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Comparison Between Marie Jaëll's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor and Cécile Chaminade's *Concertstück* in C-Sharp Minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 40

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Abstract

This article provides a comparative analysis of Marie Jaëll's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor and Cécile Chaminade's *Concertstück* in C-sharp Minor for piano and orchestra, Op. 40. The study first examines different approaches to exoticism by these nineteenth-century French women composers. It reveals how Chaminade incorporated elements of Turkish Janissary music, and how Jaëll employed the double harmonic scale. Both composers had close relationships with many of their contemporaries. Within this context, this study explores how the writing style of these two piano concertos was influenced by the German tradition and other composers, such as Liszt and Wagner, particularly through the use of thematic transformation and extensive chromaticism. Furthermore, the individual stylistic characteristics of both composers are highlighted through an analysis of musical structure, meter arrangements, and compositional techniques. Jaëll's unique style manifests through the application of unconventional meters and the organic integration of complex lines in her concerto. Chaminade's *Concertstück*, on the other hand, reflects her distinctive salon style through scherzo elements and lyrical melodies.

Keywords

Marie Jaëll; Cécile Chaminade; piano concerto; women composers

1. Introduction

Marie Jaëll and Cécile Chaminade were two significant French women composers of the nineteenth century. Jaëll was admitted to the Société nationale in 1879 (Ramaut et al., 2015, p. 87). Chaminade was elected a Chevalier of the National Order of the Legion of Honor in 1913 (Moegle, 2013, p. 16). Piano works played an important role in the output of Jaëll and Chaminade. Jaëll's achievements in the field of piano education are noteworthy, as she published books on piano pedagogy, incorporating neuroscientific research to propose innovative pedagogical methods. Chaminade composed a large number of piano solo works that brought her worldwide popularity.

The piano concerto is the ultimate pursuit of piano composition and one of the model forms of *haute composition*. In addition, the piano concerto is a large-scale work, an area where women composers once engaged less often. Jaëll wrote two piano concertos in total, the second of which was composed in 1884. Chaminade's *Concertstück*, written in 1888, is considered one of her best works. Both concertos have been the subject of biographical studies. For

instance, Marcia Citron published a Bio-Bibliography of Chaminade. There are also authoritative recordings of these two concertos; the Naxos Music Library has four recordings of the *Concertstück* by Chaminade, including one performed by James D. Johnson and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. However, only one recording of Jaëll's piano concerto can be found in the Naxos Music Library, which was performed by Romain Descharmes and the Lille National Orchestra. The relatively small number of recordings and research papers suggests a lack of attention to these two excellent concertos.

2. Commonalities and Differences

Even though Chaminade was born eleven years after Jaëll, they still have a lot in common. First, they were both musical prodigies. Bizet, who was Chaminade's childhood neighbor, called her "little Mozart" (Moegle, 2013, p. 14). When Jaëll was a child, she could already play difficult pieces very well. After hearing Jaëll's concert at the age of eight, Moscheles predicted: "This child will achieve something great in Art" (Struber, 2017, p. 16). Later in life, both women composers had a brilliant performance career. Chaminade began her annual tour in Europe in 1892, and she came to America in 1908. Jaëll performed the entire piano works of Liszt in addition to Beethoven's complete sonatas (Robb, 2022, p. 221). The virtuosity of both of them is also evident in these two concertos, as both were performed by these two composers themselves.

Certainly, there are many differences between their life experiences. Jaëll Studied at the Paris Conservatory, whereas Chaminade only took private lessons. Jaëll's husband, also a famous pianist, supported Jaëll's musical career (Ramaut et al., 2015, p. 103). Chaminade's husband, on the other hand, was a music publisher and lived separately from Chaminade (Moegle, 2013, p. 15). Chaminade's orchestral works were very successful in the 1880s (Citron, 1988, p. 25). However, except for the two piano concertos and the cello concerto, the other three orchestral works by Jaëll were rarely performed (Ramaut et al., 2015, p. 82). There are also many commonalities and differences in the two piano concertos by these two composers.

3. Exoticism

Exoticism is one of the attractive features of Chaminade's salon music. After the death of her father, she assumed financial responsibility for the family and thus moved away from large-scale works to profitable salon music (Citron, 1988, p. 10). Chaminade employed exotic titles in many of her salon pieces to attract "those desiring an escape from the humdrum of everyday life" (Moegle, 2013, p. 14). In addition, Chaminade's brother-in-law, Moritz Moszkowski, and her childhood neighbor, Georges Bizet—both important people in Chaminade's life—were also known for their Spanish-style works. Her Spanish style was influenced by them (Jerrould, 1988, p. 46). In Chaminade's *Concertstück*, however, the exotic source is mainly Turkish Janissary music (Oh, 2000, pp. 82-83), which can be traced at least as far back to Beethoven and Mozart.

