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Florent Schmitt's Dionysiaques, OP. 62

Trevor Frost
Lindenwood University

FLORENT SCHMITT'S *DIONYSIAQUES, OP. 62*

Trevor Frost, Lindenwood University

In 1913, composers such as Gustav Holst had written his *First Suite* and *Second Suite* for military band in England during a time when many composers were taking great interest in folk songs. Bandmasters in America such as John Philip Sousa, Henry Fillmore, and Karl King were composing marches for their professional bands. In Paris, however, music was transforming and being pushed into the modern era of music. This is where Florent Schmitt's *Dionysiaques, op. 62,* burst into the wind band medium. Schmitt's use of erotic dancing and hysteria, rhythmic syncopations, polyrhythms, percussively treated chords, bitonality, and scoring of his 1907 ballet *La tragédie de Salomé* would anticipate Igor Stravinsky's '*Danse sacrale*' from *Le Sacre du printemps*.[1] As he was composing the work, Stravinsky admitted, "I confess that [*Salomé*] has given me greater joy than any work I have heard in a long time."[2] Schmitt continued this style with *Dionysiaques*.

Florent Schmitt

Schmitt first began studying music at the Nancy Conservatoire which prepared him for the entrance examinations for the Paris Conservatoire, which he entered in 1889. Schmitt's primary composition teacher was Gabriel Fauré. Fauré's teaching style focused on giving informal advice and inspiration rather than technical instruction.[3] This would result in the encouragement of independence that would prove to be a lasting contribution to Schmitt's development as a composer.[4]

Influences and Style

Schmitt's early exposure to Classical and German Romantic composers from his amateur musical parents was due in part to being born in Lorraine, France, which resided on the border with Germany. Composers such as Beethoven, Wagner, and Strauss were his favorites to study along with Russian composers like Rimsky-Korsakov.[5] Along with the aforementioned composers, Schmitt was familiar with Ravel's music and had a great fascination with Claude Debussy's music as well. The concept of program music, which would not be

[1] Jann Pasler and Jerry Rife, "Schmitt, Florent," in *Grove Music Online.* ed. Dean Root. https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.24960.
[2] Pasler and Rife.
[3] Diana Janda, "'Dionysiaques', op. 62: An original composition for band by Florent Schmitt," (DMA thesis, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, 1993), 2.
[4] Janda, 3.
[5] Francis Pieters, "Focus on History: The Gymnase Musical Militaire'," *WASBE World*, (2011): 20. https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/5742831/wasbe-conference-2011-daily-schedule-karel-husa.

formalized until the mid-19th century with Franz Liszt, had influenced the Impressionism of Ravel and Debussy, despite them not accepting the term.[6]

Composers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were in some ways influenced by Impressionism and the music of Ravel and Debussy. Schmitt had adopted aspects of Debussy's harmonic vocabulary, such as the use of extra-tertian chords with or without nonharmonic tones along with the use of parallel streams of chords.[7] However, Schmitt was known for his independent spirit and his refusal to be identified with any particular school or group. His music was admired for its energy, dynamism, grandeur, and for its union of French clarity and German strength.[8] Despite being heavily influenced by Debussy, Schmitt avoided the whole tone scale—except for decorative purposes—and pentatonic scales as he considered them too confining and preferred a more conventional tonal context with some reordering and blurring of function through chromaticism.[9] Schmitt's use of polymeter and counterpoint would also distance his work from Debussy.

Schmitt can be thought of as a forerunner of neoclassicism. He favored traditional forms while freely adapting them to meet this style of forward motion and maintaining clarity, unity, and his order of thoughts. In this regard, Fauré was Schmitt's influencer.[10] One could speculate that this may have been one of the inspirations for Stravinsky to write in the neoclassicism format given his admiration for Schmitt's *Salomé*.

