

THE LEGACY OF THE PARIS CONSERVATOIRE  
AND ITS HARPISTS: A SOLO HARP RECITAL

by

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AND ITS HARPISTS: A SOLO HARP RECITAL

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## ABSTRACT

The Paris Conservatoire trains musicians of the highest quality, and the harpists of the Conservatoire are no exception to this legacy. The transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, in particular, saw a group of brilliant and talented harpists begin their careers from the springboard of the Conservatoire. Among these were Henriette Renié and Carlos Salzedo. The Conservatoire also trained other great musicians who composed brilliantly for the harp. The presence of virtuosic harpists at the Conservatoire provided a source of inspiration for composers such as Gabriel Pierné and Jacques Ibert to build upon.

This paper accompanies a solo harp recital that focuses on music by harpists and composers who studied at the Paris Conservatoire. The selected works for the program include *Légende* by Henriette Renié, *Variations on a Theme in Ancient Style* by Carlos Salzedo, *Concertstück*, Op. 39 by Gabriel Pierné, *Entr'acte* by Jacques Ibert, and *Grand Study in Imitation of the Mandoline* by Elias Parish Alvars.

The purpose of the subsequent historical and compositional analysis of the selected works is to provide a broader perspective for both the performer and audience members in the context of a solo harp recital. Such detailed analysis enriches the recital experience for audience members. Understanding the historical context and stylistic components of the music guides the performer in his interpretation of the music. For the performer, this analysis is an essential component of the recital preparation process.

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## INTRODUCTION

The classical musician presenting a solo recital has much to consider throughout the process. Some musicians select a theme or idea for the recital that brings the selected works together into a cohesive unit. The musician must analyze the pieces in terms of form, harmonic and melodic content, and required techniques. The process of painstakingly learning the pieces note by note requires many hours of practicing and listening. The musician absorbs the music, intimately learning every aspect of it. Throughout this process, an essential component of preparation includes a thorough analysis of the composers' biographical information and the historical context of each piece.

This research component of recital preparation aids the musician in better understanding how and why the composer created the work. Clues as to the composer's intentions, especially regarding the expression of ideas, become an important part of the musician's performance of the piece. Every moment of the performance must be controlled and intentional. As the musician incorporates his own interpretation of the piece, he must first understand what the composer originally intended.

The following research has been an integral part of the recital preparation process for this solo harp program. The theme for the accompanying recital is French composers who studied at the Paris Conservatoire, with particular emphasis on the legacy of harpists who studied at this institution. The legacy of great harpists and composers such as Henriette Renié and Carlos Salzedo has significantly impacted the current generation of harpists. Additional works on the program by Gabriel Pierné and Jacques Ibert are important in the harp's repertoire and represent an indirect contribution to the harp legacy

of the Paris Conservatoire. This recital also features a work by Elias Parish Alvars who, although not a student at the Conservatoire, played a significant role in the development of harp repertoire and was a masterful harpist and composer.

HENRIETTE RENIÉ: *LÉGENDE* (1901)

Henriette Renié (1875-1956) remains one of the harp's greatest legends. Harpists recognize her contribution in creating a lasting respect for the harp as a solo instrument. Not only did she compose masterpieces for the harp, but she also influenced composers and their compositions for the harp during her life and even after. Her passionate and devoted teaching trained professional harpists who have carried her legacy and technique down to the current generation of harpists.<sup>1</sup>

Born on September 18, 1875, Renié grew up in an artistically minded family. Her mother was related to a well-known Parisian cabinet-maker and her father was an architect, painter, and singer. During one of her father's singing performances, Renié, who was just 5 years old, heard the Belgian harpist Alphonse Hasselmans play. She declared that he would teach her the harp. Indeed, at the age of 8 she began to study under Hasselmans and progressed quickly.<sup>2</sup>

