move from an ambiguous key of A#, with the cello and flute emphasizing e-natural, the diminished 5th of a#, to another ambiguous tritone of b-f in the piano, which harmonizes a recapitulation of the opening by the voice and the cello (the 6th Nahandove refrain). There follow three measures in which the piano continues sounding its tritone. This space corresponds to the two sentences of text which Ravel omitted from Parny's poem.

The b of the piano tritone resolves downward to a, into the coda in A major, as the cello and the piccolo dwell on the Lydian 4th and the major 7th of the key in the final "Nahandove refrain."

Whereas Nahandove was 84 measures long, the next song, Aoua! has only 71 measures. This song has two major parts, preceded by an introductory exclamation, and rounded off by a short codetta.

The opening exclamation, "Aoua! Aoua!" is an addition of Ravel's to the text. This cry acts as a punctuating point in this song, the way the "Nahandove refrain" punctuated the first song. However, this cry only appears three times: at the beginning, between the first and second parts, and at the end of the text, before the codetta.

The first cry of "Aoua!" is in e minor. This 5-measure introduction is followed by the first part, which includes the first two of the three verses. This part consists of a gradual crescendo from pianissimo to fortissimo at the second cry of "Aoua!" It also makes a gradual increase in tempo, from

andante to allegro feroce, where the voice arrives in f minor. The three instruments create a polytonal ostinato-like accompaniment.

In terms of dynamics and tempo, the second part, the third verse, is the reverse of the first, moving from allegro feroce and forte through a molto ritenuto near the end to adagio (the 3rd "Aoua!") and pianissimo from the instruments at the end. In addition to the voice, only the flute (sounding "like a trumpet") and the piano play. The codetta is centered both on F# major and d# minor, where the cello joins the ensemble.

There is a taste of the bitterness of La Valse in this song, only more incisive and vicious due to the percussiveness of the piano part and the bitterness of the text.

The final song, Il est doux..., is in three parts. This song is the shortest of the three, 50 measures. The first part begins Lento with the flute in D-flat major, playing a melody twice through, the voice joining it the second time. The first two of the four verses are included in this part, the second verse being accompanied by the piano playing bare major 7ths, joined by a cello trill at the end of the verse. The voice moves from e-flat (Dorian) to f#, also Dorian.

The next part, Andante, is the third verse, with the voice in d#, accompanied first by a d# artificial harmonic in the cello, then a combination of sound effects in all the instruments, including pizzicato harmonics in the cello and bell-like sounds in the piano.

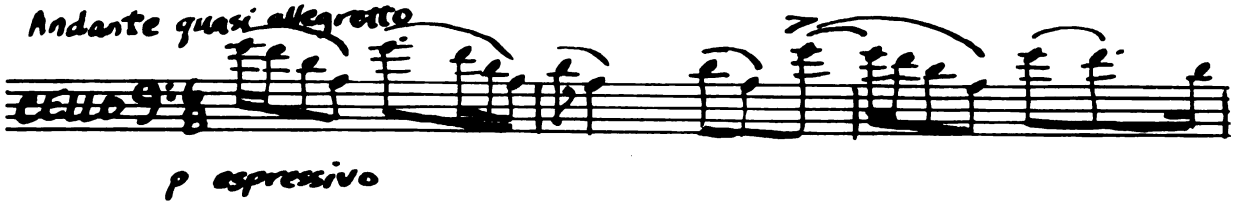
The final part, Andante quasi allegretto, is in a rather unusual scale on D-flat containing a Lydian 4th as well as a minor 6th and minor 7th, the voice being accompanied, essentially, only by a perfect 5th, d-flat-a-flat, in the piano. The final line of the text is unaccompanied, leaving the listener unsure as to tonality, since it ends on a falling perfect 4th to f in the key of D-flat.

This last song is just as lethargic and peaceful as the previous one was tense and vicious. It is very slow, and never rises above the dynamic level of piano.

NAHANDOVE

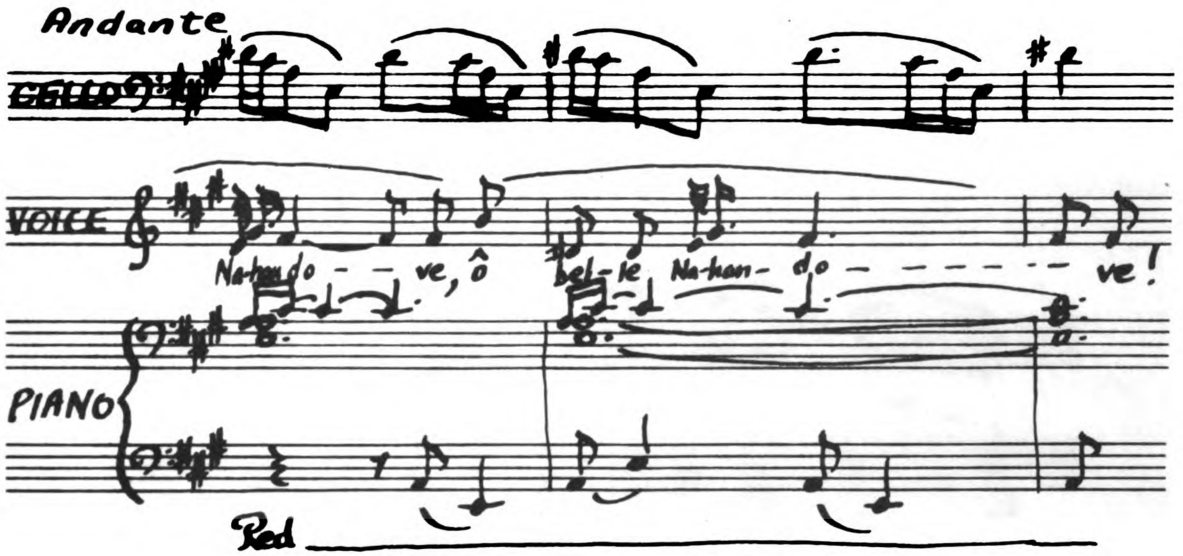
The very first measures of this song present a problem of tonal ambiguity, due in part to the function of the intervals of the cello descant in relation to the tonality. This descant (Example 11), with its intervals of 2nds, 3rds and 4ths, containing a key signature of no sharps or flats, is unclear as to whether it is in the Dorian mode (based on d), or (looking ahead to the end of the song, which is in A major) whether it is in a minor, emphasizing the 7th, 6th and 4th degrees of the scale.

Example 11. Nahandove, m. 1-3.



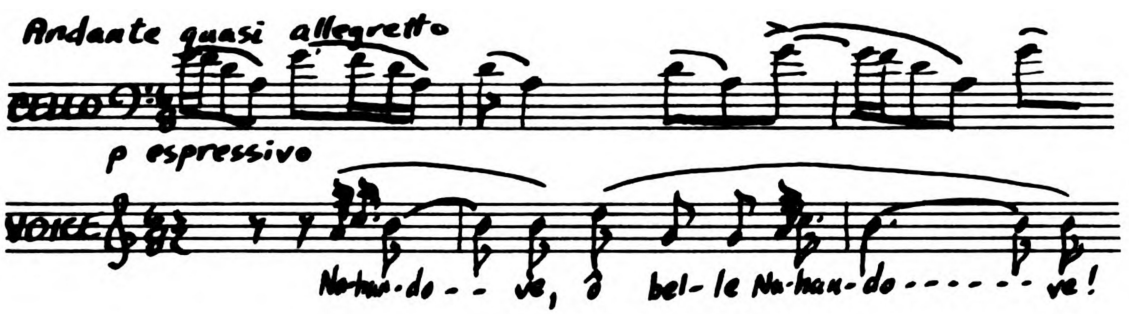
The final measures (Example 12) reveal Ravel's intervallic concept in this song. The original cello descant has the same contours as those shown in Example 11, and the first note of the pattern (in this case d#) is the 4th degree of the Lydian mode on A. Thus, in Example 11, the cello descant is understood to be in the Dorian mode on d, beginning on the 4th degree. The essential 6th scale degree is emphasized in the voice part (Example 12). The often-stated Nahandove refrain puts the syllable "dove" on the 6th degree, in this case f#.

Example 12. Nahandove, m. 79-80.



This refrain (Nahandove, o belle Nahandove!) appears eight times in the course of the poem. A check on how each of these refrains is harmonized reveals the following: In the first statement, the "dove" syllable falls on b, which in this case is the Dorian 6th degree in d (Example 13):

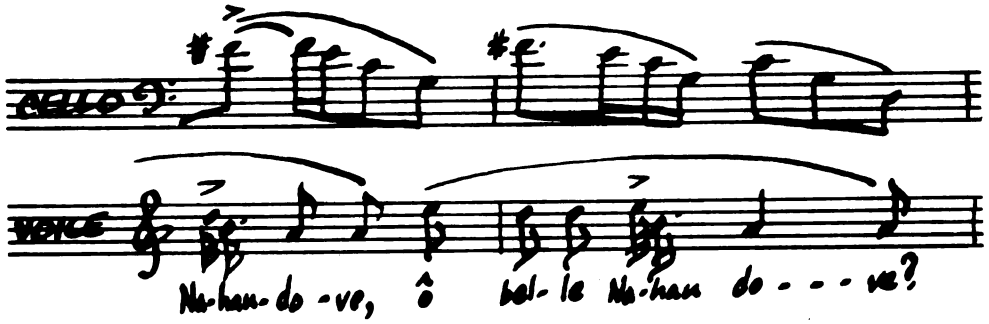
Example 13. Nahandove, m. 1-3.



The second statement (Example 14), also only voice and cello, occurs at the place where an f# appears for the first time in the cello part. This f# is the 4th scale degree, now

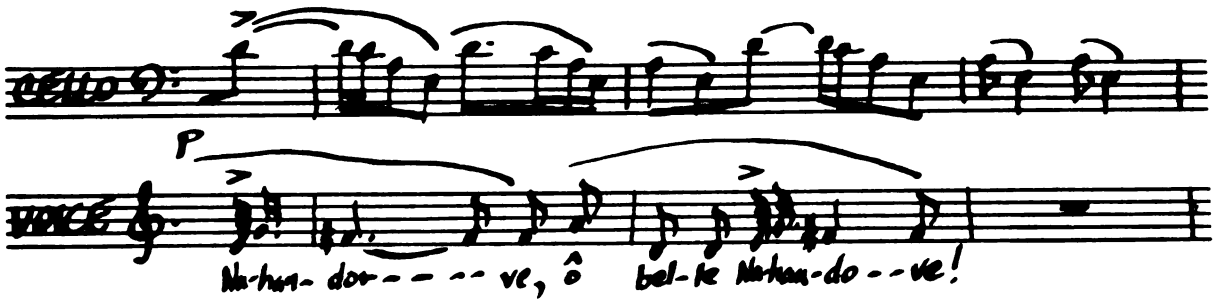
in the Lydian mode on C, which is comparable to the pattern in Example 12. In this case also the "dove" syllable comes on the 6th scale degree, a.

Example 14. Nahandove, m. 10-11.



At the end of the first section, now in a, just before the entrance of the piano, this refrain occurs again, with the syllable "dove" on f#, again the 6th degree:

Example 15. Nahandove, m. 16-18.



There is one more statement of this refrain (at m. 68) which fits this established pattern, but there are three that do not quite fit, for various reasons, which will be explained later. From the statements already made, however, one can see that the basis for the interval structure of the first song is

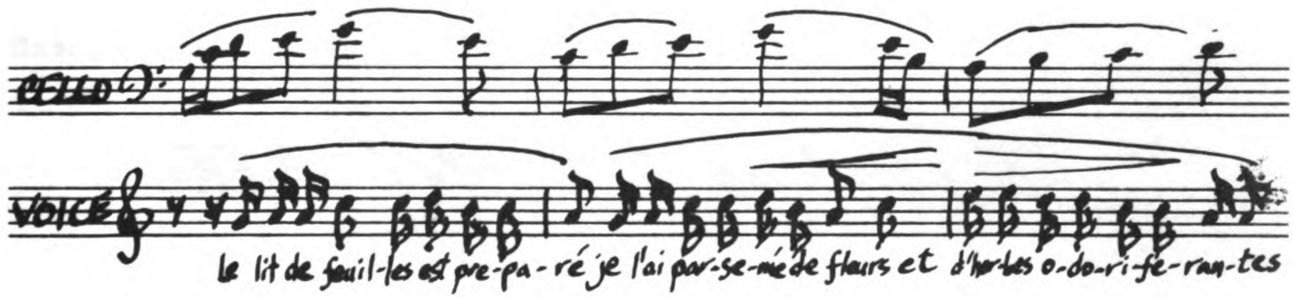
as follows: first, the writing is modal; second, when it is major it is accompanied with a Lydian 4th scale degree, when minor, it usually contains the Dorian 6th degree; third, from the cello descant, the intervals of the 2nd, 4th and 7th (in addition to the minor 3rd) are very important in both melodic and vertical structures. Later, in several places, the vertical sonorities are quartal or quintal, though the harmony as a whole is not meant to imply a quartal or quintal philosophy in the Hindemithian sense. The use of 4ths tends to disguise the essentially tonal writing employed by Ravel.