In this *Concertstück*, the section in mm. 179-217 is typical of Janissary music, and many of the characteristics of Janissary music can be seen in this section. The meter of Janissary music is usually duple or irregular, and the melody is characterized by fast ornamental patterns (Rice, 1999, p. 46). The meter of this section is 2/4, which is exactly duple. The steady eighth notes in this passage are the marching rhythm, which never changes to any other rhythmic pattern until m. 217. The modes used in Janissary music are complex and varied (Rice, 1999, p. 46). The melody's ascending scale from mm. 179 is in D-sharp major while the descending scale is in B major. The mixing of different scales also occurs elsewhere in this *Concertstück*. For example, in mm.140-41 (Figure 1), each part uses a different scale. The B-sharp is the seventh degree note of the C-sharp harmonic minor scale and can form the augmented second with the sixth degree note A-natural. However, the melody played by the horns uses B-natural instead of B-sharp to form a C-sharp Aeolian mode scale.

The augmented second is a very exotic interval contained in various Arabic scales, and there are a lot of augmented seconds in this *Concertstück*. The arpeggiated line in m. 53 contains seven sets of augmented seconds. The B-sharp changes to B-natural in m. 55; it returns again in m. 59. Chaminade emphasizes the presence of the B-sharp especially in the upper register in mm. 59 and 62, where the B-sharp is made to recur through a modent-like arrangement.

Chaminade's approach to Turkish music in this *Concertstück* is slightly similar to Mozart's: Using artistic techniques to process Janissary music to make it fit their own musical image. Mozart speeds up the marching rhythm of the Janissary music in his *Chorus of Janissaries* from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* to make the music conform to the musical conventions for representing Turks in Vienna (Rice, 1999, pp. 74-75). In this *Concertstück*, the marching

eighth notes are also very fast. Additionally, Chaminade adds rapid ascending and descending scales and dense chordal accompaniment on top of marching eighth notes. Although these artistic approaches alter the original shape of the Janissary music, they undoubtedly result in a pleasant and satisfying experience for the audience.

Figure 1. Chaminade, *Concertstück*, Op. 40, mm. 140-41.

Jaëll's Orientalism was inspired by Victor Hugo's collection of poems, *Les Orientales* (Ramaut et al., 2015, p. 80). This poem influenced many French musicians in the nineteenth century. Jaëll's *Les Orientales* is a collection of which she was most proud: "I have just finished a set of songs based on Victor Hugo's *Orientales*. This is far better than anything you know by me. When you see it, you are bound to realise that this is a work of lasting significance and one that will have a lasting impact on the world" (Ramaut et al., 2015, p. 80). However, Piano Concerto No. 2 does not have the specific exotic contextual associations that *Les Orientales* does; Jaëll uses the exotic scale as a toolkit in her concerto. Chaminade, on the other hand, changed the original shape of Janissary music. Therefore, both piano concertos fit the paradigm of non-exotic exoticism.

In Jaëll's piano concerto, the non-Western mode appears very early in the concerto. The section before m. 29 is in C minor, and from m. 29, F-sharp starts to appear. E-flat and F-sharp, as well as A-flat and B-natural, form two augmented seconds in the C minor scale (Figure 2). This scale is called the double harmonic scale, and it is found not only in Arabic music, but also in Hungarian or Gypsy music. Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 also uses this double harmonic scale. The theme of mm. 29-36 changes dramatically when it returns in mm. 189-199. In m. 31, the melody descends from B-flat to A-flat, while in m. 192 it changes to B-natural down to A-flat, changing the major second to an augmented second to further enhance the exotic colors. The melody of mm. 29-36 alternates between the piano part and the orchestra part, forming a canon. While the melody in mm. 189-99 appears only in the orchestra part, the piano uses triplet octaves that are constantly crescendoing to support the power of the *fortissimo*.