Although Schmitt had violent tendencies regarding his music, he also had an ironic, humorous side. His *Marche burlesque from Feuillets de voyag*e seems to parody Charles Lenepveu's march from *Jeanne d'Arc*, which was performed by the Société Nationale a year after Maurice Ravel lost the Prix de Rome to one of Lenepveu's students.[11] This humorous side of Schmitt's music may have been influenced by Emmanuel Chabrier who had captivated French music critics and composers with his own humor. In between the stanzas of the late song *Ballade des gros dindons*, Chabrier alludes to *Don Giovanni*'s mandolin serenade, a comic disjunction associating large turkeys, burdened by their pendulous wattles, to an archetypal seducer.[12]

Rival Musical Societies

Schmitt found himself surrounded by fellow composers and other artists throughout Europe by being a part of various musical societies. In 1910 Schmitt

[6] Roger Scruton, "Programme Music," in *Grove Music Online*. ed. Dean Root. https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.22394.
[7] Janda, 10.
[8] Pasler and Rife.
[9] Janda, 11.
[10] Janda, 11–2.
[11] Pasler and Rife.
[12] Steven Huebner, "Chabrier, (Alexis-)Emmanuel in *Grove Music Online*. ed. Dean Root. https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.05351.

helped found the Société Musicale Indépendante with Maurice Ravel, Charles Koechlin, and his former teacher Gabriel Fauré. The goal of the Société Indépendante was to continue to support contemporary musical creation without the restrictions linked to forms, genres, and musical styles, even as Schmitt favored traditional forms in his own works. The Société Indépendante held concerts that hid the composer's names in protest of the alleged prejudiced attitude of concert-goers and critics. This was an attempt to prove that opinions of new works were often influenced by the composer's name.[13]

The Société Indépendante rivaled an older group called the Société Nationale de Musique when then President Vincent d'Indy took over. During d'Indy's time as president of the Société Nationale, he turned down an offer to become a professor at the Paris Conservatoire out of frustration and instead took the opportunity to develop his own composition curriculum at the Schola Cantorum.[14] D'Indy's curriculum focused on music of the late Baroque and early Classical eras, Gregorian chant, and Renaissance polyphony. It was these teachings that led the new generation of French composers, Schmitt included, to realize that the Société Nationale had become increasingly conservative under d'Indy's presidency. They felt the society was now less helpful to composers who did not follow the compositional teachings of d'Indy.[15]

Before this defection of young composers, an informal group of Parisian musicians, poets, painters, critics, and musicians started to meet weekly. The core of the group, being named *Les Apaches* after a newspaper seller saw the group returning from the premiere of Debussy's opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, consisted of Maurice Ravel, Ricardo Viñes, and Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi in 1902.[16] Other members who would frequent meetings included Maurice Delage, Léon-Paul Fargue, Déodat de Séverac, Edouard Bénédictus, Igor Stravinsky, and Schmitt. Here, as well as providing an audience for each other's new works, they discussed aesthetics, collaborated with one another, and rendered practical help such as copying parts.[17] It would not be until d'Indy, acting president of the Société Nationale, refused to program a work by Delage that the *Les Apaches* composers, many of whom were members of the Société Nationale at the time, created the rival organization, the Société Indépendante. *Les Apaches* dwindled during the First World War and meetings stopped altogether.

[13] M.D. Calvocoressi, "Modern French Composers: I. How They Are Encouraged." *The Musical Times,*62, no. 938 (1921): 239. https://www.jstor.org/stable/909393.
[14] Andrew Thomson and Robert Orledge, "Indy, (Paul Marie Théodore) Vincent d'," in *Grove Music Online*. ed. Dean Root. https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.13787.
[15] Michel Duchesneau, "1871 La Société Nationale de musique," Nouvelle Histoire de la Musique en France, Last modified 2016, https://emf.oicrm.org/nhmf-1871/.
[16] Jann Pasler, "Stravinsky and the Apaches," *The Musical Times*, 123, no. 1672. (Jun. 1982): 403, https://www.jstor.org/stable/964115.
[17] Jann Pasler, "Apaches, Les," in *Grove Music Online*. ed. Dean Root. https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.51370.

Before d'Indy became president of the Société Nationale, he tried to open up the society to non-French music and musicians, but founding members Romain Bussine and Camille Saint-Saëns resisted until they retired in 1886. Up until that point, the Société Nationale focused on promoting French music and allowed rising French composers to present their works in public. In the aftermath of France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1, nationalist feelings began to rise. The Société Nationale leaned heavily towards chamber music and away from opera, as other founding member Gabriel Fauré recalled,

> The truth is that before 1870 I would never have dreamt of composing a sonata or a quartet. At that period there was no chance of a composer getting a hearing with works like that. I was given the incentive when Saint-Saëns founded the Société nationale de musique in 1871 with the primary aim of putting on works by young composers.[18]

The Société Nationale tried to merge with the Société Indépendante during the First World War as d'Indy allowed Fauré to become president of both societies, but the young composers of the Société Indépendante refused. The Société Nationale ended up lasting four years longer than the Société Indépendante, until its end in 1939 with its last president being Florent Schmitt.