The first part of Nahandove is introduced by the voice and cello only. In this part (m. 1-18), the lover is anticipating and preparing for the arrival of his beloved Nahandove:

> Nahandove, o belle Nahandove! L'oiseau nocturne a commence ses cris, la pleine lune brille sur ma tete, et la rosee naissante humecte mes cheveux. Voici l'heure: qui peut t'arreter, Nahandove, o belle Nahandove? Le lit de feuilles est prepare; je l'ai parseme de fleurs et d'herbes odoriferantes; il est digne de tes charmes, Nahandove, o belle Nahandove.

The voice declaims this very simply, with a supple rhythm quite independent of the cello:

Example 16. Nahandove, m. 12-14.



Although the text expresses great impatience, the vocal line has a kind of "disinterested" quality about it, as if simply saying the text without much expression. This first part starts in d (Dorian), moves to C (Lydian) in m. 9, and arrives at m. 13 in a (Dorian), leading to the entrance of the piano with the descending perfect 4th in the cello, a-e (Example 15). Musical unity is achieved through a simple free repetition of melodic fragments (Example 17). See also Example 16 for another example of this free repetition (i.e., "le lit de feuilles est prepare" is paralleled by "je l'ai parseme de fleurs").

Example 17. Nahandove, m. 3-6.

Of course, the already mentioned "Nahandove refrain" is another example of this type of free repetition. Another melodic fragment stated by the voice in m. 6 (Example 18) is used near the end of the song in the piccolo part, as part of the final cadence:

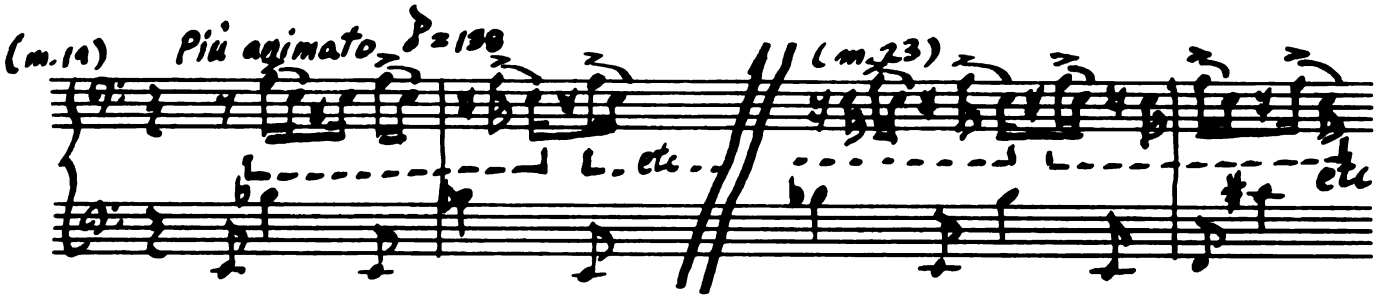
Example 18. Nahandove, m. 6-7.

At Number 1 in the score (piu animato), the lover hears his Nahandove approach:

> Elle vient. J'ai reconnu la respiration precipitee que donne une marche rapide; J'entends le froissement de la pagne qui l'enveloppe: c'est elle, c'est Nahandove, la belle Nahandove!

This section, which begins pianissimo in the piano, quickly rises to a forte at m. 28, where the flute enters for the first time. Several new techniques for this song are used here. The first is an asymmetrical ostinato pattern in the piano part. The tonality at m. 19 (Number 1) is now e, and each hand of the piano plays its own pattern:

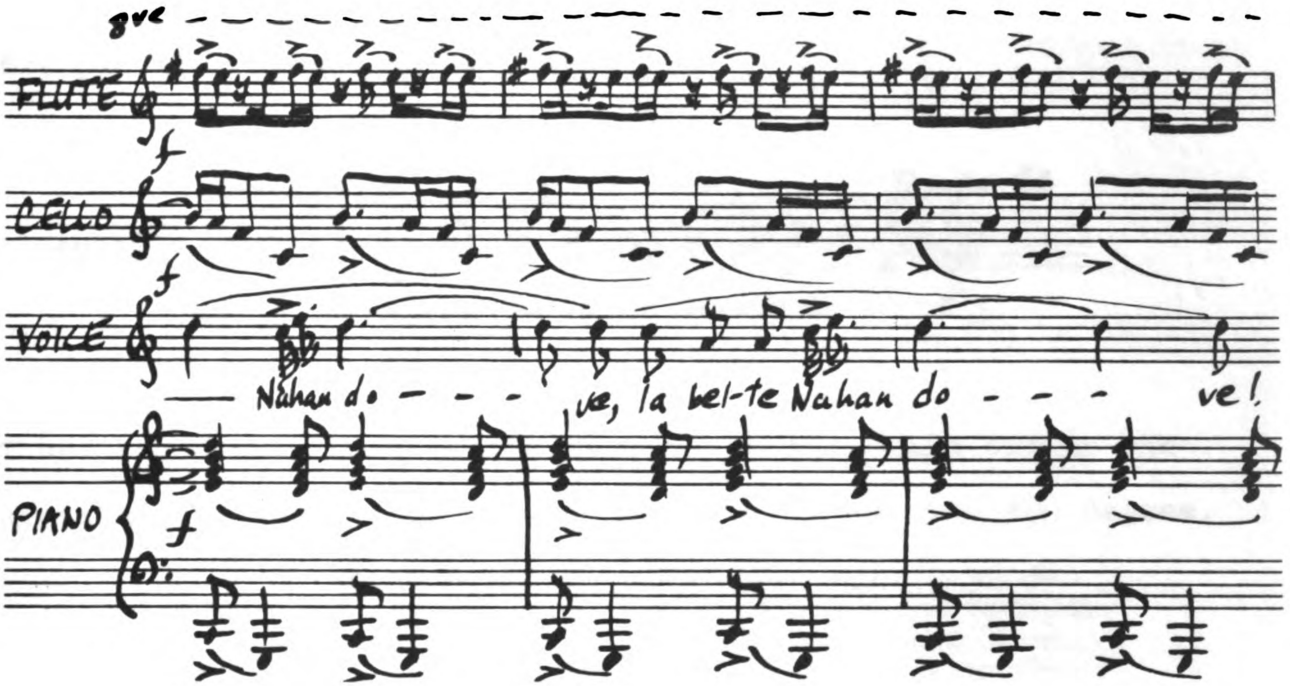
Example 19. Nahandove, m. 19-20 and m. 23-25.



The left hand has e and b-flat in a straight $\frac{6}{8}$ pattern. Above it, the right hand plays a figure directly derived from the cello part, which has just finished (end of Example 15), in a five 8th-beat ostinato. This ostinato continues on the same notes even as the left hand shifts to augmented 5th sonorities on f and b-flat. This use of an irregular ostinato is quite enough to represent the hurried approach of Nahandove. This very short section reaches its climax at the point where the

voice sings "c'est Nahandove, la belle Nahandove!" Now, there occurs one of the "Nahandove refrains" which does not fit exactly into the pattern established in Examples 12-15. This is because there is a subtle superimposition of two modes:

Example 20. Nahandove, m. 29-31.



The piano and the flute are in C (Lydian mode) with the flute emphasizing the f#, while the cello and the voice are in F, with the voice singing the "dove syllable" on the usual 6th degree, while the cello plays its motive from the beginning of the song in F (Lydian mode) accenting the 4th, b-natural. The ostinato pattern, which had been five 8th-beats long in Example 19 has now become a full measure (6 8th-beats) long in the flute part. The piano alternates simply between two

diatonic seventh chords, forming ninth chords on the strong beats, with the d-f-a-c sonorities acting as lower-neighbor tones in a chord on C.

After this climactic moment, there is a ritardando back to the original tempo. In this ritardando, the voice, for the only time, has the motive with which the cello began the song (Example 21), this time in a.

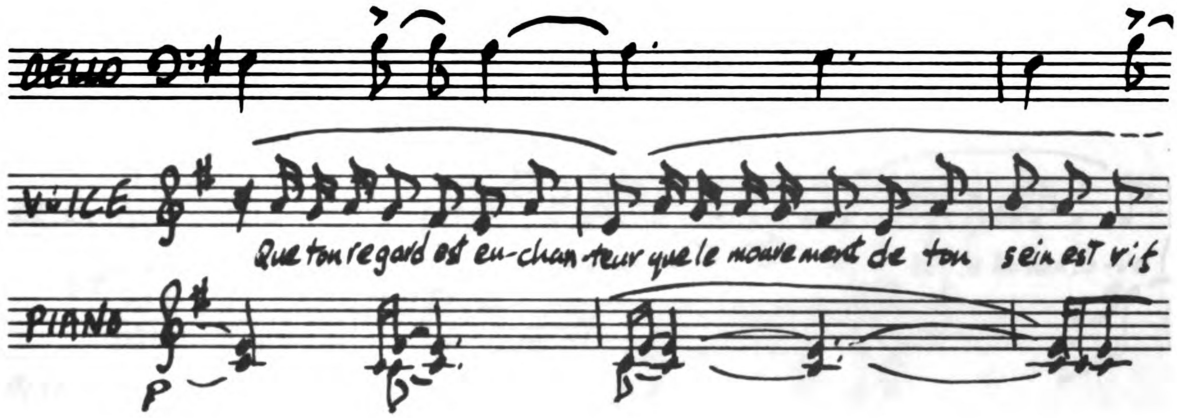
Example 21. Nahandove, m. 34-35.

Thus, the d which begins the phrase, which was the 9th in the section just ended (see Example 20) now becomes the 4th degree.

> O reprends haleine, ma jeune amie; repose-toi sur mes genoux. Que ton regard est enchanteur, que le mouvement de ton sein est vif et delicieux sous la main qui le presse! Tu souris, Nahandove, o belle Nahandove!

The tonality of this section is somewhat ambiguous: the voice sounds as if it is in a (Dorian), while the piano is noncommittal as to whether it is in C or a (first inversion):

Example 22. Nahandove, m. 37-40.



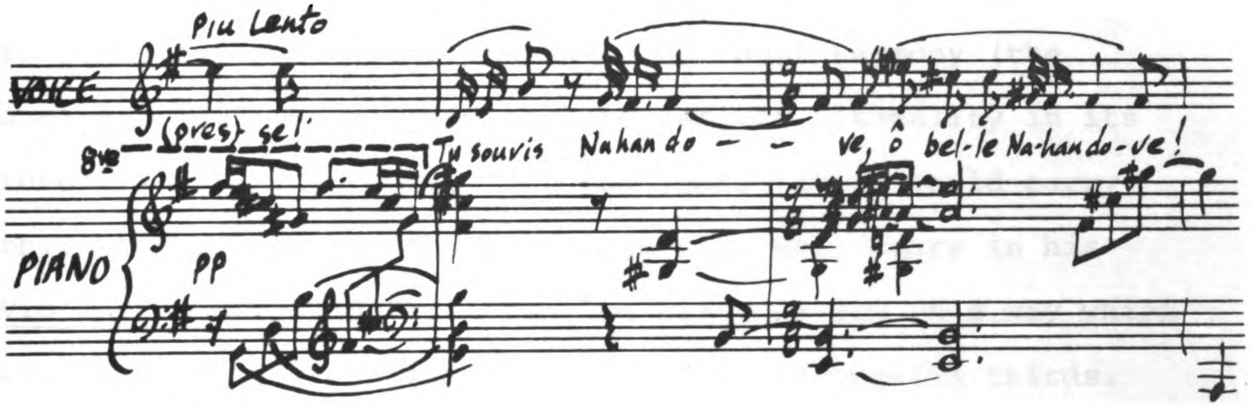
In this example, a new motive which is a condensed version of fragments of the cello descant from the first and second sections (Example 23), occurs in the voice part (the group of 16th-notes followed by 8ths). This motive gains further prominence in a succeeding section.

Example 23. Nahandove, m. 9 and m. 36.

The last full measure of Example 22, in the voice part, shows further emphasis on the intervals of the 2nd and the 4th. This stress on the perfect 4th, at this point and in the next few measures (inverted to the perfect 5th -- Example 24), brings about a remarkable change to a very definite quintal feeling. At measure 41, the piano plays a G-major triad in the left hand, and arpeggiates and sustains the perfect 5ths

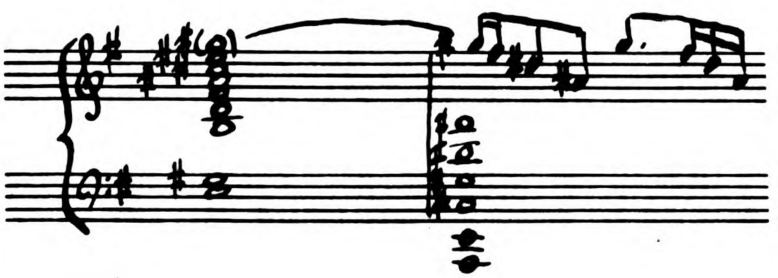
f#-c#-g# above that, while high above, the right hand plays the original cello descant, now in c#:

Example 24. Nahandove, m. 41-44.