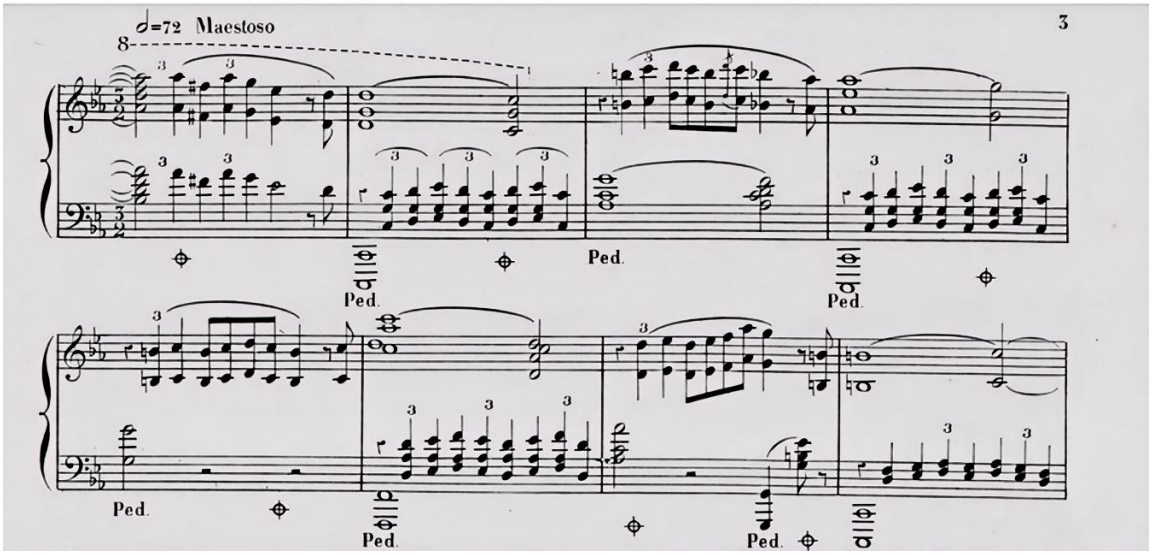

Figure 2. Jaëll, Piano Concerto No. 2, mm. 29-36.

There is another exotic theme in mm. 59-67. Jaëll emphasizes the exotic color by repeating the augmented second progression several times. In this passage, D-flat and E-natural are the sixth and seventh degrees of the F harmonic minor, forming an augmented second. This exotic theme occurs only three times, the first time in mm. 59-67 and the second time in mm. 232-39. The last appearance is in mm. 297-304, a passage that contains more augmented seconds, including G-sharp with B-natural, D-natural with E-sharp, C-natural with D-sharp, and the previously occurring D-flat with E-natural (Figure 3). This exotic material appears for shorter lengths of time and serves as an embellishment of the concerto.

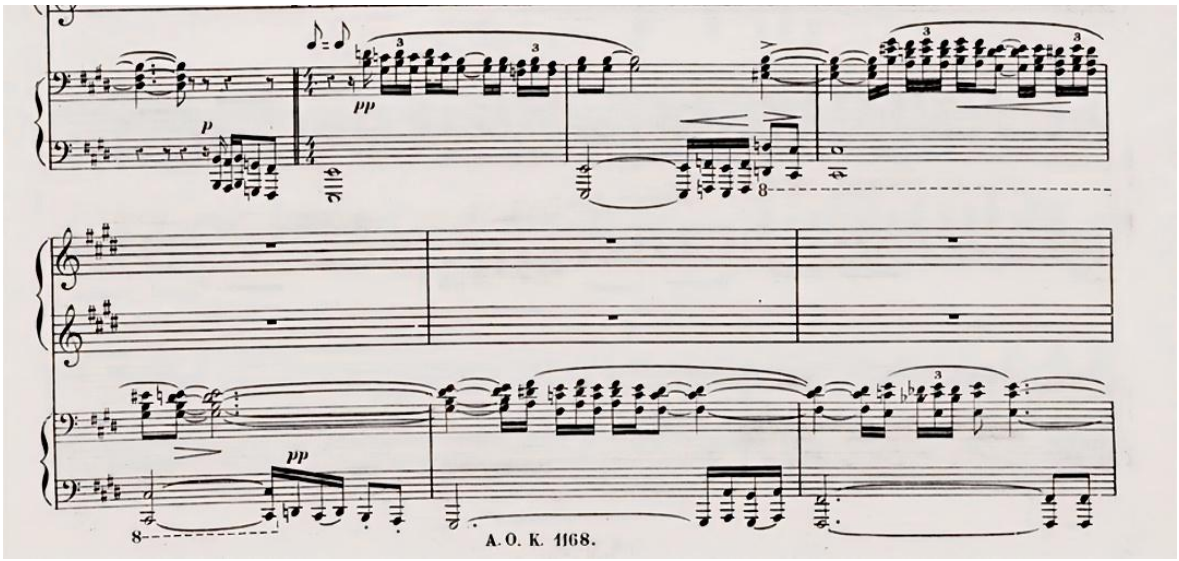

Figure 3. Jaëll, Piano Concerto No. 2, mm. 297-304.