Renié began studying the harp at the Paris Conservatoire at age 10 under the instruction of Hasselmans. A child prodigy, she won second prize at the Conservatoire's annual competition in her first year there and first prize two years later. She also studied harmony and composition at the Conservatoire, winning additional prizes from the school in this area. Her *Concerto en ut mineur*, completed in 1901, successfully established her

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<sup>1</sup> Haefner, "Virtuoso, Composer, and Teacher: Henriette Renié's Compositions and Transcriptions for Harp in Perspective," 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

as both a harpist and composer, as well as showcasing the harp as a solo instrument. Her growing career as a harpist led to invitations to perform all over Europe.<sup>3</sup>

Primarily through her performances, Renié propelled the harp forward and into a position as an established solo instrument for the concert stage, no longer just an instrument for amateurs. When Renié began composing for the harp, the double-action pedal harp had existed for approximately 100 years. Renié brought harp compositions to a higher level by using enharmonics and modulations, incorporating the abilities of the double-action pedal harp to play in any key.<sup>4</sup> Her composition *Légende* exemplifies her ability to use the full chromatic range of the instrument and compose a piece with rich harmonic depth.

Many hail *Légende* as Renié's greatest work because she pushed the boundaries of harp music through its programmatic nature and special effects.<sup>5</sup> This piece was composed in 1901, the same year she completed her *Concerto en ut mineur*. A 1926 recording of her performance of *Légende* sold out six months after the release, testifying to both her popularity as a harpist and the appeal of this composition.<sup>6</sup> This work is technically challenging and requires a great deal of virtuosity in performing it.<sup>7</sup>

Influenced by her love of reading and of the theater, many of Renié's pieces relate a narrative.<sup>8</sup> *Légende* conveys the tragic tale of two lovers' challenges and ultimate demise, as told in the poem "Les elfes" by the French nineteenth-century poet, Charles-Marie Leconte de Lisle. On the eve of the lovers' wedding, the Queen of the Elves stops

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 5-9.

<sup>4</sup> Slaughter, "Henriette Renié: A Pioneer in the World of the Harp," 9, 34, 37.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>6</sup> Haefner, "Virtuoso, Composer, and Teacher," 8-9, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Slaughter, "Henriette Renié," 41.

<sup>8</sup> Haefner, "Virtuoso, Composer, and Teacher," 39.

the Cavalier from meeting his beloved and attempts to make him love her, even casting a spell on him. After his escape, he finds his beloved, but she is a mere ghostlike form because she has already died. Devastated, he also dies.<sup>9</sup>

One particular refrain in the poem that appears seven times describes the elves and their joyful dancing. Renié sets this refrain to music. The half steps in the motive do not resolve to a new harmony but rather descend, rise and then fall again to the same harmony, suggesting confusion and perhaps at one point “the frantic gallop of the Cavalier’s horse.” She varies the setting of the motive each time it appears.<sup>10</sup>



Example 1: *Légende*, Henriette Renié, mm. 39-41

This motive also transforms to become heavy and rhythmically driving, expressing the Cavalier’s desperation. Later the motive moves up to the high register of the harp and the delicate, quick notes depict the elves and their dancing.<sup>11</sup> This refrain becomes an important theme in the piece, continually returning. The half step movements serve in some ways as a repeated reminder of the instrument’s chromatic abilities.

As expected in many French harp compositions of this era, rolled chords, arpeggios, and glissandos often fill out the musical lines in *Légende*.<sup>12</sup> With so many rapid notes and flourishes, this piece has a very complex, dense sound. The structure

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 22-4.

<sup>12</sup> Slaughter, “Henriette Renié,” 48.



depends heavily on that repeating refrain – the elves’ theme. As the moods change and the story unfolds, this theme unfolds as well, tying the sections of the music together and bringing a sense of unity to the piece.