At m. 43 (also Example 24), in another "Nahandove refrain," the setting is different from the others. The "dove syllable" can be considered to be on the 6th degree of the scale of A, rather than on the 6th degree of the chord at that point, as in the other sections. The chord here is E, the dominant. As the piano sustains all the notes sounding at m. 43, a complete dominant 15th sonority results:

Example 25. Nahandove, schematic reduction of m. 43-44.

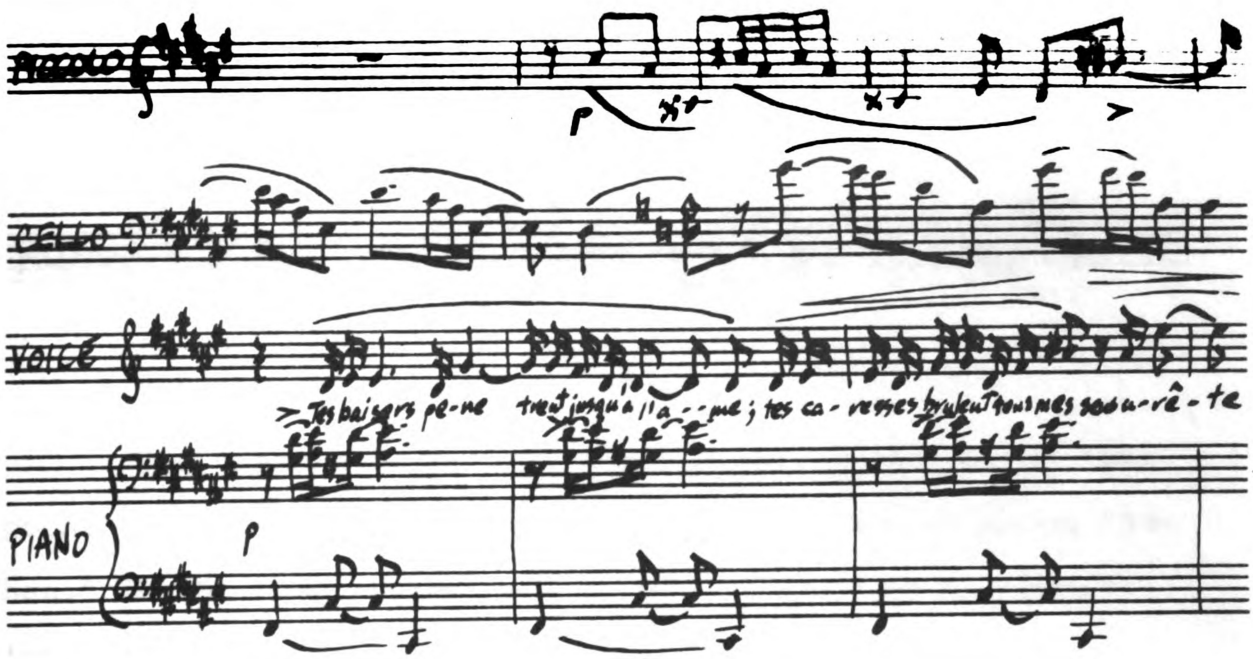


The bass note of this chord resolves to a in the next measure, with the upper g# becoming the top note of the cello descant, now in d#, a tritone from the tonality of the bass. In this way. Ravel uses quintal structures, with their tonal vagueness, to reflect the ultimate extension of tonal harmony (the dominant 15th chord), and also to reflect bitonality in its resolution. Alban Berg, just ten years later, would carry this principle "over the brink" into atonal theory in his Violin Concerto (1935), arranging his tone-row in a way which would allow him to create sonorities of successive thirds, hinting at tonality. Ravel approaches this point from the opposite direction.

The next section, at m. 35, continues bitonally, with a key signature (in all parts) of six sharps, quite distant tonally from the opening tonality. Ravel uses this tonal distance to express the passion of the text:

> Tes baisers penetrent jusqu'a l'ame; tes caresses brulent tous mes sens: arrete, ou je vais mourir. Meurt-on de volupte Nahandove, o belle Nahandove?"

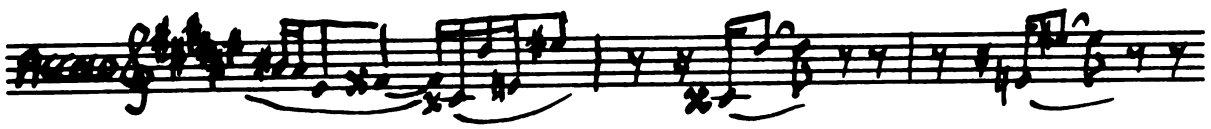
Example 26. Nahandove, m. 45-47.



The cello continues its characteristic descant, first in a#, then in d#, while the piccolo, also in d#, plays the motive introduced in Example 23. This motive is expanded to include two different versions of the 7th scale degree, major and minor. The voice sings in d# (Dorian). The piano repeats a figure on the chord of $F\#^7$, the d# and g# in the right hand being appoggiaturas to the 3rd and the 7th. This figure in the right hand is an outgrowth both of the appoggiatura figure in Example 24 (the d# and g#) and the ostinato (inverted) which the flute first played in Example 20, in the manner that it is accented. On the whole, this section is also quite restrained, considering the voluptuousness expressed in the text. Ravel chose to limit his portrayal

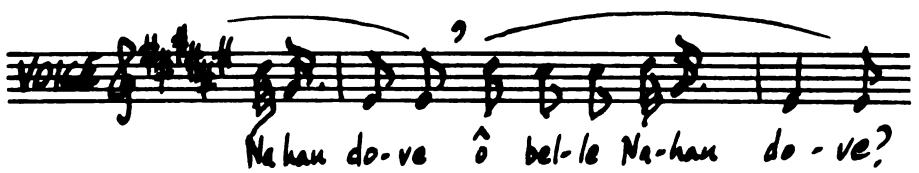
of this rapture by the use of octave displacement in the piccolo part, where the chromatic scale in m. 48 becomes very disjointed:

Example 27. Nahandove, m. 48-51.



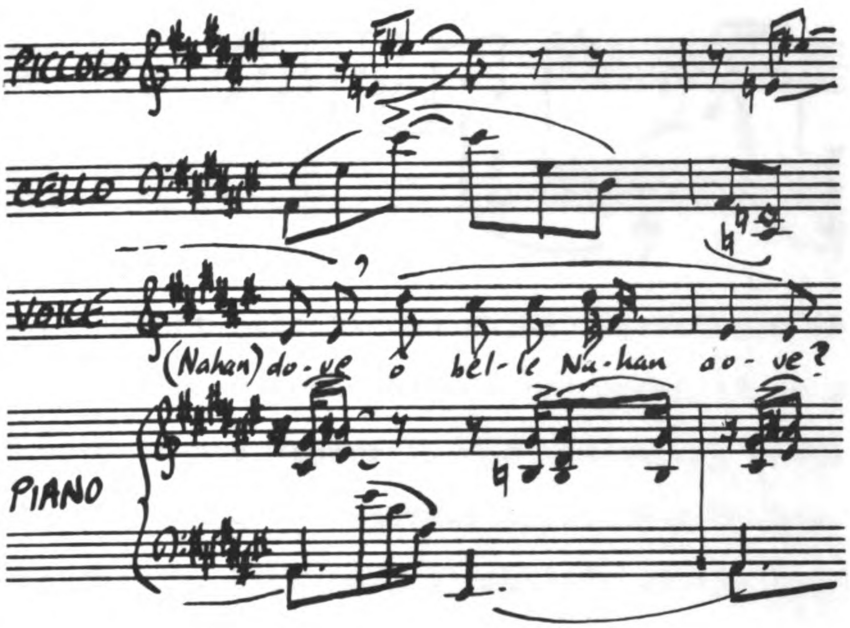
The "Nahandove refrain" is the most different at this point than anywhere else in the song. The two syllables "Na-han," in the same rhythm as all the others, now have wider intervals:

Example 28. Nahandove, m. 50-51.



The harmonization of the "Nahandove refrain" does not follow the usual pattern, since the "dove syllable" is on the 5th degree of a ninth-chord on a#, which also contains an added 4th. It may be significant that just this once, the 6th degree (f#), which is normally reserved for this syllable, is omitted in all of the parts:

Example 29. Nahandove, m. 50-51.

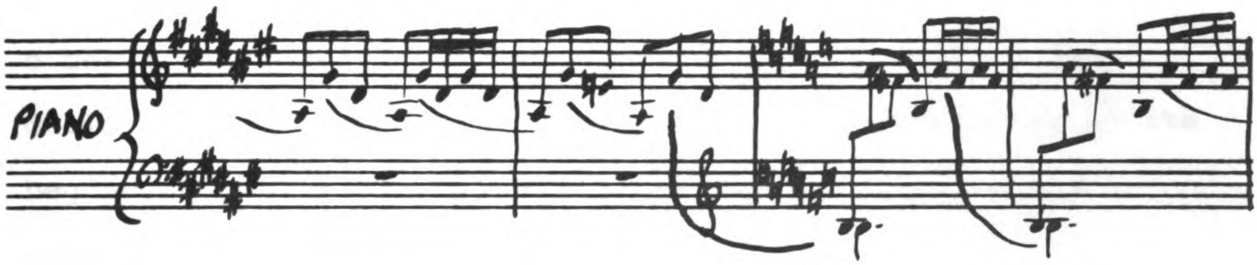


From this point, there is an accelerando to a quick tempo (Number 4) to reflect how the pleasure passes like a flash:

> Le plaisir passe comme un eclair: ta douce haleine s'affaiblit, tes yeux humides se referment, ta tete se penche mollement, et tes transports s'etteignent dans la langueur. Jamais tu ne fus si belle, Nahandove, o belle Nahandove!

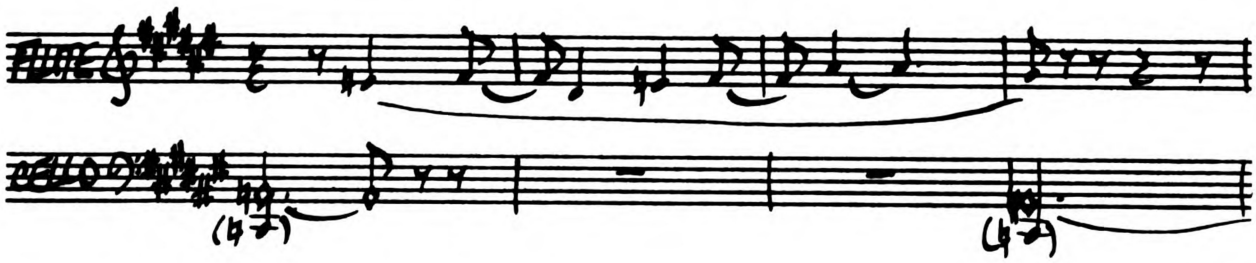
This section passes quickly, over an ostinato-like figure in the piano part based both on the original cello descant and the motives of Example 23. The tonality is vaguely defined: the piano accompaniment is constructed for eight measures as consecutive 4ths, shifting at the change of key (m. 63) to a more easily definable 7th chord on b (Example 30):

Example 30. Nahandove, m. 60-64.



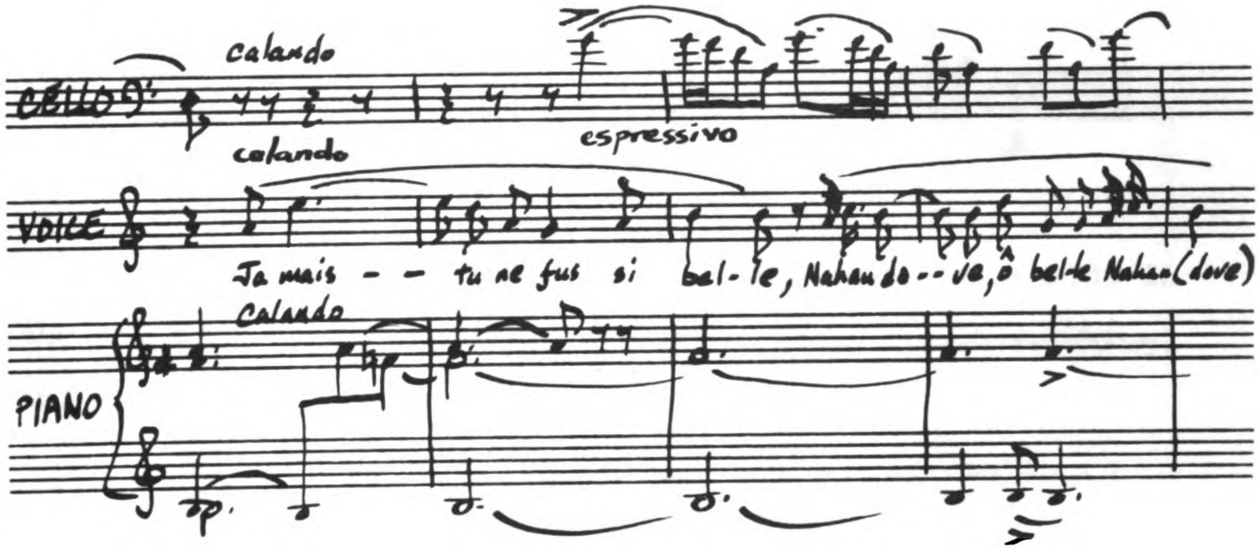
In this manner, the figure which constituted the 4th and 7th at m. 50 (see Example 29) in the midst of an a#^{9} chord becomes a free ostinato figure in the succeeding section, to the key signature change. A phrase modulation occurs at the key signature change, back to the tonality of the beginning of the song. The flute and the cello at this point are barely heard: the flute whispers a melody passing through an e-natural, the Phrygian 2nd degree in the key of d# and also a tritone from the bass a# in the piano part (see Example 30). The cello merely echoes the e-natural as a faint harmonic. Economy of means is at an extreme here:

Example 31. Nahandove, m. 55-58.