The last appearance of this exotic motive is based on thematic transformation, one of Liszt's compositional techniques. The first appearance is marked with *fortissimo*, while the last appearance is marked with *pianissimo*. The thick octave texture in the first appearance is changed to a thin chordal texture in the last appearance. Instead of diminishing the presence of the exotic motive, the soft dynamic creates a further mysterious atmosphere that is deeply appealing. The use of the thematic transformation throughout the piece makes all the sections linked together better.

The most contrasting thematic transformation in this concerto is undoubtedly the transformation of the opening motive at the end. The mysterious C minor motive played by the pizzicato of the strings at the beginning is transformed into a glorious C major motive at the end. The piano part in the end uses a repetitive and dense C major chord to further enhance the grandiose sonority. This shift from minor to brilliant major at the end is reminiscent of Beethoven's symphonies; Jaëll studied with Saint-Saëns and Franck, and Franck's Symphony in D minor and Saint-Saëns's Symphony No. 3 in C minor are also modeled on Beethoven's symphonies, going through the path of victory through struggle. During the composition of this concerto, Jaëll recovered from the trauma of her husband's death and regained her compositional confidence: "I feel that I have recovered and I will no longer lose myself. You don't have this spark without becoming worthy of being an artist. I am worthy of it, God desires that I prove it" (Ramaut et al., 2015, p. 80). Therefore, this triumphant ending can also be considered a symbol of Jaëll's own confidence.

4. The Influence of German tradition and Other Composers

Jaëll had a close relationship with Liszt; she also studied Liszt's technique in her pedagogy. One of her important missions in life was to explain Liszt's technique to the public (Schmidt-Rogers, 1994, p. 18). Liszt would also support and encourage Jaëll. Despite the lack of enthusiasm from the public for the piano concerto, Liszt expressed his admiration for it: "It is not surprising, my dear Ossiana, that your superb Concerto was not understood on its first hearing. People will change their minds, as well they should" (Ramaut et al., 2015, p. 84). This piano concerto is quite difficult to perform, and Jaëll's many successful performances of the concerto are proof of her excellent technique. There are a large number of octaves of rapid progressions and chordal passages with wide leaps in this concerto. These are reminiscent of the difficult passages in Liszt's Etudes. These difficult passages are often in the transition section. The

passage in mm. 69-77 contains a large number of rapidly repeating intervals, so it is an extreme challenge for the performer's dynamic control to ensure that there are no abrupt accents in the middle of these rapid repetitions. These fast-running passages are not only difficult, it also prevent the multi-section structure from becoming loose by producing momentum.

The solo piano part of Chaminade's *Concertstück* was heavily influenced by Liszt (Oh, 2000, p. 86). Thematic transformation can also be found in this *Concertstück*. The theme that appears in mm. 118-20 is only one measure long and consists mainly of eighth notes. In mm. 312-16, however, the material is transformed by a rhythmic augmentation, with the original eighth notes transformed into quarter notes. The dynamic changes from *mezzo forte* to *fortissimo* while the mood changes from calm to agitated. The left hand pushes the mood to a climax with a fast arpeggio across the bass register. Most of Chaminade's salon piano works are not too difficult to play, which makes them more suitable for amateurs. This *Concertstück* and Chaminade's Études, on the other hand, have many technical difficulties. Chaminade's 6 *Études de concert*, Op. 35, No. 6, "Tarentelle," dedicated to Jaëll, is a piece of endless triplets from beginning to end, with fast arpeggios and numerous two-against-three rhythms. It is obvious that this piece was a tribute to Jaëll's virtuosity.

Chaminade's choice of "Concertstück" as a title seems to imply that she wanted to connect with the German tradition more than the French one (Park, 2019, p. 53). The *Concertstück* also evidently reflects Wagner's influence through its extensive chromaticism, thick chordal textures, and dramatic contrasts. However, Jaëll's relationship with Germany and Wagner is particularly complicated. Jaëll was born in Alsace, a disputed territory between Germany and France. Jaëll grew up with a mixture of French and German culture; she gave her first concert in Germany, and her early musical training was also German (Guichard, 2004, p. 47). Ten years after the Franco-Prussian War, she said: "The artistic benefit that I gained in Germany used to provide me with too much mental anguish, and I cannot put myself on display there" (Ramaut et al., 2015, pp. 93-94). Not only did the war bring Jaëll a lot of mental anguish, but it also made her lose some of her opportunities in Germany. Jaëll decided to leave Germany because of the war, and her husband declined future job opportunities in Germany, such as director of the music journal founded by Schumann (Guichard, 2004, p. 48).