CARLO SALZEDO, *VARIATIONS ON A THEME*

*IN ANCIENT STYLE, OP. 30 (1911)*

Born in Bayonne, France, near the Basque area, Carlos Salzedo (1885-1961) was surrounded by music from birth. His father was the director of the National Conservatory of Music in Bayonne and his mother was an accomplished pianist. Salzedo began his official music studies and piano instruction at the St. Cecilia Music School, but quickly outgrew that school’s offerings by the age of 9 years old. The Paris Conservatoire admitted him that same year and he began a general music and piano course of study.<sup>13</sup> After completing solfège studies at the Conservatoire, Salzedo’s father selected the harp for him due to his son’s more delicate health since the instrument was thought to be less physically taxing, a “parlor instrument.”<sup>14</sup>

Salzedo began studying the harp independently with Mademoiselle Marguerite Achaud, who introduced him to Alphonse Hasselmans shortly thereafter. At the age of 13, Salzedo began studying harp at the Conservatoire. He won the Conservatoire’s first prize for both harp and piano, and then embarked on a professional career as a musician, touring as an orchestral harpist and a soloist. In 1909, Salzedo moved to New York City to play with the Metropolitan Opera, spending four seasons performing there.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bitter, *Pentacle: The Story of Carlos Salzedo and the Harp*, 29-30, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Houser, “Five Virtuoso Harpists as Composers: Their Contributions to the Technique and Literature of the Harp,” 86-7.

<sup>15</sup> Bitter, *Pentacle*, 33-5, 41-2, 44.

During this time in his career, Salzedo composed his *Variations on a Theme in Ancient Style* for the solo harp in 1911.<sup>16</sup> That year he premiered the work at the Met during one of the Sunday Night Concerts.<sup>17</sup> Unlike previous composers who maintained conservative compositions in terms of tonality and techniques for the harp, Salzedo applied different tonalities and unique sounds through special effects that pushed the instrument into the modern era.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to many of his later works, this solo is neoclassical and uses traditional, tonal harmonies.<sup>19</sup> This composition is among his earlier works, having a more romantic tendency yet still incorporating innovative approaches.<sup>20</sup> Salzedo employs the theme and variation structure to feature many different virtuosic techniques on the harp. The focus is not on pushing harmonic or rhythmic boundaries, but rather on showcasing the harp's wide-ranging techniques.<sup>21</sup> Salzedo's *Variations* remains one of the instrument's foremost virtuosic and technically demanding works.<sup>22</sup>

The first and second variations both feature grace notes. The first uses them as light ornaments to a flowing counterpoint line in the right hand. The second variation has a Spanish dance feel, with the grace notes acting as a castanet sound. The third variation highlights the harp's capacity to produce a staccato sound through muffling each preceding note. The light sound of the fourth variation requires rapid, accurate placement of jumping intervals. The fifth variation combines rolled chords with a special double

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<sup>16</sup> Houser, "Five Virtuoso Harpists," 96.

<sup>17</sup> Bitter, *Pentacle*, 221.

<sup>18</sup> Choate, "Carlos Salzedo – Composer, Performer, Teacher: Performance Practices of Selected Works," 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Houser, "Five Virtuoso Harpists," 96.

<sup>21</sup> Choate, "Carlos Salzedo," 37.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 14.

glissando, played with two notes an interval of a 3rd apart. The sixth variation interweaves the right and left hand notes, producing one continuous line.

Variation 7 is one of the most thorough studies of trills ever composed for the harp, using a variety of trills to achieve a breathtaking effect of delicate expression. The trills create the illusion of sustained pitches, which does not occur when plucking the strings.<sup>23</sup> The final variation expresses a high level of energy through rapid scales and arpeggios, a last virtuosic flourish before concluding with the repetition of the theme. In 1954, Salzedo added a possible cut to the piece after Variation 8 to the closing repetition of the theme. His intention was to have a shorter version prepared for long programs, but most harpists today perform the shorter version, possibly due to the demands of the piece.<sup>24</sup>

#### GABRIEL PIERNÉ, *CONCERTSTÜCK*, OP. 39 (1901)

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, composers increasingly wrote important harp parts within major orchestral works such as Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* (1830), Richard Wagner's *Ring* cycle (1853-1854), Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky's ballets *Swan Lake* (1876) and *Nutcracker* (1892), and Igor Stravinsky's ballet *Firebird* (1910).<sup>25</sup> As the harp expanded its role in the orchestra, solo concerto repertoire continued to expand. *Concertstück*, Op. 39 by Gabriel Pierné (1863-1937) was one of three harp pieces for solo harp and orchestra composed within five years at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>25</sup> Rensch, *Harps and Harpists*, 173-76.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 177.

