

CHARMES

for soprano and piano

Eric Choate

I discovered the poetry of Paul Valéry while studying composition in Paris. I immersed myself in the poetry of the great French Symbolists: Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Valéry. When I discovered Valéry's collection *Charmes*, I knew immediately that I wanted to set some of it to music.

Each poem in this collection uses objects and experiences to describe a poet waiting for his inspiration. Very often in French Symbolism the poet will choose words and sounds that have many different meanings, which inform one's interpretation of the poetry. For example, "Les Grenades," the title of the first of this cycle, means both "the pomegranates" and "the grenades." While these are completely different objects, the poem reveals Valéry's implication of both meanings. The poet is awaiting inspiration, which comes in the form of a grenade exploding with ideas, or a pomegranate bursting with creative juices. Similarly, on the surface level, "Les Pas" suggests "footsteps;" however, "pas" is also a word used for negation. This expresses an existential question: was it the footsteps of a lover approaching a vigilant bed, or was it a nonexistence contained only in the mind of the poet? Again this poem is a metaphor for inspiration, now coming to the poet seductively in the night. "Le Vin Perdu" describes a scene in which the poet tosses wine into the sea (for reasons of which he is unsure) and in a trance, watches as the translucent red becomes enveloped in the salty water. "La Ceinture" describes a sash fluttering gracefully in the dim evening's light, which disappears as the night darkens. The double meaning here is "the belt," referring not only to the sash, but the band of light at a sunset.

To underline the double meanings that happen so frequently in these texts, my settings of these texts employ many musical "double meanings." Cross relations (chromatic contradictions between two simultaneously sounding tones) play an important role in the entire work by suggesting not either major or minor sonorities, but both. Likewise, the dialectical argument between key areas, as well as the way I chose to settle in tonalities that synthesize these arguments, suggests multiple intentions and musical meanings. All of these compositional devices exist within a sound world of gestures, harmonic patterns, and styles that allude to music of the great Fin de Siècle French composers, contemporaries of Mr. Valéry, and my own poetic muses: Debussy, Ravel, and Lili Boulanger.

Eric Choate

for Ellen

CHARMES

I. Les Grenades

Text: Paul Valéry (1871 - 1945)

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With energy contained, about to burst ♩. = 52

poco rit.

a tempo

The musical score is written in 3/8 time. The piano accompaniment begins with a series of chords and eighth-note patterns. The vocal line starts at measure 5 with the lyrics: "Du-res gre-na - des en-tr'ou - ver - tes — Cé - dant à l'ex-cès de vos grains, — Je crois — voir — des fronts sou - ve - rains — É - cla -". The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, *mp*, and *express.*. The piece concludes at measure 12 with a final chord and a fermata.

12

tés _____ de leurs dé-cou - ver - tes!

16 *mf*

Si les so-leils par vous su-bis, O gre-na - des en - tre-bâil -

20

lé - es, _____ Vous ont fait _____ d'or - gueil tra - vai - llé - es _____ Cra - quer les cloi - sons de

24 *mp sultry*

ru - bis, Et que si l'or sec de l'é - cor - ce



28 *mf*

A la de - man - de d'u - ne for - ce Crè - ve, —



31 *f*

crève en gem - mes rouges de jus, —



34 *ff*

Cet - te lu - mi - neuse rup - tu re,

ff

36 *mp* *p*

Fait rê - ver une âme que j'eus De sa se-crète ar-chi-

mp *p*

40

tec - tu - re.

p

II. Les Pas

Spacious, very unrushed ♩ = 52

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of three systems of music. The first system (measures 1-4) features a piano introduction with a *ppp* dynamic and the instruction "blurry, with pedal". The second system (measures 5-9) begins with a vocal line marked *p* and the lyrics "Tes pas,". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar texture. The third system (measures 10-14) contains the lyrics "en-fants de mon si-len-ce, Sain-te-ment, len-te-ment pla-cés,". The piano part features a more active melodic line in the right hand while maintaining the harmonic support in the left hand.

5 *ppp* blurry, with pedal

5 *p* Tes pas,

10 en-fants de mon si-len-ce, Sain-te-ment, len-te-ment pla-cés,

14

Vers le lit de ma vi-gi-lan-ce Pro-cè-dent mu-ets et gla-

17

cés. Per-son-ne pure, om-bre di-

21

vi-ne, Qu'ils sont doux, tes pas re-te-nus! Dieux!

24

tous les dons que je de-vi-ne Vien-nent à moi sur ces pieds

rall.