Jaëll and Wagner didn't get along for patriotic reasons (Guichard, 2004, p. 48). In this context, Jaëll's piano concerto still reflects the influence of Wagner. This piano concerto has the same thick texture and extensive chromaticism as the *Concertstück*. In mm. 360-79, there are chromatic lines up to twenty measures long that blend in with the melody. These chromatic lines begin as single notes, and as the dynamic and mood progress, the single notes become one-handed octaves, and finally, two hands play the chromatic scales together in octaves. In this concerto, Jaëll frequently uses chromatic scales to drive the music to its climax.

5. Individual Stylistic Characteristics

Both concertos reflect the influence of other composers and the German tradition, as well as the individual stylistic characteristics of the two composers. In Jaëll's concerto, she blends the piano and the orchestra to create a single orchestral voice with complex lines. This approach is exactly one of the hallmarks of her compositional style (Ramaut et al., 2015, p. 87). The piano and the orchestra part in this concerto are not strongly contrasted or differentiated, but rather blend together in a smooth way. This is evident at the beginning of the concerto, in mm. 41-44, where the triplet arpeggio lines alternate between the piano and the orchestra in a canon, and the orchestra begins to play the arpeggios just as the piano sustains a long note (Figure 4). The flowing lines of the piano and the orchestra together set the mood for the climactic passage that follows. Canon is also used between the piano and the orchestra in mm. 58-69, and the piano part of this exotic theme has a symphonic octave chordal texture, in keeping with the orchestra's grandiose effects. Thus, when the piano stops playing and the orchestra immediately enters, the transition from the piano part to the orchestra part is natural and blends seamlessly. This approach confirms the idea in Jaëll's pedagogy that the pianist should use "the orchestra as their model for the internal imagination because in the orchestra one finds the great exponent of the art" (Robb, 2022, p. 237). However, there is also a problem of over-emphasis on the orchestra part in this concerto, with an imbalance between the piano and the orchestra in some passages. The theme at m. 78 is played by the piano, followed immediately at m. 99 by the orchestra. This theme appears two more times in mm. 107 and 127, each time played by the orchestra. In this section, most of the themes are played by the orchestra, with the piano playing more of an accompanying role.

Figure 4. Jaëll, Piano Concerto No. 2, mm. 41-44.

Jaëll uses a number of unusual meters in this concerto, such as 5/2, 12/8, and 18/16, which give the concerto a freer structure and provide the basis for a wide variety of musical characters. However, in Chaminade's *Concertstück*, the meter is basically the common 4/4 and 2/4. All in all, the musical details discussed above reflect the unique language of Jaëll's orchestral work. Locke agreed that Jaëll has her own unique style; he said, "But Jaëll is no mere imitator: these works show her to have been a composer with a truly individual profile and approach" (Locke, 2016).

Not only did Chaminade compose a great amount of salon music, but her personal style was also influenced by the salon culture. In several passages of this *Concertstück*, she incorporates the scherzo character common in salon music. In mm. 64-85, the sense of scherzo is conveyed by the short, wide-leap staccato articulation in the left hand, and shimmering appoggiaturas in the upper register (Figure 5). This provides a richer layer to the concerto, enabling the music to maintain its tension without being too dense.

Figure 5. Chaminade, *Concertstück*, Op. 40, mm. 64-65.

Chaminade had a talent for composing memorable melodies (Moegle, 2013, p. 16). Beautiful melodies are always very attractive to amateurs. There are many very lyrical and romantic melodies in this *Concertstück*, in addition to exotic Turkish melodies that are full of charm and mysterious colors. In mm. 92-117, the calm melodic lines wrapped in the warm colors of A major create a place of rest for this loud concerto. The melody of the first two measures of this passage is repeated variably in the next four measures, making the melody even more memorable. In this *Concertstück*, Chaminade also pays great attention to highlighting the melody, without making the accompaniment part overly heavy every time an important melody appears.

6. Conclusion

This article analyzes the different ways of using exoticism from the aspect of harmony and musical color. In spite of the great differences, both Chaminade and Jaëll conveyed the exotic elements effectively and made the music attractive in their own unique ways. This study also discusses the influence of German tradition and other contemporaries on these two piano concertos. These concertos were written in a time of conflict and social change; thus, these influences indirectly reveal the musical social circles and life experiences of the two women composers. However, many

of the stylistic and compositional influences in these two concertos have not been fully analyzed in this article. Moreover, the influence of these two concertos on other composers and works is worth noting in future studies. By analyzing their individual stylistic characteristics, it can be seen that both composers met the requirements of *haute composition* for originality in these two concertos. These two piano concertos certainly deserve more attention in the future.

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