Gabriel Pierné published his solo harp and orchestra work in 1903,<sup>27</sup> and the famous harpist, Henriette Renié, performed the premiere that year.<sup>28</sup> That same year, Pierné became the assistant conductor of the Concerts Colonne, later becoming the principal conductor. Trained in composition from his studies at the Paris Conservatoire, Pierné continued his compositional work during the summer while the concert season paused.<sup>29</sup> As a student of the Conservatoire, he observed firsthand the harp legacy of that school. His experience at the Conservatoire exposed him to some of the most talented harpists in the world, and he absorbed aspects of the best harp techniques into his own music.

Opening with flowing arpeggios, Pierné's piece for solo harp and orchestra has a very traditional feel to it from the outset. The melody rings clearly in the harp's upper register, evidence that Pierné understood the instrument and how best to orchestrate for it. Decorative passages above the orchestral lines are also set in the upper register of the harp. Scoring the harp above an orchestra is a challenge for many composers and one that requires a thorough understanding of the instrument in order to overcome the challenge successfully. The piece also features chromaticism, which only a double-action pedal harp could accommodate well. The brilliant arpeggios, glissandos, and rolled chords throughout the single movement work highlight some of the harp's best, most beloved capabilities. After a dramatic and grand climax, the music concludes rather quietly and peacefully with a reiteration of the main theme and a return of the opening arpeggios in the harp.

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<sup>27</sup> Masson, "Pierné, (Henri Constant) Gabriel."

<sup>28</sup> Haefner, "Virtuoso, Composer, and Teacher," 35.

<sup>29</sup> Masson, "Pierné, (Henri Constant) Gabriel."

While Pierné composed many melodies, his thematic designs were often shorter.<sup>30</sup> This idiosyncrasy is true in his *Concertstück*. The piece features four main themes. In the first half of the piece, three themes are introduced in turn. A scherzo section, which introduces the fourth theme, interrupts briefly before the piece returns to the third theme. The first and second themes briefly reappear before closing with the third theme again. This third theme, included below, becomes the central theme of the work.



Example 2: *Concertstück*, Op. 39, Gabriel Pierné, mm. 340-44

### JACQUES IBERT: *ENTR'ACTE* (1937)

Following in his mother's musical footsteps, Jacques Ibert (1890- 1962) began studying the violin when he was four years old, and later the piano. As an adolescent, he developed an interest in composition, but supported himself financially through teaching, accompanying, producing program notes, and playing as a cinema pianist. He began his studies at the Paris Conservatoire in 1910, studying harmony, counterpoint, and composition.<sup>31</sup> While at the Conservatoire, Ibert received first prize in harmony and later another first prize in composition.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Laederich, "Ibert, Jacques (François Antoine Marie)."

<sup>32</sup> Timlin, "An Analytic Study of the Flute Works of Jacques Ibert," 3-4.