The motives of the opening return as well: at the point the voice sings "Jamais tu ne fus si belle, Nahandove, o belle Nahandove," over a tritone b-f in the piano, the cello recapitulates its opening descant identically as at the beginning, while the "Nahandove refrain" is also in its original contour (compare to Example 13):

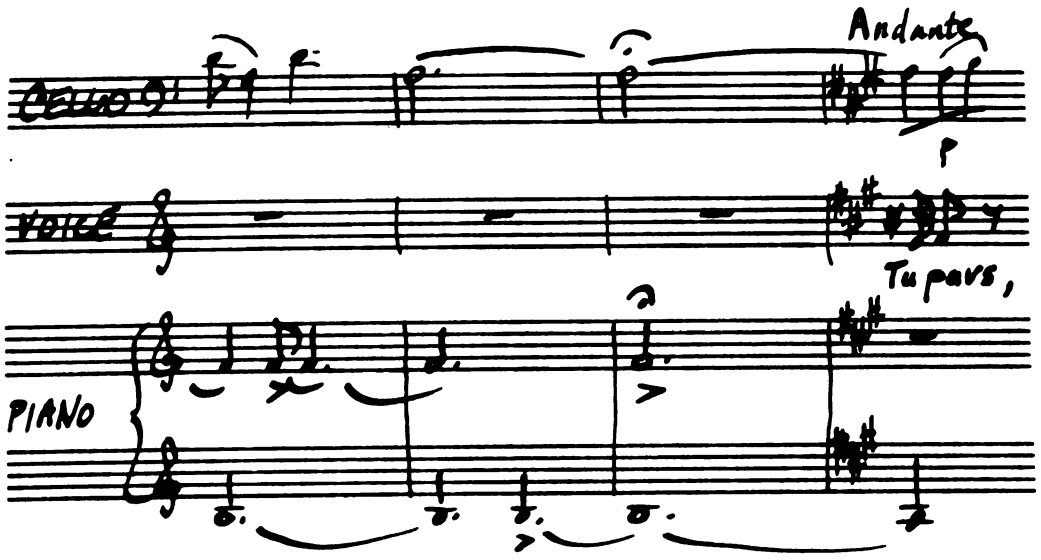
Example 32. Nahandove, m. 67-71.



In effect, the opening of the song is now "harmonized."

The arrival at the final tonality of the song takes place through a sort of "step-cadence" of the simplest kind: only one voice (the b) resolves in the bass:

Example 33. Nahandove, m. 72-75.

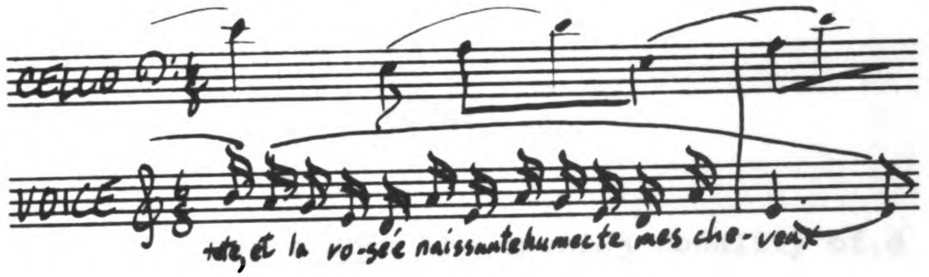


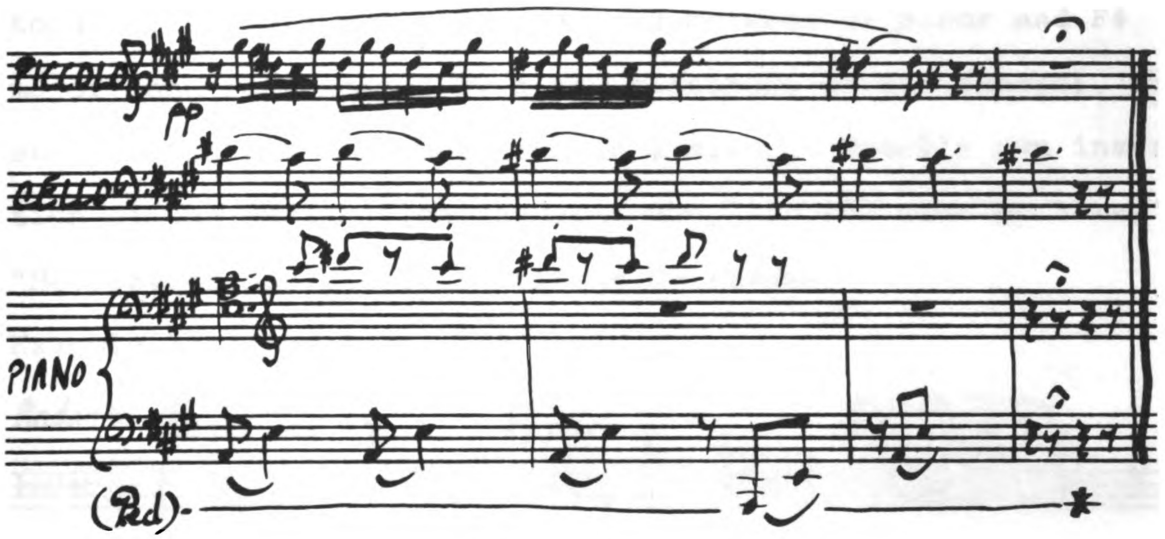
This resolution leads to the final section, a coda in the key of A (Lydian), while the voice sings of languishing, and waiting for the return of Nahandove:

> Tu pars, et je vais languirai dans les regrets et les desires; je languirai jusqu'au soir; tu reviendras ce soir, Nahandove, o belle Nahandove!

The final "Nahandove refrain" has already been mentioned (see Example 12), and, while the A-major chord with the added Lydian 4th sounds at the end, the piccolo plays a motive hovering around that 4th and including the 7th. This motive was mentioned once before, in a different harmonic context in Example 18, when it had as its pivotal notes the 5th and the 8ve:

Example 34. Nahandove, m. 6 and m. 81-84.



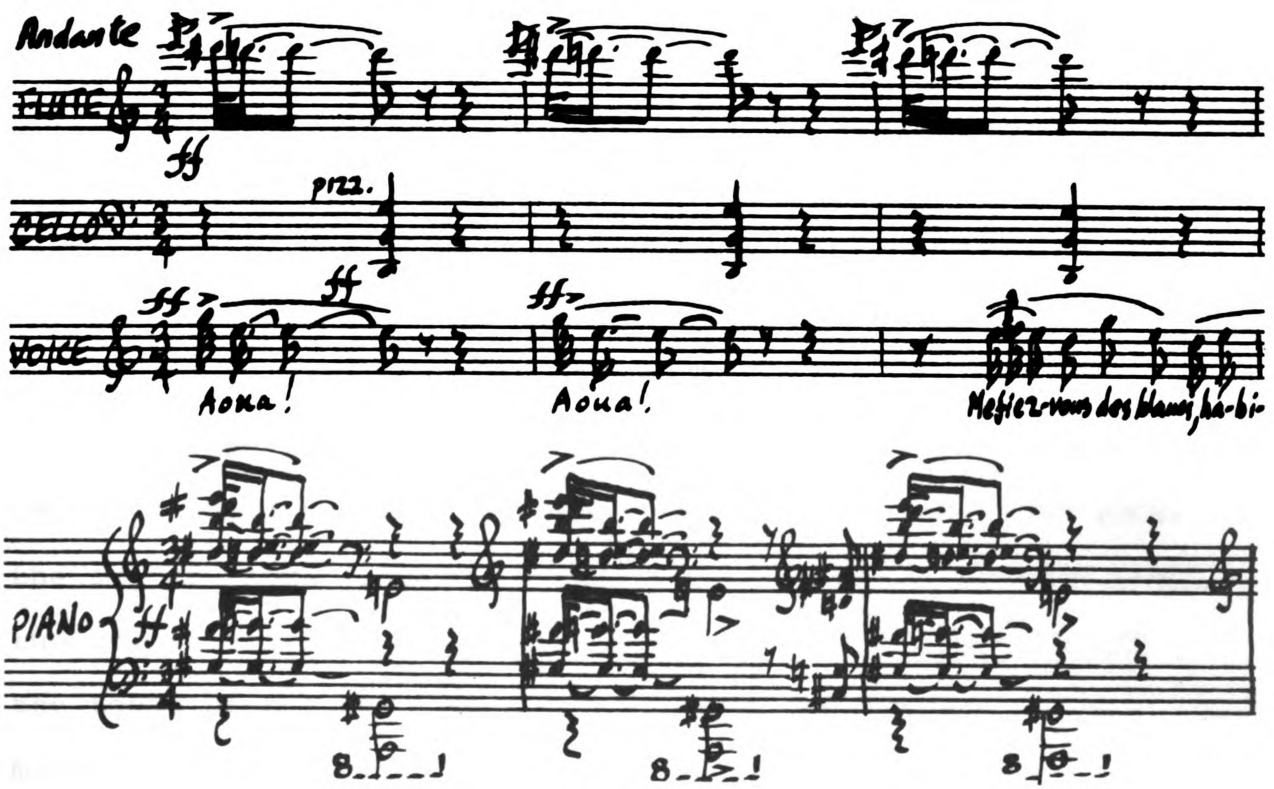


The characteristic intervals of the 4th and 7th, with which the song opened, lend a plaintive tone to the end. In the beginning, the 7th was minor, and the 4th perfect; at the end, the 7th is major, and the 4th augmented.

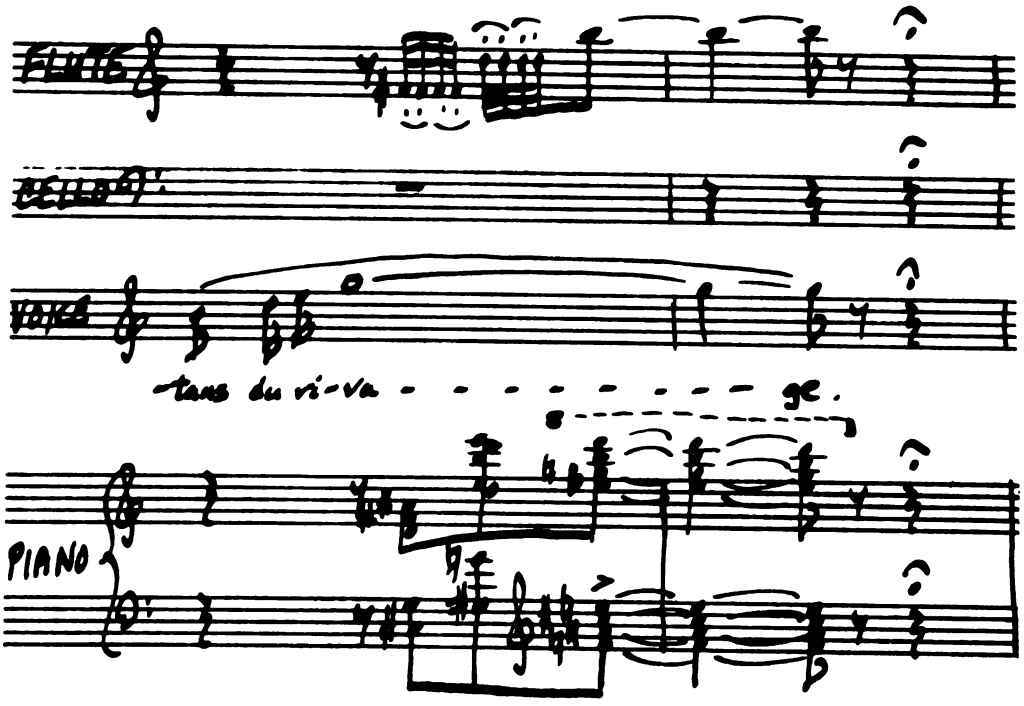
AOUA!

Whereas in Nahandove the opening tonality of d minor was recapitulated near the end, with a coda in A major added the structure of Aoua! is slightly different. The basic tonality of this song is polarized between d# minor and F# major (and represented by a key signature of six sharps), with an introductury five measures in e minor: Ravel's own insertion of the exclamation "Aoua! Aoua!," is followed by Parny's "Mefiezvous des blancs, habitans du rivage."

Example 35. Aoua!, m. 1-5.



Example 35. (Cont.)



