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Preface: In Honour of François Lesure

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When I began my doctoral dissertation on sixteenth-century musical settings of Pierre de Ronsard, I rapidly came to respect the name of François Lesure. Then, as now, late-Renaissance France was not exactly the centre of the musicological universe, so his considerable contributions to the field loomed large. His bibliography of the royal music printers, Le Roy & Ballard, became my constant companion. I relied heavily on *Repertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM)*, especially volume BI (*Recueils imprimés XVIe–XVIIe siècles*), on the bibliography of the printing firm of Nicolas Du Chemin, and the *Nuovo Vogel*—all partially or completely Lesure’s work—as well as his many articles on composers, instrument builders and musicians in sixteenth-century France.¹ So I was excited to discover, shortly after arriving in Paris to complete my thesis, that François Lesure would be leading a seminar entitled ‘Edition critique des œuvres de Debussy’ at the *Ecole pratique des hautes études*. I went to their office to find out more. Could anyone enrol? Yes. So I did, thinking that learning about Debussy would be a useful addition to my postgraduate training, that it would be a nice break from the dissertation, and that although the topic was not related to my own research the course would at least allow me to meet the person whose work on sixteenth-century music I so admired.

What I found, when I arrived one Thursday evening for the first meeting, was nothing like the course on editing methods I expected. Instead, François assigned sessions not only to Debussy, but to Massenet, or organ building, or orchestral song, or even—to my great joy—the sixteenth century, depending on the interests of the participants. People brought what they were working on and talked about it for a while, responding to questions from François, other students and whoever else he happened to invite that week. Many were, like me, in advanced stages of doctoral work, and they came from all over the world. But students were not the only participants: there were regular visits from well-established scholars, foreigners

¹ In preparing this essay in honour of François Lesure (1923–2001), I have relied heavily on the bibliography of his publications compiled by Christian Meyer and Jean Gribenski, ‘Bibliographie des travaux de François Lesure’, *Revue de musicologie*, 88/2 (2002): 457–70, where details of these and other publications may be found. For biographical information and dates, I am indebted to the obituary by Catherine Massip in *Revue de musicologie*, 87/2 (2001): 517–20. I would like to thank the contributors to the present volume for sharing their memories of François with me.

passing through the Bibliothèque nationale (François always knew who was in the reading room, and seemed able to snag them for his Thursdays when appropriate), and performers and scholars working largely outside academic frameworks. The atmosphere was convivial, François's touch light. But although his tone was often ironic, he demonstrated an unfailing interest in what participants had to say—even if in halting French—and a truly impressive ability to engage with everyone, whatever their level and in whatever the field. Though it was billed as a postgraduate research seminar, in François's hands the course was not so much seminar as salon. Sociable and amusing, he possessed a barbed wit that made him excellent company and rendered contact with him a genuine pleasure as well as beneficial to my scholarly work. Like a charismatic host, he nimbly elicited ideas and information from others and invested the entire proceedings with his own lively curiosity and seemingly inexhaustible energy.

Only someone with François's vast range of knowledge and expertise could have managed such a thing so successfully. If the sixteenth century was indeed a first scholarly love, his subsequent career was remarkably diverse. I soon found that he occupied a similar position in the pantheon of musicological heroes of my fellow students as he did in mine, but for his work on organology, or musical iconography, or music publishing, or Debussy rather than on the Renaissance. His early training at the Sorbonne and the Paris Conservatoire was followed by diplomas from the Ecole pratique des hautes études and the Ecole des chartes, where he completed theses on sixteenth-century instrumentalists and instrument builders in Paris. The Ecole des chartes was and is France's most prestigious institution for the education of archivists, equipping its elite graduates with enviable skills in paleography, codicology and diplomatic. In its strongly documentary disposition, all of François's work reflected this early training. His delight in turning up new or neglected sources remained fresh and apparent many years later, and a fundamental concern with the material traces of music linked the highly varied subjects of his later research.

On completing his diploma from the Ecole des chartes in 1950, François joined the Bibliothèque nationale as a librarian in the recently founded Département de musique. He remained there for most of the rest of his career, becoming director from 1970 until his retirement in 1988. It was as head of the division that many of the contributors to this volume knew him best. Jann Pasler remembers that his office door was always open when she wanted to discuss some aspect of her work, and that she could count on support and attention even when her approaches diverged from François's own. Julian Rushton recalls with gratitude François's help with the New Berlioz Edition volume devoted to *La Damnation de Faust*; the assistant librarians were instructed to keep all the materials on a trolley to be wheeled out on Julian's arrival. And David Charlton describes one of François's most characteristic traits: he was always curious about others' musicological doings, especially if one was in the lift at the same time, had some book or document in hand and could not escape!