After World War I, Ibert won the Prix de Rome in 1919.<sup>33</sup> His works completed during this time were met with great success in France.<sup>34</sup> His public debut as a composer came in 1922, under the baton of Pierné at the Concerts Colonne. He enjoyed success during the 1920s with his orchestral, piano, and opera compositions.<sup>35</sup> During the years 1923 to 1937, Ibert resided in Paris and composed many works.<sup>36</sup> In 1937, he received a prestigious political appointment as director of the Académie de France at the Villa Medici in Italy, which he retained until 1960 with a pause during World War II.<sup>37</sup> As director of this French Academy in Rome, he completed administrative tasks and oversaw the Prix de Rome winners.<sup>38</sup>

Ibert disliked the idea of being associated with a school or system of thought, but instead wanted to be independent.<sup>39</sup> Ibert's style is a compilation of several different influences.<sup>40</sup> Overarching it all, though, he followed the French style, which can be characterized as restrained, lyrical, reserved, subtle, and detailed, as well as objective and rational.<sup>41</sup> Ibert's compositional style included many different genres and moods. The harmonies that he uses are modern, and not as Classical, with altered or added notes in the chords. He also often makes use of contrapuntal writing. Keeping in mind these

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<sup>33</sup> Laederich, "Ibert, Jacques."

<sup>34</sup> Timlin, "Flute Works of Jacques Ibert," 5-6.

<sup>35</sup> Laederich, "Ibert, Jacques."

<sup>36</sup> Timlin, "Flute Works of Jacques Ibert," 6.

<sup>37</sup> Laederich, "Ibert, Jacques."

<sup>38</sup> Timlin, "Flute Works of Jacques Ibert," 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Grout, Donald Jay. *A History of Western Music*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1973, 650 (quoted in Timlin, "Flute Works of Jacques Ibert," 10); Timlin, "Flute Works of Jacques Ibert," 10, 14-5, 17.

exceptions, he also uses many Classical elements in his compositions.<sup>42</sup> Ibert has also been referred to as Neoclassical.<sup>43</sup>

Ibert and his contemporaries strove to preserve French musical idioms. Ibert did so by using Baroque and Classical forms. Regarding form, in his music he often introduces motives, works with them, and then skips over any exploratory development sections, resulting in the concise forms he preferred. His works are typically tonal, taking brief moments to explore other tonalities within one central tonality.<sup>44</sup> Ibert uses rhythm to create energy “with an undercurrent of bustling, ‘busy’ notes.”<sup>45</sup>

Some of these characteristics are readily apparent in his composition, *Entr’acte*. With some Spanish ancestry, Ibert had a love for Spain that found its way into his compositions, specifically in *Entr’acte*. Composed in 1937,<sup>46</sup> this work comes at the end of his productive compositional period in Paris and the same year that he received the appointment in Rome.<sup>47</sup> Ibert created several instrument options; the violin or flute can play the melodic part and the guitar, harp, or harpsichord can play the accompaniment.<sup>48</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, the flute and harp duet is the selected instrumental pairing.

This virtuosic piece has a simple structure. The overarching form begins with an idea that has quick momentum, slows down for a brief reflection, and then returns to a quick pace, closing shortly thereafter.<sup>49</sup> As remarked upon earlier, Ibert often used very concise forms without developing thematic material. The opening thematic idea in the

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<sup>42</sup> Laederich, “Ibert, Jacques.”

<sup>43</sup> Timlin, “Flute Works of Jacques Ibert,” 12.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-8.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>46</sup> Timlin, “Flute Works of Jacques Ibert,” 91.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 91; Laederich, “Ibert, Jacques.”

<sup>48</sup> Timlin, “Flute Works of Jacques Ibert,” 91.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

flute features the rapid, driving rhythm characteristic of his works.<sup>50</sup> The flute transitions to a lyrical line that still has momentum but relaxes, offering an opportunity to enjoy the beautiful melody. Returning briefly to a variation of the opening thematic idea, the harp then has a solo, lyrical and more relaxed, that introduces a different thematic idea. The piece closes with a return of the altered version of the opening thematic idea, which appears in the middle section.

At first glance, *Entr'acte* seems to be outside of Ibert's typically very French compositional style. However, the French had an exotic perspective on Spain, exemplified by this piece.<sup>51</sup> Full of energy and with beautifully sculpted melodies, the music seems to capture the Spanish essence. This duet is a wonderful addition to the harp and flute repertoire out of the French Conservatoire legacy.