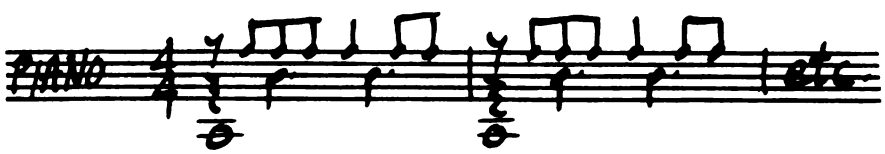
Within these measures (Example 35) are shown several basic premises for the song: a) the juxtaposition of two relative keys, in this case e minor and G major (in the cello); b) the use of minor 2nd and major 7th dissonances, both as added tones in the harmony (upper piano part and flute) as well as ringing sonorities of vertical consecutive major 7ths in the lower piano, which represent the bell or gong calling the natives to war against the whites.

In the first song, the "dove" syllable of Nahandove was usually placed on the 6th degree of the scale. In this song, the cry of "Aoua! Aoua!" is stated three times. In each case, the cry is a falling minor third with the second note being the tonic of the key. Hence, the first statement is in e minor. The chord in the piano (m. 1) is a 7th chord on E, with both the major and minor thirds present, as well as f#

and d# appoggiaturas to the g and d, respectively. The flute also plays the d#-d-natural, with a grace-note, e. The anacrusis to the third measure in the piano contains the three varieties of the 5th: perfect, augmented and diminished. This chord is used also in the fifth measure along with the 7th chord on e, ending the flourish on a chord in thirds with all the notes, except the top d, making up a complete whole-tone scale. Its effect, however, is not the "Impressionistic" sound of the whole-tone sonority as used by Debussy, but a tortured exclamation of pain and rage. The flute ends with an arpeggio on the chord of b minor. Clearly, the tension of these multiple sonorities is one that will not be easy to resolve.

This furious introduction is followed by an insistent ostinato rhythmic pattern, beginning pianissimo. The piano rhythm is on three levels (Example 36) with the "bell" on the downbeat.

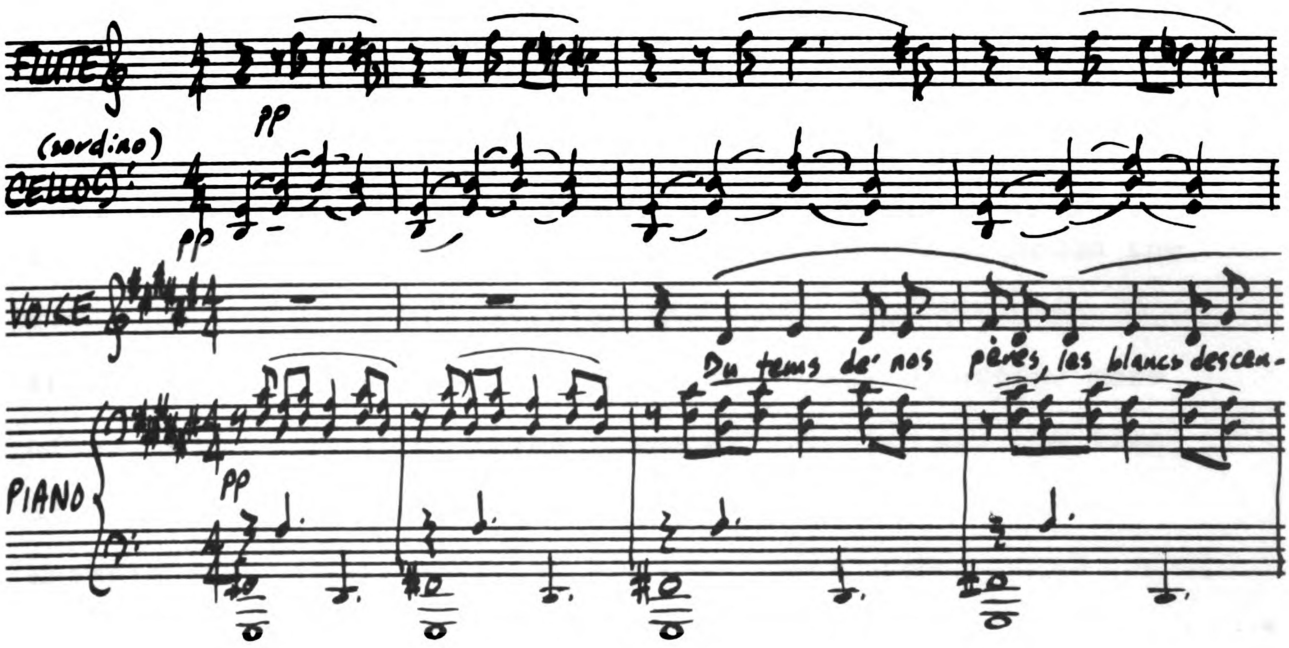
Example 36. Aoua!, rhythm of piano, m. 6, etc.



The falling thirds of the "Aoua!" cry are constantly reiterated in the right hand in parallel 5ths in the dual key of d# minor-F# major. This ambiguity of key never really resolves itself. The cello provides a steady droning backdrop of mostly

open strings in an uneasy clash with the "black key" piano sound, while the flute plays short chromatic scales down to d# and c#, alternately (Example 37).

Example 37. Aoua!, m. 6-9.



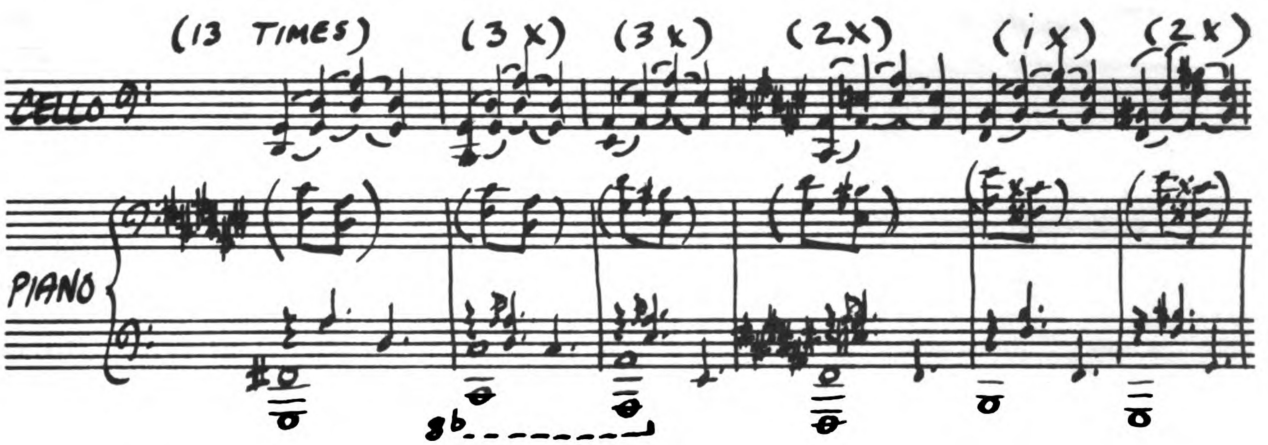
This is the perfect setting for the text, as the voice declaims the grievances of the blacks against the whites, and how the whites made promises of friendship and then brought slavery and death. Based on d#, the voice periodically rises either to a minor 3rd, perfect 4th, or diminished 5th above the tonic, and then comes back down. The complaints are at first quiet and in the lower register.

> Du tems de nos peres, des blancs descendirent dans cette ile; on leur dit: Voila des terres; que vos femmes les cultivent. Soyez justes; soyez bons, et devenez nos freres.
> Les blancs promirent, et cependant ils faisaient des retranchemens...

Example 38. Aoua!, m. 8-11.

As the text reaches the words (faisaient des retranchemens," the dynamic level begins to increase. The bass note in the cello ostinato and the piano moves to C, although the right hand of the piano remains the same. The ostinato rhythms remain the same, but the notes begin to change more often, sometimes after three measures, or two, and one time after only one measure.

Example 39. Aoua!, m. 6-29, harmonic reduction.

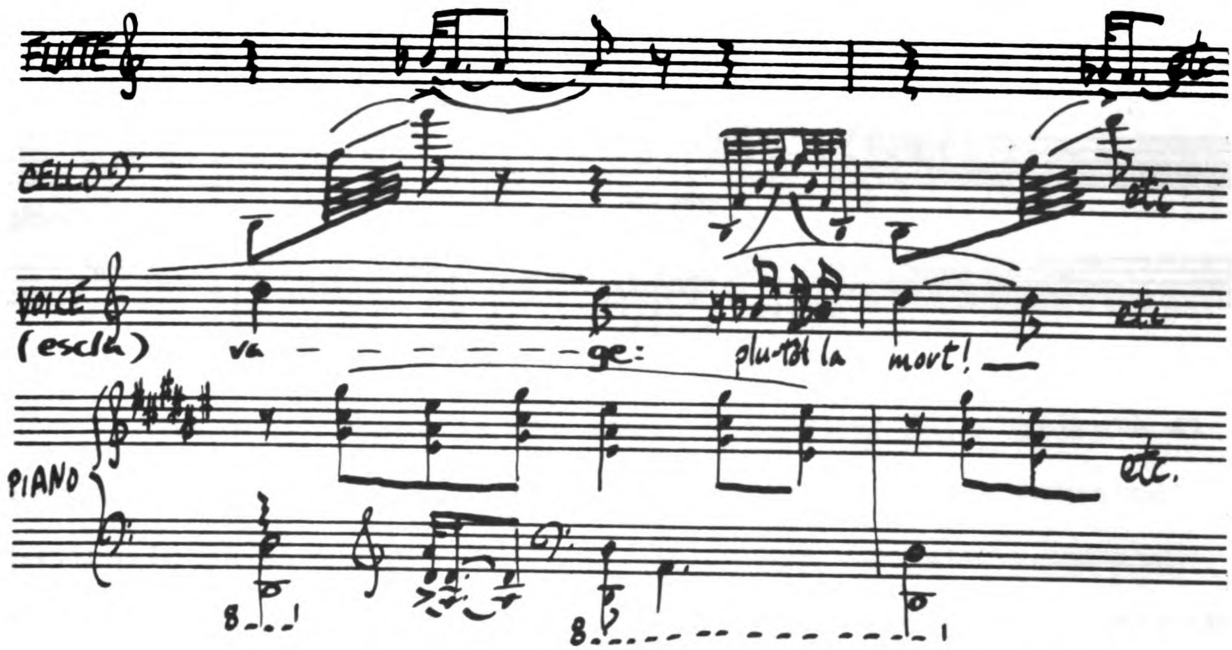


The tonality of the vocal line shifts from d# through F#, to a dominant 7th chord on B-flat.

> ...Un fort menacant s'eleva; le tonnere fut renferme dans les bouches d'airain; les pretres voulurent nous donner un Dieu que nous ne connaissons pas; ils parlerent enfin d'obeissance et d'esclavage; plutot la mort!...

Throughout this passage the indication is crescendo e accelerando poco a poco. The voice has gradually been climbing up through its range, its upper note now being d^2. The piano is in both D and a#, the right-hand ostinato now being in octaves plus fifths:

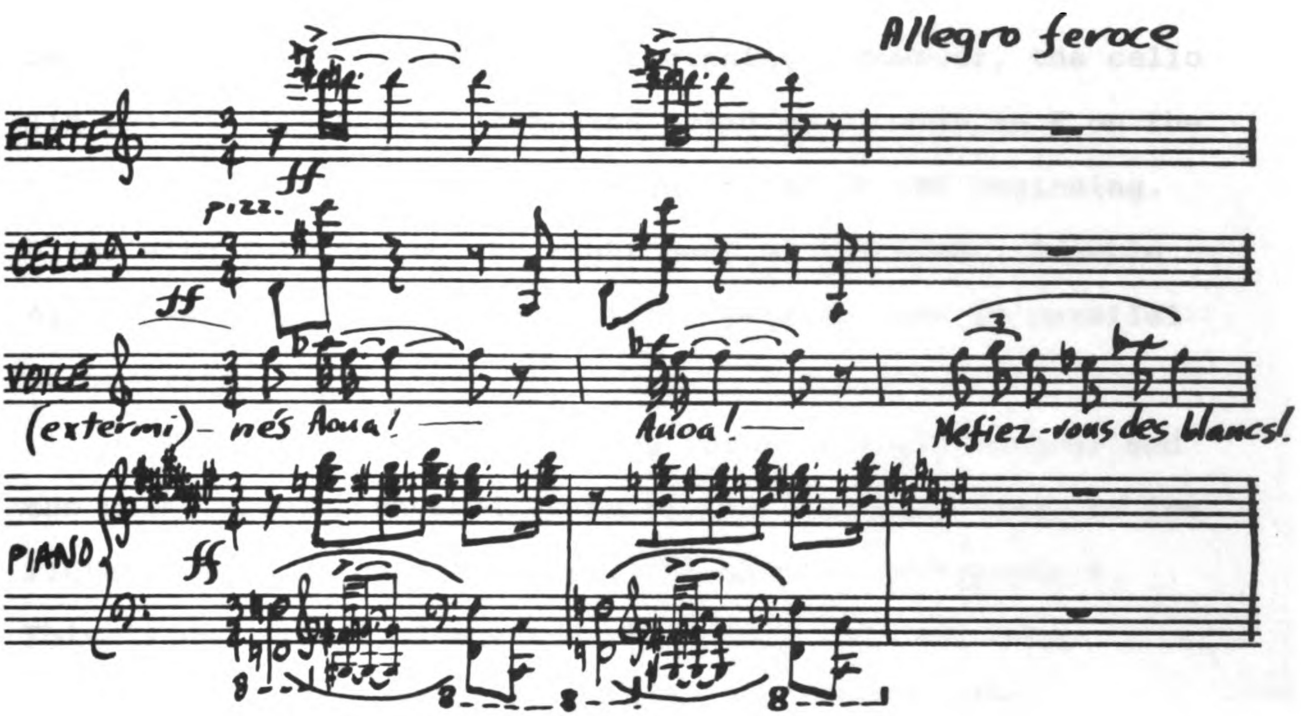
Example 40. Aoua!, m. 30-31.