Dionysiaques, op. 62

Schmitt was known for his unwillingness to talk or write about his own compositions and left no explanation for the programmatic aspects of the title, unlike his four-hands piano version, *Poème pour Orchestre d'harmonie*.[19] Despite this lack of explanation one can speculate that *Dionysiaques* is an example of program music.[20]

The noun "dionysiaques" refers to the games of ancient Greek festivals that were held to honor Dionysus, the god of wine and ecstasy.[21] According to Greek mythology, Hera, the wife of Zeus, persuaded the pregnant Semele, daughter of Cadmus, the king of Thebes, to request Zeus to appear as his real person. Zeus complied but killed the mortal Semele due to his power. Zeus saved his unborn son Dionysus by sewing him up in his thigh and keeping him there until he reached maturity.

Dionysus represented the sap, juice, or lifeblood element in nature and Dionysian rituals were held to honor him. During the rituals, women called Bacchanalia took to the hills wearing fawn skins and crowns of ivy as they

[18] Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 80.
[19] Janda, 15.
[20] Scruton.
[21] Janda, 15.

danced by torchlight to the rhythms of the double pipe and handheld drum.[22] They retold the story of his death, drank wine, and danced themselves into a frenzy, which ended in the ripping apart of a live victim such as a goat, bull, or a man if one had intruded on the event.[23]

Dionysiaques was written for was the Musique de la Garde Républicaine, under the direction of Guillaume Balay. What made this military band unique in relation to the English, German, and Russian military bands of the time was the inclusion of both a saxophone family and a saxhorn choir. This served as the main instrumental color that made this French band sound unique.[24] Sarrusophones were also used in the instrumentation of the Musique de la Garde Républicaine. Invented in 1856, French bandmaster Sarrus wanted to replace the standard double reed instruments with louder brass versions for military bands.[25] The E-flat contrabass sarrusophone was standard in the Garde Républicaine Band, but in *Dionysiaques* Schmitt called for the contrabass in C, which was used as a contrabassoon substitute in some French orchestras.[26]

Florent Schmitt's *Dionysiaques, op. 62* is a unique piece of wind band literature for its time. While American wind bands were wrapped up in the music of Sousa, Fillmore, and other bandmasters and English military bands were playing the music of Gustav Holst's military suites, Schmitt and other Parisian composers were pushing the boundaries of music.

Analysis

Dionysiaques is in **ABA'B'** form with the predominantly lyrical **A** and **A'** section contrasted with the dance-like **B** and **B'** section with an elision occurring in sections **B** and **A'**. Below is an analytical chart for *Dionysiaques* (see figure 1). For an alternative analysis, please refer to Dr. Diane Janda's thesis.[27]

[22] T. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Dionysus," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed May 26, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dionysus.

[23] Janda, 16.

[24] Janda, 100.

[25] Janda, 99.

[26] Janda, 100.

[27] Janda

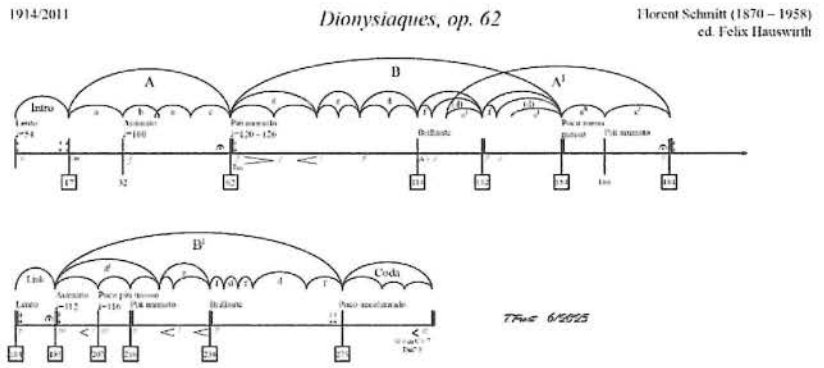

Figure 1. Trevor Frost, Analytical chart for Florent Schmitt's *Dionysiaques*.