ELIAS PARISH ALVARS: GRAND STUDY IN  
IMITATION OF THE MANDOLINE (1843-44)

Although he was English and never studied at the Paris Conservatoire,<sup>52</sup> Elias Parish Alvars (1808- 1849) has a place in this program because of his contribution to the development of repertoire and techniques for the double-action pedal harp.<sup>53</sup> As a composer, teacher, and performer, Parish Alvars did much more than create a successful music career.<sup>54</sup> He provided new ideas that opened a world of possibilities for harp music.<sup>55</sup> Henriette Renié herself believed that the music of Parish Alvars was an

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 10, 91.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>53</sup> Fan, "Elias Parish Alvars' New Method for the Harp and the Harp Methods of Bochsá, Dizi, and Labarre," 17; Griffiths, "Parish Alvars, Elias [Parish, Eli]."

<sup>54</sup> Griffiths, "Parish Alvars, Elias"; Fan, "Elias Parish Alvars' New Method," 16; Houser, "Five Virtuoso Harpists," 17.

<sup>55</sup> Fan, "Elias Parish Alvars' New Method," 17.



important part of a harpist's study.<sup>56</sup> Harp virtuosi in subsequent generations owed much to the work of Parish Alvars and built upon the significant foundation that he laid.<sup>57</sup>

Parish Alvars began harp lessons under his father's instruction. Following his first concert in 1818, he began studying harp with Nicholas Charles Bochsa in 1820 in London. Parish Alvars began composing music in the late 1820s and was a composition student of Maximilian Leidesdorf and the Guglielmo family in Florence. For a brief time beginning in 1829, he worked for the harp company Scheweiso and Grosjean, located in London. In the 1830s, his performance career expanded with tours to Germany and performances in Copenhagen, Stockholm, Russia, Turkey, Hungary, Switzerland, and France.<sup>58</sup> In the early 1830s, he settled in Vienna and in 1836 became the principal harpist of the Imperial and Royal Opera of Vienna. He returned to London only two years after that, however, and shortly thereafter toured the Eastern Mediterranean for several years.<sup>59</sup>

Parish Alvars was also a harp instructor, but the research is not clear whether he had a private studio or taught as a professor in Vienna. He wrote his own *New Method for the Harp*, but the incomplete manuscript was never published. In his manuscript, he includes the new techniques he invented. He touches on the single-action harp briefly in one chapter, but his focus is on the double-action harp.<sup>60</sup> In 1842, Parish Alvars acquired his first double-action pedal harp,<sup>61</sup> which had been invented by Sébastien Érard earlier in

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<sup>56</sup> Houser, "Five Virtuoso Harpists," 20.

<sup>57</sup> Houser, "Five Virtuoso Harpists," 29.

<sup>58</sup> Houser, "Five Virtuoso Harpists," 16-7.

<sup>59</sup> Griffiths, "Parish Alvars, Elias."

<sup>60</sup> Fan, "Elias Parish Alvars' New Method," 16-7.

<sup>61</sup> Griffiths, "Parish Alvars, Elias."

1811.<sup>62</sup> His compositional talent combined with the double-action pedal harp's greater capacities, creating new techniques and sounds on the harp.<sup>63</sup>

He built upon established techniques of the harp, such as expanding harmonics to include double, triple, and even quadruple harmonics.<sup>64</sup> Harmonics produce a bell-like tone by stopping the string with one's hand at the midpoint of the string and then plucking. Parish Alvars enhanced glissandi techniques to chordal glissandi and to harmonics played simultaneously with glissandi. He utilized enharmonic effects and also manipulated the use of pre-setting pedals.<sup>65</sup> By changing the pedal settings, a harpist can make two strings sound at the same pitch, creating enharmonic unisons. Parish Alvars pushed the manipulation of the pedals even further, however, and combined enharmonics in order to achieve certain pitches, thus making a passage much more playable.<sup>66</sup> This practice of manipulating pedals and using enharmonics is a common practice among current harpists that renders seemingly impossible passages more playable.