The cello has quit its drone-ostinato and now plays a new pattern in d in conjunction with the flute. At this point, thirds are being omitted in all the instrumental parts, so that there is no feeling of major or minor.

Within a few more measures the climax of this rise in pitch and dynamics is reached with the second cry of "Aoua!" in f minor (Example 41). This is the first of two highpoints.

Example 41. Aoua!, m. 35-37.



The vocal point in the phrases leading up to Example 41 becomes quite agitated. Until this section, it was reciting basically in eighth-notes; now, the motion has been increased to sixteenth-notes, so that the following sentences fit into the space of six measures:

> ...Le carnage fut long et terrible;
> mais, malgre la foudre qu'ils vomissaient,
> et qui ecrasait des armees entieres, ils
> furent tous extermines. Aoua! Aoua!
> Mefiez-vous des blancs!

Example 42. Aoua!, m. 32-33.

A comparison of Example 41 with Example 35 shows that the flute as well as the left hand of the piano part are playing the same figures as at the beginning. However, the cello (in Example 41) has an augmented triad on C, with an F on the first beat, rather than the G major triad at the beginning. Also, with full force, the right hand of the piano (Example 41) plays a version of the ostinato pattern, now in parallel major triads.

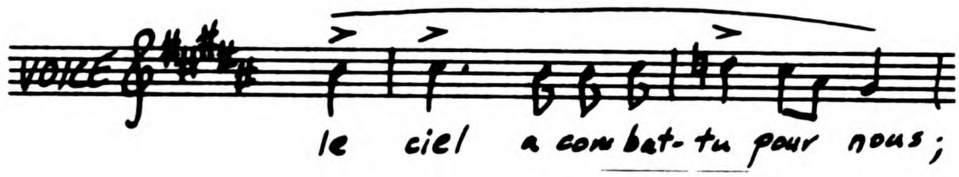
The tempo now becomes very rapid (Allegro feroce) and the piano plays a rhythmic punctuation, in major 7ths, to the flute's "Trumpet call," already illustrated in Example 9. This is the second of the two major parts of this song.

> Nous avons vu de nouveaux tyrans, plus fort et plus nombreux, planter leur pavillons sur le rivage: le ciel a combattu pour nous; il a fait tomber sur eux les pluies, les tempetes et les vents empoisonnes...

Example 43. Aoua!, m. 42-46.

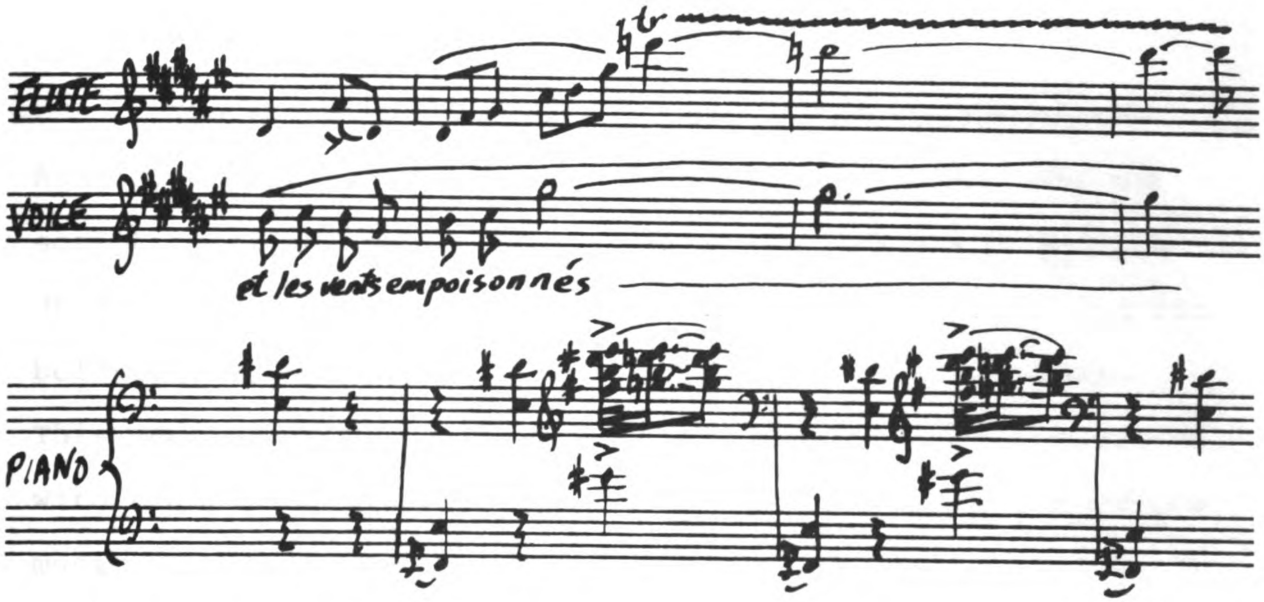
The voice is in g# minor in a triple-meter version of its melody at measure 8 (Example 37 or 38). This melody also makes use of the diminished 5th above the tonic.

Example 44. Aoua!, m. 50-52.



At the word "empoisones" (Example 45) the voice reaches its second high-point ($g\#_2$), harmonized in the piano by those same appoggiaturas to the 7th chord on e as in the opening of the song (Example 35). The flute plays a high d-natural, a diminished 5th from the tonic of the voice part:

Example 45. Aoua!, m. 56-59.



Now, there is a 4-measure molto ritenuto to the original tempo (Example 46), with the voice ending on e#, sounding like a tonic, since the second note of the two-note "Aoua!" cry has been the tonic.

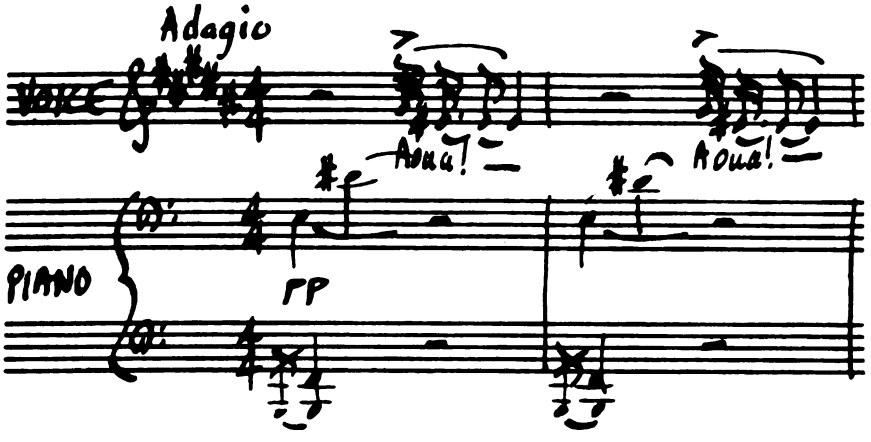
Ils ne sont plus et nous vivons, et
nous vivons libres. (Aoua!...)

The tonality is somewhat uncertain, since the e# is used to shift enharmonically into the following codetta. At the words "et nous vivons," the voice momentarily outlines the ostinato of the minor third which the piano had been playing throughout the first part of the song. (Compare with Example 37.)

Example 46. Aoua!, m. 59-62.

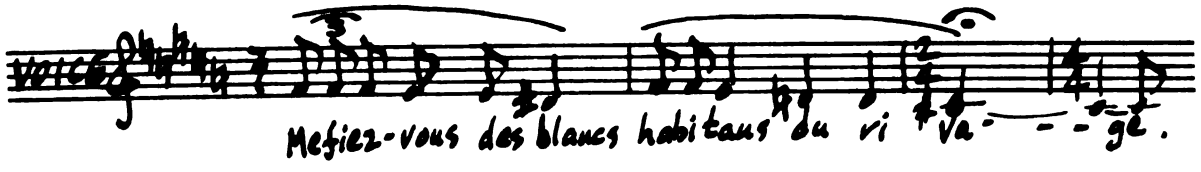
The third cry of "Aoua!" follows immediately at the Adagio, on the same e# as in the previous example. The description of the terrible warfare is now completed, and the dynamic level is pianissimo, with the piano still playing its bell-sounds, now including a tritone b-natural underneath. This section, coming just before the codetta, can be compared with Example 33, just before the coda in Nahandove, where the music also halted on a tritone before proceeding.

Example 47. Aoua!, m. 63-64.



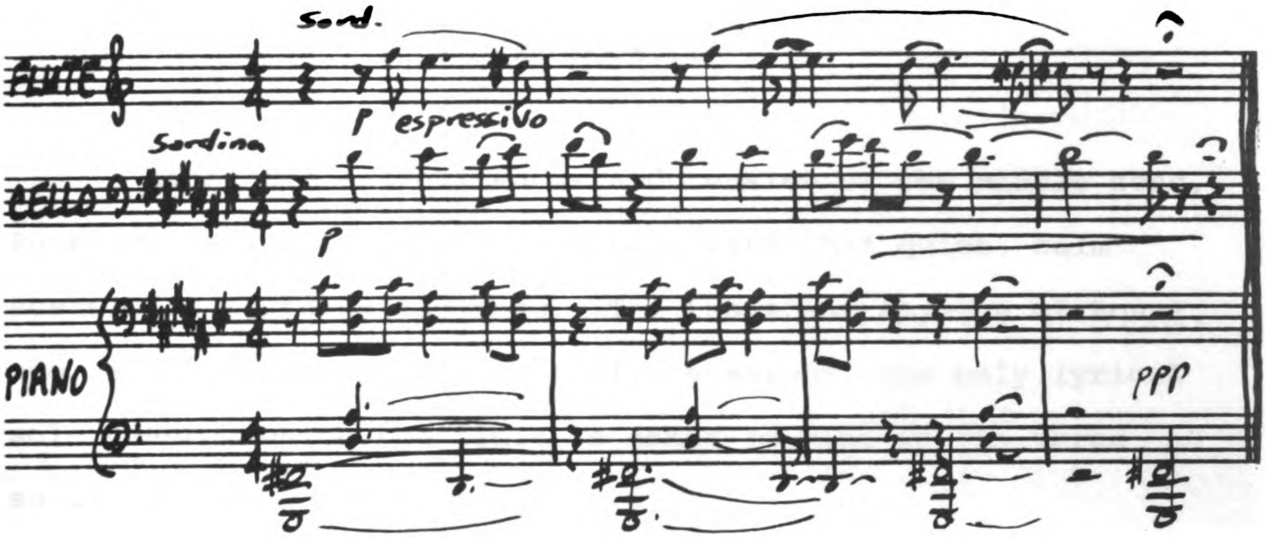
There is now an enharmonic change, the e# becoming f-natural, in which the voice states the last line of the text, "Mefiez-vous des blancs, habitans du rivage," to the notes of the original flute ostinato of measure 6, in Example 37.

Example 48. Aoua!, m. 65-68.



The last note, c#, becomes the 5th of the F# tonality of the piano part, which is a return to the original ostinato pattern, slightly altered. The cello, in d#, echoes the opening vocal melody (after the "Aoua!" cry). The flute also plays its plaintive chromatic scale fragment. The song ends with a very soft peal of the bell in the piano part, the major 7th:

Example 49. Aoua!, m. 68-71.