The work opens with the euphoniums and tubas on a B and moves up by a half-step. This initiates a progression through intervals starting with an upward major second, followed by a downward minor third, then moves up a major third. This pattern continues until it resolves on an A-flat on the final triplet on measure 3 (see figure 2).

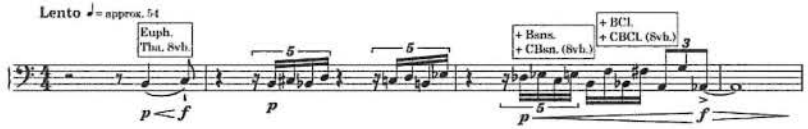

Figure 2: Florent Schmitt, *Dionysiaques*, mm. 1–4.

The introduction (mm. 1–16) establishes the thematic materials that will be used throughout the work along with Schmitt's use of extension demonstrated by the solo euphonium (see figure 3).

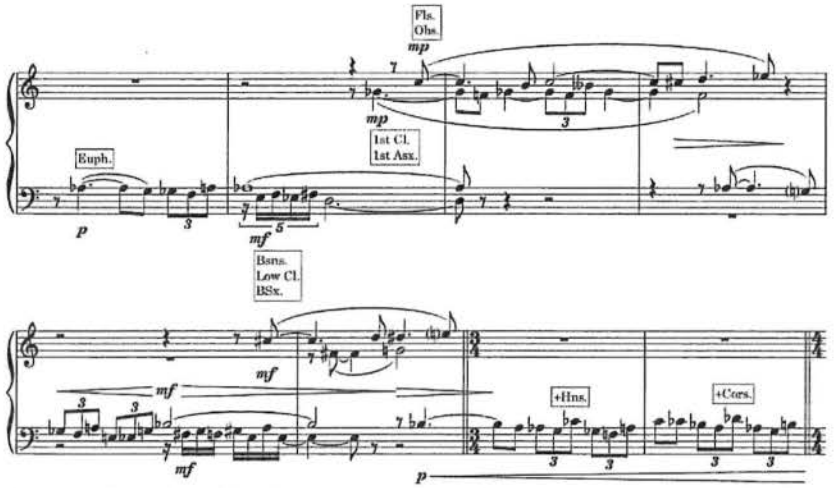

Figure 3: Florent Schmitt, *Dionysiaques*, mm. 8–16.

The **A** section, beginning in measure 17, is divided into four smaller segments: **a** (mm. 17–31), **b** (mm. 32–41), **a^{1}** (mm. 40–50), and **c** mm. 51–61. The first **a** contains three variations of the euphonium solo found in the introduction: mm. 17–9, mm. 21–4, and mm. 25–9 (see figure 4).

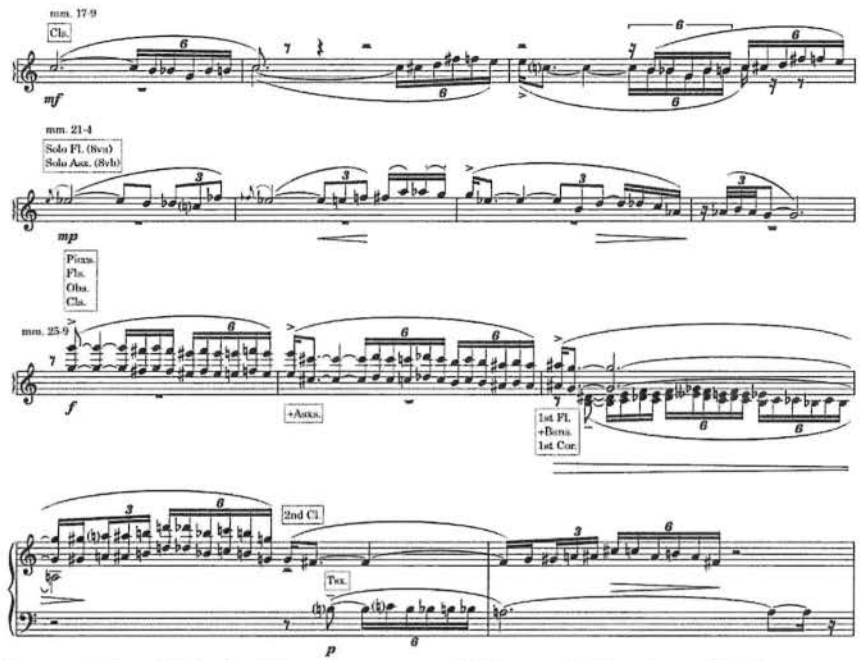

Figure 4: Florent Schmitt, *Dionysiaques*, mm. 17–9, mm. 21–4, and mm. 25–9.