The nineteenth-century double-action harp that Parish Alvars played upon was much smaller than present-day pedal harps. The string spacing was much closer and the string tension was significantly lower, only a third of the tension on modern harps. His compositions require great technical ability but not the same amount of force required on a modern harp. Additionally, modern harps have a greater resonance and he composed for harps with a much shorter decay of sound. As harpists perform his works, they must

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<sup>62</sup> Houser, "Five Virtuoso Harpists," 14.

<sup>63</sup> Griffiths, "Parish Alvars, Elias."

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Houser, "Five Virtuoso Harpists," 27-8.

keep these differences in mind and adjust accordingly. Additionally, they should consider performing on a historical instrument.<sup>67</sup>

One piece that exemplifies Parish Alvars' use of special techniques on the double-action harp is his *Grand Study in Imitation of the Mandoline*. He developed the enharmonic trill technique and featured it in this composition. This is a trill that is on a single pitch, but uses two adjacent strings, one of which is altered with the pedal settings to match the other string's pitch. Both strings then have the same pitch and are played rapidly back and forth.<sup>68</sup> The excerpts below provide an example of the enharmonic trill, first as written in the music and second as the passage is played. Although the notes are written as the same pitch, the harpist alternates between two strings.



Example 3: *Grand Study in Imitation of the Mandoline*, Elias Parish Alvars, m. 40



Example 4: *Grand Study in Imitation of the Mandoline*,

Elias Parish Alvars, m. 40 (as played)

<sup>67</sup> Sacchi and Wenonah, "The Compositions of Parish Alvars from 1834-1849," 30.

<sup>68</sup> Houser, "Five Virtuoso Harpists," 20.

The use of the enharmonic trill creates the mandolin sound effect Parish Alvars sought to emulate. This effect appears in the opening section, including a passage in which both hands simultaneously play a trill and a melody line. The opening includes an important use of enharmonics that makes a scale-like passage much more playable and at a greater speed, an approach mentioned previously.<sup>69</sup> The opening culminates with an ascending chromatic line and transitions to the main theme. Within the main theme, Parish Alvars frequently uses enharmonic trills at different pitches.<sup>70</sup> After a middle arpeggio section, the enharmonic trill reappears when the music returns to the main theme. The piece concludes with a final flourish that also utilizes enharmonics.

Another technique found in this piece is the insertion of a melody line into the middle of lengthy arpeggios, giving the impression that three hands are playing at once. A pianist, Sigismund Thalberg, receives credit for originally inventing this approach. Parish Alvars incorporated this technique in the middle arpeggio section in *Grand Study*.<sup>71</sup> The melodic line is fairly simple, leaving most of the musical interest to the changing harmonies and speed of the arpeggios.

This piece includes very large chords and stretches throughout its entirety; such stretches were much easier to play on the smaller harp that Parish Alvars used.<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, harpists playing a modern harp must find ways to adjust their hand position and even dynamic level to accommodate these stretches.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 27-8.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 23-4.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 28.

## CONCLUSION

The Paris Conservatoire proved to be an important influence on the harp's technique and its repertoire through the harpists and composers trained there. While these harpists and composers did not alone develop the instrument, they played a significant role in shaping its current position as a concert stage solo and orchestral instrument. The harp solos in this recital program are a beloved part of the harp repertoire and are frequently studied, performed, and recorded. While the musical content is valuable, the technical demands and challenges are even more so. These solos require a harpist to meet high performance levels, matching other instruments in virtuosity and complexity.

The above research offers an opportunity to examine each composer's biographical information and to analyze the music. After doing so, one is truly prepared to then listen to the music. While simply listening to a performance is pleasurable, comprehending and aurally analyzing the music is more rewarding. This deeper understanding enriches the recital experience and perhaps achieves more of what the composer originally intended for his work. Having prepared oneself accordingly, seek an opportunity to hear performances of this music and enjoy the rich legacy of the Paris Conservatoire.

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