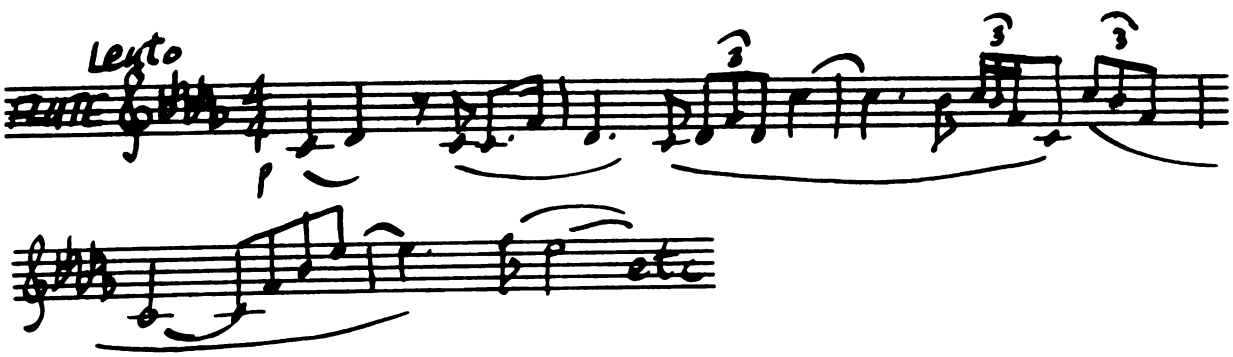


In this song, the major 7th and the tritone are given special prominence, and the multiple tonalities between the parts are arranged to bring out these intervals. Aoua! has tremendous power and vehemence built into its primitive structure: the crescendo in the first half is suggestive of the persistence of the Bolero which Ravel was to write in another three years. The painful, percussive piano appoggiaturas remind one of the Valses Nobles et Sentimentales (1911), while the overall violence of the music surpasses that of the second half of La Valse, and is certainly unequalled in Ravel's output.

IL EST DOUX...

After the explosiveness and tension of the middle song, Ravel chose to close his song-cycle with that quiet, calm scene of voluptuous laziness. The insistent rhythms of Aoua! are replaced by a long, supple flute melody, the only lyrical solo passage which the flute is asked to play in the three songs.

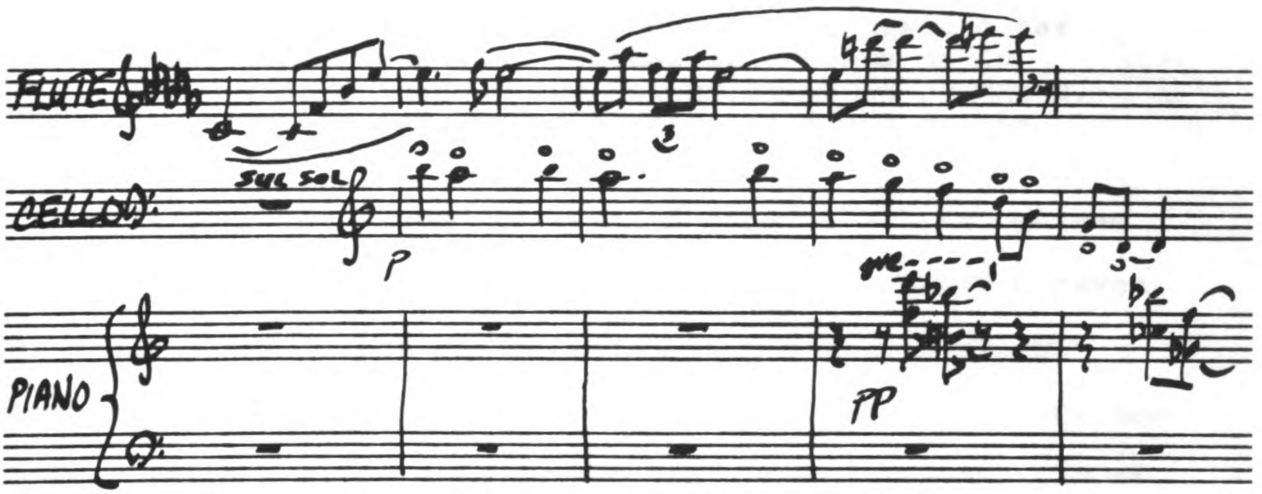
Example 50. Il est doux..., m. 1-5.



This is also the only song which has an extended introduction before the entrance of the voice. The melody is in D-flat major, and, in the third measure, it outlines a short pattern reminiscent of the opening of the cello descant from Nahandove, with most of the emphasis on the fourths; in the next measure, the idea of the fourths is carried further, the "open" sounds of these being a refreshing change from the tritones and major 7ths of Aoua!

The end of the flute introduction is joined by the cello on its high artificial harmonics, plus some light touches of high major 7ths in the piano, like the sounds of finger-cymbals or little bells. The tempo is very slow, portraying the laziness to be expressed in the text, which describes the joy of simply lying around in the shade. (See Example 2.)

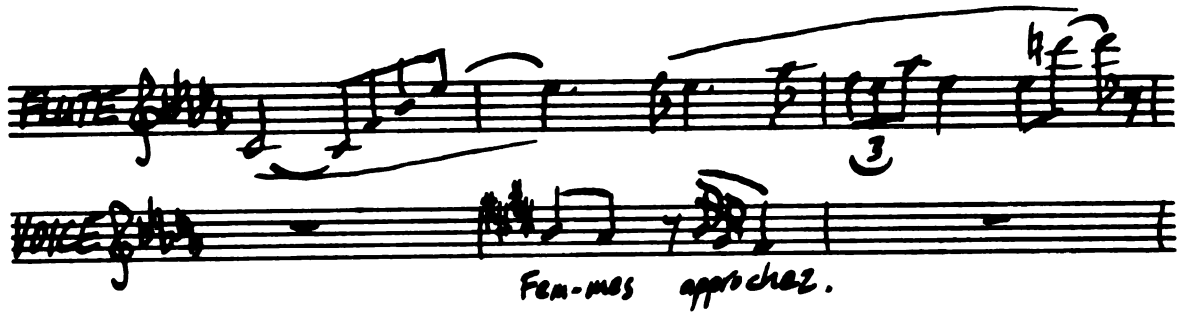
Example 51. Il est doux..., m. 5-7.



Il est doux de se coucher durant la chaleur sous un arbre touffu, et d'attendre que le vent du soir amene la fraicheur...

The voice sings this in the key of e-flat (Dorian) while the flute continues on its way, repeating its opening melody almost entirely. At "Femmes, approchez," the voice echoes the cello harmonics of measure 5, in f# minor.

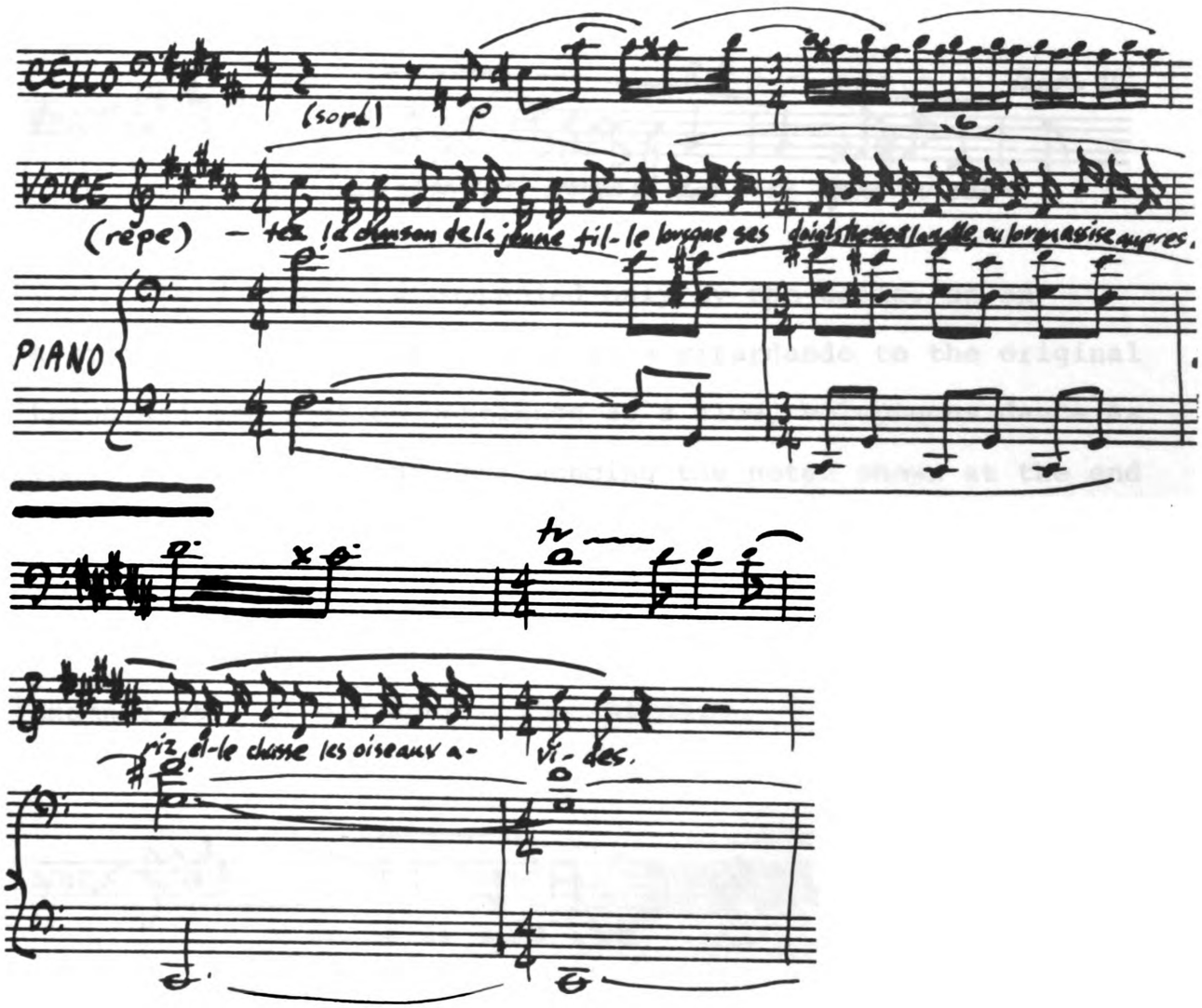
Example 52. Il est doux..., m. 13-15.



> Femmes, approchez. Tandis que je me repose ici sous un arbre touffu, occupez mon oreille par vos accens prolonges; repetez la chanson de la jeune fille, lorsque ses doigts tressent la natte, ou lorsqu'assise aupres du riz, elle chasse les oiseaux avides.

This is the second verse, and after the first phrase (Example 52), the voice is accompanied by diminished octaves (or major 7ths) in the piano, with the cello joining the voice at the end of the verse for a long trill on d#, the new tonic. There are, in effect, two keys sounding here, the d# of the voice and cello, and C in the piano, with both the perfect 5th and augmented 4th sounding above the bass, as a result of the writing in parallel 7ths in the right hand:

Example 53. Il est doux..., m. 20-23.



The next section, Andante, contains the setting of the next verse.

> Le chant plait a mon ame; la danse est
> pour moi presqu'aussi douce qu'un baiser...

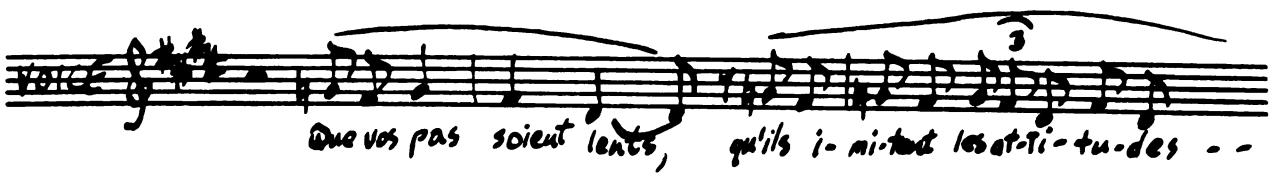
The voice is now centered on D#, though whether major or minor is unclear, as both versions of the third are present at the end of the sentence.

Example 54. Il est doux..., m. 25-29.

This line is accompanied only by the cello, on an artificial harmonic D#. There is a ritardando to the original tempo and the section continues as a slow, voluptuous dance as the voice declaims the text echoing the notes shown at the end of Example 54.

> Que vos pas soient lents; qu'ils imitent les attitudes du plaisir et l'abandon de la volupte.

Example 55. Il est doux..., m. 31-33.



The accompaniment of this section has already been described and illustrated in Examples 6, 8 and 10; the piccolo also plays the notes of the beginning of Example 55. The cello part likewise ends with these notes, in artificial harmonics.