The **b** section begins with two tritones (B-flat – E and G# – D) with the syncopated rhythmic pattern being the dominant voice. The pattern is restated two more times, once in m. 36 and again in m. 40 where an elision occurs when **a^{1}** begins with the bass clarinet solo in the same measure. **a^{1}** contains only two variations compared to the earlier **a** forgoing the third variation from mm. 25–9 and replacing it with a chromatic descent into **c** starting at m. 51.

Measures 51–61 lead to the beginning of the dance-like **B** section through the use of the "laughing" motive starting in m. 51 (see figure 5). While Schmitt was not known for describing his own compositions, the "laughing" motive marks the moment when the Bacchanalia devolved into a drunken stupor.

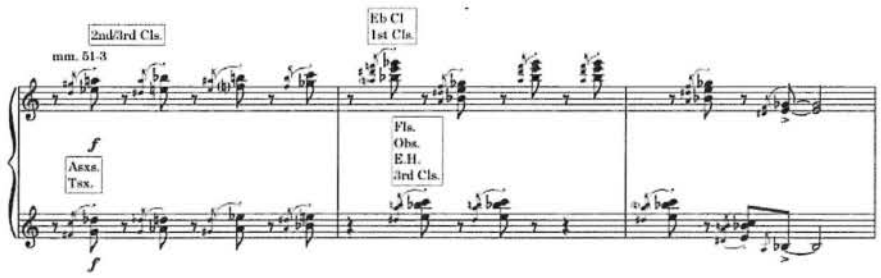

Figure 5: The "laughing" motive, Florent Schmitt, *Dionysiaques*, mm. 51–3.

The frenzied-dance **B** section begins at m. 62 with accentuated F and C-naturals. The third clarinet begins the dance theme in m. 66 on G3 which is then raised by a half-step with the second utterance two measures later (see figure 6).

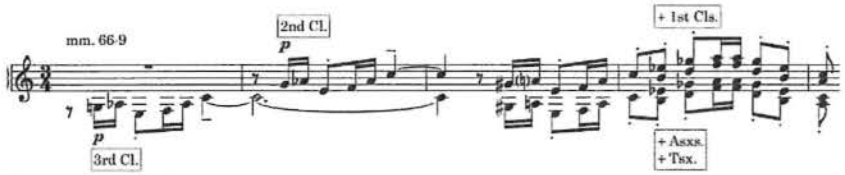

Figure 6: Florent Schmitt, *Dionysiaques*, mm. 66–9.

After a reset provided by the interrupting accentuated chords with additional color tones in m. 74, the third clarinet picks up the dance theme where it left off from G# but with its enharmonic equivalent and is repeated up a half-step two measures later. While mm. 84–5 serves as a link between the dance theme leading into new material this showcases Schmitt's use of conventional tonal context and blurring the functionality through reordering and chromaticism. Unlike the similar material found in mm. 72–3 that alternates between B-flat and A minor triads, mm. 84–5 includes a G-flat triad in the alternation (see figure 7).

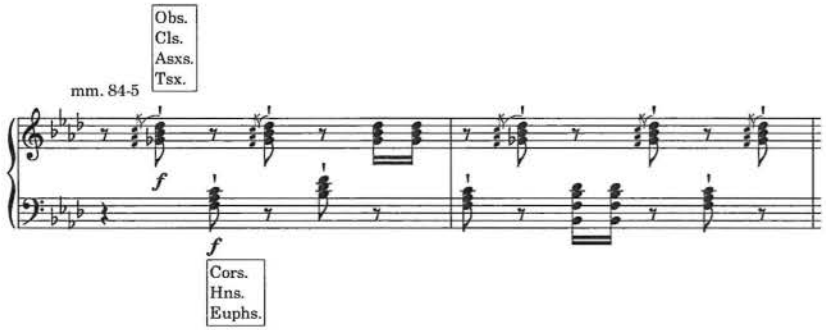

Figure 7: Florent Schmitt, *Dionysiaques*, mm. 84–5.