27

nus!

30 *a tempo* *p*

Si de tes le - vres a - van - cé - es tu pré - pa - res pour l'a - pai -

33

ser A l'ha - bi - tant de mes pen - sé - es La

36 *ff*

nour - ri - tu - re d'un bai - ser Ne hà - te pas cet ac - te

39

ten - dre Dou - ceur d'êt - re et de n'êt - re

41

f

pas, Car j'ai vé - cu de vous at -

43

rall.

ten - dre

46 *a tempo* *p*

Et mon coeur n'e-tait que vos pas.

pp

8va

49

(8va)

8va

III. Le Vin Perdu

Ironically calm ♩ = 160

p
J'ai _____ quel - que jour dans l'O - cé -

p
light pedal

4
an _____ (mais je ne sais plus sous quels cieux) _____

7
mf
Je - té _____ comme of - fran - de au né - ant,

mf

The score is in 7/8 time and consists of three systems. Each system has a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piano part features a continuous triplet accompaniment in the right hand and a more melodic line in the left hand. Dynamic markings include *p* (piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). Performance instructions include *Ironically calm*, *light pedal*, and *simile*. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 160. The lyrics are in French: 'J'ai _____ quel - que jour dans l'O - cé - an _____ (mais je ne sais plus sous quels cieux) _____ Je - té _____ comme of - fran - de au né - ant,'.

10 *f*

Tout un peu de vin pré - ci -

f

Ped.

*

13 *rit.* *a tempo*

eux...

mp

Ped.

*

16 *dolce*

dolce

f

Ped.

*rit.**a tempo*

19

19

23

p

Qui ————— vo - lut ta perte ô li - queur? ————— J'ob - é -

23

26

is peut-être au de - vin? ————— Peut-être au sau

26

29 *f*

ci de mon coeur, Son -

f
pva

32

geant — au sang, ver - sant — le vin? —

f

35

dolce

mp

dolce
mp

38

f

Sa

41

trans - par - ence — ac - cou - tu - mée — A -

mp

43

près — une ro - se fu - mé - e Re - prit — aus - si

f

8va

46 *ff*

pu - re la mer... Per -

49

du ce vin, iv - res les on -

52 *f*

des... J'ai vu bond-ir dans l'air a -

56 *p* *rit. senza misura* *a tempo*

mer Les fi - gu - res les plus pro - fon - des... —

The musical score for measures 56-58 consists of three systems. The first system shows the vocal line starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a tempo change to *rit. senza misura*. The piano accompaniment features a series of chords and a triplet of eighth notes. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with more triplets. The third system shows the vocal line ending with a fermata and the piano accompaniment concluding with a final chord and a dynamic marking of *p*.

59

f

8va

The musical score for measure 59 is a single system. It features a piano accompaniment with a dynamic marking of *f* and an *8va* marking. The piano part consists of a long, continuous melodic line with a fermata at the end. The vocal line is empty.

p

The musical score for measures 60-61 is a single system. It features a piano accompaniment with a dynamic marking of *p*. The piano part consists of a long, continuous melodic line with a fermata at the end. The vocal line is empty.

IV. La Ceinture

In quiet contemplation ♩ = 76

The musical score is written in 3/4 time and consists of three systems. The first system (measures 1-5) features a piano accompaniment with dynamics *p* and *mp*. The second system (measures 6-10) continues the piano accompaniment with dynamics *p* and *mf*. The third system (measures 11-15) includes a vocal line with lyrics: "Quand le ciel cou - leur d'une". The piano accompaniment in the third system has a dynamic of *p*. The score is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature.

16 *mf* *mp* *mf*

joue Laisse en - fin les yeux le chér-ir

21 *poco rit.*

Et qu'au point do - ré de pér - ir Dans les ros - es le temps se

26 *a tempo* *p*

joue, De - vant le mu - et de plai - sir Qu'en -

31 *mf*

châine une tel - le pein - tu - re, Danse une Om - bre à lib - re cein - tu - re

36 *poco rit.* *a tempo*

Que le soir est près de saisir. Cet te cein-tu - re

41 *mf* *mp*

va-ga-bon - de Fait dans le souf- fle aér-i - en Fré - mir le su - prê-me li-en De mon si-

46

lence a vec ce mon - de...

51 *p* *rit.*

Ab - sent, pré - sent... Je suis bien seul, Et som - bre ô sua - ve lin -

Meno mosso

56

ceul.

pp *mp* *pp*

61

pp

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