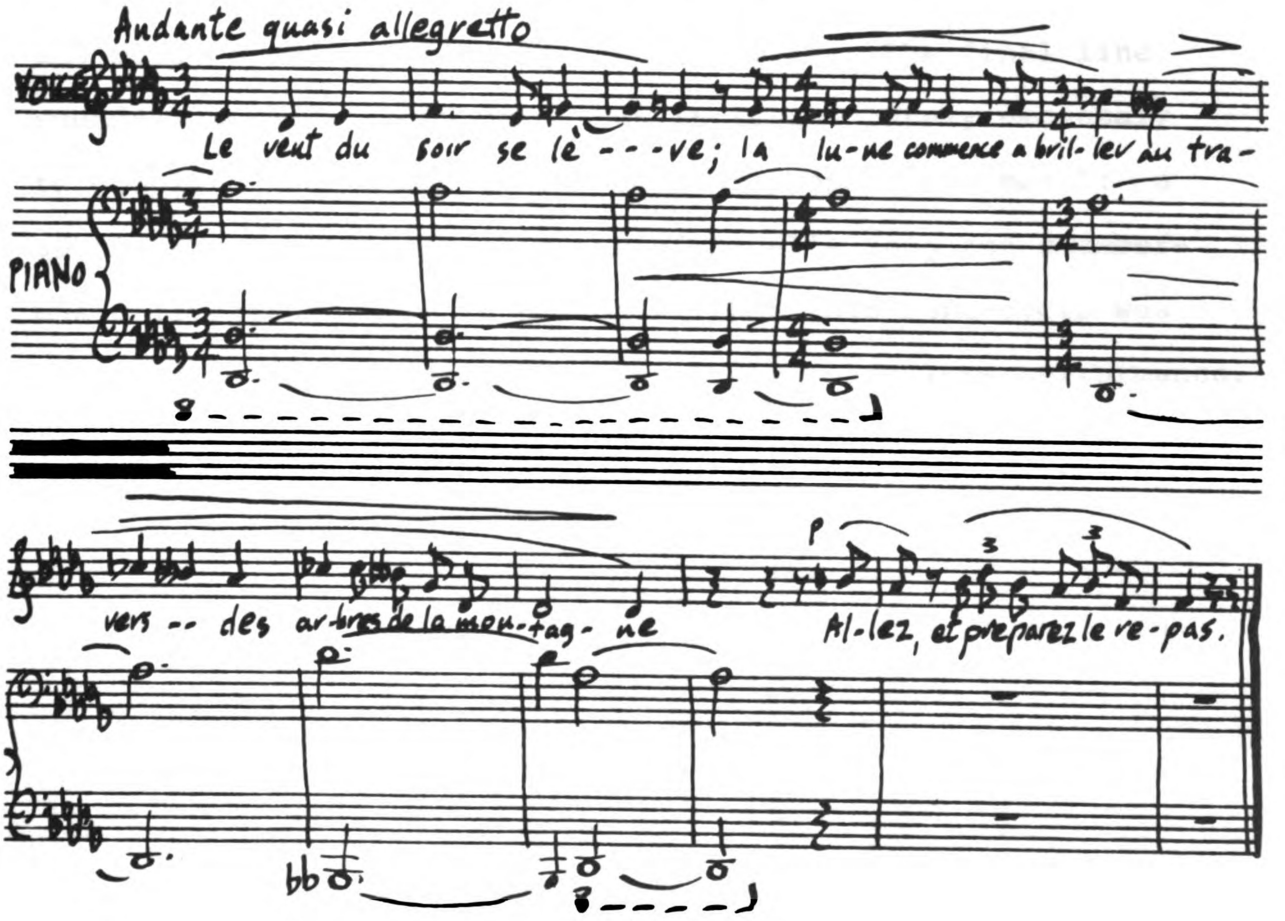
Example 56. Il est doux..., m. 37-39.

The final verse (Andante quasi allegretto) returns to the opening tonality of D-flat, describing the arrival of the evening breeze:

> Le vent du soir se leve; la lune commence a briller au travers des arbres de la montagne.

Over an open 5th in the piano, the voice sings in an artificial scale of D-flat which contains the Lydian 4th (g-natural), as well as the minor 6th (b-double flat) and 7th (c-flat).

Example 57. Il est doux..., m. 40-50.



Ravel takes advantage of the notes C-flat and B-double-flat, as the piano bass note also changes to B-double-flat, the harmonic change having the effect of a chromatic mediant relationship (D-flat to A): in effect, the chord at measure 46 is A major, the word "montagne" being on the 3rd degree of the chord. Next, there is a return to the chord of D-flat, followed by an unaccompanied statement of the last sentence, "Allez, et preparez le repas." This statement ends on the third degree of the key of D-flat by descending a perfect 4th. The last accompanied line of text had also ended with a descending perfect 4th.

This song is so spare as to be almost unanalyzable: it can merely be described. A sound effect in the piano, harmonics in the cello, an introductory melody in the flute, some fragmentary imitation between the voice and cello, voice, and piccolo, and that is the extent of it. The final line sounds like an afterthought, but it is absolutely necessary to complete the atmosphere: "Go, and prepare the meal": a subtle touch to finish this gem of Ravel's song and chamber-music literature. It is no wonder that this song-cycle was received so enthusiastically at its first complete performance.

CONCLUSION

The Chansons Madecasses is a unique work in the art-song literature. However, in relation to Ravel's style at that point in his career, these songs are quite similar to other works. They are what may be called a distillation of compositional procedures which were being used at the time.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to present a definitive analysis of Ravel's late style. Nevertheless, this paper could not be complete without some comparison between the Chansons Madecasses and some works written during the same period, as well as some mention of differences from earlier works.

A study of Ravel's output reveals that his primary concern in music was the elegantly made melody. Even during his early career, when he was using the so-called "impressionistic" techniques of parallel 7ths, 9ths, etc., it was the melodic line, rather than fragmentary, coloristic effects, which had predominance. Ravel's label as an impressionist stems primarily from his youthful works, especially those for the piano, where a florid pianism tended to blur the line in favor of the effect of a "spray of notes," as in Jeux d'Eau of 1901, or the extremely difficult passages in the Gaspard de la Nuit of 1908, inspired by the pianism of Liszt.

With the composition of the Valses Nobles et Sentimentales in 1911, Ravel's piano style took on a distinct change. As he himself wrote, "The virtuosity which formed the chief part of Gaspard de la Nuit has been replaced by writing of obviously greater clarity which has strengthened the harmony and sharpened the contrasts..."[12] The use of sharp added-note dissonances such as the augmented 4th or the major 7th to the harmonies made his music much more dissonant, while at the same time, the melody took on greater prominence. In the Trio for violin, cello and piano of 1914 the pianistic writing is further refined, becoming more chordal in some passages, while in others engaging in imitative counterpoint. In the Tombeau de Couperin (1917), Ravel's last work for solo piano, which was a tribute to the French keyboard tradition, the quasi-Baroque suite of dances is harmonically clear, with the exception of the very difficult Toccata. The Fugue of this suite makes use of very refined counterpoint. In the Chansons Madecasses, the piano is used mostly for percussive effects.

The most prominent feature of the Chansons Madecasses is the use of bitonality, and this is certainly not unique in Ravel's late style. There is some evidence of bitonality in the Valses Nobles et Sentimentales, as in Valse VII, in the middle part. Bitonality becomes most pronounced in the late chamber music. In the Sonata for violin and cello (1922), bitonality is used in "Bartokian" fashion, in canonic writing

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[12]Roland-Manuel, p. 58.

at nondiatonic intervals. The Sonata for violin and piano of 1927 also makes extensive use of bitonality, as in the second movement ("Blues"), where the violin begins by strumming G major chords, only to be joined by the piano playing the perfect 5th A-flat-E-flat in the bass. Bitonal canonic writing similar to the earlier duo-sonata is used quite often in this work.

Ravel is famous as the creator of sumptuous orchestrations, both for his own works and those of other composers. Of his works involving the orchestra, however, the one which is most typical of the type of instrumental writing found in the Chansons Madecasses is in a charming opera, or lyrical fantasy, L'Enfant et les Sortileges, written between 1920 and 1925, completed one year before the Madagascar songs. The prelude to this opera, in which a pair of oboes play in parallel 5ths and 4ths, and are joined by a single string bass playing high artificial harmonics in accompaniment, brings to mind the high cello harmonics in Il est doux.... Likewise, the aria of the Fairy Princess, with the voice accompanied by a single flute weaving a counterpoint around the vocal line, is almost identical in effect to the flute counterpoint to Il est doux.... The continuity of this flute accompaniment is also similar to that of the cello descant in Nahandove.

In some ways, the vocal writing in L'Enfant et les Sortileges is atypical for Ravel: there are some arias which are very difficult, especially the aria of the Fire, in which the soprano is required to arpeggiate 9th chords up and down

in rapidly moving 16th-notes. This type of vocal pyrotechnics is rare in Ravel's vocal music. For the most part, he was concerned with clear diction, syllabic writing, and with setting the words so that the prosody fit the natural rhythm of the language. (Ravel didn't set any but French texts.) Texts were always set clearly and succinctly in his songs.

A REVIEW OF THE FIRST PERFORMANCE 1926

In the July issue of the French music periodical La Revue Musicale, editor Henri Prunieres wrote the following review:

> Thanks must be given to Mrs. Coolidge for inspiring the creation of this authentic masterpiece! How many had deceived themselves after the war that Ravel had spoken his last word... He renews himself periodically without ever ceasing to be himself. How Ravellian are the Quartet, the Trio, the Sonata for violin and cello, L'Heure Espagnole, L'Enfant et les Sortileges, the Valses Nobles, Scheherazade, the Chansons Madecasses, and yet how these works are different from each other, in spirit and in technique. I have not seen any great contemporary European musician who, besides Ravel, succeeds in thus metamorphosing himself without apparent crisis. Within a few years, the art of Ravel has become linear, more spare, more contrapuntal. He condenses his thinking into a form of ever more rigorous simplicity. The Sonata for violin and cello inaugurates this new manner of which certain passages of L'Enfant et les Sortileges mark the magnificent blossoming. This set purpose of simplicity, but of a simplicity not at all resembling indigence, appears strongly in the Chansons Madecasses.
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> The texts are from Evariste Parny, who wasn't a dangerous bolsheviste, as one old schoolfellow of Ravel's believed, but an amiable writer of the end of the 18th century, convinced by J.-J. Rousseau that man's holding of landed property had perverted civilization, a great admirer of innocent savages. In his "Chansons Madecasses" he has left us little pictures of the ideal life of the inhabitants of the Grand Ile, scenes of voluptuousness, of peaceful life, and occasionally of war against the white oppressors.
>
> Ravel boldly made the voice the most important, limiting himself to underlining the text with some discreet touches in the flute, the cello, and the piano. One thinks of those Japanese pictures where

the slightest detail has its value, where nothing is wasted. It is an art which is very sparse and very new. Without a doubt, from the point of view of instrumental writing, there are similarities between Madecasses and Pierrot Lunaire, but truly, if Ravel himself had not pointed out the similarities, who would think of establishing any rapport between such contrary styles! These two great musicians appear to be at antipodes. Ravel, in spite of his renewed theory of Saint-Saens, on the necessary objectivity of the creative artist, is more and more sensitive, affected, even lyrical; Schoenberg, on the contrary, every day is dryer, more cerebral, "algebriste."

If the instrumental technique of Ravel owes something to Schoenberg, the vocal line has nothing in common with that of Pierrot Lunaire, [which is] jerky, dismembered, and tortured by an exasperated chromaticism. The melody of Chansons Madecasses unfolds according to a pure and simple design, an ample recitative which is sometimes inflected broadly into a low register in order to then regain sharpness and to maintain it, requiring exacting interpretation and exceptional vocal resources. Clearly, Ravel calls to mind oriental declamation built on properly colored modes.

The flute, the cello, and the piano put this melodic recitative into relief by touches of marvelous precision and delicacy. A few notes strung out by the piccolo, a few pizzicati by the cello, three chords struck on the piano, and this is enough to create the atmosphere. Once in awhile, an instrument enlaces the voice in its string of counterpoint, a procedure which Ravel has used well in the aria of the Fairy in L'Enfant et les Sortileges.

What is miraculous, is the manner in which the instruments enter and stop without ruffling the continuity of the melodic line. In the third song, while the voice evokes the dance, the instruments take part so subtly that one has no awareness of their successive uses: they unite their forces without ever losing their individuality, giving an instant impression of a veritable orchestra.

Ravel pulls every sonority possible out of his [instruments]. He uses all the expressive and picturesque resources of the flute and the piccolo, of the cello, and the piano. The piano is treated like a veritable "battery," simultaneously a gong, timbales, crotales evoking the strange sonorities of the percussion instruments of exotic lands.

This music, so knowingly composed, does not give for one instant the impression of a disinterested game. The first song, sensual and tender, evokes

the atmosphere of "des Iles Bienheureuses," of the ideal Tahiti discovered by Pierre Loti, with couples entwined under the vines and the palms, amongst the heavy fragrances which rise from the warm earth full of fruits and flowers.

The second is of a savage power unheard of from Ravel. The wars, the bloody struggles against the whites, then the cunning pestilence which slowly eliminated the invaders, all of this is evoked without grandiloquence with a direct simplicity, poignancy, a concentrated force which does not relax except to explode with frenetic violence. It is a unique page in the total work of Ravel. Finally, the third song traces for us a picture of voluptuous idleness: at sunset, the master rests and watches his women dancing while waiting for the evening meal. The music marvellously renders this mixture of slothful seriousness and sensuality which characterizes the oriental soul. Ravel was not as careful as Parny about geographic exactness, and his "savages" could just as well be the Maoris or Arabs as the "Malagashes."

The execution of the masterpiece was perfect. Mme. Jeanne Bathory emphasized the smallest nuances of the text with admirable diction and intelligence. M. Baudouin, who replaced Louis Fleury, who was indisposed three days earlier by an illness, surmounted with ease the difficulties of his part. M. Hans Kindler was dazzling and Alfredo Casella metamorphosed his piano into an orchestra of percussion instruments. All the players were warmly applauded, especially the composer, who received a long ovation.

This was a magnificent evening, in which Mrs. Coolidge can take great pride.[13]

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[13]Henri Prunieres, "Three Madagascar Songs of Maurice Ravel," La Revue Musicale, July 1, 1926, p. 60

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