The addition of the G-flat triad, which resolves a tritone away to C-natural on the downbeat m. 86, disrupts the tonal context that was established before in the linking material in mm. 72–3.

Reminiscent of the rhythmic pattern in mm. 32–41, the 2nd and 3rd clarinets, alto and tenor saxophones play fully diminished seventh chords in parallel motion over a pedal C in the tubas with the occasional tritone leap down and back at m. 86. The motive restarts in m. 90 with the tubas continuing the pedal C with the occasional tritone leap, but this time the clarinets, alto and tenor saxophones play parallel dominant seventh chords (see figure 8).

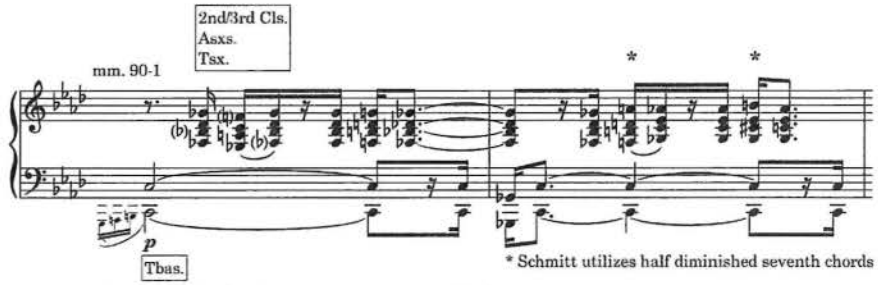

Figure 8: Florent Schmitt, *Dionysiaques*, mm. 90–1.

With the low woodwinds driving the momentum through extended 16th note motion, the dance theme returns in m. 98 with the same half-step motion that was seen earlier but starting on B-flat. This time, however, the interrupting accentuated chords is varied and placed after the dance themes are stated.

M. 118 marks the elision between sections **B** and **A**[1]. The dance theme is first fragmented and passed back and forth between the tenor sax and the first alto sax. This sets the background for two elongated statements of the second variation of the **a** theme, first with the clarinets in m. 122 (see figure 9) and then the English horn, bassoons, bass clarinet, and tenor sax in m. 128.

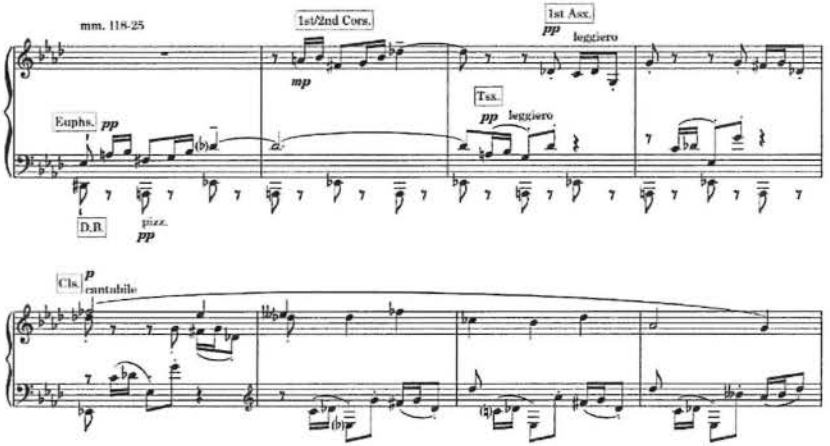

Figure 9: Florent Schmitt, *Dionysiaques*, mm. 118–25.

After a four-bar dynamic build, material from mm. 118–31 is repeated with additional color tones at a new pitch class. Unlike the downbeat of m. 118 which consists of only two notes, E-flat and B-flat, the downbeat of m. 136 consists of F#, A#, and C#. Schmitt also includes additional background figures leading to m. 154, the conclusion of the **B** section. The additional background figures

Schmitt includes in mm. 146–53 is yet another example of his use of parallel stream of chords, this time including the celesta (see figure 10).