The library provided an ideal base for the work on sources that informed virtually all of François's numerous publications, including the Debussy research that became a central concern from the 1960s. Many of his early articles on the composer relied on unpublished letters, several of them edited for the special centenary number of the *Revue de musicologie* in 1962.² Other letters furnished material for a stream of important articles in the 1960s and 1970s, leading finally to François's edition of Debussy's selected correspondence.³ At the time of his death he was involved in preparing a complete edition of the letters. Another centenary effort involved François in mounting major exhibitions on Debussy in Paris, Bordeaux and Lisbon; this work served as preparation for his iconography, *Claude Debussy*, of 1975.⁴ François was equally interested in Debussy's critical writings, which he edited in *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*.⁵ With his bibliographer's zeal, François was indefatigable in tracking down sources for Debussy's music; in many cases, he was able to bring them into the public domain by purchasing them for the Bibliothèque nationale. Among the large number of significant acquisitions he made for the library during his tenure was the autograph of the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, bought in 1977. The same year saw the publication of both François's facsimile edition of the autograph sketches for *Pelléas et Mélisande* and his *Catalogue de l'oeuvre de Claude Debussy* (Geneva). The catalogue was the essential first step in the preparation of the critical edition of Debussy's works under François's direction; its first volume appeared in 1985. It was typical of François's method that only after many years of documentary research did he feel ready to produce a synthetic account of Debussy's career; his two volumes of biography—*Debussy avant Pelléas ou les années symbolistes* and *Claude Debussy: biographie critique* (Paris, 1992 and 1994)—reflect several decades of intimate familiarity with primary sources.

Although François's work on Berlioz was less extensive than his Debussy research, it was similarly informed by engagement with documentary materials. An article on Berlioz's will appeared for the centenary of the composer's death⁶ and work on Berlioz's letters led to the edition of two volumes of the *Correspondance générale* in collaboration with Hugh Macdonald.⁷ It was characteristic of François to find these sources fascinating, even though his own reactions to Berlioz were somewhat equivocal. He remained slightly baffled by the intensity of the anglophone love affair with the composer's music, and while appreciating their scholarly work, he enjoyed gently mocking Berlioz's fans.

² Vol. 48, *Claude Debussy, 1862–1962: textes et documents inédits*.

³ Claude Debussy, *Lettres, 1884–1918* (Paris, 1980); 2nd rev. ed. as Claude Debussy, *Correspondance, 1884–1918* (Paris, 1993).

⁴ *Claude Debussy: iconographie musicale* (Geneva, 1975); bilingual French–English ed. (Geneva and Paris, 1980).

⁵ *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits* (Paris, 1971; 2nd rev. ed., 1987).

⁶ 'Le Testament d'Hector Berlioz', *Revue de musicologie*, 55 (1969): 219–23.

⁷ *Correspondance générale* (gen. ed. Pierre Citron), vols. 5: 1855–1859, and 6: 1859–1863 (Paris, 1989 and 1995).

Julian Rushton remembers encountering François in the interval of a Parisian concert and being teased about the volume of Berlioz's letters he had clutched under his arm. His ambivalence about the composer did not affect his perception of Berlioz's importance, however, and François was a major force in mounting celebrations of his life and work. The centenary of Berlioz's death was marked by exhibitions in the Bibliothèque nationale and Lisbon's Palacio Foz;⁸ at the time of François's death, he was hard at work on preparations for the bicentenary of the composer's birth. David Charlton remembers that at one subcommittee meeting for the Berlioz Bicentennial, François seemed to have more ideas than the rest of the group put together.

Given the extent of his work as a librarian and as an immensely productive scholar—the publications I have mentioned here represent only a fraction of his vast output—it is remarkable that François found time to invest his energies in the training of younger musicologists. Yet he taught at the Université libre in Brussels from 1964 to 1977, and in 1973 took over from Solange Corbin at the Ecole pratique des hautes études. His seminars there provided support for several generations of scholars, including Kerry Murphy and Jann Pasler, who vividly remember the atmosphere of encouragement they found there. The seminars also provided a mode of introducing younger musicologists to established figures in the field; François regularly invited senior scholars to hear presentations at the Ecole pratique when he found a student's work promising and thought an introduction could be useful. This was perhaps not as altruistic as it sounds; François liked to be in the thick of things, at the centre of the musicological stock exchange, bartering information on sources and projects—a role for which he was ideally suited by temperament and through his position at the Bibliothèque nationale. His support for younger scholars thus often took the form of useful introductions and practical aid in gaining access to documents. Jann Pasler recalls that François shared with her all the names and addresses of people who had contributed to the 1975 Ravel exhibition at the Bibliothèque nationale, which allowed her to set up interviews with nearly forty of them during her research on Maurice Delage; François also put her in contact with an important Stravinsky collaborator. François was always eager to involve younger musicologists in his projects, and was generous in offering important breaks to scholars in the early stages of their careers. David Charlton remembers being honoured by François's invitation to contribute to a collection on musical iconography. For Richard Langham Smith, he provided permission and practical help with the English translation of François's edition of Debussy's writings, and—perhaps more importantly—started him on the work on *Rodrigue et Chimène* that is still occupying him today. In my own case, François not only introduced me to many people (including several of the contributors to this volume) but spent many hours patiently going over my early efforts at transcribing near-illegible sixteenth-century notarial documents.

⁸ Lesure, (ed.) *Hector Berlioz* (Paris, 1969); *Hector Berlioz* (Lisbon, 1969).

This book is a testament to François's generosity, focusing on two composers that formed important points of contact between him and the anglophone scholars he befriended and supported. In its multiplicity of voices and approaches, it stands as a written counterpart to those seminars at the Ecole pratique with François's animating voice at its heart. François was both deeply engaged in the preservation and promotion of French musical culture and history, and tolerant, open and enthusiastic about foreign scholars' interest in French music. It is a pleasure for those who worked with him and learned from him to offer this tribute to his memory.