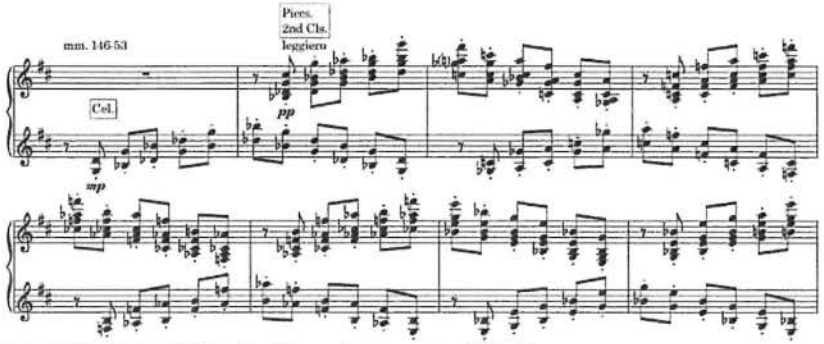

Figure 10: Florent Schmitt, *Dionysiaques*, mm. 146–53.

Reminiscent of the first **a** section in mm. 17–32, Schmitt aims to bring the **A**$^{\mathbf{I}}$ section to a close utilizing a second variation and extension of the **a** in mm. 154–65 and variations and extensions from **c** from m. 166 until the fermata on C at m. 183.

Measures 184–94 serves as a link between the **A**$^{\mathbf{I}}$ and the **B**$^{\mathbf{I}}$ sections utilizing material from mm. 8–16. Unlike the first iteration of this material, originally played by the solo euphonium, the 1st and 2nd tubas along with the string bass take this role performed down a minor 6th to C (see figure 11).

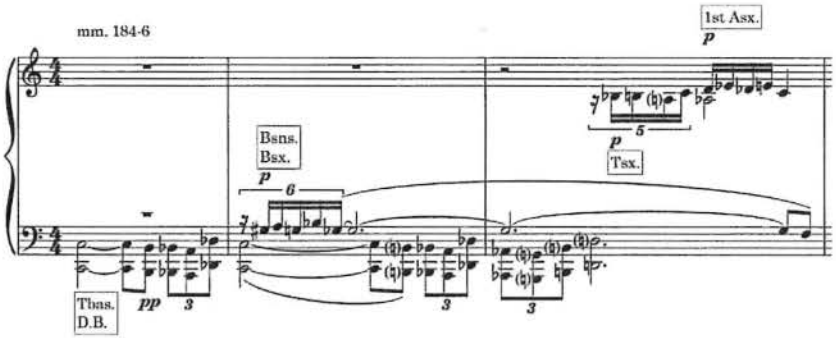

Figure 11: Florent Schmitt, *Dionysiaques*, mm. 184–6.

The contrabass clarinet and timpani hold an A through the fermata at m. 194 marking the beginning of the final section, **B**$^{\mathbf{I}}$. The opening portion of this section, mm. 195–215, highlights Schmitt's use of polymeter. Despite being written in 3/4, the contrabassoon, string bass, snare, and bass drum establish a steady, w pulse seemingly in 2/4. This is emphasized by the upbeats by the bassoons and tambourine who enter in m. 197. The frenzied dance theme from

m. 66, now more militarized from the march-like feel established prior, enters in m. 201 starting on D (see figure 12).

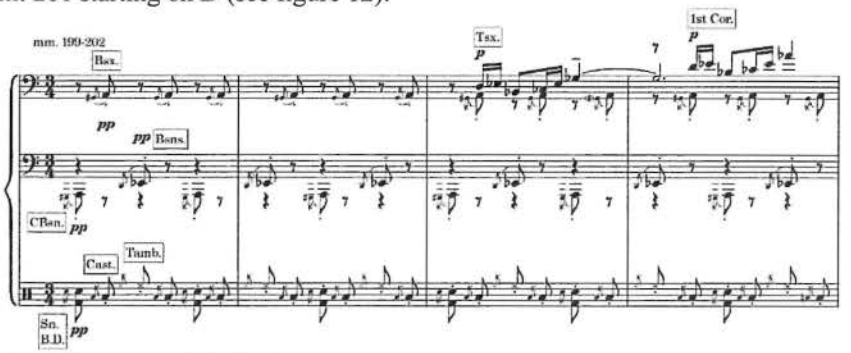

Figure 12: Florent Schmitt, *Dionysiaques*, mm. 199–202.

As the tension builds which will inevitably lead to a false climax at m. 216 using the frenzied dance material, Schmitt utilizes one and two measure long interruptions that divide the phrasings. These interruptions, found in m. 206 and mm. 212–3, are once again streams of parallel seventh chords separated that move by tritone leaps (see figure 13).

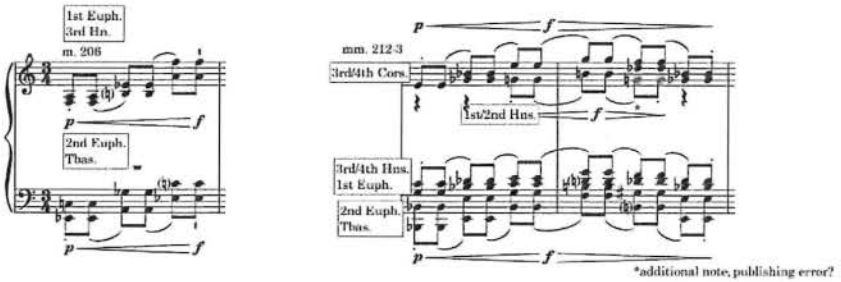

Figure 13: Florent Schmitt, *Dionysiaques*, m. 206 and mm. 212–3.

The continuation of the fragmented frenzied dance material starting at m. 216, still with a march-like feel and the addition of a repeated rhythmic pattern first performed by the euphoniums and snare drum, adds to the tension until it is finally released, albeit unsatisfactorily due to the unstable, chromatic nature of the **e** material previously found in mm. 86–9.

The **e** material is repeated and then extended, similar to mm. 94–7, through a series of 16th notes increasing in register until reaching the arrival at m. 238. This time instead of recalling the frenzied dance material in full, Schmitt trades off brief statements of the frenzied dance theme and the powerful accentuated chords from m. 114 before returning to the fully realized dance frenzy.

The **B^{l}** section concludes with a bombastic *rallentando* as the entire band alternating between two triads, C major and F# major, for two bars before alternating between A major and E-flat major triads for the next two bars. Finally, an at tempo fragmentation of the frenzied dance theme concludes the **B^{l}** section and the **Coda** begins at m. 275. The work concludes with statements of the frenzied dance theme with the "laughing" motive in the woodwinds. The rhythmic activity, by way of rising triplets, comes to an abrupt halt on a G-flat minor triad carried by the cornets, trumpets, and trombones followed by a C-flat dominant seventh. A brief flurry of triplets leads to a final tutti staccatissimo D minor seventh chord and an F.

While not nearly as well-known or performed as *Dionysiaques*, Schmitt had composed other wind band works during his lifetime. It would not be until 2008, the 50th anniversary of Schmitt's death, where Philippe Ferro, French conductor of the Orchestre d'Harmonie de la Région-Centre, recorded all of Schmitt's wind band works through the Corelia label.[28] The CD, entitled *Florent Schmitt: Intégrale pour ensembles à vent*, not only includes *Dionysiaques* with its original instrumentation, but features two world premiere recordings: Schmitt's *The March for the 163rd Infantry Regiment* and *Hymne funèbre* for tenor solo, chorus, and wind ensemble.[29]

While there were few composers who were writing original music for the wind band medium, Gustav Holst's *First Suite* and numerous marches by Karl King, John Philip Sousa, and other American bandmasters, Florent Schmitt's *Dionysiaques* is the unique outlier in this small group. Amid the musical and cultural transformation Paris was undergoing in the early 20th century, Schmitt had access to numerous resources and countless influences to share ideas with while continuing to push the musical boundaries. The result: a unique piece of wind band literature that would help launch the growth of its repertoire for years to come.

About the Author

Trevor Frost (b. 1994) currently serves as Assistant Professor of Music and Director of Bands at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri. He earned a B.M. in music education and an M.M. in music conducting from the University of New Hampshire as a student of Dr. Andrew Boysen Jr. He earned his D.M.A. in wind band conducting from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

[28] Nones, Phillip, "French conductor and wind ensemble specialist Philippe Ferro talks about the music of Florent Schmitt and *Hymne funèbre* (1899/1933), *Florent Schmitt* (blog), September 10, 2016, https://florentschmitt.com/2016/09/10/french-conductor-and-wind-ensemble-specialist-philippe-ferro-talks-about-the-music-of-florent-schmitt-and-hymne-funebre-18991933/.

[29] Ibid.

as a student of Dr. Carolyn Barber, where he also studied composition with Dr. Tyler White and Dr. Greg Simon.

Frost's primary area of research is wind band literature focusing on its dynamic relationship between programming practices, trends, and band director thinking along with its role in diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Frost remains active as a published composer, receiving commissions and performances across the United States.